

**Perspectives from below the ceiling:
Academic women and the transition from Senior Lecturer to the
Professoriate – a case study**

by

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Declaration

I, Joanne Pyke, declare that the PhD thesis entitled 'Perspectives from below the ceiling: Academic women and the transition from Senior Lecturer to the Professoriate – a case study', is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive use of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Joanne Pyke

Date

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	III
DECLARATION.....	IV
LIST OF CHARTS, TABLES, FIGURES AND MODELS.....	VII
ABSTRACT.....	VIII
INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND, CONTEXT AND AIMS.....	3
<i>How and why this topic.....</i>	3
<i>Key research questions</i>	9
OBJECTIVES	18
<i>The literature.....</i>	18
<i>Critical realism as a theoretical framework</i>	19
<i>Method</i>	20
<i>Victoria University as a case study.....</i>	21
<i>Perspectives from below the ceiling – why/why not promotion?</i>	22
<i>Is there a glass ceiling?.....</i>	22
<i>Barriers and decision making about promotion to Level D</i>	23
<i>Conclusions and what needs to change.....</i>	24
CHAPTER TWO: THE LITERATURE, THEMES AND DEBATES.....	27
INTRODUCTION	27
KEY STUDIES	27
KEY THEMES	29
<i>Institutional constraints.....</i>	29
<i>Who cares (?) and its impact on careers</i>	37
<i>Globalisation, neo-liberalism and higher education reform.....</i>	42
SUMMARY OF THEMES	49
DEBATES	49
CONCLUSION.....	52
INTRODUCTION	53
DOMINANT PERSPECTIVES.....	54
<i>Neo-classical approaches and ‘choice’</i>	55
<i>Institutional theories.....</i>	60
<i>Postmodernism and ‘the linguistic turn’</i>	62
<i>Questions of agency, structure, values and the feminist project.....</i>	64
CRITICAL REALISM AS AN ALTERNATIVE.....	65
<i>On agency and structure.....</i>	65
<i>Lawson’s critical realist ontology</i>	72
<i>Gender and collective interest</i>	73
<i>Critical realism and its critics</i>	77
<i>Critical realism and epistemology</i>	78
CONCLUSION.....	83
CHAPTER FOUR: CRITICAL REALISM AND USING A CASE STUDY	85
INTRODUCTION	85
CRITICAL REALISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR METHOD	85
<i>Critical realist methodological choices.....</i>	91
METHODS APPLIED IN THIS STUDY	93
<i>Case study definitions, strengths and limitations</i>	93
<i>Why I chose to use a case study</i>	96
<i>Methods used in this case study</i>	98
CONCLUSION.....	100
CHAPTER FIVE: VU AS A CASE.....	102
INTRODUCTION	102
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY – CHARACTERISTICS, HISTORY AND EVOLUTION AS A UNIVERSITY	102
<i>Victoria University – a description</i>	102

<i>From Footscray Tech to Victoria University</i>	103
<i>Jarlath Ronayne and John Dawkins</i>	105
<i>Elizabeth Harman and Brendan Nelson</i>	107
POLICY CHANGE AND ITS GENDERED AND LOCAL IMPACTS ON ACADEMIC WORK	110
<i>What higher education reform has meant to academic work</i>	111
<i>Reform and its local impacts</i>	114
<i>The gendered impacts of reform and sustained patterns of gender inequality</i>	116
<i>Gender equity in academic staffing</i>	121
CONCLUSION	125
CHAPTER SIX: WHY/WHY NOT PROMOTION?	126
INTRODUCTION	126
THE INTERVIEWS – DETAILS, PROCESS AND LIMITATIONS	126
<i>The questions</i>	126
<i>Analysis</i>	128
<i>My influence</i>	130
<i>Interviewee characteristics</i>	131
PROMOTION PLANS AND THEIR RATIONALE	134
<i>Why promotion?</i>	134
<i>Why not promotion?</i>	146
CONCLUSION	152
CHAPTER SEVEN: GENDERED BARRIERS AND EEO	154
INTRODUCTION	154
IS THERE A GLASS CEILING AT VU AND IF SO, WHAT SHOULD BE DONE ABOUT IT?	154
<i>Is there a glass ceiling in operation?</i>	154
<i>Equal Employment Opportunity and its relevance</i>	161
CONCLUSION	168
CHAPTER EIGHT: EXPLAINING UNEQUAL OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN	170
INTRODUCTION	170
STRUCTURE AND AGENCY	171
<i>Inertia</i>	171
INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS	179
<i>Management</i>	179
<i>Gendered micro-politics</i>	183
<i>Recruitment and promotion processes</i>	184
<i>Higher Education Reform</i>	190
SUMMARY – STRUCTURE AND AGENCY	195
BARRIERS TO PROMOTION	197
ARE WOMEN PULLING OUT FROM PROMOTION?	198
CONCLUSION	199
CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION AND PRIORITIES FOR CHANGE	202
INTRODUCTION	202
IMPLICATIONS	202
WHAT TO DO ABOUT WOMEN'S UNDER-REPRESENTATION	205
NATIONAL POLICY	206
CHANGE WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY	211
<i>Organisational change</i>	211
<i>Organisational change in conclusion</i>	214
<i>Supporting women</i>	214
CONCLUSION	217
REFERENCES	218

List of Charts, Tables, Figures and Models

Chart		Page
1.1	Percentage of women and men employed at Levels E and D, Australian universities 1996–2007	10
1.2	Percentage of women employed by academic level, all Australian universities, 1996 and 2007	11
1.3	Percentage of academic employment by gender by level, all Australian universities, 2007 and Victoria University, 2007	11
1.4	Percentage of gender by disciplinary group, all Australian universities, 2006	12
1.5	Gender by academic level, Faculty of Health, Science and Engineering, Victoria University, 2008	13
1.6	Gender by academic level, Faculty of Health, Science and Engineering, Victoria University, excluding the Schools of Nursing and Midwifery and Biomedical Science	13
5.1	Percentage of academic women employed at Victoria University by level, 1994 and 2007	117
5.2	Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Movement: Number of academic staff by level by gender, 2008	118
5.3	Faculty of Business and Law: Number of academic staff by level by gender, Victoria University, 2008	118
5.4	Faculty of Health, Science and Engineering: Number of academic staff by level by gender, Victoria University, 2008	119
5.5	Faculty of Business and Law: School by gender by academic level, Victoria University, 2008	119
Table		
5.1	Full-time academic employees by gender by level by faculty at Victoria University of Technology, 1994	117
6.1	Summary of factors that encourage and discourage plans for promotion	135
6.2	Reasons for not aiming for promotion	146
Model		
6.1	NVIVO coding framework for the analysis of interview data	129

List of Attachments

		Page
Attachment 1	Victoria University minimum standards for academic levels (MSALs)	233
Attachment 2	Information and consent form for interview participants	243
Attachment 3	Summary of interview questions	244
Attachment 4	List of acronyms	245

Abstract

Despite progressive increases in women's academic employment over the past 20 years, women continue to be under-represented in senior academic roles above the level of Senior Lecturer (Level C). This thesis explores whether there are specific barriers in operation that serve to prevent women's transition to the level of Associate Professor (Level D). The research asks, first, why does the transition from Level C to Level D continue to be a barrier for women? Second, are women giving up on promotion just when they have the experience and qualifications to be successful? From a critical realist perspective, a central assumption is that the interactions between agency and structure simultaneously operate to create the possibilities for individual action. This relationship is explored through a case study of one Victorian university, which includes interviews with women positioned 'below the ceiling' at Level C to explore aspirations and the rationale for decision making about promotion to the professoriate. The research concludes that, while there is wide diversity according to individual history and circumstances, there are multiple and cumulative barriers to women's progression along the academic hierarchy that become particularly intense at the point of transition to Level D. The implication is that many women make the 'choice' to withdraw from promotion. This 'choice' is shaped, not by a preference to value family or other priorities over career, as human capital theories would suggest. Rather, it is the outcome of sometimes overwhelming structural limitations that combine to make aspirations for promotion to the professoriate either untenable or undesirable.

Chapter One: Background and introduction

Introduction

Women continue to be under-represented in senior academic positions in higher education in Australia despite more than 20 years of anti-discrimination legislation and equal employment opportunity (EEO) policy and programs. Only one in four Associate Professors (Level D) in Australia are women and only 17 per cent of women are appointed at the level of Professor (Level E). This under-representation continues despite there being relatively equal participation by men and women at Levels A and B (Lecturer), and in numbers approaching equal at the middle academic rung of Level C (Senior Lecturer). The purpose of this research is to explore what is particular about the transition to the level of Associate Professor that continues to prevent women's entrance, why this under-representation is sustained and what, beyond what is happening already, can be done about it. Further, the research seeks to investigate a noted trend. That is that women appear to stop trying altogether just at the time they have the necessary experience and qualifications to make the transition (Probert 2005 p. 58). The specific questions the research seeks to address are first, why does the transition between Levels C and D continue to be a barrier for women? Second, are women giving up on promotion and, if so, why? To explore these questions, this study uses Victoria University (VU) as a case study to investigate women's experiences of, and aspirations for promotion and how these are aspirations are informed.

The chapter explains the background to this study, what I aim to do through this research and why. First I discuss the context in which this research was undertaken and show how gender inequalities continue to characterise academic employment in higher education. The purpose of this is to show that gender inequalities continue despite some prevailing trends that have meant that issues around gender have, as Thornton (2008) argues, been submerged and rendered difficult to see. As a feminist project, the project explores how and why women continue to be positioned within academic employment structures as relatively subordinate to men and how this subordination might be changed.

A series of objectives arise from the central research questions. These objectives shape the process undertaken in completing the research and I describe how each of the objectives has been addressed. In so doing, I give an overview of the structure and contents of the thesis. The following section starts by situating this research, how and why it was devised, and what the thinking was in its development.

Background, context and aims

How and why this topic

This study was devised and undertaken at the school of Applied Economics within the Faculty of Business and Law at Victoria University with the support of a VU scholarship. My principal supervisor was Dr Jamie Doughney with co-supervision from Dr Penny Weller. I worked with Jamie in the development of this research topic, which was arrived at through discussion around some common research interests. These interests have also been developed over the course of my research career where one important theme has been gender equity in employment, particularly around women in non-traditional trades and industries. I have previously been the Executive Officer of a government industry advisory body established to inform access and equity policy at a state and national level. I have also undertaken considerable research privately for government, unions and industry and within universities around related matters which have culminated in two books (Pyke 1992; 2008), several refereed journal articles (Pyke 1993; Pyke 2004; Pyke, Bertone et al. 2007) and numerous reports advising on policy related to gender equity, cultural diversity, community wellbeing and other related topics (For example, Doughney, MacDonald et al. 2003; Kyle, MacDonald et al. 2004; Pyke 2004; Pyke & Doughney 2004; Pyke 2005; Pyke 2005; Wiseman, Pyke et al. 2005; Pyke, Bertone et al. 2006; Wiseman, Langworthy et al. 2006; Pyke & Zuhair 2007; Pyke & Grossman 2008). As such, an important personal motivation for this research is to build on and consolidate my research career to date.

Beyond these practical concerns, the choice of topic is driven by a commitment to gender equity in employment and the basic belief that women should be able to progress within academic careers in the same way that men can given equal capacity and motivation. This is still not the case and my concern is about the limited success of anti-discrimination and affirmative action legislation and programs in delivering equal outcomes for men and women in employment. Despite this reality, however, acknowledgment of the need for attention to gender equity has declined (Thornton 2008). As Summers (2003) comments, there is a widespread impression that women ‘have been done’. My view is that while much progress has been made toward gender equity over the past 20-odd years, particularly in terms of participation in the labour market, we are still only ‘halfway to equal’. I agree with the literature that says that we have had only half of the revolution that was visualised by the Australian Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1970s (Craig 2006b; Thornton 2008). Some problems have been solved and certainly explicit and legal barriers to women’s employment have largely been removed. At the same time, limited progress has been made in terms of gender equality in senior roles in employment (EOWA 2006) and gender segregation still

characterises the Australian labour market more broadly (ABS 2007). More importantly, new issues around employment conditions have emerged which are largely due to the transformation of work that has occurred since the 1980s. Closely related to the processes of globalisation, the dominance of neo-liberal economics and developments in organisational management paradigms, the changes in work are gendered in their impacts with many harsh implications for gender equity (Acker & Feuerherger 1996; Luke 2001; Blackmore 2002; Currie, Thiele et al. 2002; Beneria 2003; Blackmore & Sachs 2003; Eveline 2004; Thornton 2004; Morley 2005a). These impacts are obscured in part due to women's increased labour market participation. My concern is that efforts to promote gender equality have been marginalised and rendered unimportant in the context of changes to work organisation that are ambiguous in their effects.

In saying this, I also recognise that numerical equality in leadership roles is only one, albeit important, indicator of equity. In line with early second wave feminism, I question the value in simply 'adding women' to a system of employment that rests on a regime of work organisation that relies on and reinforces class, race and gender inequalities through reliance on a full-time male worker model who is free from the responsibilities to care for others. The early women's liberation movement wanted more than to enter a system created by men in their interests (Burton 1985; Burton 1991; Thornton 2008). On a more contemporary theme, I join with a broader wellbeing movement that is concerned with the connections between work, care and justice (Sen 1985; Nussbaum & Sen 1993; Folbre 2001). The argument is that developments in work organisation in recent decades have taken us in the wrong direction if we wish to build a happy, just and sustainable society. To meet the criteria of justice, as Pocock (2006a p. 1) argues, 'work regimes should enlarge and assure particular human capacities that can be seen as universally essential for those who labour in a civilized society'. To do this, she argues that it is necessary to cultivate an ethic of care that matches and complements the ethic of work. Such a vision is socially inclusive and accounts for the economics of care and its relationships with work. These ideas guide my interest in the need for gender equality.

These social justice goals fit with the intent to undertake a feminist project, which means that the project is characterised by the few widely acknowledged characteristics that define a feminist undertaking (hooks 1984; Francis & Skelton 2001). These are that the study is about the lives and experiences of women, that gender is an important category of analysis and that the research is politicised inquiry. By this, I mean that the research is concerned with understanding and revealing unequal and gendered power relationships that contribute to disadvantageous conditions for women in employment. This inequity is understood as

socially and economically harmful and the aim of research is to contribute to equitable and just social outcomes. At the same time, current feminist theory is struggling to theorise gender inequality in the context that so much has improved for women if only in western developed nations (McNay 2000). In common with broader social theory, at the base of the feminist problem are theoretical polarisations that rest on an over-inflation of the role of either agency or structure in shaping gender relations. Such polarisations limit debate and movement and there is a need to reconceptualise the relationships between agency and structure as both reproductive and transformative. Drawing from critical realism (Lawson 1999; Cruickshank 2003; New 2003; Sayer 2004; Clegg 2006; Lawson 2007), I explain and elaborate on this in Chapter Three.

The purpose of the discussion above is to explain the background and motivations for this study and to say something about how I am situated in doing this research. In summary, the research was shaped by my research career to date, the aim to consolidate this career with a PhD and practical considerations about how this might be completed. I am also concerned that directions in work organisation within higher education need to be changed in the interests of social justice and wellbeing. Women's low representation in leadership is one indicator of how social justice is not lived out through institutional practices and the examination of this phenomenon provides a lens to view broader social and economic processes. The following section explains some necessary background before discussing the specific aims of the study. This includes first, how promotion processes are undertaken for academic positions in higher education and second, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and how it is implemented.

Academic employment structures and appointment processes

The academic employment structure starts at Level A at the most junior academic level and progresses to Level E (Professor). Performance expectations progressively increase along the scale at each level in relation to academic performance, responsibility, output and impact within the four broad categories of research, teaching, service to the university and engagement. Pay scales are set at progressively higher rates of pay accordingly. There is considerable consistency in applying academic levels across Australia's 38 universities although each university defines its own minimum standards for academic levels (MSALs). Those that apply at VU are presented in Attachment 1. A major distinction is made between promotion to Levels B (Lecturer or Research Fellow) and C (Senior Lecturer or Senior Research Fellow) with promotion to Levels D (Associate Professor or Principal Research Fellow) and E (Professor) in relation to demonstrated leadership and recognition within the individual's field of expertise (Harman 2008d). The shift from C to D is a major leap in terms

of seniority, status and pay, requiring a significant investment in the promotion application process. For Level C, performance is defined by national recognition, requires ‘significant contribution’ to research and scholarship and it is assumed there will be responsibility for course coordination. At Level D, the language shifts to an ‘outstanding contribution’ and recognition at an international level. The expectation is contribution to university governance and collegial life both within and outside the institution. Importantly, intellectual ‘leadership’ is a major assessment criterion at this level.

There are two means of being appointed at a given level in the academic hierarchy. These are through internal promotion processes or external appointment and the same MSALs are applied irrespective of the means of appointment. In 2007 at VU, roughly the same number of senior academic appointments was made through both methods – five people were appointed through internal promotion and six through external advertising. However, as detailed in Chapter Five, all external promotions were male while two out of the five internal promotion appointments were female (VU 2008a). The following section describes the appointment procedures using processes applied at VU as illustrative of the process applied across all Australian universities.

Internal promotion procedures are implemented on an annual basis and an open invitation is extended to all academic employees who have ongoing appointments and a PhD to apply. Applications may be made once every two years. The process is a paper-based exercise where applicants must demonstrate how they meet promotion criteria in one of four categories that include service, research, teaching or general teaching and research. Applications are considered by a panel of members. The panel includes a mix of representation of members from the relevant faculty and a mix of external and internal nominees of the Vice Chancellor and the Faculty Boards of Study as well as an appointee of the Human Resources (HR) division. For promotion to Level B or Level C, the panel consists of six members. For promotion to Level D or Level E, members of the panel are more senior university members and an additional external member is nominated by the Vice Chancellor. The role of the panel is to decide whether the applicant is operating at the level of promotion sought, based on the application as a whole and on referees and assessors reports (VU 2008e). A numerical weighting is applied by panel members against each criterion. A detailed process is specified including word limits, format, time lines and methods of support. The process is also supported by the delivery of regular promotions workshops designed to inform and support applicants in the process. Discussion with Heads of Schools is required as well as seeking

advice from mentors in the application process. It is recommended within the guidelines that potential applicants take at least two years to prepare their application.¹

The second means of promotion is to apply for an academic position that is advertised externally. This occurs when a decision has been made that a vacancy exists that is approved through the faculty and HR hierarchy. The recruitment process requires the development of a position description that aligns with MSALs and other policies including the equity and diversity policy and quality assurance. A decision is made by HR as to whether a sufficient pool of applicants will be found through internal advertising of the position. If not, the position is advertised externally through newspapers, internet advertising and/or recruitment agencies. All ongoing positions are required to be advertised externally. Applicants must submit an application, referee reports and be interviewed by a selection committee. The composition of the selection committee is guided by a set of requirements about the size of the committee (usually three to four), gender representation and seniority. Selection on the basis of merit is emphasised throughout appointment policies.

Overall, promotions and recruitment procedures are rigorously guided by university policy and concepts of merit, equity and equal opportunity feature particularly. Both processes place considerable demand on the applicant to demonstrate merit for academic positions but internal promotions procedures require a long-term planning process, extensive documentation and preparation. The practices implemented at VU are consistent with practices applied by other universities nationally (Winchester, Chesterman et al. 2005). The internal promotion process in particular is not one to be taken lightly. Before proceeding, the following section clarifies my use of the terms ‘equality’, ‘gender equality’ and ‘equal employment opportunity’ (EEO).

Equality, gender equality and EEO

Meanings of equality arise from egalitarian philosophy and the notion that all people, on the basis of a shared humanity, should enjoy the same social, political, economic and civil rights. Stemming from this is the moral argument that what gives meaning and purpose to life is the development of human capacities (Nussbaum 2003). Thus, the restriction of human capacity to exercise equal rights is morally wrong and an important issue requiring social change. As I elaborate in Chapter Three, my understanding of issues about equality are informed by such philosophy as articulated by the fields of feminist economics (Folbre 1996), Marxist feminism (Archer Mann & Huffman 2005; Ebert 2005; Giminez & Vogel 2005), development

¹ Details of the process are taken from VU’s Higher Education Promotions policy published on the VU intranet.

economics (Sen 1985; Nussbaum & Sen 1993) and in particular, critical realism (Bhaskar 1986; Lawson 1999; Groff 2000; Sayer 2004; Lawson 2007). An emphasis of critical realism, in common with other egalitarian philosophies is that the purpose of the social sciences is to identify how forms of oppression are constructed in order to inform the broader project of human emancipation (Sayer 2004). This is an idea elaborated by a growing school of critical realist thought that has been applied increasingly to concepts of gender equality, most notably by Lawson (2007). Importantly, from my perspective, material inequality is understood as a central indicator of oppression and disadvantage.

Following from this, my use of the term ‘gender equality’ refers to women’s relative access to opportunity, resources, status and influence. I say this in the context that what inequality between men and women actually means remains contentious and a key distinction is often between natural inequality that arises out of differences in physical being (Hakim, 2000, 1996, 2000) and social inequality, which is generated by social arrangements and conditions. Whether or not inequality is natural or social, and whether or not inequalities can be assessed within a normative framework, remains a central conundrum in the social sciences. My use of the term, however, is explicitly feminist in that my central focus is on the achievement of equality, both relational and distributive, between men and women. The relational aspect of equality is about unequal and gendered power relations. Understanding these differences is the focus for understanding equal employment opportunity. The distributive aspect is about material differences that arise from unequal relations that are reflected in unequal income, wealth, occupation, and other measures of status and resources that can be seen to be allocated by gender (Poiner & Wills 1992). These can be measured in terms of unequal employment outcomes, which is the starting point of this study.

EEO is the legislative, policy and strategic framework in place to address gender inequality and sex-based discrimination in employment. EEO is aimed generally at the removal of barriers to women’s progress in the labour market, and to income and status returns (Poiner & Wills 1992). In terms of legislation, EEO is proscribed through a series of Acts at both federal and state government levels. It is Commonwealth legislation that is most relevant to higher education, and to this project, including the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, the *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986* and the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986*. At an organisational level generally, and in universities in particular, EEO practice is focused largely on ensuring fairness in organisational practices including recruitment, selection, appointment, promotion and the award of employment benefits. Procedural fairness is understood as the pre-requisite for equality and equality of opportunity. All universities are also compliant with the *Equal*

Opportunity for Women Act 1986, which leads to the implementation of various affirmative action strategies in ways customised to the circumstances of each institution. In Chapter Five, I elaborate on how this is implemented within Australian universities generally and at VU in particular. Of relevance at this point is that EEO has now been operationalised for more than 20 years in Australia. The fact that it has yet to bring about gender equality is the starting point for my questions.

Key research questions

In the following chapters, I discuss in detail a theory of gender and how gender relations are a product of the enmeshed relationship between individual decision making or agency, and the rules and structural boundaries in which individual freedoms are exercised. In Chapter Three, in particular, I critique dominant perspectives of gender as privileging one over the other, with the ultimate outcome being either determinism, from an institutional perspective, or individualism, from a neo-liberal perspective. Perspectives informed by postmodernism, I argue, suffer from both problems, and in the process ignore the material effects of gender inequality as well as the possibilities for social change. Combined, the result is a polarisation in thought, with the effect of closing down debate. My aim is to articulate a theory of gender that is helpful in explaining the relationships between agency and structure and how gender relations remain relatively enduring in the context of change. Change happens, but generally slowly, in a way that is often ambiguous in its impacts, and only as fast as the rules, norms and practices that set the parameters of structural conditions can change.

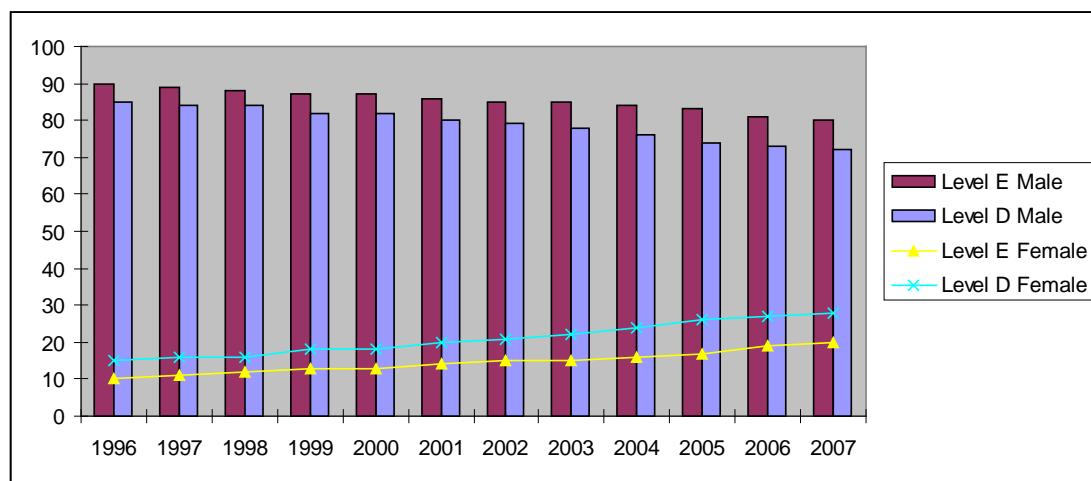
The research questions I address separate out issues that relate to structural barriers to women's career progression and those that relate to individual decision making. There are two main reasons for doing it this way. First, it is analytically useful to separate out structure and agency in order to organise the investigation and build on existing research. In the analysis phase of the research, I go on to examine the relationships between the two. That is, while individual women have diverse histories and identities, and make individual decisions about career progression, these decisions are inherently bound by the practical limitations that gendered structural conditions impose. Similarly, the structures in place progressively change and continue to generate both freedom and constraints in relation to women's possibilities. For some, depending on individual circumstance, the freedoms are great. For others, gendered constraints pose significant limitations on choice. By initially distinguishing between the issues relating to structure and agency, my intention is to show the enmeshed relationship between both.

The second main reason is that a major aim of this project is to identify possibilities for change and in Chapter Nine I focus on identifying the implications of the research for policy and priorities for change. Again, given my understanding that agency and structure are related, it is necessary to highlight what can be done at a structural level as well as what can be done to support individual women to negotiate career progression at an individual level. Individual women, I argue, need support in career decision making and assistance in overcoming barriers, that are, to a certain extent, within the control of the individual to manage or negotiate. At the same time, organisational rules, practices, and cultures must change in order to make women's career progression a tenable choice. Similarly, this needs to happen at a national policy level. For these reasons, my questions are focused first on structures, and second on agency. The following section goes on to explain both.

Why does the transition from Level C to Level D continue to be a barrier to women?

The first research question broadly relates to structural conditions and arises from the obvious fact that women are under-represented at senior academic levels and that the transition from Level C to Level D is a particular stumbling point. As Chart 1.1 shows below, in 2007, 27.9 per cent of all Level D appointments were women and the percentage at Level E was 19.9 per cent. These percentages have improved over time but women's representation is still low compared with men's.

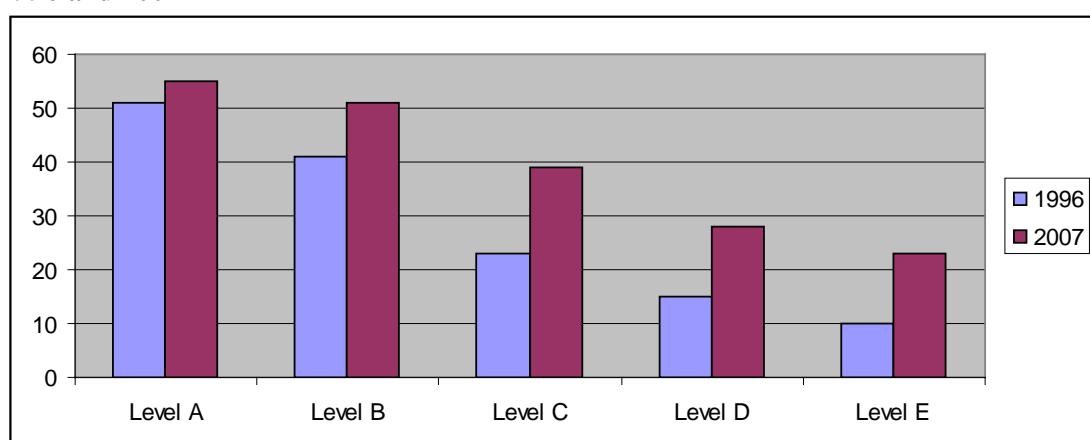
Chart 1.1 Percentage of women and men employed at Levels E and D, Australian universities 1996–2007



Source: DEEWR Staff Data 1996–2007

The rate of increase in women's representation at every level has increased over the same period to the point that employment at Levels A and B are equitable. At Level C, women's employment was at 35 per cent – an 11 per cent increase since 1996.

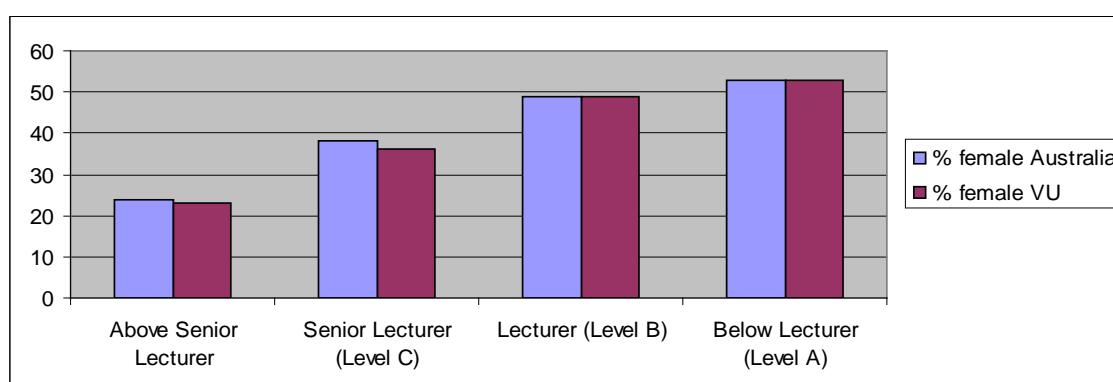
Chart 1.2 Percentage of women employed by academic level, all Australian universities, 1996 and 2007



Source: Universities Australia: <http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/publications/stats>

The charts above show that women's representation at Levels D and E remains comparatively low. This study relies on a close examination of one case, VU, to explore how gender inequalities continue despite women's increasing participation. In Chapter Five, I justify my use of a case study approach. One of the reasons I believe that one case can provide broader insight into broader trends in terms of gender relations and inequalities, is that VU's profile regarding academic representation by gender closely mirrors national trends. Chart 1.3 below illustrates this.

Chart 1.3 Percentage of academic employment by women by level, all Australian universities, 2007 and Victoria University, 2007



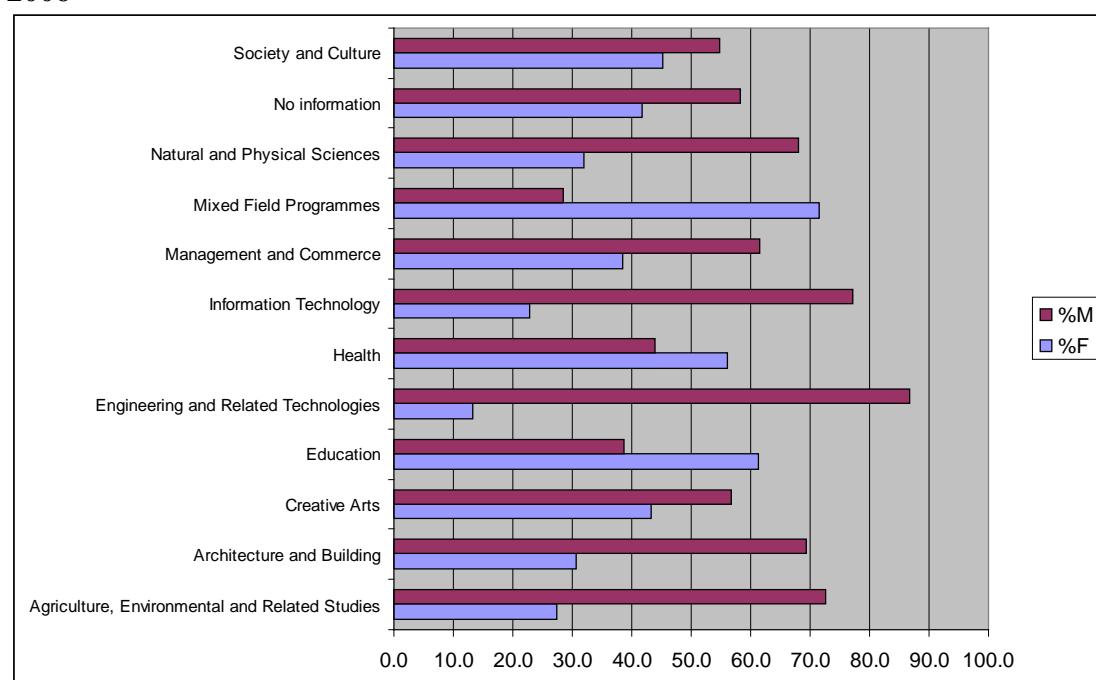
Source: DEST, Selected Higher Education Statistics—Staff 2007, Table 1.9.

A further similarity between VU and national averages is that women's representation at VU has progressively increased at each level. Given that profile, one conclusion that could be drawn is that we just have to wait for representation to increase or, discussed in Chapter Two, wait for the 'pipeline' to take effect. This is supported by evidence found by Winchester et al. (2005) who talk about the transition to C and D as being the major hurdle whereas only recently, the ceiling was in place between B and C. At the same time, they are concerned that

the rate of progress is too slow and there appear to be different and particular barriers in the transition from C to D.

The reason for my first question is that, as the evidence suggests, there are factors operating at transition from C to D that present barriers to women's progression. This is further supported by employment data that shows how women's progression is patchy across disciplines – a picture that is disguised when looking at national averages. While women might be approaching equitable numbers in traditionally female disciplinary areas in the arts and humanities, this is not the case in traditionally male occupational fields such as science, engineering, architecture and building. Chart 1.4 below shows how academic employment is largely reflective of broader labour market patterns of gender segregation by occupational group. This is particularly evident in the traditionally male disciplines of engineering and related technologies.

Chart 1.4 Percentage of gender by disciplinary group, all Australian universities, 2006

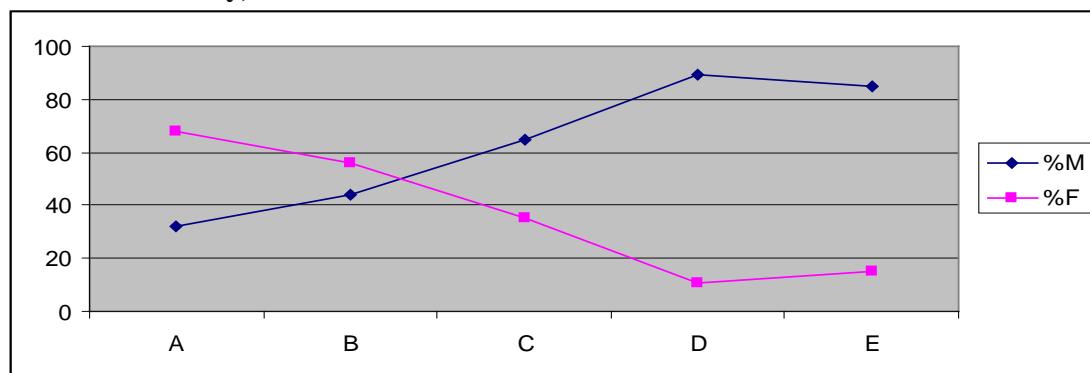


Source: DEST, Selected Higher Education Statistics—Staff 2007

While Chart 1.4 above is helpful in showing that gender segregation by discipline continues to exist, there are limitations to the national data and what can be read into it. First, each university is structured in various ways and so disciplinary areas might include a mix of programs and departments that distort the gendered profile. For example, in the last organisational restructure at VU, the School of Nursing and Midwifery was brought into the traditionally male dominated Faculty of Engineering and Science which is now one of the three higher education faculties at VU (VU 2008d). The effect of this is to disguise the real

extent of male domination within some faculties. To illustrate this, I draw on human resources data (VU, 2008a). For example, Chart 1.5 below shows how the inclusion of Nursing and Midwifery within the Faculty of Health, Science and Engineering, partly disguises the extent of male dominance in leadership.

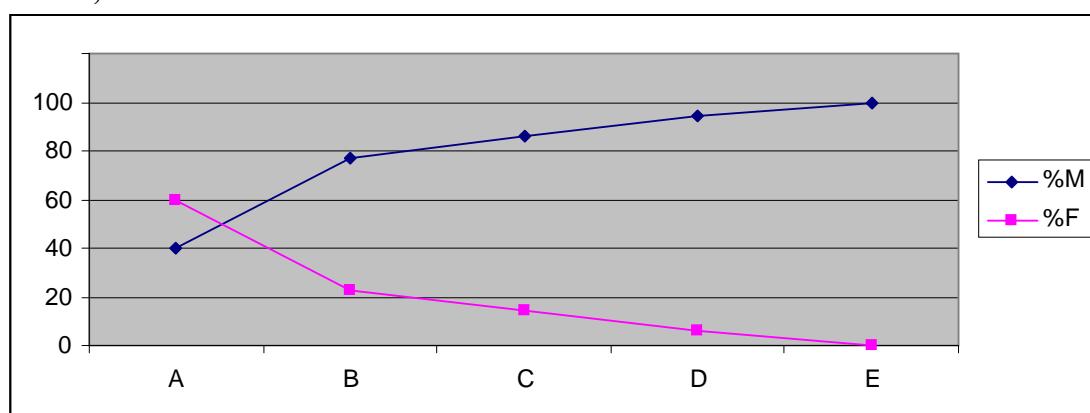
Chart 1.5 Gender by academic level, Faculty of Health, Science and Engineering, Victoria University, 2008



Source: VU workloads data, gathered by the VU Human Resources Division

I use the ‘scissors’ image in Chart 1.5 to show that the gap between male and female representation is still wide and women remain very much on the lower cutting edge. Male representation at Levels D and E is over 80 per cent across the Faculty, and while this is high, it still disguises the fact that most of the female representation in this chart comprises those employed within the School of Nursing and Midwifery and in Biomedical Science, which includes the comparative sizable Department of Osteopathy where male and female participation is relatively equal. These make up two out of six schools within the faculty and if they are excluded, male dominance is particularly clear as Chart 1.6 below shows.

Chart 1.6 Gender by academic level, Faculty of Health, Science and Engineering, Victoria University, excluding the Schools of Nursing and Midwifery and Biomedical Science, 2007



Source: VU workloads data, VU Human Resources Division

Chart 1.6 also shows that the image of the scissors almost disappears given that the intersection between male and female participation occurs at Level A, unlike the national data where male and female participation is equal at the point of Level B. There are no women appointed at Level E and only one at Level D in four out of the six schools that make up the School of Health, Science and Engineering. This indicates that the aggregate data on academic representation by gender is misleading. There are significant pockets within higher universities where women's representation is extremely low. Analysis by gender within this faculty also shows that even in schools where women dominate, women continue to be under-represented in leadership roles. For example, in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, there are 20 women and one man employed at Level B. Representation at Levels D and E are 1:1. I return to this data in Chapter Five, where I show that a similar issue exists in the Faculty of Business and Law. What this example suggests, however, is that the barriers to leadership for women are not simple or one-dimensional and that the nature of gender inequality varies by discipline. Women in non-traditional disciplines are still under-represented above Level A, while in traditional female occupations, women in leadership roles continue to be significantly under-represented in proportion to their total numbers within the discipline. Such data is helpful in showing how there are issues in women's transition from Level C to D in ways that do not occur at less senior levels. It also shows that while the overall representation of women is improving, most of this change has occurred in traditionally female dominated disciplines. In some traditionally male disciplines, the barriers to progression to leadership are particularly clear.

The second reason for the question is that there are distinct differences in promotion criteria and process in the transition between B to C compared to promotion from C to D. As noted earlier, the language relating to the criteria for promotion makes a significant shift between levels from needing to demonstrate a 'significant' to an 'outstanding' contribution to academic research, teaching and service. Applicants must also demonstrate international as opposed to national recognition of academic leadership. Further, panel members who consider applications go up a significant notch in terms of seniority and numbers. As a result, applications to Level D represent a quantum leap from those undertaken to reach Level C. Given women's different structural location within the higher education system (Burton, Cook et al. 1997; Probert, Ewer et al. 2002), gendered and interrupted career histories (White 2001; Bagilhole & White 2006), unequal responsibilities for care (Craig 2005; Pocock 2005; Craig 2006b; Pocock 2006b), lesser mobility (Arthur, Patton et al. 2007) and relative newcomer status within academic employment (Thornton 2008), my assumption is that promotion at this level presents particular barriers to women's progression.

Third, in the deregulated and market-driven environment that higher education now operates, there is an increasing trend toward external recruitment for senior academic appointments as put forward by Doughney and Vu (2006). This is a trend that seemingly advantages men due to their greater mobility, better access to informal networks and the increased ability to demonstrate merit due to uninterrupted career paths and longer term occupancy of senior positions (Doughney 2007). In contrast to internal promotion, which is a process that takes two years to prepare, the process of selection and appointment is considerably streamlined and based on response to an advertisement. This is detailed in Chapter Five. However, as one example, in 2007, six external appointments were made at VU at Levels D and E. All the appointments were male (VU 2008a). The result was that out of all 11 senior appointments made in that year, only two were women. This is a clear trend that is evident since the establishment of VU in 1992. Overall, this is a practice that dilutes the significance of the numbers of women who are now making it successfully, albeit painstakingly, through internal promotion processes.

Finally, women in senior management and leadership in the broader labour market continue to be seriously under-represented and there is little evidence that the so-called pipeline is working (Castleman, Allen et al. 1995; Allen & Castleman 2001; White 2001). By ‘pipeline’ I am referring to the time lag between policy implementation and the intended outcome. The pipeline theory promotes the idea that with time women will come through the system. At senior levels, the pipeline appears to be seriously blocked. In a recent study of women in leadership in Australia, representation remains very low (EOWA 2006). In 2006, only 129 women held directorship positions in ASX200 companies out of a total of 1487 positions. In a slightly better ratio, only 12 per cent of senior management positions were held in the same companies and only three per cent occupied CEO positions. Further, women in leadership are paid significantly less than their male counterparts. Recent estimates suggest that women earn only 58 per cent of the average male in the same group of ‘top earners’ as defined by the Equal Opportunity for Women Agency (EOWA 2008a). While higher education in general compares well with 21 per cent of Vice Chancellor positions held by women, success at an executive level is not necessarily an indicator of trends at the upper-middle and senior management level. A noted international trend is that while there have been increases in women’s representation at junior, middle and executive levels, representation remains low at the senior levels (VanStaveren 2007). Such evidence suggests that there are different and specific barriers operating at this point. The assumption that the pipeline will work is one that requires interrogation.

Overall, my intention is to focus specifically on the transition between Level C and Level D to explore whether there are specific structural barriers to women's progression at this point. My second question refers more specifically to women's agency and the choices that are made in the process of career decision making. This is informed by research findings that suggest that women appear to stop applying for promotion by the time they reach Level C as the following section explains.

Are women pulling out from promotion to Level D just when they have the experience and qualifications to be eligible?

This question is informed broadly by the literature discussed in Chapter Two. An important part of the context, however, is that the higher education system has been in a process of continuous reform and the conditions of academic employment have declined since about the time that anti-discrimination and affirmative action legislation have been in place (Marginson & Considine 2000; Anderson, Johnson et al. 2002; Ball 2003; Kimber 2003; Horsely, Martin et al. 2005; Coates, Goedegebuure et al. 2008; Lavelle 2008). The main features of the reforms are threefold. They include the expansion of the higher education system, the retraction of government funding as a proportion of university income with a shift toward a 'user pays' model and the remodelling of higher education management in line with corporate models of governance. The shift has been to transform universities from being institutions dedicated to contributing to the public good, to being producers of education services in the global higher education market (Thornton 2005). In 2008, the export of Australian higher education services was ranked third in terms of volume of trading, behind only the export of coal and iron ore (RBA 2008). In short, higher education has been commodified and redefined as a product for domestic and international trade. As Marginson (2000) puts it, universities have made the transition from 'college to corporation'. Many of the changes brought about by reform, which has been continuous, have been borne by academics. Within the system, academics are now 'producers' of goods and services to be purchased by the 'customer' who was once understood as a student. New customers have also been defined including government and industry. The role of higher education is now to ensure the continued supply of a skilled labour market as well as products in the form of research and consulting expertise. The effects of this redefinition include larger academic workloads, increased staff to teacher ratios, extensive surveillance and 'benchmarking' and declining academic freedom. In short, academic work is no longer as attractive as it once was and women have particularly been affected for a range of reasons detailed in Chapter Two.

While at one level, one of the effects of reform has been to open up opportunities for entry into academic employment, there is also a body of research that suggests that by the time

women have made it to the point where they could aspire to promotion, they don't because they have been too buffeted by change to consider senior academic roles (Acker & Feuerherger 1996; Allen & Castleman 2001; White 2001; Brooks 2006). I believe this is particularly important given women's status as relative newcomers to academic employment. As Thornton (2008) reminds us, only 25 years ago women's participation as academics was extremely low. For example, at the Australian National University (ANU) in 1983, 99 per cent of senior academics were male whereas 100 per cent of support staff was female. VU started from a similarly low base. When the university was formed in 1992 out of 41 newly created professorial positions (Level E), only three women were appointed at this level (VUT 1994). This being the case, women's apparent fatigue, reluctance and/or ambivalence about career progression is a problem if gender equity in academic employment remains a goal. Progression to seniority in higher education is a long-haul proposition and if women are being put off at this point, when most entered in the 1980s and 90s, there are some serious barriers to progression.

Probert (2005) also picks up on this. One of her findings in a recent national study is that women appear to be giving up on progression in academe. She suggests that women have come into higher education 'behind the eight ball' in terms of human capital and consequently their approach to career progression differs to men's. Specifically, she notes that,

Women have less 'human capital' than men and they do not appear to attack the career structure as vigorously as men, with significant proportions appearing to stop climbing just as they are getting near the peaks. We need to know more about the reasons for this. (Probert 2005 p. 65)

I later discuss why I reject the idea that gendered differences in human capital have no explanatory value for gender inequalities. At the same time, it is this finding and broader research on the conditions of academic work within the reformed university that shapes my question. I have started this research with a sense that there is in fact reason to believe that many women are 'choosing' to hold back from promotion for a range of reasons despite the considerable progress that has been made regarding overall participation and the gradual increases at all levels of the academic hierarchy. This does not mean that I assume that women 'naturally' choose to do anything by virtue of being female. My understanding is that individual decisions are made within a gendered structural context that makes some things possible and/or desirable and others not. An important focus of this study is to understand the basis on which preferences are shaped and what this means in terms of choice. Essentially, I want to establish whether or not women are ambivalent about promotion and if so, why.

In summary, my research questions are shaped by the clear recognition that women are under-represented at senior academic levels and that this characteristic of academic employment is resistant to change. This is despite the existence of anti-discrimination and affirmative action legislation as well as the implementation of EEO programs for more than 20 years. In light of other trends identified in relevant research, the question to flow from this is to ask whether women are resisting or holding back from promotion. I am interested in whether or not this is the case and why. In asking these questions, a range of objectives follow.

Objectives

The objectives that flow from these aims shape the contents of this thesis and the structure of the following chapters. These include first the need to establish current knowledge of, and explanations for gender inequality in higher education. The second is to articulate a theoretical perspective capable of explaining the ambiguous impacts of change in gender relations that have occurred in recent decades. A further objective is to identify a methodological approach that is congruent with my theoretical perspective, which relies on critical realism. I have opted for a case study approach, which I understand as being capable of generating useful and rich insights about gender inequalities within a bounded context. This approach requires a detailed explanation of the case and I do this by providing a history of VU and an overview of organisational policy and practices in the context of higher education reform and in relation to the research questions. A further objective is to draw on the perspectives of women themselves who are positioned below Level D within the academic hierarchy. I do this by conducting interviews with 24 women currently employed at Level C. Finally, the objective is to respond to the research questions drawing on the data. This is undertaken with an eye on policy change and, given what I have found from the research, what can be done to improve women's representation in senior academic roles. The following section explains how I address each of these objectives. In doing so, I provide an overview of the structure of the thesis and its contents.

The literature

The first objective of this research is to ground it in current knowledge. This involved a review and analysis of the relevant literature relating to gender inequality in higher education. Chapter Two details the literature on women's progress and participation in higher education, a body of research that is increasingly an international and cross-disciplinary endeavour that also overlaps with work undertaken across sectors of the labour market. I describe this work in terms of three major areas of focus. First, the largest body of literature focuses on how gender inequalities are reproduced within organisations due to gendered organisational

cultures and practices that ultimately generate unequal outcomes for women. The second and growing body of research is informed by literature about the relationships between work and life. Unequal responsibility for care, defined in the broad sense, is identified as explaining women's unequal outcomes in work generally and academic employment in particular. The third area of focus is about the changing nature of academic work in the context of higher education reform guided by neo-liberal economics and globalisation. From this perspective, the ambiguous nature of women's progress and continued inequalities is understood as being reproduced by the gendered impacts of policies and practices that are underpinned by the positioning of universities as competitors in the global higher education market.

While there is considerable overlap across these themes, there is debate within the literature about how and why gender inequalities continue in academic employment. These debates are largely an outcome of competing theoretical perspectives that are dominant in feminist theorising. Arriving at an approach I believe is capable of explaining durable yet changing gender relations is the second major objective of this research which I explore in Chapter Three.

Critical realism as a theoretical framework

One central objective of this research is to identify a theoretical framework to understand gender inequalities in the context of rapid change in gender relations. Improvements in women's status and participation have been profound to the point that there is a common view that 'women have been done' (Summers 2003). At the same time, the effects of change are ambiguous and difficult to identify (McNay 2000). Women's continued under-representation in leadership, unequal incomes and unequal responsibility for the care of families and households are clear inequalities that continue. The gendered impacts of work intensification, the casualisation of the workforce, and the repositioning of academic work within a corporatised university are among the many issues that have emerged in the context of globalisation and neo-liberal economic reform.

Approaches to understanding gender relations can be characterised as being informed by three dominant and ultimately conflicting approaches. First, and this has had the greatest influence on the literature in this field of research, are institutional theories that are informed broadly by Marxist economic theory and theories of patriarchy (Burton 1985; Bagilhole 2002b; Bergmann 2005; Eveline 2005; Acker 2006). Neo-liberal perspectives can be seen at the other end of the theoretical spectrum with the focus on individual agency and how inequality is an outcome of individual decision making (Hakim 1996, 2000, 2004). The third approach is informed by postmodernism (Butler 1990, 1993, 1997). From this perspective, inequality is

not the question but the focus is on how gender identity is constructed and experienced across diverse contexts. My understanding is that each of these perspectives, while containing important insights, is ultimately flawed and unhelpful in understanding durable patterns of inequality in the context of social change and transformation. My approach draws broadly from a critical realist perspective which I believe is convincing in its understanding of how gendered processes and products exist as a system that simultaneously reproduces and transforms unequal gender relations (Lawson 1999; New 2003; Sayer 2004; Lawson 2007). The purpose of Chapter Three is to explain how critical realism overcomes some inherent problems with dominant theoretical perspectives and how it is useful for my research in explaining women's unequal career progression in higher education. It also provides the background for Chapter Four, which explores the epistemological and methodological implications that inform my choice of method.

Method

The aim of Chapter Four is to explain and justify my choice of a case study as a research strategy to understand gendered outcomes in higher education employment. This choice is informed by the epistemological implications that flow from a critical realist ontology (Sayer 1984; Lawson 1999; Porpora 2001; Danermark & Ekstrom 2001b). These stem from some central tenets of critical realist ontology. These are first, that reality exists independent of our knowledge of it. This reality is not transparent, however, and the only way to see reality is through its effects in the social realm. Second, all social problems are theory laden and shaped by language. As such, social research is guided largely by the practical limitations of the concepts and tools available for understanding what is going on. This also means that understanding concepts is central to social enquiry although the concepts that are used are only an indication of reality rather than reality itself. The objective is to understand the meanings attached to language and how concepts shape and produce broader social processes and structures. Social structures are also understood as being linked to material practice, or what people do, which explains how social structures are enduring while at the same time open to change. These practices are enacted, however, within an open system. This means that it is not possible to control all of the possible influences on social interaction. Only surface reality can be observed with a given context that is always in a generative process of reproduction and transformation. What is achievable is the development of fallible theories that contribute to an argument about the way in which certain social outcomes occur. Central to this process is the exploration of patterns of power and dominance. Within critical realist ontology, a central objective is to expose power relations and the interests served in the maintenance of social systems. As such, social research is understood as inherently value laden and political in its effects.

Given the above, critical realism makes no claims that it is possible to identify definitive ‘truth’ or to develop universal laws. What is possible is, within practical limitations, to generate clues about what is going on through the use of a range of methods that are available. No new methods are advocated but it is generally useful to employ both intensive and extensive methods. Intensive methods, such as interviews, are useful to gain a rich understanding of concepts and social practices within their context. Extensive methods, such as surveys, enable an assessment of the extent of a given problem over a large number of cases. The difference with critical realist informed practice is not that different methods are employed but a different meaning is attached to the data generated. The purpose is to use the data as evidence to identify and theorise about the mechanisms in operation at a deeper level of reality.

From this perspective, case studies are a useful social research strategy (Danermark & Ekstrom 2001a). I use the term ‘case study’ as a research strategy rather than a method and believe that it is the, ‘... intensive study of a single case where the purpose of the study is ... to shed light on a larger class of cases ...’ (Gerring 2007 p. 20). In line with critical realist ontology and the nature of my questions, case studies are particularly useful in responding to questions about ‘how’ and ‘why’ particular patterns or outcomes occur (Flyvbjerg 2006). The purpose is to understand how women negotiate their careers within higher education and why it seems there are sustained barriers to career progression. Investigating how this plays out within a specific case, I argue, is useful and I use a mix of methods within the one intensive case study. These include a literature review and a history and policy analysis of VU as an institution that is set within the context of higher education reform process. The main method I rely on is a series of in-depth interviews with Level C women employed at VU. Twenty-four interviews were conducted and I analyse and report on the findings of these interviews in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Victoria University as a case study

While this study relies on interviews with academic women and their perspectives on promotion and career progression, these are set in context in Chapter Five. The purpose is to describe VU as an institution and how it has evolved since its initial establishment in 1916 as a technical college based in Melbourne’s Western Metropolitan Region and more recently as a new university formed out of the Commonwealth higher education reforms implemented in 1988. VU has a very recent history as a university, coming into being initially as Victoria University of Technology (VUT) in 1992 through an amalgamation of the Western Institute of Technology (WIT) and the Footscray Institute of Technology (FIT). Since establishment,

VU's evolution has largely mirrored higher education reform policy changes implemented through two successive federal governments. It is relatively typical of the corporatised university model that is critiqued extensively as shifting higher education from a role that upholds civil society to that of a producer of educational commodities (Marginson 1993; Marginson 1997; Marginson & Considine 2000; Thornton 2005; Thornton 2007). Part of this description is to show how the implementation of EEO and affirmative action initiatives have been similarly shaped by corporate imperatives.

The aim of Chapter Five is to set the context for women's perspectives on promotion and academic career advancement. The main method that I rely on to investigate women's career aspirations is in-depth interviews with women who are positioned 'below the ceiling' at Level C within the academic hierarchy. Chapter Six specifically reports on the themes identified in the interviews regarding promotion aspirations and why or why not career progression to Level D is being considered.

Perspectives from below the ceiling – why/why not promotion?

In Chapter Six, I report on how I have gone about conducting 24 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Level C women at VU. The interviews were organised around four main themes including career history, current working conditions, career aspirations and perceptions about EEO and its relevance to their progression. The selection of these themes was informed by Lawson's (1999) critical realist perspective that focuses on both agency and structure and the relationships between in shaping choice and decision making. Primarily, I was interested in the conditions that shape choice.

In this chapter, I discuss key findings in relation to women's aspirations to appointment at Level D. First, I discuss the interview findings from the 10 out of the 24 who do aspire to promotion. In order to make sense of the often conflicting considerations that shape this aspiration, I describe the rationale for this aspiration by each of the interviewees in terms of 'encouraging factors' and 'discouraging factors'. I go on to identify key themes. The aim is to identify encouraging and discouraging factors and the structural conditions that shape the conditions of individual choice. The second part of the interviews is about perceptions of the role of gender in shaping career aspirations and opportunities and the extent to which EEO policy and practice are relevant. Chapter Seven reports on and analyses these findings.

Is there a glass ceiling?

One area of questioning in the interviews was about interviewee perceptions of the operation of a 'glass ceiling' at VU and whether or not EEO policy and practice support them in their

career aspirations and opportunities. The glass ceiling is understood as the metaphor commonly applied to describe the transparent barrier to women's progression to senior positions within organisations (Cotter, HermSEN et al. 2001; Wirth 2001; Benshchop & Brouns 2006). The purpose of these questions was first to gather an understanding of how issues about gender inequality were understood and whether or not these have relevance at an individual level. Interest in this is informed by the theoretical understanding discussed earlier that the changes in gender relations are ambiguous in their effects (McNay 2000). Further, gender inequalities have been effectively rendered invisible by the neo-liberal discourse that has dominated social and economic change generally, and higher education reform specifically (Thornton 2008).

I report on the findings of this section in two sections. First, I discuss the responses in relation to perceptions about the existence of the 'glass ceiling'. This question elicited some divergent opinions. The term was clearly problematic concept even though more than half the respondents were clear that there are gendered barriers to progression. While a few believed the barriers to be very much intact, most struggled with the metaphor for a range of reasons. The major problem was the belief that gender, in itself, was too enmeshed in other factors such as age and organisational politics to be able to identify a glass ceiling that strictly applied to women.

The second area of questioning was around the relevance of EEO to career opportunities and progression. Diverse opinions were expressed about this ranging from those who had received direct benefit from EEO initiatives and have a strong faith that procedural fairness is in place, to those who were deeply cynical about the purpose and application of EEO. For some, EEO was at best an exercise in legislative compliance and public relations. At worst, it was a means of university protection from liability for corrupt practice. Overall, there was a theme in the responses that EEO was submerged in the context of higher education reform and that the means of strengthening the impact of efforts to support gender equity lay in improvements to management systems and processes which would serve to encourage, rather than discourage, women's career aspirations.

Barriers and decision making about promotion to Level D

The purpose of Chapter Eight is to return to the original questions posed in this research. Drawing on the findings, I argue that gendered processes continue to generate structural barriers, both old and new, and that these create the conditions for individual decision making. None of these barriers, however, is insurmountable and there are notable instances where women continue to aspire, despite the weight of disincentives working against them.

Similarly, there are a small number for whom the pathway is clear through the combined effects of good timing, supportive management and/or mentor, and placement within a disciplinary area where there are growing opportunities. At the same time, the gendered processes at play are powerful, and for most of the interviewees, the outcome is that, by the time they are qualified to apply, the disincentives to pursue promotion to Level D outweigh the incentives. In order to explain my response to the key questions, I identify key mechanisms that produce this outcome.

The first key factor I discuss, I call ‘inertia’, which refers to the multiple ways in which women are held back from accumulating the experience and qualifications necessary to be eligible for promotion. The second set of conditions were institutional barriers including hostile and/or ineffective management at a senior and local level, gendered micro-politics and recruitment and promotion processes and changing criteria for eligibility. The third set of conditions relates to the outcomes of higher education reform. The effects of reform are ambiguous, and in some ways have opened up women’s opportunities for career progression. At the same time, higher education reform has also produced a decline in academic working conditions including increasing workloads that prevent career-building activities.

My conclusion is that the progression to Level D for academic women is slowed due to multiple gendered barriers. Most of these barriers are those that are well recognised in the literature. However, there are new barriers generated by changes in higher education administration. These include increased flexibility to make external appointments at a senior level and the value-driven nature of policy focused on ‘quality’ and ‘excellence’. My Barriers, old and new, serve to hold women back. I also conclude that most women are holding back from promotion just when they are poised to be successful. This is largely because they get to this point too late in their careers and are discouraged, tired and sometimes unwell from heavy workloads, bad management and constant change. In summary, they believe that the odds are against them and they ‘choose’ to believe that attempts at promotion are not worth it. This is not the case for all, and for a few, the choice to aspire to promotion is worth making. There was only one interviewee, however, who this clearly applied to. Combined, there is a range of processes at play that discourage women’s career progression.

Conclusions and what needs to change

The purpose of Chapter Nine is twofold. First, I discuss the implications of the research findings and am explicit about why gender equality in higher education leadership is important. I do this against the measure that all capable people should be able to progress in their careers free from gendered barriers to the ultimate benefit of all. This is clearly not the

case and I argue that there are multiple and harmful implications that arise out of the way women are systematically discouraged from progression to the professoriate.

The second aim is to identify priorities for change. In doing so I refer back to what I understand as the central purpose of social research, which is to identify patterns of subordination and oppression, to analyse the mechanisms that bring this about and to reveal opportunities for change. The larger goal is human emancipation and the condition of this is the liberation of human capacities. My findings support the conclusion that women's sluggish progression is not an outcome of freely determined 'choice', nor are structures so all pervasive and oppressive that there is not room for change. This leads me to identify a series of priorities that are required to free up women from existing constraints. Approaches to change need to rest on systemic reform coupled with strategies to support women. I conclude by emphasising the need to fix some urgent problems, such as bullying, but also the need for institutional processes to shift to a model that is more inclusive and caring in the broadest possible sense. This is advocated in the interests of not only women's possibilities for progression but to be responsive to broader and growing social and economic imperatives.

I conclude this thesis with a summary of the territory I cover and some brief concluding comments. My main point of emphasis is that efforts toward gender equality, while important in themselves, need to be seen as one element of a broader emancipatory project, which is about making the world a happier, healthier and more sustainable place for all. I have set this project within its broader context and in particular, have emphasised the limitations of the radical free market ideology that has dominated public policy, both internationally and in Australia, over recent decades. The major problem is that the measurement of progress is based almost exclusively on narrow monetary measures, which is a poor measure of what is actually important in life. Given the urgency of climate change and multiple issues emerging from globalisation and the inequalities associated with that, policies directed at change need to measure and prioritise more than narrow financial goals.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to explain the background to the study, what I aim to do through this research and why. First, I have explained the context for the study and how and why the central research questions were arrived at. I describe the academic employment hierarchy and explain how promotions processes are managed at VU. I also explain my understanding of key concepts used around the ideas of equality, equity, gender equity and EEO. I then explain the rationale for the key research questions. The first of these is about identifying the barriers to women's progression to Level D given that progression continues

to be sluggish. This question is aimed at exploring the gendered structural barriers in operation. The second question focuses more on exploring agency and women's choices in relation to forming aspirations for promotion to Level D. This question comes from a number of sources, one of which is that women's low representation is that women freely make different choices about career advancement than do men. The aim of this question is to interrogate this assumption and to examine the relationships between structure and agency. That is on the understanding that decision making occurs within the possibilities available in a structural context. Finally, I describe the objectives of this study, which provides an overview of the thesis and the key findings, analysis and conclusions that are drawn. The following chapter starts by locating this research within the literature and explores what is already known about women's progress in higher education employment.

Chapter Two: The literature, themes and debates

Introduction

The previous chapter provided the background and rationale for this study. I clarified the research aims and explained that the purpose was to respond to key questions about why women's representation in senior academic roles remains relatively low. I also spelt out the research objectives that flow from these questions. The first of these is to ground the study in what is known already about women's progression in higher education, which is the primary aim of this chapter.

There is now a large body of relevant research that is international, interdisciplinary and overlapping into fields of research on women in leadership, women in education and women in management. This chapter reviews the Australian literature that is specifically concerned with gender equity in higher education. It also refers to key international studies given that women's low representation in leadership roles in Australia is a characteristic shared internationally. Research from the UK, the USA, Canada and New Zealand is of particular relevance although there is a growing and broader international contribution that is accessible from Europe in particular and also Asian, South American and African nations.

In order to describe the landscape, I start by identifying key studies undertaken through the 1990s that have been highly influential in articulating the issues around gender equity in higher education and effectively shaping the agenda for research. I then go on to describe the research within three key themes: institutional barriers, the relationship between care responsibilities and career progression, and the gendered impacts of higher education reform. In summarising this literature, I identify gaps and debates in the research and how my research will contribute to knowledge in this field of study.

The following section starts by identifying key studies that have shaped the literature on women in higher education in Australia.

Key studies

In line with momentum generated by the broader feminist movement, research on gender equity in higher education in Australia really only emerged in the 1980s through research undertaken by universities about the extent and nature of gender inequality within their individual institutions (MacDonald, Mandeville et al. 1982; Cass, Dawson et al. 1983; Sawer 1984; Reilly 1985; Allen 1986; Harper 1987; Poiner & Burke 1988; Moses 1989; Kelly 1998). This research informed University Equal Opportunity and/or affirmative action plans

made necessary by the implementation of the Commonwealth *Affirmative Action for Women Act 1986* which required that universities report annually on the status of women and to establish plans and targets for improvement.

By the 1990s, this locally based research, combined with a growing body of international research, informed a series of projects that identify the nature of sex discrimination and gender inequality within universities effectively ‘setting the agenda’ for policy and program change. These include work undertaken by Castleman et al. (1995) who study payroll data from 10 universities in South Australia and Victoria and show how women lag behind men in achieving permanency and seniority. Deane (1996) investigates women’s disadvantage in research and demonstrates the complex interaction between institutional profile, discipline and seniority in gaining research support. Everett and Entrekin (1994) investigate EEO in four Australian universities with a focus on work-related attitudes of academic staff. Arguably, the most influential study was undertaken by Burton et al. (1997) who undertook a major survey of the issues relating to EEO in all Australian universities. This report identifies equity issues in employment, problems with EEO theory, barriers to effective EEO practice and makes recommendation on how EEO should be implemented. Burton emphasises the ‘masculine culture’ of universities, reflecting the values, priorities and structural arrangements in which they are becoming embedded. Burton shows university employment terms and conditions, policies, practices and reward structures that have been organised around the cluster of characteristics, attributes and background circumstances typical of men. Also influential was the national research undertaken by Probert, Ewer and Whiting (1998) who point to significant disadvantage regarding pay equity, permanency and classification experienced by women in higher education. Key barriers identified for academics include late entry, career breaks and women’s disproportionate and unequal household and care responsibilities.

The significance of this series of projects is that they provided an agenda for research which is largely about identifying and understanding the multiple direct and indirect barriers to women’s progression in higher education and how policy and programs might be constructed to change these. The barriers or impediments to progress identified across the sector are usefully summarised by Burton (1997 p. 143) and include the following:

- cultural impediments
- women’s lack of participation in decision making

- staffing policies and practices – the interpretation of the merit principle and criteria for selection and promotion
- labour market and location factors
- the research culture
- gaps between policy and practice
- work–family incompatibilities
- lack of women applying at particular levels and in particular areas of work
- lack of resources for the EEO function
- inadequate integration of EEO principles into university restructuring and strategic planning.

I list these as their identification is based on an analysis of equity reviews from across the higher education sector and, more than 10 years later, they still usefully summarise the focus of most research regarding gender equity in higher education. Essentially, the research is concerned with exploring how women are held back throughout the career journey in order to explain why academic employment remains unequal. While my focus is on the transition from the middle to senior rungs of academic employment, this broader literature is important in understanding why women continue to be blocked at Level D given the length of time and effort required for appointment at this level. The following section describes the literature in greater detail and within some overlapping but discernible themes.

Key themes

The first, and by far the dominant theme, is concerned with institutional barriers and constraints. The second theme is informed by a growing work–life literature that connects the relationships between organisational practices and gender inequities in the private sphere. The third theme is concerned with globalisation, neo-liberal social and economic policy, higher education reform and its gendered impacts. Flowing from this is a body of work that analyses and reflects on EEO and how it has fared since its establishment through the 1980s and 1990s. The following section explores each of these themes in turn.

Institutional constraints

As noted by Probert (2005 p. 51), a dominant assumption in the literature is that unequal outcomes for women are a result of unequal treatment by systems and organisations. These inequalities are commonly described using well-known metaphors. Toren (2001 p. 51), for example, writes that women around the world face ‘at the entrance an iron gate, then a sticky floor, at top a glass ceiling and in between a hurdle track’. This section explains and discusses

how these and other metaphors are used to describe institutional barriers that contribute to women's unequal employment outcomes.

Leaky pipelines

The 'pipeline' is the metaphor used to describe what is put as the unavoidable time lag between policy change and organisational change. According to the pipeline argument, women's position in higher education is slowly but steadily improving in response to their increased educational achievement and the decline of gender discrimination in hiring, promotion and tenure. The view is that a pipeline is operating and will produce gender equality in due course (Dobson 1997; EOWA 2006).

The 'leaky pipeline' is based on a critique of the pipeline argument and the extent to which it ignores the gendered and political space that exists in the pipeline, causing it to 'leak women' (Allen & Castleman 2001; White 2001; Bell & Bentley 2005). In higher education, the leaky pipeline describes how women's representation dissipates progressively from high participation as students at an under-graduate level to significantly low participation rates in research higher degrees (White & Birch 1999; Bell & Bentley 2006). As postgraduate research is the pathway to academia, this then impacts on women's employment as academics. At each stage of the journey toward and through academe, there are 'leaks' and more women than men leak out. Specht (2006) also examines the extent to which the pipeline is operating in science fields and finds that it is only partially working and that there are factors other than the duration of service, such as family responsibilities, contributing to the low numbers of women in senior positions. In the field of science and engineering Blickenstaff (2005) alternatively calls the process the 'gender filter'.

A recent focus has been on women and their capacity to undertake research. This is identified as particularly important given that research completion and output is critical for career progression at all stages of an academic career – from the completion of a PhD and recognition for promotion at each step of promotion. A very recent study of the experience of almost 2,000 PhD graduates from Australian Group of Eight universities shows significant differences between men and women regarding initial motivation, experience and outcome (Dever, Boreham et al. 2008). Women receive less support and encouragement throughout the process, have less engagement with a professional community, have lower earnings on completion and are positioned less favourably in terms of career development. An earlier study identified how academic women at Levels A and B report little time or opportunity to complete PhDs due to heavy teaching loads and care responsibilities (White 1996). Bell and Bentley (2006) also undertake an analysis of where women are located in terms of the

national higher education research infrastructure. While women's participation is increasing at a doctoral and post-doctoral level within certain fields, they remain extremely under-represented in research leadership roles and as successful applicants for ARC funding.

Other research highlights issues for women doing research within the conditions generated by higher education reform. A major theme in this research is that building a research career is now possible and expanding, yet women's progress is patchy and undertaken in the context of new and emerging constraints. Dever, Dalton and Morrison (2006) explore the 'double-edged sword' of workplace flexibility in terms of women's ability to produce research. While women can succeed in research terms, excessive workloads are required to do this. Deane et al. (1996) explore the difficulties of generating research in the 'new universities' established since 1987 where a research culture is lacking and significant infrastructure and support are required to support women's output. Keogh & Garrick (2005) examine the ultimately disadvantageous outcomes of casual academic employment and the precarious possibilities it creates for career progression. Casual employment, dominated by women, allows little scope for engagement in the research necessary for career consolidation. This is a theme picked up particularly by UK-based researchers where similar conditions are at play (Fletcher, Boden et al. 2007).

All of the above contributes to the operation of the 'leaky pipeline', which has as an argument intended to counter the discursive power of the term 'pipeline'. The widespread belief in the pipeline argument is a barrier in itself, disguising the need for proactive strategies for change. As such, Allen and Castleman (2001) claim that the argument ignores the micro-politics at play which affects women's ability to progress in institutions that have been established with a masculine norm for progression as the benchmark. How notions of merit are constructed according to masculine norms is the focus of 'chilly climate' research, which I discuss below.

Micro-politics and the chilly climate

The 'chilly climate' was initially coined by Sandler and Hall (1986) to describe the hostile environment in US institutions of higher education in the 70s. The term has gained currency as '... shorthand for women being frozen out of the status and reward systems in their institutions' (Eveline 2004 p. 99). Research has produced evidence that institutional climates have remained chilly and, in some respects, may be getting worse (White 2001; Eveline 2005; Eveline & Currie 2006). This claim rests on the understanding that the workplace is a major site of gender politics and that power is relayed in everyday practices. Blasé (1991 p. 1) defines micro politics as being:

... about power and how people use it to influence others and to protect themselves. It is about conflict and how people compete with others to get what they want. It is about cooperation and how people build support among themselves to achieve their ends.

As Morley (1999) indicates, the study of micro politics has become an important tool for organisational and feminist research to reveal the ‘dark side’ of organisational life and where power relationships can be identified through rumour, gossip, sarcasm, humour, denial, ‘throwaway remarks’ and alliance building.

The idea of organisational culture as being hostile is based on the understanding that universities are highly gendered in their practices despite the appearance of gender neutrality. This seeming neutrality disguises the extent to which the male working model is the norm and therefore invisible, marginalising women as ‘other’ (Ward 2001 p. 197). This is operationalised through notions of merit and success in universities that are more closely aligned to what men in universities do well (Carrington & Pratt 2003). Micro-political studies seek to demonstrate how concepts of merit are formulated but also how women’s capacity to build the necessary capital is subverted through everyday interactions and decision making. Kjeldal, Rindfleisch & Sheridan (2005), for example, examine how deeply gendered organisational cultures and practices continue within the formalised rules of equity policies. While teaching allocations, as one illustration, might appear equitable and within an established formula, closer examination shows how commonly women end up with teaching responsibilities that are more labour intensive and lower in status leading to a ‘Catch 22’ or a vicious circle in relation to promotional opportunities. More labour-intensive teaching loads lead to less time for research, attendance at conferences and activities that increase competitive advantage in promotional practices. So what appears as a gender-neutral practice is in fact highly gendered, and disadvantageous to women. Higher education is identified as being particularly masculine through its history of exclusion of women until relatively recently (Gherardi 1994). Bullying or harassment is one of the more direct expressions of gendered power structures that works against women (Bagilhole 2002b; Thornton 2004).

Sticky floors and glass ceilings

Understanding the gendered pay gap in universities is one strand of research in this field and the metaphors, sticky floors and glass ceilings, are used to explain how this arises. Booth, Francesconi and Zoega (2003) describe sticky floors as the situation arising where otherwise very similar men and women might be appointed to the same pay scale or rank, but women are appointed at the bottom and men further up the scale. The ‘glass ceiling’, in contrast, describes the transparent barrier to further advancement once women have attained a certain

level within an organisation (Baxter & Wright 2000; Wirth 2001; Hiau 2005) or alternatively, ‘a goal that is within sight but is somehow unattainable’ (Eagly & Carli 2007 p. 63). Combined, both are used to describe how women remain concentrated at lower ranks in occupational hierarchies resulting in a gender pay gap. As explored by Hiau (2005) in a study that compares salaries in the private and public sector, both phenomena contribute to gender differences in earnings at the different ends of the career trajectory.

There is little research investigating sticky floors in the Australian higher education sector. While there is evidence that it does occur, there are limitations in what available data can reveal about whether or not there is discrimination in terms of women’s initial appointment levels compared with men’s. There is evidence, however, that men are more likely to be appointed early in their careers at a higher level than women. For example, Probert (2005 p. 55) demonstrates that half of the women at UNSW were initially appointed at Level A while this was the experience for 40 per cent of men. Men are also found to be more likely to be successful in bargaining about their level of appointment (2002 p. 10). Similar findings come from the US. In a major national review of progress on equity indicators in US universities and colleges, West and Curtis (2006 p. 4) conclude that ‘When women are hired, they are often paid lower salaries than men of equal rank, again short changing both women faculty and educational institutions by discouraging women graduate students from pursuing academic careers’.

There has been no quantification of this gap in salaries in Australia as there has been in both the UK and the US. In the US in 2006, the average female academic salary was 81 per cent of that earned by men. This was a ratio identified as having changed little since the early 1970s (West & Curtis 2006 p. 11). Ward’s (2001) less recent study in the UK identified a gender salary differential of between 15 and 30 per cent. Her conclusions are that rank, age, full-time work, time out of the labour market and faculty affiliation are revealed to be the largest contributors to the gender salary gap in the academic profession. Overall, while aggregate data is available, and evidence about the existence of the pay gap can be established, all that this can do is describe the pay gap, not explain it.

There are two dominant explanations for the pay gap in the literature. The first is about differences in human capital which relates to levels of education, years in employment and relevant skills (Becker 1985; Dobson 1997; Ward 2001). However, as Van Staveren (2007 p. 2) highlights, gender differences in human capital are declining in light of a rapidly reducing gap between women and men’s educational levels, both in Australia and internationally. Consequently, differences in human capital are no longer useful as an explanatory factor in

unequal outcomes for women except in relation to initial entry into organisations (Metz & Tharenou 2001). A related explanation is that women make different choices that value family over career progression (Hakim 2000) . The second major explanation is that institutional barriers operate to disadvantage women relative to men (Bagilhole 2002b; Acker 2006). These arguments are detailed in Chapter Three. What is relevant at this point, however, is the gender pay gap is an important theme in the literature.

Promotion

Another area of investigation relates to the promotion process itself. As Probert (2005, p. 56) comments, ‘It is widely believed among Australian female academics that they do less well than men in the promotions process and that this reflects either direct discrimination or systemic/indirect discrimination.’ This discrimination is identified as coming into play through gendered concepts of merit as discussed above. An aspect of this argument is that members of promotion panels value success in research above teaching where women are more heavily invested. Probert (2005, p. 57) argues that the operation of this discrimination is unsupported by the evidence on the basis that while women are less likely to apply for promotion, they are more likely to be successful than men when they do. This success rate has been achieved through changes in promotion criteria where there is some discretion in how to weight the contribution to teaching, research and university or community service at different levels of the career structure. This argument is further supported by findings of a national review of promotions practices by Australian universities (Winchester, Chesterman et al. 2005) which tests the hypothesis that the under-representation of women in academia reflects barriers in the promotion process. The major conclusions drawn are that, while best practice might not be in place universally, promotions practices reflect a commitment to fairness and equity and address in appropriate ways the barriers to progression identified within the literature (Winchester, Chesterman et al. 2005). They also show that the number of women applying for promotion is approximately equivalent to the eligible pool of potential applicants. The conclusion is that promotion policies and practices are not the ‘place to look’ to explain women’s under-representation in leadership positions.

While Probert’s (2005) conclusions about promotions processes are not challenged per se, there has been argument that a focus on formal promotions processes misses the point. The real problem, according to Doughney & Vu (2006) is the way senior positions are filled, which is largely by external appointment. Their analysis shows that this process serves to advantage men at least at VU. Second, they question whether or not discrimination does in fact still operate at the level of professorial appointments. Given the inequality and gendered character of academic career histories, men continue to be advantaged at the point

where promotions panels are deciding who is ‘the best person for the job’. In general, men continue to be advantaged by greater experience and occupancy of senior positions. This is in no small part generated by unequal responsibility for care, which allows for a singular focus on career. Women, in contrast, ‘pull back’ due to their lesser ability to compete with those who have been free to build greater experience. So while the promotions process in itself is ostensibly ‘fair’, women continue to be held back on the way to promotion over the course of their career history and have less access to promotion by applying for external positions.

Overall, there is not a large body of work that looks specifically at promotion. A longitudinal study is currently in progress at La Trobe University that looks at all levels of academic promotion although, at the time of writing, the outcomes of this research are not published. In addition to the studies mentioned above, there are also a number of projects that explore the gendered experience of promotion and how women might be better supported to be successful (Anifto 2002; Doyle 2006). A related body of research is on women in leadership and/or management as well as work focused on what happens once women reach seniority.

Women in leadership – above the ceiling

There is now a substantial body of literature on women in leadership. Much of this literature is practical in nature identifying strategies to encourage women into leadership roles and how to survive and succeed (De Vries, 1998; Manning 1995). At the same time, there has been a growing feminist contribution to the literature that seeks to identify and document the role of women as leaders historically (Hinton 2002; Steinberg 2008), to identify a ‘women’s style’ of leadership (Coughlin, Wingard et al. 2005; Werhane, Posig et al. 2007), to identify women role models as an encouragement to women to enter leadership (Smith 2000) and to document case studies of how gender and leadership are played out within specific occupations, disciplines or sectors (Wenniger & Conroy 2001; McAllister 2006). Another major trend in the literature has been to build on the ‘business case’ which is around the need for organisations to capitalise on the leadership capacities of diverse population groups, including women, in order to compete in the global economy (Simmons 1996; Cope & Kalantzis 1997; Sinclair 2000a; O’Flynn, Fisher et al. 2001; Blackmore & Sachs 2003; Beck & Davis 2005; Charlesworth, Hall et al. 2005; Sanchez-Huckles, Chin et al. 2008). Most relevant to this study is a body of literature that seeks to understand the social and cultural processes that serve to exclude women from leadership and to interrogate the concept of leadership as a social construction that is closely connected to concepts of masculinity, heterosexuality and heroism (Cox 1996; Still 1996; Blackmore

1999; Still 2005; Blackmore & Sachs 2007). Sinclair's (2005) contributions are of particular importance in that she explores dominant and heroic constructions of leadership which are defined and embodied by white men. Women and 'others' are marginalised simply by being women.

In the higher education sector, Eveline (2005) builds on Sinclair's critique and, using one university as a case study, explores one model of successful leadership which requires recasting identities beyond dualist conceptions of masculine and feminine. The way through for women in leadership is to break new ground with the development of new styles to rise above marginalisation. Similarly, in an evaluation of women in leadership programs Groombridge and Wordon (2006) question the ambitions and relevance of leadership programs for women. They suggest that there is a need to rethink leadership training to cope with increasing complexity and take account of women's different career trajectories.

Much of the research on women in leadership in higher education identifies barriers to women's progression and the difficulties in surviving once having been appointed in senior roles. White (2001), for example, uses the operation of the 'leaky pipeline' to explain women's under-representation and that in fact by the time women reach the point of progression to senior ranks, they are 'worn out, dispirited and no longer have the energy to push on along the hard road of senior academia'. A major contributing barrier is the lack of a critical mass of women in senior ranks to inspire or support newcomers. In a later comparative study of Turkey and Australia systems, Ozkanh and White (2008) identify historical, social and cultural conditions in operation that prevent women's access to leadership. Others identify factors that encourage women's progression. One factor is earlier education in private and/or girls-only schools (Ward 2003; Ismail, Rasdi et al. 2005). Other factors include family support, uniqueness of academic role and religiosity (Ismail, Rasdi & Wahat 2005).

Chesterman (2004) identifies barriers as well as enabling factors through a national study of senior academic management. Success factors in leadership include the presence of a critical mass, the existence of networks and collegiality, transparency in appointment processes and flexibility in working arrangements. She finds that while senior women are enjoying the power of a senior appointment and recognition of success in their roles, they have taken a considerable time to get there and are slowed in their progression relative to men. A range of barriers is also identified that relates specifically to seeking promotion.

These include issues such as lacking in confidence, reticence, ambivalence, seeking balance and resistance as playing a part in women's avoidance of senior jobs (Chesterman 2004).

Overall, a focus on women in leadership has been one growing theme in relevant Australian research. There is attention to how women can succeed as leaders, the contribution women can make to organisational productivity through leadership, understanding the construction of the concepts of leadership which serve to marginalise women, barriers and constraints to women's entry as well as those factors that have contributed to the women's success.

Institutional barriers in summary

Overall, the metaphors discussed above are used to describe various conditions that combine and operate to hold women back progressively in terms of their career advancement. While such research represents the majority of research in the area, there are two other important themes that provide an overlapping but alternative focus. The following section goes on to discuss the first of these, which is about the impacts of care on women's promotional opportunities.

Who cares (?) and its impact on careers

The importance of care responsibilities in shaping women's career choices, aspirations and outcomes is acknowledged as a critical factor in the literature on women in higher education. Probert (2005), in particular argues that this is where she believes we should be looking in terms of explaining women's poorer outcomes in higher education and how policy and strategies might be directed most effectively. The momentum for understanding the relationships between work, family and community has grown in the context of a declining birth rate, an ageing population and increasing skill shortages – all issues of central concern to the Howard government (HREOC 2007 p xi). Frequently, the issue has been referred to as the ““BBQ stopper”” – it is the topic of the 21st century for families, employers and governments.” (Summers 2003 p. xi).

From work and family to work and life

In a policy context, the term 'work and family' policies has been predominantly used to describe 'arrangements to support employees faced with balancing the competing demands of work and family in today's fast-paced complex environment' (Newman & Mathews 1999 p. 42). Supporting employees to address the 'balance' between work and family is seen largely as a human resource management issue with the aim of minimising the costs of losing skilled employees (generally women) due to the conflicting demands of work and family. The test of whether balance has been achieved rests on a perception of satisfactorily resolving the

multiple demands of work and family roles (Thorntwaite 2004). The notion of ‘work and family’ has been extensively critiqued, however, as being too narrow in scope, implying that care is only the concern of heterosexual women with children and suggestive of a neat distinction between two separate spheres of life.

The use of the term ‘work and life’ signals a conceptual shift made on the basis of three major points as elaborated by Pocock (2005). First, the term ‘work and life’ encompasses the care responsibilities of childless people and those who live in a family context that varies from the traditional nuclear model. Second, work and life is suggestive of the ‘spillover’ between work and life and boundaries are porous (2007). Work inevitably impacts on many aspects of home life and the reverse is also true. It is also not a two-dimensional relationship and there are profound impacts on communities when the working population is unable to find time to engage in activities or relationships beyond the immediate worlds of work and family. In the context of increased flexibility made possible through information technology, the encroachment of work into all spheres of life is increasingly the case (Eveline & Currie 2006). Third, Pocock (2007) argues against the extent to which notions of ‘work and family’ rests on imagery created by the commonly used metaphors of ‘balancing’ or ‘juggling’ – that the aim is to find a harmony between the demands of these distinct spheres of life. She coins the term ‘collision’ as more accurately describing the experiences of working life of most Australians where demands are increasingly in conflict. These understandings inform a concept of care that is broader than care provided by parents to children. It incorporates the notion that all individuals experience periods of dependency on care throughout their lives as well as the need for the care of the self. This is particularly pertinent in the context of academic employment where the pastoral care for students as well as care within collegiate and organisational networks is a central feature of academic work.

There is much evidence to show that women assume unequal responsibilities for care. Time-use data shows that women undertake most of the child care and housework and there are differences between men and women regarding expressed preference for working hours and care responsibilities (Drago, Wooden et al. 2006; AIFS 2007). Data also shows that partnership increases women’s unpaid work load while the reverse is true of men (Craig 2005). Further, there are qualitatively different types of child care provided by men and women even when time availability is the same. Analysing large-scale time data, Craig (2006a) concludes that mothering is quantitatively and qualitatively different than fathering and that mothering involves more double activity, more physical labour, a more rigid timetable and more overall responsibility than fathering. Responsibilities for care also have not changed much over time and women’s responsibility for family care has diminished very

little despite the exponential entry of women into paid work over the past 30 years (Baxter 2002). These responsibilities vary according to life cycle, ethnicity and socio-economic status. Policy conditions, such as the cost of child care, also have a direct impact on women's employment participation (Summers 2003; Leahy & Doughney 2006). The discussion about work-life policy and discussions about 'who cares' are also highly gendered and, as Pocock (2005) points out, men are largely invisible in the discussion despite calls to widen the debate (HREOC 2007). It is a discussion largely about how women can fit care responsibilities with work and working participation patterns reflect that it continues to be women who shape their working lives around care. As Pocock (2005) states, the main mechanism for women to manage work and life is part-time work. Drago, Wooden et al. (2006) also show that most life events have little impact on the working hours of men, while women's working hours fluctuate considerably with the birth of children, the death of family members and other life events.

Who cares in higher education?

Women in full-time academic employment carry a burden of care that is sharply distinct from men both in families and at work. As Probert (2005) identifies, female academic staff who have children are significantly more likely to be the main carer of children than are men. Almost 49 per cent of academic women identified themselves as the main carer of children compared with 4.4 per cent of men. Further, female academics are less likely to live with a partner (72.1%) than are men (83.8%) and of those women who do live with a partner, almost all the partners of female academics (91.7%) work full-time. This is in contrast to full-time male academics with partners where only 57.2 per cent of partners work full-time. These differences are further compounded with the finding that almost a quarter of female academic staff also have caring responsibilities for aged parents compared with 13.8 per cent of men (2005 p. 63).

In their role as academics, men and women also differ, according to Probert (2005 p. 59) in terms of workload and productivity and with women spending more time on student welfare and pastoral care and less time on potentially career-building activities such as consultancies and conference organisation. Women were identified as having lower research output and that 'more time' through teaching relief was what women wanted in order to complete research compared with men who wanted more money. This was highlighted particularly by women with older children who acknowledged that research was the only thing that could be put off when the combination of teaching, administration, children and research created overload (2005, p. 68). A lack of time was also cited as the major reason for not completing a PhD. All

of these findings are clear in identifying that responsibilities for care are an important constraint on women's capacity to be competitive for promotion.

Despite the momentum in the debate around work and life policies, broader conditions combine to make the conditions for managing work and life harder, particularly for women. Clearly, many women are 'choosing' not to have children and Eveline (2004 p. 184) points out the 'contraceptive effect' of higher education on women with a Bachelor degree or higher being twice as likely than women without post-school education to not have children (although recent evidence shows that this pattern might be changing) (Lunn 2008). Longer working hours also make the balance harder to manage with figures showing that Australia's average working hours are among the longest against comparable countries (van Wanrooy 2007) and there is a clear relationship between long hours and poor work-life satisfaction. The cost of child-care has risen substantially and there continues to be a lack of universal coverage around maternity leave provision (Farouque 2007).² As Pocock (2005, p. 15) points out, whether or not adequate provision is available, managing colliding demands is largely a matter of luck within current employment arrangements. The elements of 'luck' include having a sympathetic employer and a strong union.

Women in higher education are arguably a special case in the work-life policy debate. The situation is somewhat paradoxical in that women are often attracted to higher education employment due to the flexibility that is offered and the ability to work from multiple locations (Subramaniam 2003). Further, most Australian universities have continuously implemented comprehensive EEO programs (Winchester, Chesterman et al. 2005). For tenured women at least, provisions such as maternity leave and professional development are generous compared with other sectors (Probert 2006). There is also a strong union that is active in improving women's employment conditions. At the same time, universities are 'greedy institutions' (Coser 1974) that want all of your time. While academic work allows a high degree of discretion and autonomy in relation to where, when and how one works, this does not mean less work and in many cases, the reverse is true (Coates, Goedegebuure et al. 2008). The pressure to complete a PhD and then to meet the relentless demand to publish is a continued pressure that means that work is not confined to standard hours. While this is true of many forms of work in the current climate, the boundaries between work and non-work time are particularly blurred for academic workers (Waters & Bardoel 2006). With information and communications technology, there are few barriers to undertaking work at any time of the day leading to the extension of work beyond normal working hours. This

² In the 2009–10 budget, the Rudd government has announced the intention to implement a national paid maternity leave scheme to commence in 2011.

‘extensification’ (Eveline & Currie 2006) of work encroaches to the point of taking over sleep which is particularly the case for women with children as Acker and Armenti (2004) so clearly describe. The continuous implementation of higher education reforms have meant that workloads have intensified and teaching loads have increased by almost one third over the last 10 years (Wordon & Fryer-Smith 2006). It is also widely understood that while work and family policies might be in place, they are under-utilised and a range of barriers inhibits their use. As Waters and Bardoel (2006) identify, the major barrier to their utilisation is excessive workloads and while the entitlement to take leave might be in place, a lack of institutional commitment, poor communication about entitlements, workplace cultures, workloads and performance criteria commonly don’t allow their utilisation.

There is little disagreement that the responsibility for care is a critical factor regarding women’s capacity to be competitive for promotion. There is also extensive evidence that the issues of managing work and life have significant implications for the health and wellbeing of individuals, for families, communities, organisations and the national economy and that this is a growing phenomenon in the context of trends toward long working hours and increasingly competitive organisational policy (Pocock 2006b; Pocock, Skinner et al. 2007; Coates, Goedegebuure et al. 2008). At the same time, there is relatively little research on the impacts of care for higher education employees generally or in relation to its impact on women’s promotional opportunities although my understanding is that this is a theme that is in progress (eg. Thompson, Valentine et al. 2007). In the Canadian higher education system, Acker (1996) identifies how women are ‘doing good and feeling bad’. They work hard to do a good job, be good colleagues, good university citizens, good teachers, and they nurture their students. At the same time they feel disappointed, that their efforts often go unnoticed, that there is an unfair division of labour and that they are continuously under pressure to work harder. The consequence is high levels of anxiety, stress and frustration for women academics. In the UK, Forster (2000) identifies that, coupled with institutional structural and cultural barriers, many women have resigned themselves to not reaching senior positions due to their family commitments.

Poor work–life balance for carers is a key issue in higher education particularly in relation to achieving greater representation of women in leadership positions. As Doughney and Vu (2006) conclude, care responsibilities are a key factor in preventing women from building the kind of experience and long-term incumbency in positions that feed into the professoriate and will make them the ‘right person for the job.’ The cumulative effect of these conditions is that, often by default, women are ‘choosing’ between career and care - a ‘choice’ that men are rarely expected to make.

As noted earlier, unequal care responsibilities are widely acknowledged as a critical factor in understanding women's career trajectories yet there are few studies that take a close and specific look at the impact of care on female academics. Similarly, the gendered effects of globalisation and higher education reform is an important theme in itself as well as an 'overlay' (Currie, Thiele et al. 2002) on conditions that shape career prospects for academics. The following section goes on to identify the threads of this discussion and what it says about prospects for female academic career progression.

Globalisation, neo-liberalism and higher education reform

The impact of globalisation, neo-liberalism and the reform of higher education is an important theme in the literature, which can be roughly divided into three focus areas. These include the broader impacts of globalisation on work, the impact of neo-liberal informed sector reform and the gendered impacts of 'new managerialism' that now characterises university administration in Australia and in comparable OECD countries. By globalisation, I refer to the ways in which space and time have been compressed by technology, information flows, trade and power that have resulted in the shift that has meant that distant actions have local effects (Wiseman 1998 p. 14). In turn, the process of globalisation has transformed work and work organisation through the economic centrality of knowledge and information, the use of information and communication technologies and the internationalisation of the labour market. Neo-liberalism is a related but separate term that refers to a political economic ideology that has coincided with globalisation and become dominant in recent decades through its adoption and implementation throughout the OECD. The core tenets of neo-liberalism rest on some central notions that are most commonly associated with the work of economists Hayek (1941), Friedman and Friedman (1962) and Buchanan (1975). These include that the economy is driven by self-interested individuals, that the best way to allocate resources is through the market and a commitment to free trade and laissez-faire policy that allows the market to self-regulate (Olssen & Peters 2005 p. 314). 'New managerialism' flows from this theory base and is now dominant in public sector administration (Moore 1995; O'Flynn 2007). While there is a range of related management theories that are applied including Agency Theory, Transaction Cost Economics and Property Rights Theory among others, as a collective group, Olssen and Peters (2005) call these techniques 'New Institutional Economics' or 'New Public Management'. Essentially, they can be characterised as an approach that is modelled on free market and private sector principals. This is the approach that has been applied through higher education reform resulting in the 'corporatisation' of university administration. What this has meant for academic work is greater surveillance, accountability and the need to demonstrate performance in accordance

with market-based criteria (Marginson & Considine 2000 p. 7-8). The gendered impacts of each of these related trends are explored in the literature relating to women in higher education.

Globalisation, work and gender

In common with the broader literature on globalisation, impacts are widely identified as paradoxical, unpredictable and contradictory (Guillen 2001). One of the clear outcomes is that work has been transformed through the application of information technologies, the shift from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy and the internationalisation of the labour market (Guillen 2001). These trends, in turn, are closely linked to social and demographic change. Women's expanded entrance into the labour market, declining birth rates and thus an ageing workforce in developed nations and increased cultural diversity feature large as major impacts on the nature of work and work organisation (Pyke 2008). Attention to these trends is a feature of the literature on women in higher education.

The impact of information technology is one thread. Eveline and Curry (2006), for example, explore the contradictory impacts of e-technology on mid-career academics in managing work and family life. While such technologies offer the flexibility to work in multiple locations at various time, the ultimate outcome, when coupled with increasing workloads, is increased stress and a complete blurring between home and work life. In Canada, Acker and Armenti (2004) in a related theme, explore how women are particularly affected by extended workloads and the need to 'prove themselves' as more junior within academic structures.

Academic workforce age structures also have gendered implications and the Australian higher education sector can be seen as characterised by three features. These are: 'age heaping' – that is, that the workforce is older than other working groups with a 'heap' at the upper ends of the age scale; and a mature age structure and an imbalanced gender ratio (Hugo 2005). The implications of this are that a large proportion of academics will be lost as they retire within the next 10 years and that there is a 'lost generation' of potential academics due to the lack of recruitment and growth in the academic workforce over the last 15 years. Many of those who are 'lost' are women who currently occupy casual academic positions that may or may not lead to tenure and the opportunity to work toward seniority (Keogh, Garick et al. 2006). Wordon and Fryer-Smith (2006) also highlight the gendered impacts of the changing academic career journey in the face of broader economic change. Academic careers, they argue, are no longer built on a set of logical, consecutive steps but there are increasingly a variety of entries in and out of other workplaces. Due to gendered structural arrangements, women are more constrained in the capacity to negotiate these new entry points. This is

exacerbated by the increasing individualisation of academic work where collegiality is identified as important in nurturing women's progression.

Perhaps the most significant strand of the literature is around internationalisation. While internationalisation is closely related to globalisation, the term has a particular meaning in the higher education context. Essentially, it refers to the process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the university. International projects may be conducted locally or offshore but a global, international or intercultural dimension is integrated into higher education practice (Arthur, Patton et al. 2007). Internationalisation is reflected in a growth of studies that make international comparisons about women's progress. Morley (2005b) for example, compares gender equality across Commonwealth countries. She highlights the difficulties in understanding transnational progress toward gender equity, the dominance of developed nations in understanding masculinity and promoting an equity discourse and the contradictory set of conditions that operate to impede progress. Tilbrook (2006) compares women's experiences in senior higher education management in US and Australian universities and concludes that a clear commonality is that women remain 'outsiders' in senior roles. Neale and White (2004) similarly conclude that senior academic women in Australia and New Zealand continue to face subtle and informal processes around promotion that operate to discriminate. Thanacoody et al. (2006) draw almost the same conclusions in a comparison between Australia and Mauritius. They find that the barriers to progression are remarkably similar despite very different cultural contexts.

A related area yet to be explored in any depth is gendered differences in opportunities to participate in international projects. One Canadian study that does this is undertaken by Arthur, Patton and Giancarlo (2007) who examine how women are positioned regarding the importance of, and participation in international projects. They find that women are lacking in confidence and perceived competence to participate actively in international projects and make a series of recommendations about how to better support women's increased participation. Overall, women's under-representation in senior roles is an international phenomenon that is pervasive despite cultural, political and economic differences. This under-representation is generated through historical conditions but continues in the context of social, economic and technological changes.

Neo-liberalism and new public management

Neo-liberalism has informed the development of higher education reform and university management (Marginson & Considine 2000; Thornton 2005). The impacts of this are

profound and have led to a decline in academic working conditions (Anderson, Johnson et al. 2002; Coates, Goedegebuure et al. 2008; NTEUb 2008). Exploring the gendered impacts of this is an important theme in the literature. There are two overlapping areas of focus. The first is about how the implementation of ‘new managerialism’ impacts on women through its basis in generating profit, top-down management and concentration on surveillance, accountability, excellence, quality, outputs and outcomes (Olssen & Peters 2005). The second theme is about how equal employment opportunity is positioned in the reformed university and the possibilities for effectiveness in the corporatised system that higher education has become (Noble & Mears 2000; Aveling 2002; Blackmore & Sachs 2003; Thornton 2008).

New managerialism

Universities have been modelled on corporate styles of management, as detailed in Chapter Five. There are many dimensions of this style of management which are seen to impact on women due to women’s location within the academy at more junior levels and in fields that are less closely connected to the profit imperative which now drives higher education management (Eveline 2004). The major impacts, however, include larger academic workloads, expanding ‘managerialism’, the increased surveillance that comes from that and the increasing role of competition that characterises new work organisational arrangements (Blackmore 2002; Blackmore & Sachs 2003; Williams 2004).

Increasing workloads have a direct and gendered impact on health and wellbeing and there is an emerging literature that seeks to identify how these conditions have particular impacts on female academics. Raddon (2002) explores the tensions that mothers experience in trying to fulfil the identities of being a ‘successful academic’ while at the same time being a ‘good mother’. Currie et al. (2000) identify ‘top-down’ masculine discourses as reinforcing and normalising high workloads and a prime commitment to the institution. Eveline and Currie (2006) also examine the impact of work ‘extensification’ that occurs through the increasing utilisation of information technology that allows work to be undertaken at any time. Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2003 p. 113) discuss how university practices are more problematic for women than they are for men due to the ‘simple logistics of age, the biological clock, the tenure clock, the physical demands of pregnancy and childbirth, the gendered expectations of family obligations’.

Heavier teaching loads are a major contributor to workloads overall and, as identified by Probert (2000), women spend more time in engaged in student welfare and pastoral care detracting from the ability to spend time on research. Kjeldal, Rindfleisch and Sheridan (2005) also describe how women’s teaching allocations are qualitatively different than men’s

and are more likely to be taking courses that require more face-to-face time at undergraduate levels. Much of the increase in student numbers, however, has come from international students. In some universities, international students make up more than 50 per cent of the total student population (Marginson & Eijkman 2007) and their inclusion has considerable implications for teaching and support services. The revenues generated by international students have not been channelled to increasing academic staff (Marginson & Eijkman 2007). The increased teaching loads for academic staff have therefore increased in complexity due to the need to respond to increased classroom diversity with accompanying diversity in language and literacy ability (Chung, Kelliher et al. 2006).

Another important theme is around the increased incidence of workplace bullying which Thornton (2004 p. 162) argues is an outcome of a corporatised environment where ‘... the relentless pursuit of profits have become dominant imperatives’. In the higher education sector, Thornton argues that top-down management and the erosion of collegiality has led to a loss of academic control over the conditions of work and fewer opportunities for academic voices to be heard. These conditions lead to a decline in workplace satisfaction and an increase in stress. Closely related is a rise in the incidence of bullying and women are especially at risk (ILO 1998). Women are also positioned badly in relation to securing funding for research and attracting fee-paying students (Eveline 2005). In the push for profits and the delivery of credentials that lead directly to lucrative employment, the fields where women dominate, such as the social sciences and creative arts, are less able to ‘compete’ in the entrepreneurial university. Fields that are not able to clearly demonstrate the relationship between market outcomes have suffered particularly in the corporatised environment. Women’s concentration in lower paid and insecure positions is also reinforced in increasingly hierarchical management systems as Lafferty and Fleming argue (2000).

The importance of meeting performance criteria regarding research output has increased in the post-reform university and the gendered impacts of this is another important theme in the literature. In the UK, Fletcher et al. (2007 p. 433) argue that the conditions in which research is undertaken ‘systematically militate[s] against women’s full and equal involvement in research’. This is brought about through increasing competition between academics, the continued existence of homosocial networks and a lack of transparency in process that combine to create conditions where women are marginalised. Thornton (2004), on a related theme, points to the ‘corporatist paradox’. While the managerialist rhetoric is to increase research output, the conditions for producing research have deteriorated due to declining resources and support and increasingly authoritarian workplaces that drain the energy necessary to engage in creative research.

Morley (2005a) explores the impacts of quality assurance systems on women. She shows benefits to women through increased transparency and opportunities to participate in management processes implementing the systems. At the same time, discourses around ‘excellence’ and ‘quality’ reinforce power structures that value certain types of work over others and subject academics to high levels of surveillance and scrutiny. Morley (2005) also points out that, given women’s location in less senior roles, quality assurance processes also mean a lot of work which is largely administrative and invisible again reducing time to undertake the kind of career-building work of research and networking. Morley (2005 p. 412) argues that the discourse of ‘quality’ imposes a new ‘moral order’ over the chaos of unequal power relations. Simultaneously, the emphasis on outcomes, targets and performance measures reinforces ‘macho’ styles of leadership (2005 p. 419) and closes the space for discussion on social justice.

Overall, the impact of higher education reform and the implementation of new managerialism have had harsh impacts on the nature of academic work and on women in particular. This has led to reflection on the relationship between higher education reform and the role of EEO.

Equal Employment Opportunity in the context of reform

The implementation of EEO strategies has been in place in universities now for a little more than 20 years. There is a theme in the literature that evaluates EEO and shows how events since the late 1980s have progressively undermined the capacity of EEO to deliver on its original intentions.

Blackmore and Sachs (2003), Thornton (2008) and Noble and Mears (2000) make the major Australian contributions to thinking about the fate of EEO and gender equity in academic staffing in higher education and each shares a similar perspective about what has happened. While each recognises that EEO and affirmative action initiatives have clearly worked as reflected in women’s increased participation, the outcomes have been patchy and diluted by progressive waves of reform and restructuring. First, until the mid-1980s, Australia was recognised internationally as a model of gender equity initiatives in part due to close alliance between the women’s movement and the state (Blackmore & Sachs 2003; Summers 2003). An impact of the broader economic reform program of the Hawke/Keating government in the 1980s and 90s led to the initial undermining of this relationship with the decentralisation of the industrial relations system which saw the devolution of bargaining down to the enterprise level. Feminists at the time continued to argue for the need for strong top-down equity policies at the state and federal levels to support bottom-up activism (Burton 1991). The

Dawkins reforms of higher education applied these devolutionary principals in the higher education sector which many commentators saw as premature for EEO which had little time to ‘take hold’ within organisational practices (Noble & Mears 2000). Equity was an afterthought rather than a central principal in the restructuring of universities. As Blackmore and Sachs (2003 p. 145) argue, ‘EEO was still seen by most to be an imposition, an afterthought, rather than central to management practice or good leadership’.

The years of the Howard coalition government from 1996 to 2007 was a period in which many of the gains made in terms of supporting women’s labour market participation were seriously undermined. Through its broader campaign to reign in the welfare state, the Howard government was widely recognised as decimating the infrastructure that had been built to support gender equity in numerous ways (Summers 2003). One of the tangible outcomes of this was the renewed widening of the gender equity pay gap that had been progressively closing prior to the election of the Howard government (Probert, Ewer et al. 1998). In the higher education system, devolution of governance meant that some institutions did better than others in terms of maintaining a focus on gender equity in staffing (Burton, Cook et al. 1997). Generally, however, EEO has been marginalised by the reduction in government funding, new managerialism and the profit imperative. As Thornton (2008 p. 2) notes, ‘the politics of gender and race have either moved to the periphery or disappeared altogether unless they can be shown to have use value in the market’. Higher education reform also coincided with a rising backlash against affirmative action as being unfair to men and organisationally divisive (Faludi 1992). Blackmore and Sachs (2003) argue that restructuring is a form of backlash in itself with its tendency to favour men in leadership who have the benefit of long-term occupancy within positions of organisational power.

In line with neo-liberal reform principals, gender equity has been widely reframed in terms of ‘managing diversity’, a term that aligns efforts to support gender and cultural difference within market imperatives. What this represents is a shift from the social justice commitment that underpins EEO to one that ‘invokes the existence of difference and variety without any necessary commitment to action or redistributive social justice.’ (Blackmore & Sachs 2003 p. 151). One of the outcomes is that efforts to ensure student equity are prioritised due to the power of the discourse to attract a more culturally diverse (and fee-paying) population in an internationalised higher education system. The relationship between academic staff equity and any profitable outcome is not so clear despite efforts throughout the literature to demonstrate that there is in fact a very clear ‘business case’ to be made in support of EEO and the effective management of staff diversity (Cope & Kalantzis 1996; Bertone, Esposto et al. 1998; EOWA 2008).

Overall, the influences of higher education reform, restructuring and global social and economic change is the context for gender equity in higher education academic staffing. It is also a theme in the literature that is specifically dedicated to the analysis of how such change impacts in terms of gender relations. These impacts, as reflected in the literature, are dynamic, ambiguous, paradoxical and difficult to read. What is clear is the view that EEO has been at least partially submerged by the dominance of market-based principles in higher education.

Summary of themes

To summarise the discussion this far, I have identified that much of the Australian literature that looks at gender equity in higher education staffing is guided by a few comprehensive studies undertaken in the late 1990s that have effectively set the agenda in terms of the issues and problems that generate sustained gender inequality in the higher education sector (Castleman, Allen et al. 1995; Burton, Cook et al. 1997; Probert, Ewer et al. 1998). While each has a different area of focus, combined they identify the multiple and interacting barriers and conditions that contribute to women's position as more junior and segregated within traditionally female occupations. Much of the research undertaken since then has branched off to explore aspects and dimensions of the broader systemic conditions at play. As noted above, I have grouped this literature within three major themes including institutional barriers, unequal responsibility for care and higher education reform. The purpose of the following section is to identify debates that run through the literature.

Debates

Also discussed in Chapter One, an important objective that flows from my research questions is to identify a theoretical perspective that is helpful in understanding how unequal gender relations are sustained in the context of social change and transformation. The need for this arises through the existence of a broader struggle in feminist theorising. As McNay (2000) comments, while much has changed and improved in terms of women's opportunities and progression, the effects of these changes are ambiguous and difficult to identify. This struggle is evident within the literature on women in higher education. While there are large areas of agreement, there are also a number of debates and disagreements particularly in relation to 'where to look' for the key factors that ultimately produce unequal outcomes for women.

A recent example of this arises from Probert (2005 p. 65) who comments that a focus on the division of labour within the household is the 'place to look' to explain women's unequal employment outcomes. She argues that EEO within university practices has been largely effective and the existence of workplace discrimination no longer explains gender inequality.

These claims have been challenged as being based on evidence that is too general and ignores the subtle micro-political processes at play that continue to reinforce masculine benchmarks as the norm. Morley (2005) alternatively argues that laying the blame on women's care responsibilities provides an explanation that is too easily perceived as rational when it is actually an outcome of discrimination and unequal power relationships. Looking at households and care, '... offers a rational explanation for irrational prejudice' (Morley 2005 p. 423).

Another related response comes from Stevens-Kalceff et al. (2006) who challenge the assertion that work-load allocations are equitable in higher education. Through a case study of the School of Physics at the UNSW, they analyse workload allocations, research grant income, postgraduate supervision and career histories by gender. They conclude that while there is no evidence of direct discrimination, women end up with significantly more teaching contact hours than do men, which contributes to a self-perpetuating and compounding cycle preventing women from seeking or achieving promotion. Given that promotion relies heavily on research grants, and that women have significantly greater care responsibilities, the more time spent teaching means less time for research (2006).

A similar argument is made by Doughney and Vu (2006) who argue that too little attention has been paid to the increasing trend in universities to make senior appointments externally, explaining women's under-representation. This practice gives rise to a range of questions about concepts of merit and unequal histories claiming that women cannot compete against men's longer term occupancy and experience in leadership roles. It is at this point that they argue that discrimination operates in the selection of the 'best person for the job'. Women's unequal histories and gendered power relationships come in to play to disadvantage women as being less likely to be recognised as the 'best person'.

There is also disagreement about the extent to which 'the pipeline' is working and whether or not the systems are in place to improve women's position within organisations. The notion of the pipeline suggests that it is just a matter of time before gender equity is achieved and point to women's growing participation as evidence that this progress will be sustained (EOWA 2006). Others, however, make varied projections about the length of time it will take before equity is achieved. Fletcher et al. (2007) estimate that in the UK, it will be another 68 years before half of the readers and professors will be women. Others produce different estimates such as Noble and Mears (2000) who estimate that it will take 20 years for equity in numerical representation of academics and considerably longer for this to be achieved at the most senior levels. In relation to equal pay, Doughney (2003) projects that 'women will be

waiting another 135 years for equal pay if the past 20 years' trends continue'. Winchester et al. (2005) project that at current rates, it will be 47 years before there will be gender equity at Level D. Others point to new and sustained barriers that are in operation to prevent increasing representation of women at senior levels (Allen & Castleman 2001; White 2001; Chesterman 2004; Morley 2005a). As White (2001 p. 72) concludes, women in the professoriate '... have little optimism about their future careers and about the next generation of women in academia achieving any significant change'. Others argue that while women's overall participation might increase, the structures of participation have shown little change (Doughney 2003; Sequino 2007). In a similar vein, there is the argument that while women's participation has increased, the quality of that experience is seriously undermined in a climate of higher education reform, longer working hours and excessive managerialism (Blackmore 2000; Subramaniam 2003; Eveline 2004; Thornton 2005; Morley 2005a).

There is also a clear trend to emphasis both the opportunities and constraints to women in higher education. As Acker (2004) advises, there is a distinct movement away from interrogating women's relative disadvantage toward understanding how women resist and manage within organisations. (Blackmore 2000; Devos & McLean 2000; Dever, Morrison et al. 2006) This trend informs a debate about whether or not the concept of the glass ceiling continues to be useful given its description of transparent yet intractable barriers – barriers that are clearly not impossible to overcome (Baxter & Wright 2000; Benshchop & Brouns 2006; Eagly & Carli 2007). Directly related is whether or not patriarchal organisational cultures are a factor in women's slow progression. The idea that gender inequities are a direct outcome of 'the dominant position of masculinity ... and the active marginalisation of femininity' is challenged by Probert (2006 p. 52) as being too general, unable to be supported by the evidence and resting on essentialised notions of gender. Others (Morley 2003; Eveline 2004; Eveline & Currie 2006) thoroughly defend the notion that deeply patriarchal and illusive practices are conveyed and reinforced through organisational micro-politics with the outcome being unequal treatment for women. Further, others suggest that the outcome of EEO policy has been a 'double-edged sword'. While policy and programs have done much to improve the opportunities for women, they have also sent discriminatory practices 'underground' and less easy to identify and challenge. In an increasingly individualised culture where competitive advantage lies in the ability to self-promote, others identify that the university is increasingly 'a man's world' (Tilbrook 2006).

Underpinning these debates are competing theoretical perspectives around the relative role of agency versus structure in the reproduction of unequal gender relations, which I explore in detail in Chapter Three.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to ground this research in the current literature which I have done by describing the literature in terms of themes that have emerged since the 1990s when several key researchers effectively charted the territory in explaining gender inequality in higher education employment. The aim is to identify where my research questions fit in terms of the broader body of knowledge and to show how my research addresses a particular issue in women's progression, which is relevant given the progress that has been made to date. Women have come so far within academic employment but appear to be substantially 'stuck' under what is effectively, if not a glass ceiling, a considerable barrier to progression.

I also identify debates that run through the literature. These debates are symptomatic of broader issues in feminist theorising in particular and in social sciences more generally about the role and nature of structure and agency and how they interact to reproduce and transform unequal gender relations. Explaining this in detail is the initial focus of the following chapter, which discusses and critiques dominant theories of gender inequality. This critique is a preface to the development of my own theoretical understandings, which I argue resolve some key tensions and problems.

Chapter Three: A critical realist theory of gender

Introduction

The preceding chapters provided the background to this study. Chapter One described women's position in higher education and provided background and context to the study of gender equity issues. Chapter Two described and analysed the literature in the field with a focus on key debates that are talked about regarding women's under-representation in senior roles. The aim of this chapter is to be explicit about my theoretical assumptions about gender, which, as I explain, draws primarily from critical realism. To do this, I first clarify dominant and competing theories of gender. These include neo-classical or choice theories (Hakim 2000, 2004), institutional approaches (Acker 1998) and postmodernism (Butler 1990) and each has had a major influence on the ways in which gender inequality is explored and understood. I explore the central differences between each theory, which is about the relative priority given to individual agency, the nature of structures and the relationship between the two in terms of shaping employment outcomes. Flowing from these different conceptions, central disagreements continue about how and why gender inequalities are reproduced, whether or not gender inequality is real or if inequality matters. I discuss these ideas and their implications in order to give the background to my own perspective on gender inequality, how it is reproduced and its implications.

My own perspective is informed broadly by insights from feminist economics (Folbre 1994, 1996, 2001), development economics (Sen 1982, 1985; Nussbaum 1997, 2000), Marxist feminism (Archer Mann & Huffman 2005; Ebert 2005; Giminez 2005; Giminez & Vogel 2005) and critical realism (Sayer 1984, 2004; Lawson 1997, 1999, 2007; Groff 2000, Cruickshank 2003, New 2003, Clegg 2006). In particular, I rely on Lawson's (2007) critical realist theory of gender, which I argue is convincing in explaining the processes that operate to simultaneously transform and reproduce unequal gender relations.

While critical realism generally, and Lawson in particular, has been subject to critique, the grounds of this criticism are largely epistemological rather than ontological which is the basis of Lawson's reasoning. I conclude this chapter by outlining what a critical realist epistemology entails, how it is defended and how this approach informs my choice of method. The following section starts with an overview of how I understand feminist theorising to be 'stuck' around some central issues that serve to prevent social change. I then detail the three dominant perspectives and discuss the flaws of each in addressing current conditions.

Dominant perspectives

To reiterate from Chapter One, the central premise of this project is that women who enter academic employment in higher education should be able to realistically aspire to advancement to senior positions in the same way that men can. Given similar levels of capability and aspirations, unequal and gendered barriers to progression such as hostile work cultures, unequal responsibility for care and the penalties imposed due to interrupted career histories are an injustice. While much, if not all, of the research on gender equity in higher education is supportive of this premise, efforts toward the ultimate goal of gender equity in employment are limited by what seems an intractable problem. As Probert comments (2005 p. 51):

... female under-representation at levels D and E is common not only to Australian universities, but to universities in the UK and the US. Despite the impact of anti-discrimination legislation and affirmative action on other areas of women's employment, it appears resilient to change.

Adding to this frustration is central disagreement in feminist social and economic theory that has contributed to, if not an impasse, certainly a malaise about what is the feminist project in the first instance let alone how to get there.

A major part of the problem is, as McNay (2000) argues, the ambiguous effects of the changing nature of economic and social structures in late-capitalist societies. Society is now understood as increasingly complex, plural and uncertain. One of the major changes has been the changing status of women and the restructuring of gender relations. Inequalities remain, but there are changed configurations. As McNay (2000, p. 1) argues:

The effects of these processes of gender restructuring upon the lives of men and women are ambiguous in that they do not straightforwardly reinforce old forms of gender inequality: nor, however, can their detraditionalizing impact be regarded as wholly emancipatory. New forms of autonomy and constraint can be seen to be emerging which can no longer be understood through the dichotomies of male domination and female subordination. Instead, inequalities are emerging along generational, class and racial lines where structural divisions amongst women are as significant as divisions between men and women. Feminist theory has registered the ambiguous effects of these social changes through a rethinking of the concepts of gender identity and agency.

This ambiguity is clearly the case in the higher education sector where, as I have shown, women's overall participation has grown steadily over time. At the same time, important issues surrounding the quality of work and inequalities within organisations continue to exist. The difficulties in explaining this complexity give rise to some central questions which I paraphrase from the broader literature. What are the limits on agency or choice within existing structures? To what extent is 'woman' useful as a category of analysis? How can we recast feminist theorising to incorporate a focus on the material conditions of women? What is the 'feminist project' and can this be articulated with any meaning within existing gender relations? Is it possible to articulate a set of norms that can be universally applied in relation to gender equity? In recent decades, dominant theoretical perspectives have taken feminist theorising down divergent and often oppositional paths regarding these questions, which can be seen to be reflected within policy frameworks.

As in broader social theory, the major theoretical schism within feminist policy and practice is between liberal perspectives informed by neo-classical philosophy and economics and Marxist or socialist feminism. This was a divide that could be bridged while the agenda for change was clear, as it was in the 1960s and 1970s when the aim of the women's movement was to address the very clear, unjust and discriminatory conditions for women (Hargreaves 1982). However, this divide has increased in importance as the neo-liberal economic agenda gained global dominance in recent decades. Perhaps more destabilising to the development of a widely agreed agenda for change has been the development of postmodern and post structural thought that emerged over the same period, which as I explain later, has formed a strange alliance with liberal feminism. The following section discusses each of these theories in order to be explicit about the debates and theoretical problems that characterise feminist theorising and provide the landscape for this study.

Neo-classical approaches and 'choice'

A dominant approach in the literature on gender equity in higher education derives from neo-classical economic theory that suggests that the differences between men and women can be explained largely by differences in human capital (levels of education, years in employment, skills) (Becker 1985; Dobson 1997; Ward 2001). This idea is closely linked to the concept of 'choice' and the differences between men and women regarding individual investments in education and training that will position them for opportunities to earn higher incomes in the labour market. The claim is that women choose not to pursue advancement to senior levels due to a common preference to combine household responsibilities and care with paid employment (Hakim 2000). It follows then, if gender equity in employment is the goal, it is women who need to change (Burton, Cook et al. 1997).

This explanation follows from neo-classical theory which explains the economy as being driven by a central actor, the ‘Rational Economic Man’ who seeks to maximise utility (or happiness or satisfaction) by making self-interested decisions about what to buy and sell and at what price (Folbre 1994). Individual decisions are based on a rational assessment of costs and benefits. Unequal outcomes are explained by the greater likelihood that men will make a greater investment in the development of human capital on the basis that they will receive financial returns from that investment. Women’s labour market position is the outcome of different individual choices. Women ‘choose’ to place greater value on roles outside of the labour market, mostly as mothers and carers for families and within communities.

This is the idea most notably developed and popularised by Hakim (2000) through ‘preference theory’. Hakim argues that unlike previous generations, women are now liberated to make ‘genuine’ choices and that women consistently ‘choose’ one of three patterns of labour market participation: adaptive, work-centred or home-centred and that these preferences are found at all levels of education, and in all social classes (Hakim 2004). Most women (about 70%) choose the ‘adaptive’ model, which is to combine the role of primary carer and household responsibilities with part-time work. Hakim’s work has been influential despite an extensive critique and has been a powerful informant of public policy during the conservative Howard government’s term of office (Summers 2003; Leahy & Doughney 2006).

The influence of human capital theories has been strengthened by their alignment with widespread adoption by governments of free-market ideologies most commonly associated with Hayek (1941), Buchanan (1975) and Friedman (1962). Free-market capitalism is understood as the most efficient and effective mechanism to promote economic growth and free and unfettered competition is central to the smooth operation of the ‘invisible hand of the market’. If left alone by the interference of government, both prices and quality will be sorted out. Individuals will not pay for poor quality products and will only pay a reasonable price. Competition between producers will mean that they will not survive if prices and/or quality do not meet the criteria of consumer demand. The operation of the free market is also advocated as bringing about the best outcomes for all people. While not actually producing equity, the living standards of the most disadvantaged are lifted to higher levels by living in a growth economy than would be achieved in economies structured around more collective principles which stifle competition and discourage innovation (Marginson 1992). The role of governments, therefore, is to maximise individual choice by staying out of the way of the free

operation of the market. This notion is conceptualised as ‘negative freedom’ or as the absence of coercion or interference as being the central objective (Marginson 1992).

EEO policy that is informed by neo-liberal theory, and certainly policy that was implemented under the Howard government rests on these ideas (Summers 2003; Leahy & Doughney 2006). That is, the role of EEO is to free up ‘choice’. The role of governments, and in the organisational context, management, is to ensure that individuals have freedom of choice by the elimination of direct discrimination that is ‘irrational’ and the application of ‘fair’ policies and practices that treat men and women in the same way. Individuals should be free to make investment decisions in their own human capital based on individual preferences. Assuming a lack of direct discrimination, women’s ‘choice’ not to pursue career advancement is one that should be supported and the role of government is to direct resources to supporting the greatest numbers of women. Under the previous Howard government, which was advised by Hakim (Summers 2000), this meant the direction of resources to support those who ‘choose’ the ‘adaptive’ model. This is a fundamental notion that sits comfortably with conservative governments (Leahy 2007). As such, the need to critique liberal concepts of choice is important in the context that mainstream economic and social policy largely rests on this notion. I agree with Leahy (2006), who argues that the approach is deeply flawed in that it contributes to the deepening of existing inequalities.

The critique of human capital theory is extensive. First, while theories of human capital can identify that differences exist, it cannot identify why (VanStaveren 2007). This is illustrated by the work of Allen et al. (1995) who show that when tenure rates and employment levels are compared for men and women in the same age groups and with the same length of service, men are more likely to hold senior and tenured positions. As such, there must be other factors at play such as indirect discrimination, which choice theories are at a loss to explain. More importantly, the differences in human capital between men and women are narrowing. In Australian universities in 2007, women actually have slightly higher levels of post-graduate award completion for all categories of study except in the completion of PhDs by Research. The gap here is also narrowing. Out of all academic staff, 60.4 per cent hold a PhD qualification. More than one-third of this group are women (DEEWR 2009).

The fundamental problem with human capital theory, however, arises because of a central assumption about the unfettered freedom of individuals to make decisions on the basis of clearly formed preferences. The feminist critique of human capital theories highlights how freedom is gendered (Folbre 1994). Many women’s ‘freedom’ is constrained compared to men’s, particularly for women who continue to carry the lion’s share of responsibility of care

for families and communities (Leahy & Doughney 2006). Second, it assumes that individuals make ‘choices’ out of ‘rational’ self-interest. ‘Rational’ is also a gendered term and as Folbre (1994 p. 25) points out, what is rational, ‘is associated with an objective, dispassionate, distinctly masculine approach, often counterposed to a subjective, emotional, feminine approach.’ Women’s greater tendency to see their own self-interest as inseparable to the wellbeing of others, particularly in their role as mothers, means that the concept is highly problematic (Sen 1982; Folbre 1994; Nussbaum 2000). Third, it assumes that individuals come with some preconfigured ‘preferences’ by which choices can be made and that these preferences are related to biological sex. As Doughney (2007) argues, such an assumption disguises the extent to which preferences are ‘adaptive’. That is, preferences are shaped by the influences of circumstance, experience, habit and custom – all of which are highly gendered and combine to shape aspirations, expectations and desires. In other words, what individuals ‘prefer’, to a large extent, is an adaptation of what individuals have experienced, think is possible and understand. For example, Doughney (2007) reminds us of Aesop’s fable of ‘sour grapes’. When the fox cannot reach a bunch of grapes that initially look appealing, the fox rationalises that the grapes must be sour in order to be reconciled with the fact that it can’t have them. This is a particularly apt analogy in the case of women in leadership where it is commonly noted in the literature that women ‘choose’ not to pursue leadership roles because of the perception that the experience will be ‘sour’ (Noble & Mears 2000). It is not possible to generalise whether or not that perception is a realistic decision based on a cold, hard assessment of the situation or whether it is in fact false. The point here is that ‘preferences’ and ‘choices’ are influenced by a range of conditions that shapes whether or not something is perceived as desirable and/or attainable.

To expand on this point, choice theory is also flawed in its assumption that preferences are predetermined, ranked and are established before choices are made. As Leahy (2006) argues, what an individual ‘prefers’ is generally sorted out after one has considered the often contradictory range of options, possibilities and conditions. For example, whether a parent of young children ‘prefers’ to combine work and care responsibilities or prioritise career building, is dependent on a balance of often conflicting considerations such as the availability, cost and quality of child care, the extent to which care responsibilities are shared with others, income earned, employer support, the investment that has been made in career progression to date, the type of job and the degree of flexibility available and so on. The decision making process is usually undertaken in consultation with others and generally the preferences of others are taken into account because one’s satisfaction is likely to overlap with theirs. Having decided on a set of arrangements, there may be later regret. Giving up a lucrative job perhaps may be later seen as a bad decision as it proves difficult to find a comparable position

later on. The point is that preferences are dynamic and an outcome of a process of deliberation rather than the precondition of deliberation. Preferences also change as conditions change.

In summary, the neo-classical model and ‘choice’ theories are unhelpful in explaining gender inequalities in employment due to a range of problems. The theory rests on essentialised notions of gender that imply that there is something predetermined about being male or female that leads to different choices. Agency, within this model, is a highly individual affair and the role of interdependence and the extent to which individual interests are often inseparable from the interests of others is neglected. As such, there is a failure to explain the role that social processes, structures and conditions play in the formation of preferences or choices that lead to gender inequalities. The implication is that equality is a matter of individual choice and that while women should be ‘free’ to pursue career advancement as they choose, this is ultimately an individual responsibility. The role of government and organisations is to ensure there is an absence of unequal barriers to progression should one choose to take that path. It is women who must change if they are to be competitive with men in the labour market. The implications for organisations is that, besides ensuring that fair and due process is in place, they are largely ‘off the hook’ in terms of responsibilities for gender equity. The essential structures of work remain unchanged and the onus is on the individual to ‘perform’ in the competition that is work. The real danger of positioning individual ‘choice’ as central is that gender inequalities will continue to widen as we have seen on many measures under the Howard government where theories of choice have been the dominant framework to guide government policy generally and policy that impacts on women in particular (Summers 2003; Leahy & Doughney 2006). This occurs through the way in which choice theories serve to ‘naturalise’ gender inequality by rationalising that labour market differences between men and women are an outcome of choices that are freely arrived at through a process decision making based on individual preferences.

Despite the dominance of ‘choice’ theories as they inform EEO and higher education reform more generally, most of the literature relating to women in higher education is informed by theories of labour market segregation or institutional theories. This approach is also critiqued in the literature as providing an inadequate explanation of the role of agency, resting on essentialist notions of gender and of providing universalist accounts of truth in relation to gender oppression by men of women. The following section expands on this.

Institutional theories

As noted by Probert (2005), a dominant assumption within the literature is that unequal outcomes for women are a result of unequal treatment by systems and organisations. This idea is informed largely by labour market segmentation theories or Marxist economic theories. The focus is on how choices are constrained by structures that operate to serve dominant interests. Broadly, this idea is drawn from Marxist theory that argues that capital accumulation relies on the exploitation of resources. Women and ethnic minorities are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and are positioned in the labour market as a cheap and dispensable resource that can be drawn on when demand for labour is strong. This idea is closely linked to ‘reserve army’ and ‘dual labour market’ theories (Cockburn 1991 p. 84). In this model, labour markets and organisations are segmented, different groups of labour market participants are compartmentalised and isolated, and each group receives different rewards and opportunities for otherwise comparable attributes (Kirton & Green 2000). A divided labour market weakens the potential for collective action effectively undermining union action and strengthening the employer position to exploit labour. A central tenet is that capitalist economic infrastructure is dependent on a gendered and inequitable division of labour (Acker 2006).

Feminist theories of patriarchy are linked to labour market segmentation theories, but largely grew from a critique of Marxism as failing to take account of the gendered nature of the labour force (Kirton & Green 2000). Patriarchy is defined as a ‘system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women’ (Bradley 1989 p. 55). Patriarchy, combined with the capitalist mode of production, is identified as explaining unequal outcomes for women. Evidence for this position is drawn from sustained segmentation in the labour market by both gender and ethnicity – a characteristic that is resilient over time. The position is also supported by cross-cultural studies which show that female subordination is a common characteristic across cultures where women are ascribed different and subordinate economic roles within most communities (Fenton, Bradley et al. 1999).

The second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s was largely informed by theories of patriarchy providing a common focus for political action. In a capitalist system, gender, class and ethnicity combined are identified as situated within hierarchies of oppression. Feminist action was guided by the goal of eliminating oppression and the focus of political action was to challenge the structures that reproduce these inequities. Much of the literature on women in higher education continues to be concerned with the ways in which gender inequities are reproduced through systems and processes that marginalise women with a view to bringing about change in gender relations.

Through this lens, organisations are understood as critical sites for the reproduction of gendered social relations. This division is sustained through a definition of women as ‘different’ and masculine models of authority do not allow for the differences that women bring into the context of the workplace, particularly at a senior level (Rindfleish 2002). Merit, or the concept of excellence, is understood as socially constructed and defined by dominant interests. Merit is deployed as ‘gender-neutral’, but the idea of ‘excellence’ continues to be modelled on what men are good at, such as ‘objective research’ in fields which are science-based and closely connected with the needs of industry (Morley 2005a). The ‘ideal worker’ is also a male concept, understood as someone who is free to pursue an uninterrupted career path and work long hours free from the need to assume primary care for families (Bailyn 2003; Leahy 2007). Concepts of leadership are also central, which historically, have been associated with masculine attributes such as courage, independence, control, emotional toughness, self-reliance and self-sacrifice (Sinclair 2005). This is particularly pertinent in the Australian context where feminist historians show that, until relatively recently and through a selective reading of history, the Australian identity has been cast as particularly male, and a tough, independent and heroic one at that (Dixson 1975; Lake & Kelly 1985). Sinclair (2005) explains masculine leadership as a dominant cultural construction, and one that is closely associated with male heterosexuality, yet is not labelled as such and is therefore invisible. As such, notions of leadership are deeply problematic for women, where women are first and foremost seen as gendered beings, with attributes that are deemed unsuitable for leadership. As Smith (2008 p. 7) comments:

... while men can forget that they have gender, women cannot. Women are constantly reminded that they are distinct, while men are able to assume that they are truly representative of all human beings.

Each of these concepts is central to the research on women in higher education and they are ideas that continue to be developed. One current development combines theories of globalisation and is focused on identifying how gender inequalities are reproduced through the processes of higher education reform and broader economic change (Eveline 2004; Thornton 2005; Morley 2005a; Doughney & Vu 2006; Eveline & Currie 2006). Despite the dominance of this approach, however, structuralist feminist theories have been subjected to sustained critique.

Centrally, institutional theories are criticised as over-estimating the explanatory value of the categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’ in explaining gender relations and of privileging the role of

structures in determining individual agency. The implication is that women are cast as ‘victims’ in an oppressive regime of control helpless in the face of dominant structures that protect the interests of capital. More generally, structural theories are widely dismissed as being ‘irremediably flawed and useless to understanding the complexities of “globalisation” and “postmodernity”’ (Giminez & Vogel 2005). While few researchers in the field could clearly be identified as strictly structuralist, there is a perceived ‘conventional wisdom’ that women’s unequal outcomes are a result of ‘the dominant position of masculinity within academia and the active marginalisation of femininity in everything, from the construction of academic disciplines to selection panels’ (Probert 2005, p. 52). While there has been a clear defence mounted that this ‘conventional wisdom’ is actually a marginalised yet accurate portrayal of the inequitable gender relations that persist in academe, structuralist perspectives rely on assumptions about organisational practices as being oppressive of women (Morley 2006). The critique has been primarily delivered from a postmodern perspective.

Postmodernism and ‘the linguistic turn’

Since the 1980s, feminist theorising has progressed in line with broader social theory in the development of postmodern and poststructural theoretical perspectives most notably associated with Foucault (Foucault 1967, 1977, 1978). Overall, the development describes the shift from second wave feminism, informed by structural theories of patriarchy, to third wave feminism informed by postmodern or poststructural theory. Like forms of Marxism, there are many forms of postmodernism which have yielded numerous insights and any broad categorisation of theories disguises theoretical distinctions within a broad ‘wave’ of thought. There are, however, three major theoretical threads which Mann and Huffman (2005) categorise as emerging roughly chronologically. These include theories of intersectionality or identity theories, post-colonial theory or global feminism and theories generated by younger feminists or third wave feminism. While there are clear differences between each of these threads, poststructuralism or postmodernism (and the terms are often used interchangeably) have some distinctive features. These include the abandonment of essentialist and humanist versions of ‘reality’ and a perspective on truth that all versions of the world are partial, fluid and multiple. While structuralist theory has a direct interest in the causes and reproduction of inequality, postmodernism abandons the notion that male and female is a binary category but has an interest in identity formation and exploration of the ‘self’ and ‘other’ and in the significances of the boundary between (Reed 2001 p. 80). Budgeon (2001) describes the ‘death of the subject’ as central to poststructuralist thought where it is understood that there is no stable subject that is ‘woman’ or ‘man’. Instead, individuals are ‘subjects in process’, are constituted by language, discourse, or power, have no essential qualities of maleness or femaleness, but are perpetually open to transformation (Lloyd 2005 p. 1). Most importantly

for this study, poststructuralism does not have a focus on inequality but instead is concerned with ontology and with how individuals are formed in the first place (Holmes, Hughes et al. 2003 p. 64).

Initially, the critique of second wave feminism came through intersectional theories or theories of identity. These ideas were delivered primarily by black, lesbian and disabled feminists who argued that feminist theory and practices used a white, heterosexual, middle class and able-bodied model of womanhood as the norm, effectively marginalising the experience of ‘other’ women (hooks 1984; Carby 1987; Jeffreys 1987). These challenges demonstrated the patterns of domination and exploitation between women, thereby exploding the notion that all women experience a shared oppression (Mirza 1997). Feminist post-colonial theories or global feminism built on these ideas in the global context showing how women in the developing world are commonly portrayed as a homogenous group disguising complex power relations of which gender was only one dimension of oppression (Mohanty, Russo et al. 1991). This critique was informed by the postmodern notion that structuralist theories make unsupported and universal claims on truth that assume the authority to speak on behalf others (Yeatman 1994). Following from this is the criticism that the second wave feminist focus on the ‘reproduction of gender roles’ underplays the role of individual agency and disguises the extent to which subjects take up roles that are multiple and contradictory, simultaneously accommodating gender roles while resisting them (Francis & Skelton 2001 p. 66). Postmodernism questioned the stability of gendered power relations that seemed so clear through the modernist theoretical lens. According to postmodernism, society, the people constituting it and the power relations between them are more complex and diverse than had been assumed (Francis & Skelton 2001).

There are many terms used to describe the later development of feminist postmodernism including ‘young feminism’ or ‘free-to-be-me’ or DIY feminism (Archer Mann & Huffman 2005). This wave is particularly informed by Butler (1990) and builds on the idea that the second wave created new forms of oppression emerging in part from the notion of ‘the personal is political’. Dent (1995), for example, argues that second wave feminism was characterised by missionary zeal that required ‘self-policing, confession through consciousness-raising groups, and salvation through political action’ (Archer Mann & Huffman 2005 p. 70). In contrast, the third wave attempted to open up feminism to less restrictive ideas, strategies and ways of conceptualising feminism. In order to resist binary and restrictive notions of male/female, good/bad, black/white, third wave feminism embraced and exposed contradictions of identity. As a means to avoid the propagation of universal ‘truth’, the third wave has an avoidance of theory and a preference for personal narratives as a

means of exposing multiple and contradictory truths. Sexuality and ‘raunch culture’ are embraced through this model as a form of rebellion (Levy 2005). Overall, the third wave supports the notion that second wave feminism is dour, prudish and repressive of the expression of multiple identities in a way that is repugnant to younger generations of women (Budgeon 2001). Second-wave feminism is seen to encourage ‘group think’ that regards women as pawns and victims in a system of social control underplaying the role of agency and resistance (Paglia 2007).

Poststructuralism has had profound implications for political activism and public policy in relation to the nature of change and about issues of equity (Clegg 2006). Structuralist positions on gender suggest a focus on the material aspects of women as a collective entity, and the need to engage in a practical struggle to achieve justice and equality (Nussbaum 1999). The development of the poststructuralist position has led to the rejection of ‘woman’ as a meaningful category, and the focus is on symbolism and to find ‘spaces’ within non-hierarchical structures of power in which to challenge dominant concepts of gender identity. While the former has a focus on changes in legislation and collective action, the latter has a focus on understanding the alternative expressions of gender as resistance to localised interests. These alternative versions of understanding the social, and the ways in which public policy problems are recognised and defined, have given rise to a significant polarisation between structural and poststructural accounts of gender and questions of inequality (Fraser 1997; Nussbaum 1999; Braidotti & Griffin 2002). While there has been a wide trend to incorporate the insights of both theoretical positions into research (Yeatman 1994; Dillabough 2001; Francis & Skelton 2001; London Feminist Salon Collective 2004; Archer Mann & Huffman 2005), there are some clear extremes in a debate that continues throughout the literature.

Questions of agency, structure, values and the feminist project

The purpose of the preceding discussion is to clarify competing perspectives and to identify the key points of contention. Each of the theories has been, and is, influential in shaping thinking about issues relating to gender equity. Each, however, contains serious flaws that stem from an over-inflation of the role of either agency or structure. Further, recent developments in postmodern thought, in the abandonment of normative values, has also lost sight of the role that gender and gendering practices play in the reproduction of women’s relative material disadvantage. None provides an adequate explanation of gender inequality in the context of globalisation where women’s progress can be seen as ambiguous. While remarkable progress has been made, this progress has been uneven, patchy and sustained patterns of inequality remain. Any clear agenda for change has been lost in the context of this

disagreement. Together, the contradictory influence of dominant theories mean that there is little movement or agreement on how to address gender inequities. The following section elaborates on my approach to understanding gender inequalities. Informed primarily by critical realism, my aim is to overcome some of the central theoretical problems identified above..

Critical realism as an alternative

The following section elaborates on a theory of gender inequality which is informed broadly by the insights of Feminist Economics (Folbre 1994; Harding 1999; Folbre 2001; Kuiper 2006), Marxist Feminism (Ebert 2005; Giminez 2005), Development Economics (Sen 1985; Nussbaum 2000) and Critical Realism (Lawson 1999, 2007; Archer 2000, Cruickshank 2003; Dow 2003; New 2003; Clegg 2006). As discussed, I particularly draw on Lawson (1997, 1999, 2007) for what I read as a convincing theory of gender, how inequalities are reproduced, and what the possibilities are for change within a normative framework.

I start with a discussion of the central problems in relation to agency and structure that are talked about through competing versions of feminist theory. I then go on to discuss some problems that are specific to theorising gender. First, I discuss the problems raised by ‘gender scepticism’ and the extent to which gender has been questioned as a meaningful category of analysis. I then explore the implications of this debate in relation to whether or not we can understand women as sharing any form of collective interest. Here, I draw on Lawson (2007) and Folbre (1994) to argue that there is something stable about gender and it is possible to show that collective interests are shared between women, but only sometimes, in some places and in ways that are shaped by other forms of difference such as age and ethnicity. I then explain Lawson’s critical ontological argument about gender which provides an explanation of the social processes that reproduce broader patterns of domination and repression on the basis of gender. This argument is underpinned by a moral argument based on a conception of what it is to be human and what makes life worth living. From this basis, the modernist feminist notion that the feminist project is about social justice and change in order to liberate the capacities of all humans is retained.

On agency and structure

Constructing a useful theory of gender, agency and structure is a central preoccupation within much feminist theory. As McNay (2000) elaborates, this struggle centres on the development of useful theories about freedom and constraint and the role of gender in shaping individual freedoms. As discussed above, each of the dominant theoretical frameworks makes clearly different assumptions about the limits of human freedom and the role of structures in shaping

those freedoms. Neo-classical economic models privilege agency by placing individual decision making at centre stage with the economy being driven by the individual decisions of rational and independent economic actors (Marginson 1992). Poststructuralist perspectives theorise individuals as being discursively formed and having no real agency (Clegg 2006). Institutional theories emphasise the role of structures and constraints on agency (Probert 2005). The source of debate is around the extent to which explanatory weight is given to either agency or structures. I believe it is essential that due weight be given to both as well as the relationships between and I agree with Clegg (2006) who argues for the need to avoid upwards or downwards conflation. Downwards conflation regards individuals as no more than a social construct. Upward conflation reduces society to the individual and denies the power of society in shaping individuality. Clegg argues for a theory that accords central conflation to agency where structures can be seen through how people behave within the rules, norms and relations that make up social structures (Clegg 2006 p. 317). I also agree with the critical realist position (Cruickshank 2003) that neither agency nor structure can be understood in isolation. Individual human action shapes and is shaped by broader structures such as the family, organisations, political systems and so on. Individuals do not exist or act in a vacuum and are simultaneously the creators and servants of the structures that exist. The extent to which individuals can exercise autonomy and freedom in decision making is dependent on space, time and specific conditions.

The need to understand agency, or individual decision making and actions, is particularly apparent in this study where the focus of attention is on women who have already built careers to the middle rungs of academic achievement. By the time women are appointed at this level, they have made a considerable investment in their careers and have succeeded within a particular career pathway where others have not. This progression is clearly an outcome of individual decision making, negotiation and planning. Those women who are at the focus of this study could not be in their current roles without making some deliberate choices about where they want to go in their careers. While the career journey is somewhat serendipitous, as I explore later, it has been necessary for the women in this study to engage in some long-term planning to achieve their goals. This journey has not been easy for many and in the case of VU particularly, many did not enter from privileged backgrounds. Academic women at VU do not necessarily come from middle class backgrounds and a number in my sample have been ‘first in family’ to participate in higher education as students let alone as senior academics. A number are from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) and there are a few who entered Australia as refugees. Almost all have or have had, over the course of their careers, major care responsibilities for children, parents and/or partners who have required care. They have also lived out their careers in a climate of major reform,

uncertainty and declining working conditions. To say that individual choices and decision making are not an important dimension is somehow patronising given the extent to which individuals exercise purposeful intent, often in the face of significant disincentives.

At the same time, to understand individual action and choice in isolation from the influence of structure is to ignore social relations and the extent to which individual choice is shaped by the possibilities made available through existing structures. It seems clear to me that individuals do not come with a set of hard-wired preferences and goals that guide life decision making and actions but that decisions are made in the context of possibilities, both real and perceived. The way in which people make decisions are shaped by where they are positioned in relation to other people, institutions, organisations and resources. As Giminez (2005 p. 24) puts it, agency has to be explained in terms of the structural conditions that make actions possible. Lawson (1999 p. 50) defines structures as consisting of ‘contested structures of power, rules, relations, and other, possibly relatively enduring but nevertheless transient and action-dependent, social resources at our disposal’. Compared to other structures and even organisations, the higher education system is particular and obviously bound by rules, structures of power and relations. Resources are distributed unevenly and groups are positioned differently within those structures. Understanding the career progression of individuals within higher education, without attention to the assets, rules and norms of higher education that apply over the career lifespan of any individual is not possible given the extent to which higher education employment structures are highly exclusionary. While many, if not most, of the rules and structures are informal as well as formal, as so many gender equity researchers are at pains to point out, the role of formal structure is more visible than in many other contexts. It is therefore essential to consider how structures shape possibilities for employment and progression and for whom.

My understanding is that it is necessary to have a theory that links the relationships between both structure and agency. Without this link, the outcome is either determinism or an inability to explain individuals’ social relations (Cruickshank 2003 p. 3). The critical realist perspective, as explained by Lawson (2007), is useful here by incorporating this understanding as a central tenet. These relationships are dynamic and generative. Individuals are essentially social beings who change over the course of a lifetime in ways mediated by, but not reducible to, social conditions and structures. As Cruickshank (2003 p. 1) explains:

...the self is neither an asocial entity divorced from its socio-historical location with a fixed identity, nor a contingent epiphenomenon that is reducible to the prevailing

norms of a society or community. Rather, selfhood is to be understood in terms of an ongoing process, whereby selfhood is socially mediated but not socially determined.

At the same time, structures, and their evolution are inseparable from the actions of individuals. The critical realist position argues that structures need to be seen as emergent properties. This means that structures are ‘...created by the actions of individuals in the past, and now have causal properties in their own right’ (Cruickshank 2003 p. 3). This understanding of structures means that individuals cannot be seen as determined by structures but that the relationships between actors and structures are linked. It also allows for possibilities for change in structures and the options open to individuals within structures.

A major theoretical question that needs to be addressed, however, is around the role of gender in positioning women and men differently and unequally within structures. As noted, while there has been much change in recent decades, women continue to be positioned as subordinate within the Australian labour market in common with international trends. Poststructural theory is unhelpful in explaining these resilient patterns by shifting the focus from understanding what is common between women to what is different (Probert 2006). It has also challenged the extent to which the category of ‘woman’ is useful for analytical purposes by challenging the idea that women share any meaningful collective interest. My view is that women’s interests do coincide, albeit not always, in ways that are fluid, mediated by local conditions and shaped by individual differences. In order to explain this, I rely on Lawson (2007) who, from a critical realist perspective, articulates a theory of gender that incorporates the insights of both second wave and poststructural feminism.

Gender scepticism and its implications

As discussed, dominant theories rest on widely different assumptions about the extent to which the categories ‘man’ or ‘woman’ are useful in explaining anything about society and whether or not gender has any connection with biological sex. Current perspectives range from Hakim (2000) to Butler (Butler 1990; 1993; 1997; 2004) with the former claiming that women ‘naturally’ make different choices and decisions while Butler eliminates the significance of sex differences entirely with the idea that the body is formless and its powers are constructed from discourse (New 2003 p. 67).

Scepticism about whether gender is in fact a useful category of analysis extends from early critiques of second wave feminism as discussed earlier. Second wave feminist theory itself developed from the criticism of the dominance of positivism in social science method underpinned by the belief in ‘value freedom’ and scientific method as being untainted by

local bias and personal history. Feminism exposed social processes that were previously unexplored by science by revealing that claims of universal values were in fact infused by the personal and predominately white, male histories of those who undertook the research. By the late 1980s, some feminists themselves began to articulate the ways in which second wave feminism was guilty of the same mistakes (hooks 1984; Mohanty, Russo et al. 1991; Walker 1995). Second wave feminism was dominated by white middle class feminists who treated their own particular experience of gender difference as universal. This treatment marginalised and silenced the role of race, ethnicity, culture, age, physical ability, sexuality and other forms of difference. The evolution of these ideas has led to ‘gender scepticism’ where it is argued that once an individual’s gender experience is so affected by other dimensions of identity, it is meaningless to consider gender at all as a useful category (Bordo 1993). The rationale is that once we are attentive to other forms of difference, the notion of gender is so fragmented that it is useless for systematic investigation. It becomes impossible to separate facts about gender from those about race, class, ethnic origin and so on. In short, essentialised notions of gender are understood as misrepresentative of the experience of many. Its effect is to marginalise and silence those whose identity is formed by characteristics and histories that are more important than gender in shaping agency and social position.

On one level, Lawson (2007 p. 139) reads this development as an historical correction in the course of an emergent feminist theoretical discourse. Identity theorists were right to highlight the substantial differences and inequities between women and to challenge the authority of second wave feminists who, in many cases, had more in common with the male dominated scientific establishment they sought to challenge than they did with many groups of women who suffered oppression as a combined outcome of class, race or other characteristics. As Archer Mann and Huffman (2005 p. 56) articulate:

Recent developments in social thought have heightened our awareness of how theories of emancipation can be blind to their own dominating, exclusive and restrictive tendencies and how feminism is not innocent of such tendencies.

Postmodernism was also right to point out the kind of naïve realism that underpinned the social sciences. Less useful, however, have been later developments in postmodern theory that has thrown out one of the major insights of second wave feminism, which was to make the distinction between sex and gender. As New (2003) highlights, the sex/gender distinction provided the core of explanatory critiques that tried to explain the systematic misrepresentation of women’s liabilities and capacities. Postmodern feminism has rejected

this distinction with the effect of cancelling out the ability to identify and analyse differences between men and woman. As Butler (1990 p. 10) claims:

When the constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one.

I agree with New (2003 p. 68) who says this is nonsense. The argument that gender has no biological connection to sex is, as Nussbaum (1999) argues, to fail to account for the pre-cultural needs and behaviours that occur through the state of being human such as hunger, comfort and survival. Further, it ignores the actual and lived differences between men and women that arise through biological difference such as childbirth and differences in body size. As Soper (1990) points out, a woman may still fear a man when walking down a street alone at night, whether or not she agrees theoretically that we should reject the categories ‘male’ and ‘female’. In a related point, the notion of identity as being discursively constructed, and within localised networks of power, leads to the conclusion that there is no coherence to ‘personhood’ and that our identity is constantly in flux and change (Francis 2001). This view fails to account for that which is consistent about personality and that which enables one to be ‘known’ as an individual who behaves and responds with some degree of predictability. Overall, this view of identity and gender as social constructed and constantly in flux ignores that which is biologically determined and fixed. This has the political implication of taking the focus off the lived experience of oppression, exploitation or pain that is experienced by some groups as a direct outcome of gender, ethnicity, age or class position (Nussbaum 1999).

As New (2003 p. 68) says, ‘Gender is not and *cannot be* “radically independent of sex”’. Sex and gender are to some extent autonomous but not reducible to each other. The sex/gender distinction allows the investigation of the different forms that gender takes and allows for the critique of conservative notions that gender can be reduced to sex. In turn, it allows a focus on whether social relations are such that groups of people experience material disadvantage by virtue of gender. This being the case, it is necessary to retain what is important from second wave feminism, which is to identify gendered patterns of domination. As Lawson (2007 p. 138) states,

... the postmodernist critique, in highlighting the problems of essentialism, loses the insight for which gender analysis was originally formulated, namely the discrimination

of individuals classified as ‘women’ in ways that have little directly to do with the quality of being female.

I agree with the broad critical realist position that argues that the evolution of postmodernism has effectively ‘thrown the baby out with the bathwater’. In other words, the avoidance of universalist claims on knowledge and essentialist assumptions about some shared experience of being a woman, has meant that the processes that generate oppression and gender inequality go unexplored. All that can be identified is the differences between people – a highly individualistic notion that assumes no collective interests between women or any other group. As Lawson (2007 p. 139) says:

The postmodernist critique of (interpretations of) early gender theorising contains much insight and can indeed be read in part as a corrective of the excesses or errors of naïve essentialist positions. However, the critique itself is ultimately not satisfactory, in that it loses the central insight of the earlier feminist contribution entirely. For according to the logic of this critique there is no basis for the systematic forces of societal discrimination.

Given the sustained and resilient issues of gender inequality, my understanding is that this research needs a theory that learns from what is useful about poststructuralism. This is that all individuals are different and that essentialised notions of ‘woman’ run the danger of excluding and silencing the experiences of many whose life is shaped by other characteristics such as ethnicity. A feminism that has any real relevance must acknowledge differences between women, understand that people can and do change and that there is a strong localised dimension to identity formation and expression. Women are not ‘squashed ants’ located firmly under the foot of an oppressive and monolithic patriarchal structure. Women can and do find spaces to resist oppressive gender identities and generate options that are a reflection of autonomous and deliberate decision making. Nor are women universally oppressed by men. I agree with Giminez (2005 p. 14), who argues in her defence of the continued relevance of Marxist feminist frameworks:

... men do not have a privileged position such that they have the foresight and power consciously to shape social organisation in their favour. Men, like women, are social beings whose characteristics reflect the social formation within which they emerge as social agents.

I agree with a central tenet shared by emancipatory schools of thought that the purpose of feminist theorising, research and action is social justice and gender equality. Nussbaum (2000), in particular, argues for the need to support the conditions necessary for human flourishing and that these conditions have some universal similarities that arise in part from some common biological needs of being human. What is necessary then is a theory that is capable of identifying patterns of domination and oppression based on gender that repress human capabilities and functioning and explains how and why gender relations operate to cause such repression. This means not making essentialist assumptions that women have a shared experience purely by virtue of being born as a woman while at the same time recognising that women cross-culturally are socially and economically positioned in ways that reinforce male advantage that in part arise due to biological differences. It also means identifying what is stable about gender and how some women, sometimes, in some places, do share some common interests and that these interests underpin collective conflict and collective action. The campaign for a national, taxpayer-funded paid maternity leave scheme is the most current local and obvious example of how women's collective interests have a political dimension (HREOC 2008). The critical realist framework articulated by Lawson (2007) achieves these ends by providing an ontological argument about the ways in which gender is constructed with some stability within the interdependant relationships of structured agency and broader social structures.

Lawson's critical realist ontology

Lawson (2007) builds on Bhaskar's (1986) transcendental realism and argues that the social realm is structured in that it is more than one ontological level and is made up of more than individual actions. It comprises rules, relations, positions, processes, systems, values and meanings that cannot be reduced to human behaviour. Second, human beings are also structured. Individuals are more than observable behaviour but have capacities that may never be exercised. Furthermore, human beings are reflexive, in that we have thoughts and internal conversations that cannot be observed by others. Individuals are more than what they actually do or, as Lawson puts it (2007 p. 143), '...what we can do does not reduce to the patterns of behaviour that others can observe; and nor even does all of what we actually do'. Third, reality is emergent. Lawson (2007 p. 143) explains this in the sense that reality:

- 1) has arisen out of a lower stratum, being formed by principles operative at the lower level;
- 2) remains dependent on the lower stratus for its existence; but,
- 3) contains causal powers of its own which are both irreducible to those operating at the lower level and capable of acting back on the lower level.

... according to the conception I am defending, the social realm is emergent from human interaction though with properties irreducible to, yet capable of causally affecting the later.

Lawson (2007 p. 143) goes on to argue that this conception of the social realm means to accept a materialist notion of the social which involves an ontological dependence ‘of social upon biological upon physical forms coupled with the taxonomic and causal irreducibility of each to any other’. In summary, the social realm includes structures and human beings that cannot be understood separately and cannot be reduced to one or the other.

A further dimension of Lawson’s argument is that society is constituted fundamentally by social relations and positions. This is observed by the obvious disparity between individuals and social segments in relation to obligations and prerogatives. Teachers and students, for example, have widely different social responsibilities and can enjoy different freedoms. Lawson (2007 p. 145) points out that these social positions exist independently of individuals and that, ‘...society is constituted by a set of positions ... into which agents, as it were, slot’. These social positions also operate in relation to each other. Lawson distinguishes between two types of relations. External relations exist when one position exists independently of the other. Pedestrians and car drivers, for example, are affected by each other but each is not reliant on the other for its being. Other positions are internally related where one object does not exist without the other. Examples include, parent and child, teacher and student, politician and electorate and so on. This means that groups are internally related within a system of rules. It also paints the picture that social life is:

‘...a network of positions characterised by the rules and so practices associated with them where the latter are determined in relation to other positions and their associated rules and practices ... the basic building blocks of society are positions, involving, depending upon or constituted according to social rules and associated tasks, obligations and prerogatives, along with the practices they govern, where such positions are both defined in relation to other positions and are immediately occupied by individuals. (Lawson 2007 p. 146)

Gender and collective interest

Lawson shows that people are positioned differently within the social realm and have different access to resources, prerogatives and obligations depending on how they are both internally and externally related to others. These relationships make up a network of social

positions, and behaviour within the network is governed by rules and practices. Positions also change across the life cycle, and to a certain degree, positions are interchangeable. For example, students become teachers, children become parents, and citizens are elected as politicians, for example.

Lawson goes on to elaborate on a theory of collective action that is based on the operations of systems within social networks. Social systems are defined as ‘...ensembles of networked, internally related positions with their associated rules and practices’ (Lawson 2007 p. 146). As he explains, relations within social interactions have a strong group element. To use the example of teachers and students again, both positions have clear group characteristics. While individual teachers can behave in ways that are unique to their own personal style or personality, teachers work within a distinctly different set of rules and resources than do students. A teacher’s behaviour is also strongly oriented toward meeting obligations of students as a group. As such, ‘...a social group or collectivity can be distinguishable by their current occupancy of a specific set of social positions’ (Lawson 2007 p. 146). Importantly, any one person always occupies a number of groups at the same time. It is possible to be parent, child, teacher, student, old, young and so on at the same time. These are characteristics that are defined by relations to other groups. This understanding means that the existence of group interests becomes visible and that there is possibility for collective conflict both between and within groups. It also allows a focus on issues to do with the distribution of resources through making visible the differences between groups. Within this conception of systems, gender is one dimension of group relations that positions people differently in relation to resources and rules.

Following from this explanation of social positioning is that while people occupy different positions, both social positions and social rules change but can be enduring due to the dual processes of reproduction and transformation. Lawson uses the example of language systems to explain this. Each person is born into a language system. Individuals do not make up the language system - it is learnt over time. At the same time, systems of language depend on people speaking the language rules, which in turn do not determine what people do or say, but facilitate action. What occurs in the process of language use is neither created nor determined. Language systems are transformed and reproduced:

For any given language system, its structure of rules, etc., is given to the individual when he or she comes to speak, and it is reproduced and/or transformed through the sum total of individuals engaging in speech acts. The social structure in question, then,

is the condition of a set of practices; just as its reproduction and/or transformation is the result of these practices. (Lawson 2007 p. 148)

All social structures are identified as in a continuous process of transformation and/or reproduction. Those aspects of social structure that appear to have remained unchanged do so because people keep doing the same thing. At the same time, structures do not continue in a purely static form due to influences such as new technologies that change practices. As such, social structures are shaped by the dual and interdependent processes of reproduction and transformation. Both processes are undertaken through human practice. In turn, human practices are presupposed by some inherent human capacities such as the capacity to acquire and speak a language. This concept shows that humans are also structured and are more than their behaviours. Humans have inherent capacities and the ways in which these capacities are developed depends on how they are practised.

This conception of social process is understood as a *transformational model of social activity* (Lawson 2007 p. 148) where nothing in the social realm is fixed but all processes are subject to change, albeit generally slowly. It also shows how both social structure and human agency are reproduced and transformed through human practice. As mentioned earlier, neither agency nor structure can be reduced to each other or to the practices that reproduce and transform them both. As Lawson (2007 p. 150) argues:

Neither structure nor agency has analytical priority, for each depends irreducibly on the other. And although each develops at its own ontological level, it does so only in conditions set by the other. Thus each is significantly dependent on, though not created or determined by, the other. Social life, then, is intrinsically dynamic, and interdependent.

This conception of social reproduction and transformation helps to address the issues raised by ‘gender sceptics’ by conceptualising the social realm as changing yet enduring. It also incorporates and explains how individuals change as part of this process and can have fragmented and multiple identities. At the same time, it explains how systematic discrimination can continue by the ways in which groups are marked as similar through various characteristics such as age, skin colour, language and gender. Lawson (2007 p. 151) argues that gender is bound up with a system of identification and differentiation that serves to privilege some over others. This system is made up of (1) a repeated distinction drawn between individuals on the basis of bodily features that mark biological sex; and (2) a set of social processes that allocate systematically different kinds of social positions that actually

have little to do with the biological similarities or differences. Specifically, Lawson (2007 p. 152) defines gender as:

... neither as a substance, nor simply a category of analysis, but rather as a social totality, a social system. It is a system of processes and products (of processes in product and products in process). The processes in question (which are always context specific) are precisely those that work to legitimise/motivate the notion that individuals regarded as female and those regarded as male ought to be allocated to, or to have allocated to them, systematically differentiated kinds of (relationally defined) social positions. The products are (equally transitory and spatially/culturally limited) outcomes of these processes. If the processes serve *to gender*, i.e. are gendering processes (or processes of genderation), the products (aspects of social relations, positions (with associated rights and norms, practices, identities) must be regarded as gendered.

Lawson goes on to describe the gender system as being inseparable from the rest of the social realm and that all structures and their processes of reproduction have gendered aspects. Some of the gendering process is fully conscious as occurs in instances of direct discrimination or overtly sexist practices. More generally, gendering processes go unnoticed and are implicit within actions and have unintended outcomes.

In summary, Lawson's argument makes visible social processes that reproduce broader patterns of domination and repression on the basis of gender – processes that are obscured by the 'linguistic turn' or postmodern theories that force an individualistic focus. Second, he achieves this by retaining the important theoretical insights of both modernist and postmodernist theories of gender. His explanation retains the sex/gender distinction bought to light by second wave feminists and theorises how collective interests are constructed and how these interests are infused by gender and gendering processes. His theory also reinforces the Marxist feminist notion of social processes as needing to be understood in their historical context. At the same time, Lawson incorporates the insights of postmodernism. There is nothing in Lawson's framework that cancels out the importance of individual difference or the possibilities for social change. In addition, Lawson's ideas are underpinned by a moral argument based on a conception of what it is to be human and what makes life worth living. This is couched within the notion that human beings, as a species, share genetic and biological features and a common set of rights. It is the exercise of those rights and the development and expression of inherent human capacities that gives meaning to life and provides the measure for social justice.

Critical realism and its critics

There is acknowledgement through the literature that Lawson's ontological argument makes a contribution to feminist argument in a number of ways. First offers an integrating argument for feminism's criticism of mainstream economics (Peter 2003 p. 96), assists in refining concepts of gender, and contributes an ontological explanation of gender relations that is lacking in much feminist theorising (Kuiper 2006). Harding (1999) is also appreciative of Lawson's take on knowledge as being situated – a position that has been long argued by feminist standpoint theorists but is now being defended from a different perspective. That Lawson's claims are supportive of the broader feminist emancipatory project is also acknowledged as important.

The major points of critique of Lawson's account of gender are primarily epistemological rather than ontological. Not all are convinced that critical realism is adequate to escape the epistemological problems of naïve realism, which relies on a belief in 'value freedom', scientific neutrality and an ignorance of the politics of knowledge production. Critics argue that critical realism similarly takes too little account of the underlying structures of power in the production of knowledge and in the process, gives too little attention to the interests that are served by science (Barker 2003 p. 105). This task of understanding how science is gendered and gendering has been central to feminist epistemology to date and is a task that is not complete. Feminist economics, as one branch of feminist enquiry has had, as one of its central issues unpacked the specific character of the western masculinist subject, personified in mainstream economics as 'the Rational Economic Man'. Within this model, 'the features of rationality, isolation and autonomy are not only assumed to apply for the economic agent, but are also ascribed to the economist him/herself.' (Kuiper 2006 p. 118). Feminism has shown how western science has been effective in elevating science, and the scientists who produce knowledge, as experts who can solve social 'problems' through knowledge that is portrayed as technical and value free rather than political and value laden. Critics argue that critical realism leaves this epistemological problem unchallenged because:

As it now stands, critical realism does not recognise and theorise the structuring power of language in science nor the positions, power and (personal) interests of researchers in established bodies of thought that importantly determine who will be heard and not be heard in the academic discussions. (Kuiper 2006 p. 119)

While the emancipatory intent of critical realist claims is acknowledged, the effect is perceived as akin to replacing a totalitarian dictatorship with a benevolent one. As Peter (2003 p. 98) claims:

Lawson's account invokes the picture of a crowd of scientists peeping at 'reality' through many different holes in a wall. Accommodating feminist concerns merely means piercing more holes into this wall, with the hope of gaining a better view of 'reality'.

It is Lawson's lack of attention to the 'scientific' interests that are served by the realist position that is central to the critique of critical realism. Adopting a 'realist' epistemological position on the nature of knowledge means that the existing scientific (predominantly white and male) establishment is upheld in their ability to examine and speak 'objectively' for marginalised groups and individuals.

In essence, the criticisms of Lawson specifically, and critical realism more generally, are largely epistemological. The following section defends the broad critical realist stance and epistemology through clarifying the broad critical realist position taken on knowledge creation versus naïve realism and relativism.

Critical realism and epistemology

The response to criticisms about realist epistemology is to say that the feminists are right to be cautious about naïve realism but that this is not the critical realist position (Sayer 2004). Critical realism has developed in dialogue with, and criticism of, both naïve realism and relativism or post-positivism. Critical realism, to a certain degree, strikes a middle path between the two and shares some characteristics with both. There are critical departures, however, and the following section discusses these commonalities and differences.

Naïve realism is ...

By 'naïve realism', I refer to the philosophy of science that is associated initially with Descartes (1988) who laid the epistemological foundation for the natural sciences. His project was aimed at the development of an epistemology that could define, identify and communicate truth claims. An important characteristic of Descartes's work was his belief in the power of mathematics to provide a universal language for the understanding of a rational science and scientific principals. This was a commitment that was developed over time and a key characteristic of naïve realism is the commitment to a unified science and the development of a common scientific language. This development, as Danermark and Ekstrom

(2001a) comment, can be read historically as an effort to cut through political, social and religious conflict that characterised Europe at the time. A lack of definition around ‘science’ and reality contributed to this conflict. Ultimately, central principles have been developed as ‘logical positivism’ particularly associated with philosophers including Schlick, Reichenbach and Wittgenstein in the early 1900s (Danermark & Ekstrom 2001a p. 6).

Central tenets of naïve realism include first its underpinning in scepticism about theology or metaphysics. This extends from notions of reality and the idea that the world can only be understood in material terms. Objects are comprised of matter and exist independently from the observer. As such, it is possible to ‘know’ the world through objective observation and experience. From this perspective, in order to identify truth and facts, a process of verification of the actual existence of matter must be established. This is a test that theological or metaphysics can rarely pass. Naïve realism sets out scientific method in the natural sciences and strategies of induction can be applied (Blaikie 1993) where the scientific process involves objective and neutral observation under experimental conditions. This approach rests on the idea that the self can be divorced and examined separately from its historical location, that observed variables can be taken as facts and the relationships between variables can be seen as having causal relationships (Cruickshank 2003). Naïve realism understands the world as existing independently of the knower and the task of the researcher is to conduct experiments to identify relationships between cause and effect and to move objectively from facts to theory uninfluenced by prior assumptions. The scientific process is understood as ‘value free’. The researcher can adopt a neutral and ‘objective’ relationship to phenomena under investigation. A further implication is that the scientific process is regarded as neutral and the broader social meaning of the research is not important. As such, it doesn’t matter what theoretical position is developed as long as it serves some instrumental value and that a reasonable argument can be made that the facts fit the theory (Chalmers 1982).

Commonalities and differences between naïve realism and critical realism

Despite welcoming and accepting the force of critique that has undermined logical positivist epistemology, there are some central ideas that are shared by the critical realist perspective. First, critical realism shares the notion that there are common methods that can be applied, which are derived from the natural sciences (Walters & Young 2003 p. 52). This follows from the central belief that reality exists independent of the observer and can therefore be studied as objects of scientific investigation. As such, it is both possible and important to identify ‘facts’. A further commonality is the importance of looking for causal connections between variables through the conduct of empirical research. These commonalities are important, and

as detailed in Chapter Five, this understanding shapes the possibilities for method. Empirical research is an important tool for critical realist research.

However, critical realism departs from naïve realism on a number of grounds. First, reality is understood as being layered and emergent rather than the one-dimensional view that reality is only what can be sensed or observed. I have noted this earlier in the chapter but to recap, individuals or the self cannot be understood separately from the social and historical context. Nor can the self be reduced as being determined by the rules and norms of a society. Selfhood needs to be understood as an ongoing process that is socially mediated but not socially determined. Reality is understood as being more than individual actions or experiences. It has layers and it is emergent in that it is formed by, and dependent on what has gone before. Each of these layers has causal properties in its own right but is dependent on, but not reducible to, interactions with history and social relations (Lawson 2007 p 143). In essence, human behaviour and social phenomena are more than what can be immediately observed.

With this as a central understanding, the rules of the natural sciences are limited within the critical realist framework and it is accepted that there are substantial differences between the objects of study within a natural setting to that of a social. Societies operate within an open system, where the objects of study can only be understood within their historical context. Further, phenomena are constantly open to change due to their interactions within a shifting landscape. Both structures, and people as individual agents, change in ways that are dynamic and often imperceptible and/or unconscious. It is not possible to restrict the range of causal influences to generate a closed system. So while there is a common understanding that reality does exist independently from the observer, the surface reality cannot reveal what is going on underneath (Walters & Young 2003 p. 54).

The implication of this for making knowledge claims is that behaviours and social phenomena can be observed and understood as facts. Empirical research can be usefully undertaken. The central difference is that critical realism doesn't take these facts as constituting truth. All that can be done is to access a level of reality via fallible theories. As Cruickshank (2003 p. 2) explains:

This view of knowledge holds that there is an objective reality, and instead of hoping that one day we will somehow have absolute knowledge, the expectation is that knowledge claims will continue to be better interpretations of reality. As knowledge claims are fallible, the best we can do is improve our interpretations of reality, rather than seek a definitive, finished 'Truth'.

In other words, the purpose of identifying causal relationships in social behaviours departs significantly from logical positivism where the purpose of identifying causal relationships in social phenomena is explanation and prediction. The purpose for the critical realist is to observe causal relationships in order to better understand the mechanisms and powers that govern the social world (Walters & Young 2003). As Lawson (1997 p. 21) describes it, mechanisms are ‘a way of acting or working of a structured thing’. These things, like a match or a bicycle, have effects. The interest of critical realist research is to understand the mechanisms so that the potential effects can be theorised.

In summary, critical realism accepts and welcomes the weight of criticism levelled at logical positivism while still retaining some important insights. The role of empirical research is therefore an important means by which to access reality, albeit through a different lens that understands knowledge as fallible. Further, causality is only useful to the degree to which it assists in identifying generative mechanisms that reproduce and transform social phenomena and human behaviour.

The discussion above explains why critical realism is realist because it understands that there are facts and reality that can be understood as existing separately from the researcher. The ‘critical’ in critical realism describes the way in which it has emerged in criticism of dominant theoretical approaches to understanding society and behaviour. This has included the acceptance of the relativist critique of positivism as well as contributing to the critique of relativism itself.

Relativism

Relativist epistemology or post-positivism has been a key informant of feminist postmodern theory (Cruickshank 2003; Sayer 2004). Relativism can’t be attributed to any one philosopher but has been informed broadly by the likes of Putnam (2000), Foucault (1967, 1977, 1978), Lyotard (1991, 1993), Kuhn (1996), Feyerabend (1987, 1988, 1991) and Derrida (1976). Its emergence was largely formed out of a critique of positivist epistemology with the major criticism being around its universal and totalitarian claims, its trust in rationalism and its reliance on the belief that reality can be observed objectively without taking account of the role of perspective. The criticism is that observation is always made from a certain perspective that alters the way in which an object is interpreted. Perspectives are always local, contextual and imbued by experience, culture and theories (Chalmers 1982). Similarly, it is disputed that knowledge can be understood as free from individual interests. Individual interests are, in themselves, a central dimension of the scientific process and need to be

understood as much as the object of study (Danermark & Ekstrom 2001a). As such, it is not possible to generate scientific laws as suggested by the naïve realist claim. Such laws are merely stories and interpretations of reality from a given position. Thus, the role of language is central and all that science can do is play ‘language games’ to compete in providing a more convincing version of reality (Rorty 1989 p. 8).

A central tenet of relativism is the rejection of the concepts of truth and reality as having any genuine denotative meaning. Truth is a discourse. As Groff (2004 p. 2) puts it, ‘...the post-positivist view is that any belief can be valid depending upon one’s perspective; that truth is simply a term of praise and there is no such thing as a reality’. An extension of this is that there are no tools by which to decide which story is better than another. They just are. The test of validity is in their ability to satisfy various human needs and purposes (Danermark & Ekstrom 2001a).

Relativist insights

Critical realism incorporates some central relativist epistemological claims. These are that knowledge is always situated and that language and discourse are central to the concepts that we use and apply. Social research is also understood as a practical activity that requires attention to the relationships between practice, meaning, concepts and language (Danermark & Ekstrom 2001a p. 10). In terms of methodology, the use of qualitative methods plays an important role in understanding how social relations are discursively shaped.

At the same time, critical realism has also evolved in response to problems with relativism or post-postivism (Cruickshank 2003). A major problem is the dimension of the ‘real’ that disappears from sight. Science is reduced to discourse and so the material realities of social life are invisible. Consequently, relativism discourages critical analysis and exchange because there is little point in arguing if everything is conceived of as valid. Social issues related to inequality are regarded as just one discourse among many. Critical realism departs from this due to its grounding in the concept of research as a political exercise, which involves moving from facts to values (Cruickshank 2003 p. 3):

... the task of empirical research is to explore how existing social, political and economic relations create inequality, and turn on exploitation, in order to develop a normative critique against those relations. Research is used to provide the facts about hardship and exploitation, and from such facts normative and political arguments may be developed against the status quo.

This concept is grounded in the underpinning moral argument that the purpose of being is the development of capacities as a human right. Process and mechanisms that prevent the exercise of human capabilities need to be understood in order to identify how these might be changed in the interests of human flourishing.

In conclusion, critical realism has been criticised as failing to overcome the central problems with naïve realism. These problems are that a set of facts can be accessed on which explanations, predictions and theories can be developed that can be universally applied ignoring the role of perspective and the role of language and discourse in shaping truth claims. The broad defence is that this is a misreading of critical realism. While it shares some commonalities with both naïve realism and relativism there are important departures based on the ontological understanding of reality as layered, interactive and generative.

To a large extent, critical realism draws from the most important insights from what is a continued polarisation of thought. It retains from positivism the need for empirical research and the need to understand the material realities that shape social life. At the same time, it rejects the possibility of value freedom and the idea that reality can be understood simply from what can be observed. From relativism, it acknowledges the role of language, perspective and the political nature of the research process. Similarly, it rejects the notion that all science can be reduced to discourse and that there is no normative framework by which to distinguish between knowledge claims.

In essence, the key epistemological claims of critical realism are two-fold. First, there is a reality that can be accessed which is stratified, differentiated, structured and changing. The second is that our understanding of this reality is fallible and that the best that can be done is to engage in both qualitative and quantitative research to generate a better understanding of the mechanisms that produce patterns and regularities. This enables an understanding of how social life might be explained and potentially changed. My understanding is that critical realism provides direction on how we might improve on knowledge without making unsupportable and universal claims. At the same time, the approach forces a distinction between what might be understood as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ science in terms of its material implications for human flourishing.

Conclusion

Critical realism, as I understand it, draws on the most important insights of dominant theories of gender while overcoming some of the major flaws. First, it explains the interactions between agency and structure without privileging one over the other as a means of explaining

social processes. Second, critical realism is useful because it provides an ontological argument that is guided by some central humanist principles and the notion that human beings have common needs and capabilities by virtue of a common human genetic structure. This commonality, as Lawson points out (1999 p. 46), does not exclude the possibility and actuality of individual differences, personality and powers but recognises the commonality of shared needs essential to any emancipatory project. This understanding gives a purpose and a means of evaluation for social action and research which is to understand the extent to which social systems work to enable the realisation of human potential and capacities (Lawson 2007). My reading is that critical realism provides a viable theoretical alternative when feminism has been straining to provide a decent account for the ambiguous effects of recent social and economic trends. As Clegg (2006 p. 316) comments, critical realism helps to ‘put rest to the myth that there is no alternative to poststructuralism except a reversion to a crude version of the unified rational subject, which poststructuralism has so ably deconstructed’.

Critical realism also opens epistemological implications that guide possibilities for method. The following chapter goes on to explain my choice of methodology in a way that is consistent with the broad critical realist position on knowledge creation.

Chapter Four: Critical realism and using a case study

Introduction

The aim of the previous chapter was to clarify the theoretical assumptions that I apply in this research, how I understand gender relations to operate and how this manifests in higher education. I draw particularly from critical realist theory for its capacity to explain persistent patterns of gender inequality in the context of globalisation, within the broader labour market and within the higher education policy context. The aim of this chapter is to show how critical realism informs my use of a case study to generate evidence for theory development.

This chapter begins with a discussion of critical realism, epistemology and methodology. The aim is to explain the congruence of my selection of method within a critical realist framework. I explain that while a characteristic of critical realist method is the idea that methodological choices are dependent on the context and purpose of research, the use of case studies is commonly applied as a means of generating both ‘intensive’ and ‘extensive’ insights about how and why social phenomena operate. This choice is not without its limitations, however, and I go on to discuss the commonly understood strengths and weaknesses of the approach. The purpose of this discussion is to ultimately defend its usefulness as a means of explaining women’s persistent under-representation in leadership roles in higher education and to show that a case study is a reasonable method on which to base such an explanation. The following section starts with a discussion of critical realism and its implications for method.

Critical realism and its implications for method

In the previous chapter I have made a broad defence of critical realism and its epistemological implications. I did this as a response to the feminist critique that critical realism falls into the traps of naïve realism with an overemphasis on objectivity and scientific neutrality at the expense of recognising the subjective and the inherent (and gendered) power relations that shape knowledge creation. While I argue that this is a misrepresentation of the critical realist stance, to an extent, critical realists agree that more attention needs to be paid to the question of epistemology and method (Porpora 2001). As a response, the development of critical realist analysis and what this means in terms of method is a growing theme (Bricmont 2001; Danermark & Ekstrom 2001b; Cruickshank 2003; Downward, Finch et al. 2003; Peter 2003; Walters & Young 2003). Despite this gap, there are some distinguishing characteristics of critical realism and the methodological options that flow from the ontological argument on which critical realism is based.

As a starting point, critical realism departs from the relatively narrow methodological options extending from positivist and relativist approaches. Logical positivism clearly leads the researcher down the empirical path where the rules of the natural sciences are directly applied within the social science context (Chalmers 1982). Research strategies rely on the application of inductive or deductive logic, requiring a process of theory building, testing and finding ‘proof’ to support an hypothesis, either by falsification or by demonstration that the theory is true according to the results of experimental testing (Blaikie 1993 p. 131). Methods are quantitative and rely on experimentation, surveys, model building and statistical analysis. The rules of objectivity apply where the researcher must distance themselves from the object of analysis and apply rigorous procedure. The task is to reduce social phenomena to discrete variables, to identify causal relationships between variables, and to explain and predict what might happen in future given the operation of defined variables. Claims of knowledge rest on ‘proof’. The aim of research is prediction (Porpora 2001 p. 262).

In contrast, qualitative method flows from a broader metatheoretical base and is less distinctive in terms of its characteristics and purpose. Danermark and Ekstrom (2001), however, identify the main theoretical starting points as stemming from hermeneutics or phenomenology. The goal of qualitative research is to understand the quality or essence of social phenomena with the understanding that objects in the social world are distinct from those found in the natural sciences. Therefore the rules of the natural sciences cannot be applied. The focus is on gaining a rich or ‘thick’ understanding of one or a few cases which need to be understood as a whole and within the context in which they exist (Danermark & Ekstrom 2001b p. 159). The task is to identify the meanings of ‘text’ which refers broadly to what people say, write or produce within its broader cultural context. A core assumption is that the researcher’s preconceptions or prejudice cannot be divorced from the object of study. Critical reflection on the various ways in which prejudice and context shape the interpretation and meaning of behaviour and phenomenon is a crucial research task. The aim is to describe social behaviour and outcomes for the purpose of theory building rather than prediction as is the case in logical positivism. Overall, the goal is to gain an understanding of the whole of a given phenomenon within context, rather than just its parts.

As noted earlier, critical realism does not imply a wholesale rejection of either positivism or relativist epistemologies but finds insights from both. At one level, this leaves all methodological options, qualitative and quantitative, open and useful for research. This is indeed the case and as Danermark and Ekstrom (2001) explain, the use of mixed methods is congruent with the critical realist framework. At the same time, this does not mean simply that ‘anything goes’. What it means is that both approaches are useful but are applied in a

metatheoretical context with the purpose of identifying the mechanisms that produce social outcomes. Danermark and Ekstrom (2001 p. 153) call critical realist methodology ‘critical methodological pluralism’ which stems from a core ontological argument that is examined in the previous chapter.

The critical realist conception of reality is derived from Bhaskar’s (1978) ‘ontological map’ which makes the distinction between three layers of reality: the empirical, the actual and the real. Fundamentally, there is a reality that exists independent of our concepts and knowledge of it. This reality, however, is not transparent, behaves in ways not accessible to immediate observation, and consists of powers and mechanisms that can only be experienced indirectly by their ability to cause things to happen. Further, because reality is layered it is only possible to observe the effects of reality, as opposed to producing it (as might be possible in an experimental setting in the natural sciences), all knowledge is fallible and limited by the concepts and tools available to observe. Critical realism emphasises the point that social research is essentially a practical activity and can only deal with issues of practical relevance (Danermark & Ekstroma 2001). This idea stems not from the instrumentalist notion that knowledge is true because it is simply useful to someone. It is based on the practical acknowledgement that it is only possible to identify or ask particular questions if conditions allow it and the tools are available for investigation. Reality changes and changing circumstances and conditions make some forms of knowledge irrelevant and/or inaccessible while other questions become compelling and important. As Danermark and Ekstrom (2001a p. 26) point out, ‘the kind of knowledge that is produced depends on what problems we have and what questions we ask in relation to the world around us.’ As such, it is not achievable to create just any kind of knowledge at any time and place. Prevailing conditions shape what is possible. As such, the question of method is a practical problem and methodological choices must suit the object and purpose of investigation.

A further characteristic of critical realist philosophy is the central importance of everyday language and concepts as being constitutive of social phenomena (Sayer 1992). This understanding distinguishes critical realist research from that applied within the natural sciences. In the natural sciences or in positivist social research, social enquiry requires a one-dimensional interpretation by the researcher of the object of enquiry. Critical realist research understands that investigations involve a two-dimensional process of interpreting the interpretations of the subject about social phenomena involving a ‘double hermeneutic’. Little is revealed by simply studying actions. What is necessary is to understand the meaning that actors give to action in order to explain the dimensions of social behaviour. Sayer’s (1992 p. 31) example about the meaning of money is useful to describe this. To observe the way that

humans pass around pieces of paper and metal disks would give little insight into the meanings of money, how the use of money shapes society or what kind of action it is. What is necessary to understand is how and why people use it and the meanings that are attached to it.

This example is also useful for showing the extent to which concepts are relational in that they shape and connect with other concepts and social phenomena. In the case of the concept of money, its understanding reveals the relationships with work, class, ownership, production and so on. Danermark and Ekstrom (2001a p. 34) emphasise that there are two aspects to the relational character of concepts that are of central importance to critical realist social investigation. First, there is the relationship between concepts and the broader social structure. The second aspect is the relation between the broader structure and the material aspects of its existence. The belief that social structures are the deep dimension of social reality and that these structures are always made up of material practices is what distinguishes critical realism from relativist philosophies of science. While it shares a focus on the connections between concepts and social relations, it is the relationship between concepts and reality that is of importance to critical realist research practice.

It is the conceptualisation that social structures are linked to material practices that explains the relative durability of social structures (Lawson 2007). While societies change, and indeed societies undergo major transformation over time, most changes are relatively slow and happen incrementally through the dual processes of reproduction and transformation as detailed in the previous chapter. This process takes place when people act according to concepts that they believe to be real. These concepts are more than simply thoughts that can be changed at will; they are real with material outcomes that have powers and that have effects beyond individual acts. Thus, the everyday concepts that are applied are the starting point for revealing the mechanisms that reproduce and transform social structures. This also means that it is not possible to conduct experiments as is the central method of natural science (Danermark & Ekstrom 2001a). Critical realism understands societies as open systems with complex interconnections and relationships between concepts, material practices and broader structures. It is not possible to systematically limit and control all of the possible influences on social interaction as is necessary in controlled experiments. Only surface reality can be observed within a given context that is always in a generative process of reproduction and transformation.

The methodological implications of this discussion are threefold. First, the analysis of concepts and concept formation is essential. This means that actions and the meanings that people attach to them need to be understood. It is not enough, however, to simply describe

and report on what people say unless this is the object of the research. The second implication is that it is necessary to dig deeper – at the level of the generative mechanism. What this means is to explore how the enactment of concepts generates or causes social structures and processes. As Mayntz (2004 p. 241) indicates, mechanisms refer to recurrent processes linking specified initial conditions and a specific outcome. The purpose in identifying these processes is to develop theory about how outcomes occur by the presence of particular conditions. This process avoids the impossible task of developing universal laws about social phenomena. Instead, the starting point is to identify an observed or suspected regularity or correlation that, given certain conditions, provides the basis for making causal propositions that can explain a given phenomenon. In describing mechanisms, Mayntz (2004) stresses that mechanisms are not linear in their effects but are better conceptualised as occurring as part of a causal chain so there is a distance between cause and effect. The term ‘mechanism’ should also be reserved for describing linked activities of several units or elements and not applied to ‘unit acts’. For example, globalisation can be described as a mechanism that comprises numerous processes with distant, multiple and distant effects. This example is also helpful in demonstrating how mechanisms are not discrete with a given beginning and end, but rather, provide an explanation for a particular set of events or circumstances. At the same time, mechanisms are also hierarchical in their explanatory power and can be applied at various levels or within a ‘nested hierarchy’ (Mayntz 2004 p. 242). This means that mechanisms can be explained either in isolation, by the way in which they are constituted by lower-level mechanisms that generated their activity or contextually, by showing how they fit into the organisation of a higher-level mechanism. Overall, the identification of mechanisms provides the basis for explanation for how certain outcomes are reached.

The third implication, in order to generate theory, is to explore how people’s ideas and concepts are related to social practices. An essential part of this, as Sayer (1992) articulates, is to explore the patterns of power and dominance within social practice. This is argued on the basis that systems of domination are maintained by both the control of resources and through the reproduction of systems of meaning that maintain power relationships. What it means to be, for example, a refugee, a wife, an academic, is not disconnected from the practices that create that meaning. Different groups have different interests in the reproduction or the transformation of that meaning. A further implication is that it is impossible to maintain value neutrality in the conduct of social research (Danermark & Ekstrom 2001a). This is opposed to the claims of the natural sciences that investigate objects that are neither good nor bad - they just are. Social science investigates the social world of roles, identities and relations and their various meanings, which are inevitably associated with values of good, bad, right or wrong. The researcher enters into relations of power in the interpretation of the subject of

investigation requiring critical reflection. Concepts also need to be passed through a process of negotiation in order to be understood and passed as knowledge. In the process, social investigation exposes power relations, a process in itself that challenges whose interests are served and how. Questions of values, and the politics of social investigation, are therefore inherently embedded within the process.

In conclusion, the critical realist ontology, while not prescriptive in methodology in itself, has implications for methods in social research. These stem from the understanding that reality exists beyond our observation of it, that this reality is layered and that research is a practical activity limited by available concepts and tools available. Understanding the use and meaning of everyday concepts is the starting point for social investigation and these concepts are inherently value laden and shaped by language. Concepts also change and are socially produced and situated within time, place and context. Concepts are central, however, because they are understood as being constitutive of social phenomena and can reveal social relationships and the material practices that shape social structures. An essential aspect of interpreting relationships and social mechanisms is also to reveal the relationships that shape patterns of power and domination. As such, the research process is inherently value laden and political in its effects. These assumptions have important implications for the choice of methodology.

As noted above, critical realism does not exclude any particular method. This is largely because methods are understood as tools to generate evidence that can access one layer of reality and provide insight into the generative mechanisms in operation to explain why social phenomena occurs as it does. Data, gathered through empirical or interpretative approaches does not, in itself, explain anything. They are ‘evidentry tools’ on which to build an argument about the kind of social processes that are going on underneath (Porpora 2001 p. 262). Critical realism adopts a critical attitude in relation to both dominant approaches and therefore draws from central insights. At the same time, the critical realist approach differs in relation to the central purpose of the research process. As Porpora (2001 p. 262) puts it, ‘...it’s not that positivists run regressions and we do not, but how we run regressions and the significance we attach to them.’ Similarly, qualitative methods can provide important evidence of how a particular phenomenon manifests within a small number of cases. The critical realist purpose is not to identify a perspective that exists within a particular context, but to identify generative mechanisms that are at play in shaping broader social structures and to construct an argument that might explain dimensions of reality and the concepts and material practices that constitute this reality.

Critical realism is also highly critical of the extent to which polarised epistemological positions close down dialogue. The ‘science wars’ between positivism and hermeunetics, qualitative and quantitative or universalism and particularism have dominated the social sciences for considerable time. To a certain extent, this divide can be seen as a symptom of competing epistemological understandings, each denying its philosophical underpinnings. For example, Porpora (2001 p. 263) calls positivism ‘...a philosophy for sociologists who do not want to have to think about philosophy’. Likewise, postmodernism, in its rejection of truth and objectivity, similarly rejects the philosophical basis of objective rationality, therefore leaving no room for dialogue. As Porpora (2001 p. 263) concludes, ‘we get the incommensurability of rival paradigms as a foundational presupposition of postmodernism’. Both positions occupy polarised positions on a theoretical spectrum while sharing the characteristic of excluding ontological reflection on metaphysics (Porpora 2001). The critical realist understanding is that the purpose of social science is to gain a deeper understanding of social reality and to build better, albeit fallible, explanatory argument. CR joins with a growing trend to move beyond the ‘either/or’ approach to social science in order to progress knowledge in relation to current social issues.

This means that all social science methods are useful. In themselves, they are simply tools by which to generate data that can be used as evidence to mount a particular argument. The important distinction is about how they are used and for what purpose. As Danermark and Ekstrom (2001a) explain, choices are guided by the ontological/methodological link. Further, given that social science is a practical activity, inherently shaped by the questions at hand, the tools and resources available and the general limitations of the researcher, methodological choice is also largely a question of what is possible in a particular situation. Both qualitative and quantitative methods can be usefully employed. Both have their limitations, however, and a combination or mix of methods can enrich understanding of a given problem.

Critical realist methodological choices

Methods open through critical realist research can be summarised as a choice between gathering limited data from a large number of cases or by generating rich data from a limited number of cases. While choice of method is usually expressed as using either qualitative or quantitative methods, the critical realist literature talks about the need to combine intensive and extensive methods (Porpora 2001; Danermark & Ekstrom 2001a; Downward, Finch et al. 2003). This terminology is accurately descriptive but also avoids some of the dualisms in the social science debate discussed above. Combined intensive and extensive methods can be deployed in order to identify generative mechanisms and how they are manifested through particular events or processes. Both have a different practical purpose, however. Intensive

methods are used to identify how a particular process works in a particular case or small number of cases. This can identify specific information about how particular changes have occurred through the actions and intentions of a few people or events. Typical methods employed include interviews, focus groups, ethnographies and qualitative analysis. The strength of intensive methods is that they can lead to comprehensive and expansive findings but the limitation is that it is not possible to generalise beyond a few cases. In contrast, extensive methods can reveal regularities, patterns and distinguishing features from across a population and/or contexts and give an idea about how widely certain characteristics or processes are represented. Methods include surveys, questionnaires and standardised interviews. Statistical analysis is applied to identify regularities. Such data can generate useful descriptions on a wide scale, but lacks explanatory power about why a phenomenon occurs. Given the strengths and limitations of both, it is therefore often productive to use a mix.

The need to use a mix of methods largely stems from the central objective, which is to identify mechanisms evident through causal patterns. Mechanisms are systematic in their presence and operation but may not always be evident in a given context where there might be counteractive mechanisms at play. For example, gendered labour market segregation can be identified through broader and relatively stable patterns occurring over a long history. These patterns are not random and attention to relationships between gender, class and ethnicity, for example, will show greater order in those patterns. However, there may be specific contexts in which the mechanisms that cause these patterns are not at play. In this case, broader labour market analysis can show that the mechanisms are still present and active but possibly not within a specific situation. The combination of methods enables contrastive explanations that can compare a specific context with the bigger picture. Lawson (1997 p. 229) identifies this process as essential in identifying ‘demi-regularities’ in social phenomena. By this, he refers to patterns in how mechanisms play out inconsistently depending on their relationship with other mechanisms that vary in strength according to context (1997 p. 204). The use of both extensive and intensive data provides additional clues as to how generative mechanisms operate both in the particular and in the broader context. An essential step in the research process is to explain these demi-regularities. This involves the application of retroductive logic in explaining how the appearance of identified mechanisms can explain the phenomenon under investigation. This part of the explanation requires an intensive approach in order to provide an in-depth understanding of a few cases. Danermark and Ekstrom (2001a) explain this as necessary given that experimentation is not possible due to the inability to control or close the system under study.

In summary, the research process is strengthened by the use of both intensive and extensive

methods. It also requires sticking to the rules of good empirical practice for both types of methods. Sampling technique, for example, needs to follow procedures that will enable the researcher to select a research population from which reasonable conclusions can be drawn about a broader population whether that is by use of random, systematic or other types of established sampling procedures. In a similar way, the selection of cases in the conduct of qualitative research should be strategic in order to explore a case that might enrich a theory of how mechanisms operate to generate particular social phenomenon.

In conclusion, critical realism leads social research down a pluralist methodological path. This is based on the idea that the traditional divide between qualitative and quantitative methods is unproductive and leads to only partial explanations of social phenomena. Methodology inspired by critical realism arises out of scepticism about the metatheoretical perspectives of both logical positivism and relativist schools of thought yet draws from both. The methodological approach advocated is the combination of both intensive and extensive methods. While this approach draws largely from established social science methodological procedures, the use of method is shaped by the metatheoretical link. In other words, the purpose of gathering data is to identify generative mechanisms that simultaneously reproduce and transform social phenomena.

Methods applied in this study

As explained, this study relies on an intensive case study of Victoria University. The purpose of this section is first to clarify what is specifically meant by the term, case study, and how it fits with critical realist ontology. I then explain the rationale for using a case study method and discuss the strengths of such an approach and clarify its limitations. I go on to describe how data has been gathered and the purpose this has in addressing the core research questions.

Case study definitions, strengths and limitations

There is considerable ambiguity across the literature regarding what a case study actually is and what its strengths and limitations are in generating data for theory development. This occurs partly due to the multiple ways in which case studies are applied, for varied purposes, in different contexts, by almost all social and natural science disciplines. In contrast to other strategies, there is a struggle in the literature to deliver a consistent and useful definition of ‘case study’. This struggle results in general criticism and misunderstanding about the potential usefulness of case studies.

Case studies are often mistrusted as a legitimate and rigorous approach to social science.

Similarly, they are misunderstood in terms of their purpose, design and intent (Campbell 1975; Yin 2003; Flyvbjerg 2006; Vincent 2008). Flyvberg (2006) usefully identifies and subsequently addresses the key misunderstandings or arguments about the limitations of case studies as a method. First, a common claim is that it is not possible to generalise on the basis of a single case. Generalisation, from a logical positivist perspective, is the purpose of the social research. Case studies, therefore, are not useful except possibly in the initial stages of research to generate theories. The second related criticism is that case studies cannot be used to test a theory, again on the basis that a limited case or narrow set of cases is insufficient to falsify a theory. The third point often made is that case studies are subject to bias and have the tendency to support research preconceptions rather than test ideas. A related point is in generating ‘thick’ data or masses of seemingly conflicting narrative about a particular case; the danger is that the data becomes inaccessible and resistant to the analysis of key variables and causal relationships. An additional misunderstanding, that Yin (2003) identifies, is that it is commonly assumed that a case study approach essentially involves qualitative method, which, as discussed above, is not necessarily the case. Finally, and more generally, case study research is commonly regarded as ‘sloppy’ science – usually incorporating a lack of rigorous procedure, a lack of focus and leading to sweeping generalisations that lack supporting evidence (Gerring 2007 p. 6).

Each of these criticisms can be responded to on epistemological grounds and in relation to what a case study approach incorporates within its design and possible intentions. Gerring (2007 p. 20) defines a case study as ‘the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of the study is, at least in part, to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population)’. While almost any phenomenon – an event, an organisation, a country, a community for example – can be used as a case study, the key defining characteristic of a case study is that the case has definable boundaries that delineate the primary object of inference. A case study can include one or more cases as well as a mix of methods, both qualitative and quantitative, in order to respond to core research questions. As Yin (2003) emphasises, the case study is a research strategy rather than a method in itself. While case studies are used for a range of research purposes, they are particularly relevant to research questions that are focused on explanation, or exploring ‘how’ and ‘why’ particular events, changes or patterns occur as opposed to questions about ‘what’, ‘who’ or ‘what’ (Yin 2003 p. 5). Cases are selected strategically normally according to what the research wants to explore. Flyvbjerg (2006) identifies four types of cases that can provide insight. These include the general or average case, the extreme case, the critical case and the paradigmatic case. Each can be used for different purposes. For example, in a general case which is mostly typical of a broader population, it can be found that certain conditions produce certain outcomes, and there is a basis for believing that similar

conditions might be in operation across the broader population. In contrast, extreme cases, where atypical outcomes are in evidence (eg. extraordinary organisational productivity or an event that has extreme consequences), the case can reveal the processes and mechanisms at play that can be avoided or replicated. The strategic choice of a case is primarily shaped by the research questions and purpose. Furthermore, the role of intuition is acknowledged as an important factor in the selection of a case (Flyvbjerg 2006 p. 232). Essentially, a case is often selected on the basis of what looks interesting to the researcher. While this choice is informed by theory and prior assumptions, as an investigative process, the role of the ‘hunch’ is a part of the equation. Similarly, the role of practical constraints is also a factor in selection and choice of case – a factor that is particularly relevant in this study. Overall, the case study is a research strategy that involves the intensive study of a particular and bounded social phenomenon. Much of the criticism of case studies flows from the assumed differences and limits between qualitative and quantitative methods that are largely related to the epistemological claims made about truth, as discussed earlier. Critical realism departs from these criticisms fundamentally in that data is used for a different purpose - that is, to provide evidentiary tools to identify generative mechanisms. Case studies are capable of generating useful evidence for this purpose and I believe it is a highly useful strategy that can generate significant and in-depth insight into current issues. In order to justify this, I respond to the criticisms mentioned above in turn.

First, as discussed at length, critical realism assumes that social phenomena arise in an open system meaning that it is futile to develop universal laws and generalisations for the purposes of prediction. Rather, what is possible is to build on theory and to identify mechanisms that explain social phenomena. Embedded in this goal is to understand power relationships and the processes that generate enduring inequalities. This goal aligns particularly with my research, and case studies can illuminate the range of mechanisms in play in a way that other research strategies might miss.

The second major criticism, that case studies do not provide sufficient evidence to test theory, can be argued against on its own terms. While this is true one level, as Flyvbjerg (2007 p 226) points out, one carefully selected case study can do much to demonstrate flaws in commonly held beliefs. The example of Galileo’s experiment with gravity is used to show how with one experiment, Galileo disproved the Aristotelian view that objects fell at different speeds depending on weight – a belief that had been held for thousands of years. Falsification of the theory was not based on evidence from multiple cases but one strategic and definitive ‘case’ that destroyed a belief that was held to be universally true. The point is not to say that case studies are not necessarily superior to large scale research involving multiple cases, but

that intense scrutiny of carefully chosen cases can be highly useful depending on the research questions and the problems at hand.

The criticism that case studies are prone to bias and/or ‘sloppiness’ is a criticism that can apply equally across all social and natural sciences (Flyvbjerg 2006 p. 234). This criticism, in part, stems from the misunderstanding that case studies do not incorporate clear methodological processes or tests for validity and reliability. While case studies may be highly varied in design and the mix of methods employed, similar rules about rigorous and systematic social science practice should be employed. If, for example, the case study is a large organisation, a survey of organisational members might be conducted. Rigorous research techniques include implementing appropriate sampling techniques, for example, as one element of good practice. Whether or not case studies contain ‘bias’ depends on the quality of the research procedures employed. This requirement applies equally across the sciences. On a broader level, however, such a criticism rests on the logical positivist understanding that the researcher can adopt an objectively neutral relationship to the object of study. As discussed throughout, the established epistemological understanding brought to light through relativism is that all facts and knowledge are theory laden. What is important, therefore, is not the avoidance of bias perse but acknowledgement of the relationship between the researcher, the limits of the preconceptions brought to the research and the enmeshed relationship between the researcher and the subject of study. This is a perspective shared by critical realist epistemology and one that applies equally across alternative social science research practices.

In summary, a case study is a highly useful social research strategy to apply depending on the research questions, practical limitations and the context in which it is applied. Gerring (2007 p. 1) gives a useful analogy when he says there are two ways of learning how to build a house. You can either study the construction of many houses in general terms, or you can closely study the construction of a single house. Both approaches will lead to useful knowledge and whether or not one means is better than another depends on the purpose of the exercise and the resources and tools available. In other words the case study is one useful means to an end with its own inherent strengths and limitations.

Why I chose to use a case study

As noted above, my understanding is that a case study is a useful approach for this study. Particular points of strength are about the ability of case studies to respond to questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’ which corresponds to the critical realist goal of explaining social phenomena rather than attempting to develop universal laws for the purpose of prediction (Yin 2003). As

Vincent (2008) argues, the constant question of how and why a particular phenomenon occurs is the pathway to identifying the generative mechanisms at play that reproduce and transform social structures.

A further reason for using a case study is that the research design can usefully incorporate both intensive and extensive methods as advocated by Danermark and Ekstrom (2001a). As discussed, intensive methods provide evidence about the quality or essence of a particular event or experience. Extensive methods can generate more quantitative data that can reveal the frequency of a given phenomenon either within or across a number of cases. Together, they provide a rich and detailed understanding of a given phenomenon. Both intensive and extensive methods are incorporated in this study.

The design of case studies is also largely guided by practical considerations of what is possible and logical in a given context and situation, a further tenet of critical realist-inspired method. Questions of design, as Yin (2003) points out, are essentially about the logical steps that need to be taken to enable researchers to get from ‘point A’ to ‘point B’ – with ‘A’ referring to the research question and ‘B’ referring to the answers to the question. How that journey is best taken is largely determined by the conditions and context – a point often missed by competing epistemological approaches. A related point is that the role of intuition is acknowledged in the selection of cases to achieve the research ends. As Yin (2003) indicates, the selection of case studies is strategic in order to maximise the extent to which the data collected can align with the research questions and purpose. This rationale resonates for my deliberations about how best to tackle my research questions.

My choice of a case study was, in no small part, guided by practical considerations. As an employee and student at VU, the ability to access data and information was much easier than it would have been had I attempted to research another university or tried to include a statewide or national sample. Arguably, this ‘insider-status’ also contributed to the depth of information and analysis that I was able to access. In addition to this, however, case studies also enable flexibility in design, and the ability to include new information as circumstances change. As detailed in the following chapter, higher education in general, and certainly at VU in particular, has operated in a highly dynamic context over the four years that this study was conducted. In order to explain anything at all, such changes in leadership, policy, economic conditions and government, needed to be incorporated for a full picture to be drawn. As such, I employed a range of methods within the one case study in order to generate a coherent background and context for women’s promotional aspirations in higher education. These are explained below.

Methods used in this case study

The parameters of this case study are drawn around women employed at Level C by Victoria University. This focus arises from the understanding that gendered hierarchies of employment are both generated and transformed by the interaction between agency and structure. As such, the perspectives of this group of women, positioned as they are below the level of Associate Professor, are capable of providing critical insight into how individual decision making and action occurs within the possibilities that are offered within the structures of the university in particular and by the higher education system more generally. Given this understanding, it is not possible to interpret the actions of a group of individuals without attention to the structures in which they operate. The views and experiences of the women in this study are interpreted through organisational, systemic and historical contexts. Similarly, as I have argued in Chapter Three, my understanding is that women, as a group, share some common experiences, despite the extensive differences that are generated by class, ethnicity, sexuality, care responsibilities, religion and other realms of individual difference. It is therefore necessary to understand women's location through a gendered analysis of broader labour market trends and history. All of these assumptions flow from a critical realist ontology, which in turn lends itself to specific methods as described below.

As discussed, the central method employed in this study is interviews with women employed at Level C which I discuss in detail in Chapter Six. The results and analysis of the interview findings are supported by data gathered through a range of sources. First, the research questions, as discussed at length, were refined through a review of the relevant literature. The questions arrived at responded to identified gaps in the literature and were inspired by central debates. The questions were also grounded in national labour market data in general and national higher education employment data specifically. As put forward in Chapter One, 10 years of higher education employment data was reviewed to show changes in women's representation and distribution within the higher education hierarchy. The intention was also to locate VU within the national higher education context and to show how gendered employment patterns at VU are very similar to national averages. This profile shows that at least in terms of gendered employment patterns, VU is a general or typical case. This suggests that what is happening at VU in terms of women's progression is likely to share similarities with other institutions.

The second main method used is to undertake an analysis of VU as an organisation. This includes first a history of the university within the context of the waves of reform that have characterised higher education in recent decades. What this history shows is that while VU is

very much a creature of successive waves of Commonwealth Government higher education policy, and very similar in character to other ‘new technology’ universities across Australia, it has some distinctive characteristics that have shaped the academic employment experience over the past 20 years. Of major significance is its unique and legislated responsibility to provide higher education options for the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. While dynamic and changing, the region is generally characterised by high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, multiculturalism and as having borne the brunt of industrial change in the shift from an industrial manufacturing base to one underpinned by a services economy (Sheehan & Wiseman 2004). This responsibility has been inspired by a broader commitment to social justice and regional development aspirations. This is an important contextual characteristic in shaping employment conditions and the aspirations of individual academics employed at VU. This is particularly the case for those who have been employed for more than 10 years.

The second part of the organisational profile includes an analysis of gender representation by discipline area. What this shows is that while women are being promoted, and their representation is growing at senior levels, this growth is uneven across the university and there are discipline areas where women are almost completely absent above Level B. It also shows that an increase in women’s representation at senior levels is curtailed by the increasing practice of external recruitment, which strongly favours male appointments. As a consequence, the prospect of equal representation by gender is still an unlikely prospect in the short or medium term.

Third, I provide an overview of current university policy that is relevant to employment and equal employment opportunity. As I discuss, this includes policies that flow from the most recent enterprise agreement that applies to university employment conditions, policy that flows down from the Commonwealth about research activity and quality, and equal opportunity policy relating to women and leadership. This demonstrates is the plethora of influences on academic employment, all of which is highly dynamic and gendered in its impact.

This history provides the background to the interviews that I conduct with women employed as Level C academics at VU. The process, results and findings of these interviews are detailed in Chapter Six. In summary, however, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 24 out of a potential 58 women. The interviews were one to two hours long and focused on four key areas. These included career history, current employment circumstances, aspirations for promotion and perceptions of the need for and effectiveness of equal opportunity policy and strategy implemented at VU. Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically using

NVIVO³. A key theme identified is that while each of the women interviewed had a very different story to tell, the overall condition is that most have been ‘slowed down’ in their progress through the academic hierarchy due to the combined influences of gendered career histories, responsibilities for care, gendered, sometimes directly discriminatory organisational practices and excessive workloads. A small number of interviewees were actively aspiring to promotion. Some of these women have been directly inspired by EEO initiatives that encouraged this. Most, however, were not aspirational despite having reached a point in their career where they were qualified and experienced to do so. This was because they were too unwell, too tired, too traumatised, too cynical, considered themselves too old, or were busy making other plans.

It is also important to highlight that each of these methods was implemented from the perspective of an ‘insider’ as a part-time academic, full-time student and a union member over the course of four years. The fact that I live locally is also relevant given the importance of VU to the region. Over the course of the project, I have also been invited to advise on equity policy and to make presentations at various forums on the implications of my research. While these have not been documented specifically, throughout the process, much of my direction was guided by information gathered through informal means. The interest generated from women academics who are colleagues and friends, in no small part encouraged my progress, but also informed my questions and analysis. In this sense, this research has an ethnographic character in that the organisational context of the research was very much part of my lived experience for a number of years.

Together, the aim of this mix of methods is to provide a detailed insight into the conditions that shape the employment aspirations of a group of academic women employed at VU. Combined, the evidence provides the basis for an argument about why women’s progression between Level C and Level D continues to remain, perhaps not a glass ceiling, but a hazardous journey – a journey that many women ‘choose’ not to continue once they have reached a certain point.

Conclusion

The overall purpose of this chapter has been to describe, explain and justify the use of a case study as the strategy to generate evidence necessary to respond to my core research questions. The following chapter flows from one of the key methods of this study, which is to provide an historical and organisational context for the women who comprise my case study. I do this by

³ NVIVO is a software package designed for the analysis of qualitative data

providing a description of VU as a university, a history of its development and a discussion of recent events, how these changes have been shaped by national higher education reform and how this has been implemented at VU. I go on to examine the local and gendered impacts of this reform and how this is manifested at VU. I also discuss how EEO has fared within the context of reform and its potential to support women's academic employment opportunities. The purpose of this background is to give context to the findings from interviews with academic women employed at Level C.

Chapter Five: VU as a case

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the epistemological and methodological implications of critical realism and the usefulness of a case study approach from a critical realist perspective. I explained that my approach has been to use VU as a case study in order to understand women's aspirations for promotion to senior academic positions and to gather evidence by which to identify causal mechanisms that generate unequal employment outcomes for women. The aim of this chapter is to provide the organisational context for women academics employed at VU and their aspirations for promotion. To do this, I give a description of VU in terms of its physical, operative and staffing characteristics and sketch a history of its evolution from its beginnings as a technical college in the early 1900s and how this evolution has contributed to the distinctive character of the university. In particular, this includes its relationship with the development of the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne, its long-standing commitment to improving the higher educational opportunities for those traditionally excluded, and its distinctively multicultural character. I then focus on policy change that has shaped the academic employment experience at VU in recent years. This background situates the perspectives of Level C academic interviewees.

Victoria University – characteristics, history and evolution as a university

The following section begins by describing the evolution of VU as a preface to discussion its evolution since the establishment of Footscray Technical College in 1916. This shows something of VU's character coming as it does from its role in providing educational opportunities to the working class population in the previously industrial suburbs of Melbourne's inner west. I then discuss the formation of the university in 1992 and the two key periods of administration that have occurred since that time and how it has been shaped by higher education reform.

Victoria University – a description

Victoria University is one of 10 of the 'new generation' universities (NGUs) that operate across Australia. The term 'new generation' is used to refer broadly to those universities that have gained accreditation as universities since the 1970s. The term distinguishes VU from other categories of universities including Group of Eight (Go8), Australian Technology Network (ATN), Innovative Research Universities Australia (IRU Australia) (AEN 2008). VU is one of the newer universities and one of 16 that was created in the four years following the implementation of the higher education reforms introduced by John Dawkins as the Minister for Employment, Education and Training in the Hawke/Keating government (AEN

2008). VU's other distinctive characteristic is that it is one of six dual sector universities, which are those offering a mix of higher education and vocational education and training (VET) programs (PhillipsKPA 2005).

VU is based primarily in the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. The region is defined by the *Victoria University of Technology Act 1990* as including 11 municipal districts extending from Footscray down to Williamstown and to the outer west including Bacchus March and to the north-west including Broadmeadows (Parliament of Victoria 1990). VU's responsibility to the region is one of its major points of distinction as the only Australian university where a regional responsibility is made explicit in legislation. Since establishment as a university in 1992, however, both international and city-based campuses have been established. VU operates from 11 campuses across the western region and the city. Footscray Park continues to be the central campus for teaching and administration. Various programs, mostly delivered through the Faculty of Business and Law, are delivered in partnership with institutions primarily in China, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Germany. The higher education sector includes three faculties: Business and Law; Arts, Education and Human Development; and Health, Sciences and Engineering. As of March 2008, VU employed a total of 4,209 staff (VU 2008b). In 2007, VU enrolled close to 50,000 students – 20,712 in higher education programs and 26,342 in the TAFE sector (VU 2007). These numbers make VU a significant provider in the national context. In order to provide an explanation of how VU came to be, the following section sketches a short history since VU's beginnings as Footscray Technical College, better known as 'Footscray Tech'.

From Footscray Tech to Victoria University

VU has its beginnings as the Footscray Technical School in 1916 and its establishment was extremely important to the Western Metropolitan Region. As Rasmussen (1989) documents, the school's development was distinctive in its vision for social and industrial development in a region that had become the centre of Australia's manufacturing industry. This vision was shared among employers, government and community and was in part shaped by an ideal of creating a 'Birmingham in Melbourne' – that is, a form of development based on an understanding of the mutual interdependence between employers and workers (Rasmussen 1989). This was guided, according to Rasmussen (1989 p. 14), by a concern for the moral and material improvement of the working classes in Footscray and a growing sense of civic pride in the region both despite and because of the stigmatised image of Footscray as working class and 'smelly'.

The school underwent various iterations over the first 50 years of establishment and expanded over two separate locations in Footscray until 1968 when it was renamed the Footscray Institute of Technology (FIT). Four years later, in 1972, Footscray Secondary Technical School (now the TAFE division of VU) became separate institutions. From the 1970s to the 1990s, there were a number of mergers and separations, an outcome of an expanding secondary and higher education sector and changing government policy. The other major development during the 1980s was the establishment of the Western Institute in 1986 with campuses at St Albans, Werribee and Melton. Planning for the Institute was explicitly about serving the educational needs of the expanding outer Western Metropolitan Region. The first objective was to provide access to those who had traditionally been excluded from higher education in a manner that would be culturally inclusive of the high proportion of migrants who had settled in the region (Selway 1986). The Institute was intended to provide a ‘bridge’ for the region to manage the transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a services economy (McConville 1991), a theme that continues in the planning objectives of VU currently (Sheehan & Wiseman 2004). This connection with industry was reflected in the tripartite planning processes of the Institute with involvement of industry, community and government (Selway 1986). A key focus was on the inclusion of the western region (particularly outer western) residents, early school leavers, women and people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). Affirmative action strategies that gave preference to these priority groups guided student selection processes and course delivery from the outset (Selway 1986).

After six years, the Western Institute merged with FIT in 1991 to form the Victoria University of Technology as part of the higher education reforms introduced by Dawkins in 1987. Central to the reform process was the expansion of the national higher education system and elimination of the ‘binary’ higher education system that included both Colleges of Advanced Education and Institutes of Technology that existed alongside the more prestigious universities (Marginson & Considine 2000). After failed discussions about merger plans with RMIT, both FIT and Western Institute were merged to form the Victoria University of Technology on 1 January 1992 (Parliament of Victoria 1990). In 2005, this name was officially changed to Victoria University.

Since achieving university status in 1991, there have been two distinctive periods characterised by the two Vice Chancellors who have held office since VU’s creation. The first was Professor Jarlath Ronayne, who was appointed until 2003. Ronayne was succeeded by Professor Elizabeth Harman, who continues in the role at the time of writing. Both have been responsible for significant change during their terms of office. While there are some elements

of the changes that are distinctive to the two individuals, most of the changes have been driven by Commonwealth higher education policy reform. The following section broadly describes the development of VU since its establishment, both in the context of national higher education policy, and as implemented by each of the Vice Chancellors.

Jarlath Ronayne and John Dawkins

Ronayne's period of office began with the implementation of the Dawkins reforms that were set in motion in 1988. As is well understood, the Dawkins reforms represented a fundamental shift in the role of higher education and were a key plank in the Hawke/Keating government's economic reform agenda (Dawkins 1987). The role of higher education was to ensure that the national skills base, or the stock of human capital, was geared to supply Australian industry with the skills necessary to compete in the globalised knowledge economy (Dawkins 1988). In line with dominant global trends, Keynesian philosophies that previously guided higher education policy were replaced by neo-liberal economic principles (Marginson 1993). Universities were redefined from being concerned with the provision of education as a public good, to an industry that was required to contribute to economic growth and supply industry with labour with skills qualifications that matched the requirements of a knowledge economy (Gare 2006). The reforms involved expansion, restructure, increased accountability to government and decreased dependence on government funding as the main source of funding (Marginson & Considine 2000).

The binary system of higher education was rapidly eliminated and the number of universities doubled from 19 to 38 (Marginson & Considine 2000). Students were effectively redefined as 'consumers' and student fees were introduced as the first step in reducing university reliance on government funding (Thornton 2007). Similarly, academics were, in turn, redefined as 'producers'. Salaries became part of the enterprise bargaining process and improvements in working conditions and salaries were bargained for in return for greater efficiencies or productivity gains (Marginson & Considine 2000). Responsibility for policy development and university funding became centralised within government and the proportion of government funding did not increase in proportion to the expansion of the sector. In line with the principles of corporate management or 'new public management', funding was used as a lever to force university accountability with government policy (O'Flynn 2007). University funding was tied to performance plans with reporting to act as the trigger for the flow of funds. As put forward by Marginson and Considine (2000, p. 64), this was a powerful form of strategic control that ushered in 'managerialism', where management prerogative rose above all other interests replacing the previously central role that academics held in relation to the development of research and teaching practice and policy. The new systems forced

reorganisation within universities, required processes of continuous review and forced competition within and between universities. This shift is widely understood as marking the shift from collegial approaches to university governance to a managerialist approach (Thornton 2005).

Ronayne's leadership was clearly characterised by the implementation of the Dawkins reforms and the new university expanded in terms of students, staff and campus numbers (Adams & VUT 2003). From 1991 to 2003, the number of students in the higher education sector doubled from 10,000 to 20,000 (Adams & VUT 2003). The number of campuses quadrupled from four to 12 on shore. Partnerships with other universities off shore meant that programs began to be delivered in 20 locations in Malaysia, China, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, South Korea, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The number of undergraduate courses went from 79 to 231 and postgraduate courses from 79 to 181. The number of staff doubled from 1,081 in 1992 to around 2,000 in the year 2000. Ronayne also restructured the university from eight faculties to five in 1993. Another important restructure was a review of university governance and the size of the University Council was reduced from a membership of 36 to 24 in 1996. Importantly, new positions on the Council were allocated to industry representatives thereby reducing the proportion of academic representation.⁴

While in part, the need for expansion was not an option given Australian Government policy directions, Ronayne was distinctive in the explicit attempt to make VU competitive with Group of 8 universities – in particular, the University of Melbourne as the university which was understood as competing for the same ‘territory’ in terms of student enrolments (Harman 2008c). While this effort was delivered through a range of management strategies, it was particularly reflected through the establishment of the Victoria University Law School and the acquisition of the old historic Records Office and Land Titles office and the Zelman Cowen Centre for Continuing Legal Education located in Queen Street, Melbourne. The senior management perspective on this purchase was that it was ‘Jarlath’s crowning achievement in his quest to establish Victoria University as a great university, capable of competing with Australia’s best and offering something distinctively innovative besides’ (Adams & VUT 2003 p. 12).

Overall, Ronayne was responsible for establishing VU as a university and implementing the policy directions first by the Hawke/Keating government until 1996 (Adams & VUT 2003). While the subsequent Howard government first elected in 1996, implemented its own set of

⁴ Staffing numbers details of University Council are taken from University Annual Reports from 1992–2000.

reform plans, the initial changes made were not a radical departure from the directions set by the Dawkins reforms (Moodie 2007). Deregulation, tighter controls on the production of specified ‘outcomes’ in return for funding, continued expansion and increased capacity of universities to generate student fees were the main characteristics of higher education policy under John Howard for most of his period of office as Prime Minister from 1996 to 2007. Overall, the broad directions set by Dawkins were largely maintained until 2003 with the implementation of the reform plan implemented by Brendan Nelson, then Minister for Education, Science and Training (Moodie 2007) The launch of *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future*, closely coincided with the appointment of Elizabeth Harman as VU’s current Vice Chancellor.

Elizabeth Harman and Brendan Nelson

Harman continues as VC at the time of writing, and this section explores some notable characteristics of the directions taken since her appointment that are important context in thinking about women’s promotional pathways and opportunities at VU. These include implementing continuous organisational change, a focus on making VU ‘distinctive’ by branding it with particular strengths within the higher education system, and introducing two rounds of redundancies of academic staff causing particular industrial unrest. These changes have been justified in terms of Commonwealth policy.

The Nelson reforms

The Nelson reforms were based on the perceived need to address some key external and internal pressures. Key problems identified included increasing costs, duplication between universities, high levels of student non-completions and university governance structures that lack ‘business acumen’ (Nelson 2003 p. 9). The response to these problems was set out within the principles of ‘sustainability’, ‘quality’, ‘equity’ and ‘diversity’. ‘Sustainability’ was concerned largely with financial sustainability to be achieved through increasing university freedom to generate funds in a changing globally competitive environment. ‘Quality’ was about international reputation and increased outcomes in terms of qualifications gained. ‘Equity’ was about increasing participation by student groups traditionally disadvantaged in terms of higher education access. ‘Diversity’ referred to the need for differentiation between higher education institutions to increase capacity to serve different communities (Nelson 2003 p 10). A series of measures was introduced to steer higher education along these principles. In short, the central aims of the Nelson reforms were to push the higher education system further in line with the corporate management model as well as to use universities as a means to weaken organised labour and collective bargaining (Rosewarne 2005).

The striking characteristic of the Nelson plan was not in the broad directions of the reform package. In many respects, the policy was a continuation of post-Dawkins trends in terms of continued expansion, deregulation and situating universities as competitors in both the national and international higher education market (Pick 2006). What was radical was the extent to which funding for higher education was used to implement the government's workplace relations agenda which was directly aimed at weakening collective bargaining structures (Pick 2006). Through the Nelson review, Commonwealth funding was made contingent on university compliance with the government's workplace relations policies and conformity with university governance protocols. Even very moderate comment at the time described the workplace reform component as 'heavy handed' (Harman 2003). The Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (AVCC – now Universities Australia) described the requirements as 'unworkable' and 'intrusive' (Universities Australia 2003).

Despite this widely expressed critical comment, the senior management of universities nationally was compliant with the requirements largely due to the financial penalties associated. Universities that failed to comply risked not receiving up to 7.5 per cent of Commonwealth funding entitlement (Rosewarne 2005 p. 196). At the same time, the requirements took time to gain traction and it was not until 2005 that the Higher Education Workplace Relations Requirements (HEWRRs) were developed. This set out five criteria that universities must agree to incorporate into their enterprise agreements if they were to be awarded funding through the Commonwealth Grants Scheme (CGS). These were largely about increasing university capacity and freedom to offer to employ staff on individual contracts, reduce limitations on the capacity to employ casual and fixed-term staff, include productivity and performance clauses in agreements and to limit university provision of support to union organisations such as in the provision of office space (Rosewarne 2005 p. 197). Given that the Howard government lost office in 2007, the full implications of the HEWRRS have not been realised and their elimination, along with governance protocols, was one early action undertaken by the in-coming Rudd government (Universities Australia 2008a). The purpose of highlighting these developments is their implications for the industrial relations climates within universities that governed the conditions in place at the time I conducted interviews with academic women.

Since Harman's appointment in 2003, VU has been in a continuous process of organisational and policy change guided primarily by directions from the Commonwealth. There have been two new strategic plans. The first was endorsed in 2004 and a second plan sets directions from 2008 to 2016. These are set within a framework that defines a set of values, vision, mission, objectives and strategies. Each of the strategies is informed by a set of five

commitments that are intended to summarise the objectives of ‘Making VU’ – a slogan devised to encapsulate VU’s strategic directions (VU 2008b). All of the commitments start with the letter ‘C’ – ‘Collaboration’, ‘Career’, ‘Choices’, ‘Community’ and ‘Connect’. Flowing from both plans is a series of goals and performance measures. The plans emphasise the importance of distinguishing VU as a university with a unique dual-sector with a commitment to community engagement and development in the western region. Harman’s vision clearly departs from attempts to compete on similar terms with the older universities and is explicit in including the statement that:

Firstly, it marks VU as a distinctive university – one that is willing to take a path that does not mimic older, established universities operating in very different contexts from our own. Our multi-sector nature provides us with particular advantages in course design and delivery that we will build and strengthen. We aim at ‘quality in context’. (VU 2008c p. 3)

The intent to differentiate VU has been supported by a strictly enforced branding policy that defines the university’s image. As the policy sets out, the brand ‘essence’ of VU is ‘street smart’ which is intended to articulate the personality of the university. The sub-elements of this personality, we are told by the branding policy, are traits including ‘worldly’, ‘ahead of the pack’, ‘open-minded’, ‘informed’, ‘clever’, ‘modern’, ‘in touch’, ‘finger on the pulse’, ‘athletic’, ‘real street cred’ and ‘word on the street’ (VU 2005a p. 9).

What has flowed from the strategic plans has been a continuous change process. Key organisational changes have included a restructure of senior management, a review of all university policies and procedures, a faculty restructure that merged four higher education faculties into three, a review of university governance arrangements, and a quality review (VU 2007). Significant changes have been implemented in human resource management including a review of academic promotions policies, the introduction of a new staff management process called the ‘staff performance development plan’ (SPDP) and the introduction of a new workloads model. The Equity and Social Justice Unit, which supported staff equity initiatives, has been broken into the two divisions of ‘staff’ and ‘students’ and each has been respectively ‘mainstreamed’. Responsibility for staff equity now lies with the Human Resources Division. Responsibility for students has been devolved to Student Services (Harman 2008d).

A new enterprise bargain was also agreed on in 2006 after almost two years of negotiation that started in March 2004. At the same time, a ‘workforce renewal’ strategy (a round of 69

redundancies of academic staff) was implemented as a measure to ‘realign’ the ageing workforce to projected future needs (VU 2006). At the time of writing, another round of redundancies is being implemented with 270 staff in total to be made redundant – 150 of which are to be academic staff (Harman 2008a). The nature of teaching has been overhauled with a review of all courses, the implementation of a ‘learning in the workplace and community’ strategy and the implementation of a ‘course renewal’ strategy, which requires the increased alignment of courses with industry needs, improved articulation between and across sectors, and the increased use and development of multi-media for teaching. Strategies to enhance research income, output and quality have been implemented with the establishment of targets, the creation of three research institutes and the development of a Research Activity Index (RAI).

Overall, organisational change has been intense, top-down, and delivered in rapid succession since the formation of VU as a university in 1992. As a sum total, change processes have had a major impact on academic working conditions. In common across higher education nationally, their implementation relies largely on implementation by academic staff – either through compliance or through the development of new teaching and research practice and reporting on performance indicators (Marginson & Considine 2000; Coates, Goedegebuure et al. 2008). While there are a few specific policies that were particularly important in relation to aspirations for promotion, overall, the sheer volume of change was a major consideration for many of those I interviewed in relation to promotion aspirations. As one interviewee put it, *‘all of the accountabilities and all of the changes and all of the restructures [mean that] people are ‘punch-drunk’ from living with that ... I think [there is] a crisis of morale’*. The following section discusses the impacts of reform on academic work generally, as well as their local and gendered impacts.

Policy change and its gendered and local impacts on academic work

Many of the changes noted above are common across the sector nationally and there is a growing literature concerned with analysing the impact of change (Marginson 1997; Marginson & Considine 2000; Anderson, Johnson et al. 2002; Blackmore & Sachs 2003; Thornton 2005; Pick 2006; Allport 2007; Gardner & Wells 2007; Wheelahan 2007). Part of this critique is about the local and gendered impacts of reform that are experienced differently by different institutions depending on context. The following section starts with a broad discussion about higher education reform and its impact on academic work. I then examine local impacts as experienced at VU before detailing the gendered impacts of the changes. Finally, I discuss how EEO has progressed in the context of reform and how this is reflected in practice at VU.

What higher education reform has meant to academic work

Higher education reform, and its impacts on academic work, can generally be summarised as needing to do more with less. Increases have occurred in relation to academic workloads, competition for resources, job complexity, accountability and intensity. Decreases include the amount of money paid by the Commonwealth per student place, job security and job satisfaction. The effects of this are felt in multiple ways.

First, academic work has changed. This is in part due to broader globalisation trends such as the need to be proficient in the use of new and continually changing technologies, especially communications technologies, which are central to academic work. The result of this is a continuous need for professional development in the use of such technologies as well as an ‘extensification’ of work with communications technologies making it possible to work anywhere at any time (Acker & Armenti 2004; Eveline & Currie 2006). A similar trend, common in the broader labour market is that roles are changing in line with broader shifts toward a knowledge-based economy which has transformed the nature of professional work and added multiple additional tasks and accountabilities. An important shift is the increased need to ‘manage’ everything from casual teaching staff, to research projects, to project finances. For example, most teaching (53% in 2008) is now being undertaken by casual staff (NTEUa 2008). While the pay and conditions of casual academic staff is an issue in itself, it is permanent academic staff who need to rely on, supervise and manage casual staff if they are to be able to free up time to do the research they are required to undertake as part of their professional academic performance requirements (Anderson, Johnson et al. 2002).

This need for ‘management’ is largely an outcome of the increased need to compete for resources, recognition and promotion. Academics and institutions have to compete for funding generated by Commonwealth funding models that are distributed on a competitive basis (Thornton 2008). Funding for research is allocated through the Australian Research Council (ARC) and through several block grants that are administered to institutions. More recently, there has been the introduction of the measurement and reward of teaching ‘excellence’ through a Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF). Through this fund, universities bid for funding on the basis of evidence that they implement a set of processes around teaching and learning and that they can demonstrate performance against a number of indicators such as student satisfaction (Wheelahan 2007). The rationale for all of this is to encourage and reward teaching ‘excellence’, which is assessed by demonstration of performance against indicators.

This competition for research dollars, student enrolments and jobs in the context of continual organisational restructure – and in VU’s case ‘renewal’, is a major characteristic of the change in academic work. This competition also occurs within the context that public funding for higher education has been reduced. Commonwealth funding per student in real terms has fallen every year since 2000. Similarly university block funding has fallen by 20 per cent (Universities Australia 2008b p. 5). At the same time, student to teacher ratios have increased progressively. While there are varied estimates, the NTEU reports that in 1996 the average student to teacher ratio was 18.6 which rose to 26.6 in 2006 (NTEUa 2008). Effectively, academics have to do more with less and demonstrate that their performance ranks competitively against indicators defined at a federal government or institutional level. All of the above contributes to increased work intensity.

Academic work is also increasingly complex. This is particularly the case for teaching due to the casualisation of the academic workforce, increasing internationalisation of the student body. The nature of being a student has also been transformed in the context of increasing student fees, living costs and the need for students to engage in paid work alongside study (McInnis 2000). The impacts are particularly intense for universities such as VU where 25 per cent of students come from low SES compared with the national average intake of 15.5 per cent (DEST 2006). A recent addition to teaching at VU is the requirement to implement a ‘learning in the workplace and community’ strategy that sets targets for 25 per cent of all teaching to be integrated with workplace learning. Again, this adds another layer of complexity in the need for course coordinators and teachers to manage relationships and learning programs with employers and industry. Added to this is the pressure of teaching in a multi-campus institution. Many academics must teach from multiple campuses including campuses off shore, adding travel time and varied conditions to the teaching process. Combined, these conditions mean that the teaching load of academics has become increasingly complex as well as intense.

Finally, academics need to be increasingly compliant to an extensive range of management directives aimed at measuring quality and other benchmarks. As discussed above, these directives apply to teaching, research, staff development, quality reviews and so on. Everything is benchmarked. Research Activity is now assessed according to a Research Activity index (RAI) and research outcomes are to be ranked against the ‘Excellence in Research in Australia’ (ERA) (ARC 2009). Teaching evaluations must be conducted within a project management framework. At VU, it is called a ‘Plan, Do, Review and Improve’ (PDRI) framework against which teaching and learning outcomes must be reported and staff must identify how they will improve and address identified issues. Staff must also complete a

Staff Performance and Development Plan (SPDP), a management framework to measure staff outcomes against objectives. All projects must be developed within a project management framework within a ‘quality cycle’ established by the university. Institutions themselves must comply with a quality framework and regular quality reviews conducted by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA).⁵ Overall, there is little that can be done now that does not have to be measured against quality criteria and university policy. Irrespective of the relative merits of such measures, compliance is time consuming and necessary to be documented as evidence of academic merit for promotion.

These conditions combined mean that workloads and work-related stress has increased while job satisfaction and the quality of education has decreased (Anderson, Johnson et al. 2002; Houston, Meyer et al. 2006; Coates, Goedegebuure et al. 2008; NTEUa 2008; NTEUb 2008; Tomazin 2008). In 2007, according to a recent national survey, academics work on average, 50 hours per week on their jobs with workloads intensifying for those employed at Level C (Coates, Goedegebuure et al. 2008 p. 4). The same study indicates that while the majority of academics say that they are satisfied with their academic life, it also shows that almost all respondents (91%) say that working conditions have declined since the start of their career. As a result, workplace stress has increased. While this is difficult to measure, a survey of more than 9,000 higher education workers conducted by the NTEU showed that around 42 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that their workloads are unmanageable.⁶ All of the issues raised above combine to make academic employment increasingly unattractive, leading to academic skill shortages within some disciplines and at some levels due to declining wages relative to what is offered in industry and to what is considered as unreasonable workloads (Horsely, Martin et al. 2005). This resonates with NTEU data that shows that the three priorities for improvements in working conditions shared by all higher education employees are the need for improvements in workloads, job security and salary rates (NTEUb 2008).

Overall, the nature of academic work has changed profoundly over the past 20 years. Academic workloads have increased and the nature of work is increasingly complex and intense. All aspects of academic work must be undertaken within accountability and performance measurement frameworks and an increasing component of the academic workload is dedicated to compliance. Academic work is now competitive, and reward and recognition are based on complying with benchmarks and indicators established at a senior

⁵ The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) conducts quality assurance audits of higher education institutions. Audits are conducted of each institution every five years.

⁶ Source: NTEU survey results on higher education working conditions (2008)

management or Commonwealth level. The goal is ‘excellence’ in performance and outcomes. While there is a growing literature that is critical of many of these developments and the neo-liberal economic philosophies that guide policy change, the policies, structures and processes are well entrenched in a way that controls academic work. As Wheelahan (2007 p. 36) comments, these practices are based on the belief that markets are the only way to overcome the problem of ‘producer capture’ in which academics run universities for their own interests and not in the interests of students, employers, government or the economy more broadly. As such, an imperative of reform has been to control academics. As Marginson and Consodine (2000 p. 67) comment: ‘[it is] as if corporate reform and modernisation necessarily imply a weakening of academic authority and independence’.

Reform and its local impacts

While many of the impacts of reform are experienced nationally, their effects are experienced unevenly across institutions. In a system geared toward competition, some institutions are better positioned than others to win that competition – both through their varied influence at a policy level and in terms of differences between institutional stocks of social, cultural and economic capital. Go8 universities, within a competitive funding framework, are especially advantaged (Moodie 2005; Wheelahan 2007).

As noted earlier, Australian universities are categorised into four groups that are broadly descriptive of how they are positioned in the system. These groupings are formalised and agreed groupings formed out of mutual interest to increase lobbying power with government and to further common interests. Go8 universities include the older, more prestigious universities that market themselves as ‘Australia’s leading universities’ (AEN 2008) based on a series of measures such as research outputs, graduate outcomes and other measures of prestige. The Australian Technology Network (ATN) includes five universities that have a history of applied research and teaching that are aligned closely with the needs of industry. Innovative Research Universities (IRU) include five universities that are not so easily categorised but market themselves as having areas of highly regarded specialisation. As mentioned earlier, VU is a member of the group of 10 New Generation Universities (NGU) that are characterised as being ‘new, flexible, dynamic and responsive to community, business and government’ (AEN 2008).⁷

Within each of the groupings, universities are subject to various forms of ranking – both national and international. These rankings vary widely in what they measure and are

⁷ NGUs, as a formal grouping, were disbanded in 2007 although they are still descriptively useful in describing VU’s position in international rankings (AEN 2008).

contentious as to what they reflect in terms of quality or meaning (Moodie 2005). In broad terms, however, the groups are positioned differently on the ranking scales with Go8 universities ranked the most prestigious, ATN and IRU universities lower in the hierarchy though there is a fair degree of overlap between them. NGUs, with some exceptions generally rank lowest. On international rankings, specifically the 2008 Shanghai Jiao Tong (SHJT) Academic Ranking of World Universities, the only three Australian universities to make it into the top 100 were members of the Go8 including ANU, the University of Melbourne and the University of Sydney (AEN 2008). Overall, only 15 Australian universities made it to the top 500. Within Australian rankings undertaken by the Melbourne Institute, the NGUs dominate in the bottom 10 with VU ranked at 28 in a list of 36. While the measures used in these rankings vary, they are largely a reflection of available resources. Moodie (2005), for example, argues that performance on current university rankings is a direct measure of resources at each institution. In an increasingly competitive system, those institutions that are resource rich are further advantaged to attract revenue through student enrolments, research funding and other competitive grants programs such as the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF).

VU is badly positioned in a competitive policy environment on almost all measures. As discussed, VU has a legislated responsibility to serve the educational needs of the western region which is a region characterised by low participation rates in higher education and low socioeconomic status (SES) (Sheehan & Wiseman 2004). As a new university with a history of technical and vocational education, VU has little that can be characterised as a ‘research culture’ and lacks the wealthy alumni enjoyed by the more established universities and the financial and social capital that flows from that (Wheelahan 2007). As a dual-sector institution, there are additional layers of governance to manage and funding negotiations must be undertaken with both state and federal levels of government given that TAFE funding is administered through the state. VU’s international student body is also largely from developing countries and an outcome is that even though VU’s dependence on student enrolments is higher than that of other universities, the actual receipt of funding per student is lower. To illustrate, as a share of total university revenue, VU’s dependence on enrolment income is the third out of all Australian universities (Doughney 2008). At the same time, the average revenue received per student enrolment is among the lowest compared with other Australian universities. VU receives around \$13,000 per student on average compared with the ANU for example, which has an average student revenue of more than double this figure (Doughney 2008). Within a competitively funded sector, VU is not positioned well. As Wheelahan (2007 p. 35) argues, universities such as VU are actually penalised if they try to fulfil their mission of serving underprivileged communities.

The point of this discussion is that while the conditions of academic work at VU have followed trends similar to those experienced across the sector, academics at VU work in challenging conditions with less resources than many other universities. The impacts are also gendered, with impacts experienced differently by male and female academics. The following section explores how the gendered impacts of reform are clearly played out at VU.

The gendered impacts of reform and sustained patterns of gender inequality

Chapter Two detailed the ways in which higher education reform has had gendered impacts that are ambiguous in their effects. At one level, globalisation generally, and higher education reform specifically, have opened up opportunities for women's participation. At another, higher education reform affects women differently than it does men. To recap, this is because women are concentrated in traditionally female and emerging professional fields, women assume unequal responsibility for care – within and outside of the organisation – and women are concentrated in more junior academic roles. VU shares these gendered characteristics that are identified nationally. This section looks at how women are positioned structurally at VU and some of the implications of this.

Academic appointments by gender at Victoria University

The ways higher education reform has impacted on women is an important theme of the analysis of the interviews that were conducted given that VU's organisational existence is a direct outcome of the higher education reform agendas. Interview findings show that reform, as implemented at VU, has entirely shaped the employment experience of academic women, and in turn, their aspirations and opportunities for promotion. Again, this is common across the higher education sector, however, the impacts at VU have arguably been particularly masculine given its history as a technical college and the importance of male dominated Faculties of Engineering and Science at the time of the creation of the university. Women's under-representation was a feature in every faculty, and with the exception of Level A and Level B positions in the Faculty of Arts, men significantly outnumbered women at every academic level in every faculty as Table 5.1 shows.

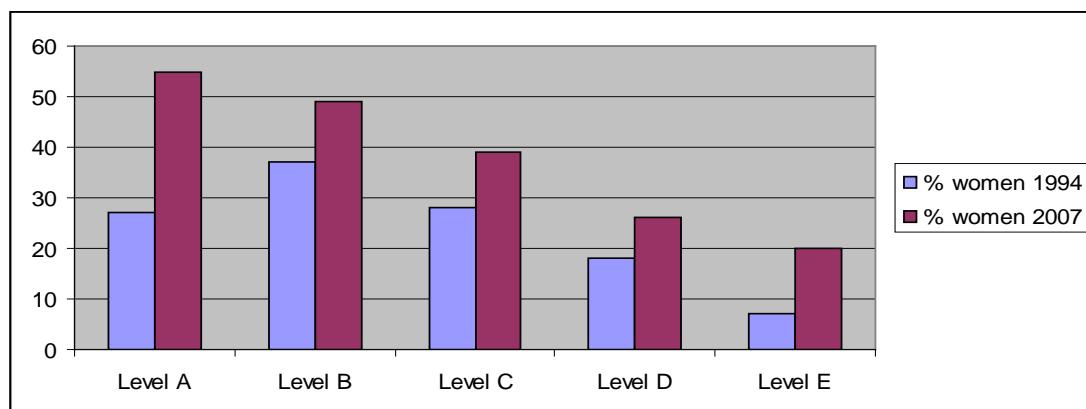
Table 5.1: Full-time academic employees by gender by level by faculty at Victoria University of Technology, 1994

	Level A		Level B		Level C		Level D		Level E	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Total Faculty of Arts	10	11	19	23	12	12	3	0	9	1
Total Faculty of Business	2	8	61	26	35	10	4	3	13	1
Total Faculty of Engineering	21	0	25	3	12	1	3	0	6	0
Total Faculty of Human Devel.	4	5	18	32	19	13	5	2	5	1
Total Faculty of Science	4	0	32	8	22	3	8	0	5	0
Total full-time VUT academics	41	24	155	92	100	39	23	5	38	3

Source: Victoria University of Technology report to the Affirmative Action Agency – 1 January 1994–31 December 1994

Another characteristic of the merger process that is revealed by VUT's employment profile in 1994 is the dominance of men at Level E. This is still talked about within the university and was raised by interviewees as an issue that still bothers some for various reasons. In the process of merging WIT and FIT, 41 professorial positions were created. Only three women were appointed at this level. While VU's gender representation was not dissimilar to national trends (Burton, Cook et al. 1997), women had poor representation as decision-makers in the formation and development of the university. The employment of academic women at the new VUT was overshadowed by men's representation, particularly at senior academic levels, most notable at Level E where women's representation barely registers. The purpose of presenting this data is that in the context of an academic career, 1994 is relatively recent history and clear gender segregation across schools and faculties remains very clear. While the gendered academic profile has changed, VU started from a low base. The following chart gives an indication of how gendered representation has changed by comparing the percentage of women employed at each academic level in 1994 and 2007.

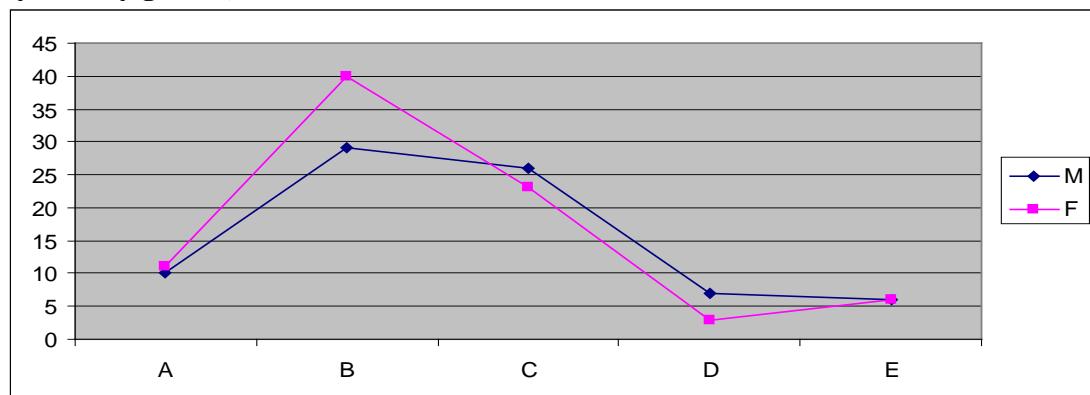
Chart 5.1 Percentage of academic women employed at Victoria University by level, 1994 and 2007



Source: Victoria University of Technology report to the Affirmative Action Agency – 1 January 1994–31 December 1994 and the Victoria University compliance report to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) 2007–2008

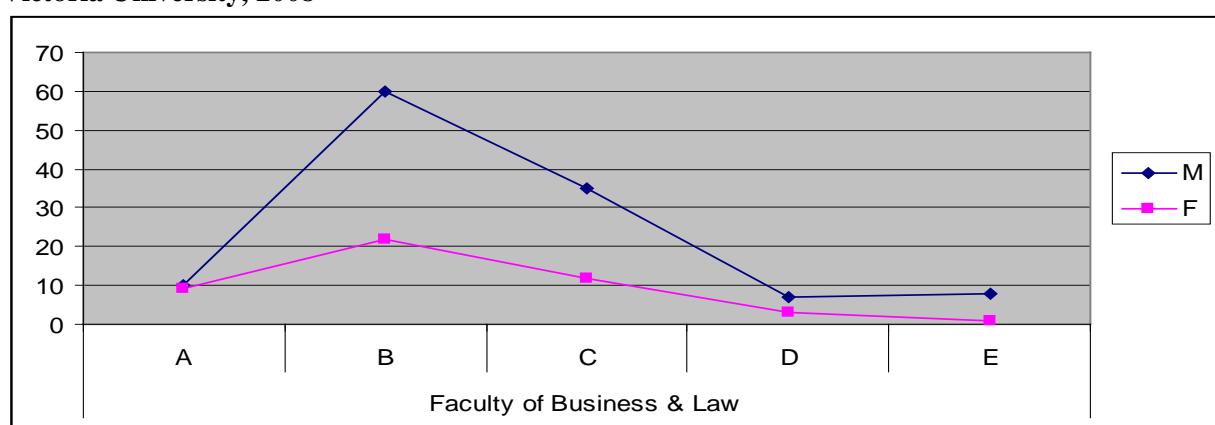
As Chart 5.1 shows, women at VU now outnumber men at Level A, are roughly equal at Level B and are becoming close to equal at Level C. At Levels D and E, women continue to be in the minority. These aggregates, however, disguise significant pockets within the university where women's representation is extremely low. Across the three VU faculties, the Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Movement, is the only one where there is roughly equal gender representation as shown in Chart 5.2.⁸

Chart 5.2 Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Movement: Number of academic staff by level by gender, 2008



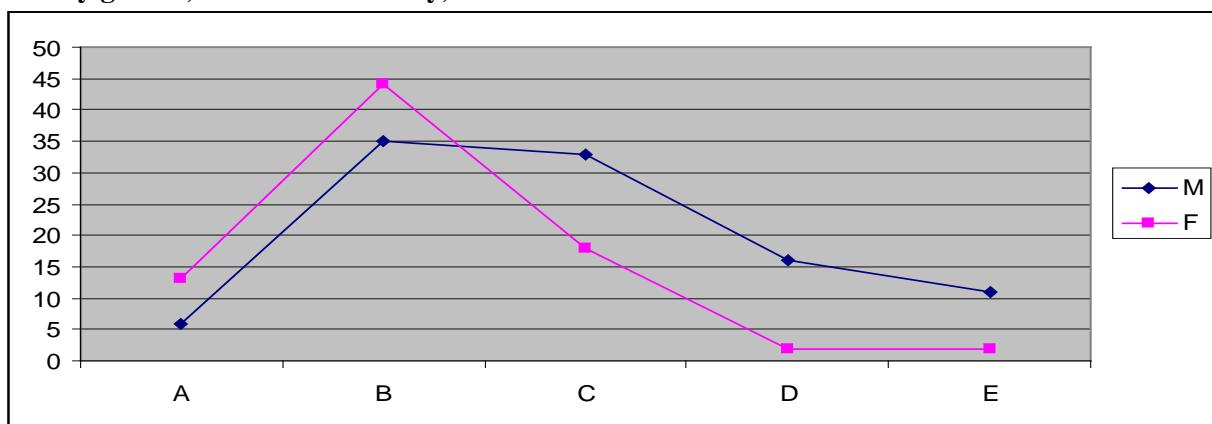
In contrast, considerable gaps in gender representation exist in the other two VU faculties including the Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science and the Faculty of Business and Law. As Charts 5.3 and 5.4 show, women's representation in senior positions is very low and it is only at Level A where women's representation is equal to men's. In effect, the high numbers of women employed at Level B, who are mostly employed in the School of Hospitality, Tourism and Marketing, distort the broader picture.

Chart 5.3 Faculty of Business and Law: Number of academic staff by level by gender, Victoria University, 2008



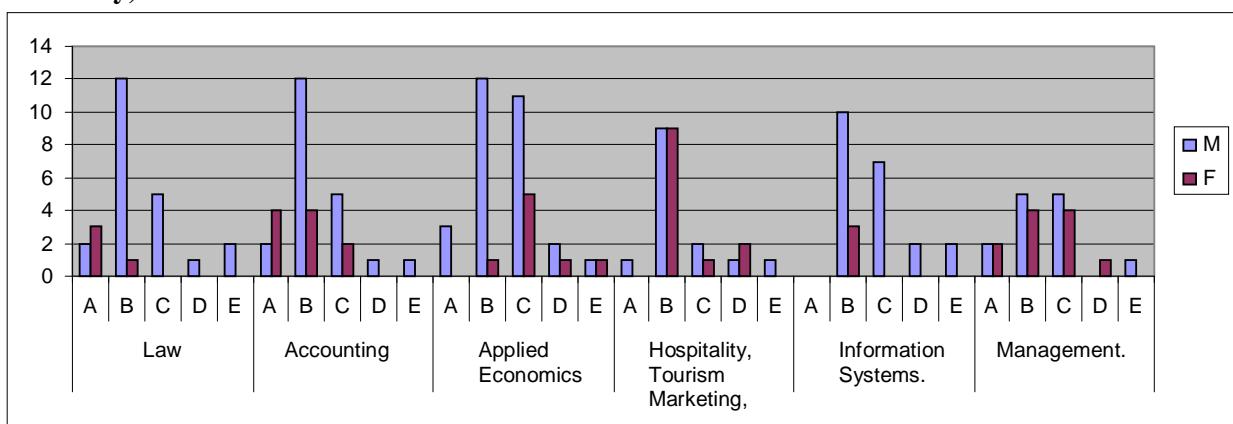
⁸ The source of the data from the following tables in this chapter is taken from VU human resource data compiled for the purpose of workloads measurement.

Chart 5.4 Faculty of Health, Science and Engineering: Number of academic staff by level by gender, Victoria University, 2008



While the charts above clearly show gendered academic staffing differences between faculties, they also show the clear under-representation of women appointed at Levels D and E within two of the three faculties. In the School of Business and Law, for example, there is only one woman appointed at Level E. What these charts also do not show are schools within the faculties where women are particularly poorly represented. The School of Information Systems has very poor representation, which can be explained partly by the highly masculine nature of the sector. The School of Law, however, does not share this characteristic and is perhaps the clearest example of women's under-representation with not one woman appointed above Level B. Even then, there is only one appointment at this level and most of the few women (three out four) within the school are appointed at Level A. This is particularly revealing in the context of arguments about the operation of the 'pipeline'. If the pipeline was working, academic staffing in schools established in the 1990s, such as the School of Law, should, logically, be reflective of the growing representation of women within that profession. Chart 5.4 below shows the comparison between schools within the faculty which shows that several schools have extremely low female representation.

Chart 5.5 Faculty of Business and Law: School by gender by academic level, Victoria University, 2008



The charts above show that aggregate figures disguise some of the very distinct pockets within the university where women are seriously under-represented. There are similar pockets within the Faculty of Health, Science and Engineering, discussed in Chapter One. Together, this profile shows that VU's disciplinary mix is a factor in women's prospects for promotion to Level D at Victoria University. These characteristics are further compounded by the trend toward making senior appointments via the process of external application as detailed below.

The effect of external appointments

A further characteristic of reform, as identified by Doughney and Vu (2006) is the trend toward external recruitment at senior levels. The effect is to minimise the opportunities for promotion internally, which has a particular impact on women in the transition from Levels C to D. Human resources data collected by VU shows that this trend has been in operation since establishment as a university. Between 1992 and 2007, an average of 9.5 external appointments was made per year at Levels D and E. The annual average of female appointments was 2.2 compared with the average number of male appointments which has been 7.3. This is not a trend that is declining if appointments made in 2007 are any indication. Six external appointments were made at senior academic levels in that year. Out of these, one was made at Level D and five at Level E (VU 2008a). All of these appointments were male. Over this 15-year period, women have not fared a great deal better with an average annual number of 2.3 appointments by internal promotion compared with the male average of 7.9. The difference is that women have started to do better by this method more recently. In 2007, two out of five internal promotions were female appointments. On the basis of this data, success in appointment by external advertising is heavily biased toward men.⁹

Overall, gender representation at VU follows national trends in terms of women's progress in academic employment. Women's participation has increased but women remain relatively subordinate in terms of seniority and are poorly represented in traditionally male disciplinary areas. As shown in Chapter One, most universities share these characteristics. At VU at least, the effects of this are compounded by the impact of external appointment at a senior level. Such trends and processes weaken the capacity of EEO policy and strategy to ensure gender equity within institutions.

⁹ Data derived from VU human resources records compiled for the purpose of the measurement of workloads as well as from VU annual compliance reports to the EOWA.

Gender equity in academic staffing

As noted in Chapter One, gender equity in higher education staffing is supported primarily by Commonwealth anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation and by Universities Australia targets for gender equity in universities. The Equal Opportunity Practitioners in Higher Education Association (EOPHA) also acts as a professional association that promotes networking and professional development for higher education practitioners engaged in social justice and gender equity initiatives. In common with universities nationally, VU has been compliant with legislation and is an active participant in policy development, program implementation and research around student and staff equity within VU (VU 2008a).

While such efforts toward EEO and gender equity staffing continue, their priority within the scheme of university operations and their emphasis has changed in the context of neo-liberal higher education reform. Thornton (2008) usefully provides a history and analysis of key developments relating to EEO policy and practice in the reformed university system. She highlights that the initial aim of EEO in universities was to ‘modernise the old patriarchal order’ (2008 p. 2) and the role of the women’s movement in driving EEO through the 1970s and 1980s. Implementation within organisations, however, was problematic for many reasons not least of which were the difficulties that arose when EEO officers, appointed initially in senior positions within university structures, tried to change practices that had traditionally worked to men’s advantage. As Thornton (2008 p. 6) puts it, senior managers were highly resistant to the ‘time-honoured practices of homo-social reproduction’. To accompany practical difficulties that arose in actually implementing the change agenda, just as policy and programs and initiatives began to gain traction, a rising backlash was generated on the basis that affirmative action was ‘unequal’. This backlash coincided with the implementation of the Dawkins reforms. In the midst of the widespread changes to higher education, EEO was largely submerged and the concerns of women as a discrete interest group were rapidly marginalised. This was an international trend that occurred rapidly after women initially gained entrance and some degree of success within universities (Faludi 1992; Blackmore & Sachs 2003).

While attention to equity initiatives remained as part of the higher education agenda and university structures, the initiatives have continued in a different form. The number of women in universities also progressively increased although, initially, this was largely an outcome of the amalgamation of CAEs, which had higher female representation than the established universities (Thornton 2008). Greater numbers did not necessarily mean equity, Thornton argues, and there were a number of trends that weakened attention to gender equity in university employment. First, the process of corporatisation promoted the trend of minimal

compliance with legislation. This trend is reflected in the watering down of organisational reporting requirements to the Equal Opportunity for Women Agency (EOWA) which was initially called the Affirmative Action Agency – a change that occurred when the *Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunity for Women) Act 1986* was reviewed and changed in 1999 (Strachan, Burgess et al. 2004). Changes to the Act reduced the relatively minimal reporting requirements of organisations even further to the point that waivers could be granted if organisations could demonstrate compliance. Within universities, in line with this trend, equity units were left without reporting lines and were established as independent entities within organisations. Thornton (2008 p. 6) describes this as ‘a nail in the coffin for EEO’ as the people and the organisations responsible for implementation were effectively anomalies within organisational structures with little relationship to the ‘real’ business of higher education. The more recent development has been to break up these units, and ‘mainstream’ them with the devolution of responsibility through faculties, schools and departments (Brown 2007). While Burton (1997) advises that this does not necessarily mean that EEO should be rendered ineffective, the actual outcome is often a ‘drying up’ of resources, and an unwillingness for anyone to take responsibility (Thornton 2008 p. 9).

The related development was the discursive shift from social justice and equity to diversity. Largely informed by postmodern concepts of difference (Thomas 1991) as opposed to seeing women as a group with common interests, the focus was shifted to an understanding of individual as opposed to collective interests (Probert 2006). In partnership with neo-liberal-inspired policy change and the corporatisation of higher education, EEO and affirmative action were, if not replaced, limited by the discourse ‘managing diversity’. This was a framework supported by Commonwealth policy and conceived of as more palatable to senior managers due to its lack of legislative compliance requirements and its ability to overcome the perceived polarisations between men and women generated by affirmative action (Pyke 2008). As Thornton (2008 p. 14) describes it, diversity was a better fit with the neo-liberal meta narrative, leading to the notion that EEO was passé. A further implication was that issues of equity became focused on supporting individual women to compete more effectively for career opportunities and progression. Within this framework, as Thornton (2008 p. 8) indicates, if women are ‘unsuccessful’ it is because of their inefficient life ‘choices’, such as having children. It was the individual’s fault if they didn’t take the opportunities presented.

Thornton’s main argument is that within the corporate university, there is no room for EEO except where a ‘business case’ can be demonstrated. This arises through the inherent clash between the social justice intentions of EEO and the neo-liberal conception of the individual as a ‘...rationally calculating individual concerned with the maximisation of profits and self-

promotion ... or (rational) economic man (Thornton 2008 p. 9). In the higher education system, individual academics must be ‘productive’ and be seen to perform in accordance with the micro-managerial accountability mechanisms that have progressively been put into place. Competition means that inequality becomes defined by who are the winners and losers. While the social liberal principals that previously informed the meaning of the university allowed room for ideas about the collective good, this has been replaced by ‘competitive individualism mediated through the brand name of the university that is played out in the market’ (Thornton 2008 p. 10). The imperative to generate profit justifies a range of practices such as workforce casualisation and the demise of collective bargaining. Thornton argues that this imperative silences equity discourses and in so doing, further entrenches traditional race, class and gender hierarchies (2008 p. 10). What is not in contradiction is the use of equity discourse in relation to students. As fee-paying customers, the need to attract as many students as possible into higher education, disadvantaged or not, is a worthwhile endeavour. The relationship of students to the ‘business’ of higher education is clear.

Equity policy and practice at Victoria University

The progressive marginalisation of EEO at VU has essentially mirrored the developments that Thornton describes. A review of VU Annual reports from 1993 to 2007 gives some evidence for this. For example, the early annual reports of VUT give a high profile to the activities of the access and equity unit established to support staff and student equity. While the access and equity report comes last the reports are presented in a way that looks like equal status to the work of the faculties from 1993 to 1995. From this point, university annual reports become noticeably ‘streamlined’ and reports on access and equity become one subject heading alongside other matters such as reports on Year 2000 compliance, ITS services and compliance with national competition policy (VUT 1998). Only one mention is made of the implementation of affirmative action initiatives in each annual report from 1993 to 2002. A further parallel to Thornton’s (2008) observations is the adoption of a Managing Diversity Plan (VUT 1998). By 2007, the annual report includes no reference to access and equity (VU 2008d).

VU has also recently ‘mainstreamed’ access and equity functions within the university. Since formation in 1992, VU has included a dedicated access and equity unit comprising a number of managerial and specialist staff dedicated to student and staff equity. By 2006, however, VU was one of very few universities to organise access and equity services in this way (Brown 2007) and by 2008, by directive of the VC, access and equity were ‘mainstreamed’ (Harman 2008d). The change was justified by reference to the need to ‘reinvent’ VU structures to meet the challenges of the future and to align with the new VU statement of purpose, *The Making*

VU 2016: A statement of purpose. The priority given to student equity, above the concerns of staff, was also stressed (Harman 2008d).

The developments described above have not cancelled out all attention to gender equity in academic staffing but it is addressed within individualised terms and is implemented primarily to meet the compliance requirements of the *Equal Opportunity for Women Act 1986*. The most notable initiatives relevant to this study in the period prior to the study were the expansion of a career development program for women, a revised academic promotion policy and procedure and the introduction of parental leave benefits that include 14 weeks of paid parental leave (VU 2005b). There have been few further developments since then although the career development program for women continues. The other recent development is that there has been a commitment to seeking recognition as an ‘Employer of Choice for Women’ by the EOWA (Harman 2008e). This requires addressing six criteria which relate to demonstrated improvement in management structures, work flexibility arrangements, paid maternity leave provisions, sex-based harassment prevention strategies, improvements in pay equity and the meeting of targets in relation to women’s representation in senior positions. At the time of writing, this process is still in progress.

The Vice Chancellor has also been public in her commitment to improving women’s representation in leadership. At the Higher Education Summit, 2008, Harman presented a paper on the need for the increased representation of women in leadership (Harman 2008e). In this statement, she is explicit in her commitment to not ‘...cover the same old ground lamenting women’s under-representation at senior levels in higher education or rehearse ... arguments about the barriers yet to be overcome’ (2008e p. 1). Instead she makes a case for the need for action due to skill shortages and that this needs to be done by implementing a range of measures that, like the VU strategic plan, all start with the letter ‘C’ – Culture, Continuity, Cash and Critical Mass. Despite the discussion that is dedicated to these ‘Cs’, the actions proposed in this paper are cautious. They are about the redesign of policies, improved flexibility and staying in touch with women when they have career breaks (Harman 2008). It is noteworthy that, at the time of writing, the major restructure to have occurred since making this presentation is the implementation of a plan to make 150 academic staff redundant (Harman 2008b).

Overall, approaches to gender equity for academic staff implemented at VU closely align with the observations made by Thornton (2008) about national trends in EEO since their initial implementation in the 1980s. In line with VU’s corporatisation, reporting on EEO has become increasingly minimalist to the point that it has disappeared from annual reports altogether.

Responsibility for access and equity initiatives and programs has been mainstreamed and officers responsible for equity in university staffing now exist as a small unit within the Human Resources Division. The approach to gender equity is now highly individualised and women are supported to compete more effectively for promotion. This is supported by the discourse of diversity, which highlights the differences between women rather than their commonalities. At a senior level, there is an expressed reluctance to give attention to the barriers that women might face and women's increased representation at senior levels is argued for on the basis of economics that align with the university's key priority, which – by implication – is to generate profit. At the same time, few measures are proposed to ensure that this happens.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief history and context for 'VU as a case' describing VU as one of 39 universities that make up the Australian higher education system. This description is put within the context of higher education reform processes that have unfolded since the 1987 Dawkins reforms and continued under the Howard Government from 1996 to 2007. As a whole, the reform process has transformed the nature of academic work, just at the time when women have entered higher education in any real numbers. The reforms, informed by neo-liberal economic philosophy as they are, have led to 'competitive individualism mediated through the brand name of the university that is played out in the market' (Thornton 2008 p. 10). VU is poorly positioned within the higher education market due to its geography, history and demographic context. Academic women at the university are also differently positioned, and more harshly impacted by the implications of reform. Efforts to support women's progression within academic employment have continued but are largely dominated by the market imperatives that drive higher education in the reformed university. VU's approach to gender equity is largely reflective of broader national trends. It is still there but in a minimal form and defined by the terms of the market.

The following chapter reports on the findings of interviews conducted with academic women at VU who, at the time of interview, were employed at Level C. Within the framework of the interviews, a number of specific policies and events were raised and discussed as having a gendered impact on promotion aspirations. These include organisational restructure itself, the staff 'renewal' plan, management practices within schools and departments, changes in promotion policy, equity policies and programs, the workloads model and the 'Research Activity Index'. These are explored in more detail in Chapter Six where I discuss the outcomes of the interviews and the relationship of policy change on women's aspirations and opportunities for promotion.

Chapter Six: Why/why not promotion?

Introduction

The previous chapter provided the context for the case study through describing how Victoria University is situated as a higher education provider within the national and local context. A major point of the exercise was to show the value of VU as a case study and both the commonalities that VU shares with higher education providers nationally and its peculiarities. The purpose of this chapter is to report on and analyse the findings of the interviews conducted with women who are currently employed at Level C. First, I provide some detail about how I approached this task, who was involved and the major characteristics of the people involved. I then go on to discuss the key findings as they relate to aspirations for promotion. Here, I make the distinction between those who have plans for promotion to Level D and those who do not, and talk about the basis for their decision making. The distinctions between these two groups are not clear cut, however, with much ambivalence and ambiguity across and within the stories. In order to reveal these uncertainties, I discuss the interviewees' decision making in terms of 'encouraging' and 'discouraging' factors that shape the various motivations and disincentives for seeking promotion. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key factors influencing women's decision making in their plans for promotion and what the prospects are for an increase in women's representation at more senior levels.

The following section starts with some detail and description about the women I interviewed and how I approached and analysed the interview process as background to analysis.

The interviews – details, process and limitations

This section reports on how I designed, implemented and analysed 24 in-depth interviews with women employed at VU. I start by discussing that rationale for the interview questions and design.

The questions

The interviews included four open-ended topics shaped by Lawson's (2007) ontological understanding about the interactions between agency and structure as elaborated in Chapter Three. On this basis, I was interested equally in agency and structure and the relationships between. As follows, I identified individual characteristics that I understand as shaping agency. These included characteristics such as age, educational and career background, parental status, length of employment, class background, cultural background and sexuality. Individual career history was identified as a major consideration in order to understand how the interviewees' current positions and choices were shaped and arrived at. Of equal

importance was understanding how the women's working lives had been shaped by and negotiated within existing structures and the opportunities that these provided. These stories were regarded as background to specific questions about career aspirations and the role that gender and gendering processes play within their particular employment experience. Following a narrative style (Elliott 2005), the questions were broadly structured around four theme areas which were generally followed sequentially depending on the nature of the story and the preferences of the interviewees. The four theme areas are described below.

How did you get here?

The first part of the interview involved asking the broad question, 'How did you get here?' I explained that I was interested in understanding the events, influences and circumstances that have shaped their career path to date and suggested that the starting point be from their undergraduate degree. I also explained that I was interested in understanding key events, the role of families and key people who had influenced their progression, the choices they had made and why they had made them. The purpose of this question was to understand the historical progression of each person's career and to identify critical aspects of identity and circumstance that shaped their career choices. These characteristics included family background and class, age, care responsibilities, cultural background, sexuality and critical influences such as the influence of mentors. The intention was that these details would flow from the telling of each person's story and that the interviewees be in control of the level of detail that they wished to provide. While I report on key attributes later, key characteristics of the interviewees did become clear. For example, most of the interviewees told me their age as such details were contextually important in the telling of career history. For those who did not say, I was able to make a 'close enough' estimate based on the timing of key career events.

This area of questioning was particularly sensitive. The telling of career history, in many cases, involved talking about key traumas or circumstances related for example, to health issues of themselves or their families, experiences of bullying or opportunities that were lost. I was very clear to invite interviewees to stop if any aspect of their history was upsetting although the general response was to continue. Several people cried.

Can you tell me about your current position?

The second theme of discussion was about the interviewees' current position, which was also intended as an open-ended probe about the current circumstances of their working life. I also explained that I was interested in hearing about the details of their work responsibilities, their workloads, their satisfaction with their work and the relationships between their work and life responsibilities. While again, the responses varied according to specific circumstances, this

question also led to discussions about key policy changes that were current at the time including the implementation of the new workloads model, the RAI and the RQF. Another important point of discussion for some was the impact of the implementation of the ‘workplace renewal’ strategy implemented in 2006, as noted in Chapter Five.

What are your plans for promotion?

Again, this question was modified depending on what had been said leading up to this question. The intent was that over the course of the interview I understood current plans for promotion and the reasons for their decision making. For those who were planning on promotion, I was interested in what their motivations were, what their perceived chances were for success, what the potential constraints might be, and what alternative plans were in place should they not achieve their goals. For those who were clearly not planning on applying for promotion, I was similarly interested in the reasons for this decision and how they felt about it.

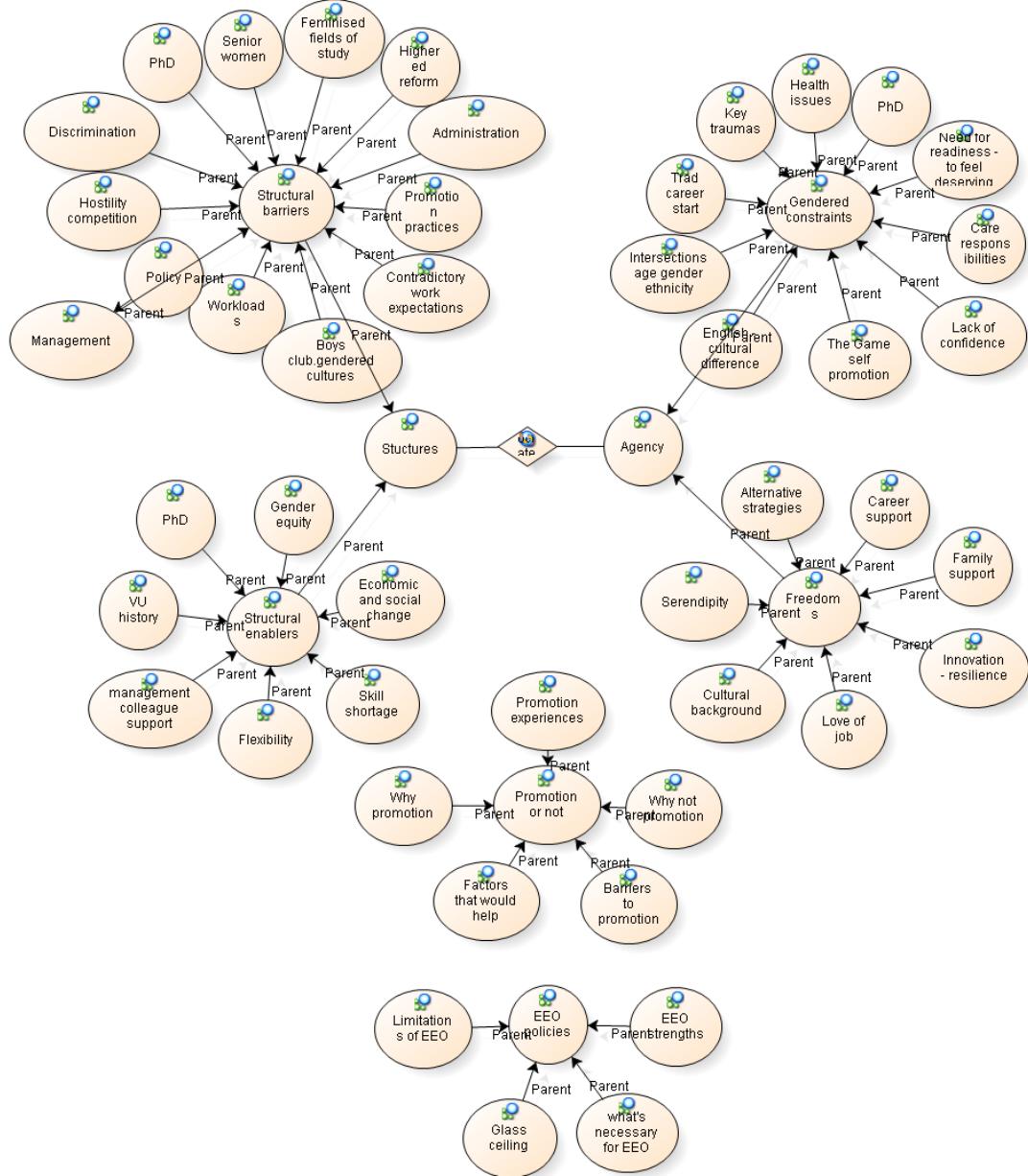
Do you think there is a glass ceiling for women in reaching the professoriate?

The intent in this theme was to identify the extent to which the interviewees understood their own experience as being gendered, whether or not this was perceived as inequitable and whether or not aspects of their own progression could be generalised to the experience of other women. I was particularly interested in their understanding of the concept of the ‘glass ceiling’ and whether or not there was a perception that there are new or continued barriers to women in seeking promotion. The role of EEO and its implementation were explored within this theme and I asked specifically whether or not EEO was useful, either in policy or practice, within the context of their own working lives. I also asked all interviewees whether or not EEO could be strengthened and how this might be done.

Analysis

The transcripts were coded and analysed using NVIVO. In this process, an initial ‘coding tree’ was constructed in order to organise the responses from each interviewee within the general framework that was reflected in the interview questions. After initial coding, each coding node was reviewed to identify overlaps and major themes that emerged. From this step, the coding tree was refined according to the major themes identified. Model 6.1 below shows the structure of the analysis. The purpose of presenting the coding tree as such was to demonstrate some of the assumptions made in the coding and to illustrate some of the relationships and ambiguities within the stories.

Model 6.1: NVIVO coding framework for the analysis of interview data



Key assumptions were first, that the role of agency and structure is inter-related and central in shaping career aspirations. In the language of NVIVO, these are ‘parent nodes’ and organising categories in which to understand other aspects of experience. They are also linked. Much of what can be understood as agency, or individual autonomy, can be seen as only possible within the structural conditions that made the individual experience or choice possible. For example, ‘alternative strategies’ is coded as being an individual freedom. This freedom, however, is made possible in some instances through the structural condition of flexible work practices. Second, both agency and structures simultaneously generate both

freedoms and constraints and neither is assumed as totally constraining or liberating. Both dimensions of career experience include conditions that operate with different effects and the coding structure is organised to reflect this. Another important factor that the structure attempted to reveal is the ambiguous effects of both structure and agency on the women's career experiences. For example, cultural background can operate as both a disadvantage and an advantage at the same time depending on other circumstances and conditions. The coding framework has tried to capture this.

As Model 6.1 aims to illustrate, promotion aspirations and experiences are considered in the context of the interplay between agency and structure. The questions asked about promotion were direct and the responses have been coded as such. The aim was to organise comments to identify some the factors that both encouraged and discouraged aspirations for promotion as well as to identify both barriers and enablers. A further coding category of 'promotion experiences' was included to capture those stories that didn't directly connect to explaining how the women made their decisions but provided general stories and experiences that were important to retain as 'flesh' to the rationales provided for career decision making.

Views and opinions about the glass ceiling, equal opportunity policy and ideas about what needs to occur to better support women's progression are coded as a separate and final category in reflection of the structure of the interviews and to inform the analysis of the interviews. Again, EEO is categorised in terms of both its strengths and limitations as well as how these overlap.

Overall, the coding assumptions were made according to my theoretical understanding of how gender is played out within organisations. While the initial basic structure stayed the same, the actual themes and placement of categories within the structure evolved over the course of reflecting on and coding the interview data. Once organised, the results within each of the nodes were reviewed to inform the final analysis of what was being said.

My influence

At this point, I need to acknowledge my influence on the outcomes of the information generated through the process of interviewing. As discussed in Chapter Three, the need for this flows from the understanding about the situated character of knowledge and the role of the researcher in shaping the research outcomes (Outhwaite & Turner 2007). While I acknowledge how this is imbued throughout the entire process, from the selection of topic, to the analysis of results, there are some influences that need to be noted specifically in relation to the conduct of the interviews. One is that I have been either a post-graduate student and/or

employee at the university since 2001. At the time I conducted these interviews, I was both. I was employed on a part-time research fellowship with one of the key research institutes at the university as well as being a PhD candidate with the School of Applied Economics. In one sense this facilitated the interviews as I was known by the interviewees and in a few cases, I actually had a working relationship with them through collaborative research projects. This meant that there was an ease to many of the interviews and a trust that I would ‘hear’ their views and opinions through a shared perspective. At the same time, my position in the Institute possibly created caution in some given potential aspirations to continue to participate as associates to the Institute’s research agendas. My sense was that there was some interest and/or caution about where I might be positioned in relation to their possible interest in future involvement with the Institute. Similarly, interviewees were at times reluctant to discuss specific issues given that it was possible I would be able to identify the individuals involved. At the same time, I was considered junior to the women in the sample and so this also shaped the way in which the discussions unfolded.

By virtue of the topic, the interviews were also shaped by the interviewees’ assumptions about feminism, what that might mean in relation to the questions, how I might perceive them and what that might mean in terms of how I might interpret or communicate that. This played out in different ways with different people. For those familiar with feminist research, it was possible that there was an attempt to be ‘politically correct’ or to demonstrate an understanding of feminist research. For others, it contributed to caution and/or defensive responses. While I cannot measure this, the feminist questions of my research also produced a bias in the interviewees who participated. Those more responsive and interested in feminist analysis were more likely to respond as well as be more willing to support me in my research efforts. I also had some refusals for reasons that I cannot, with any confidence, know. Discomfort with a feminist enquiry was possibly the reason for some. Overall, I understand my position within the university as one that requires acknowledgement given that this shaped the interview process and outcomes simply by virtue of the nature of human interaction.

Interviewee characteristics

Sample size

In simple terms, my aim was to interview as many Level C women at Victoria University as I could and I was successful in interviewing 24 out of a possible 58. The main reason for refusals I believe was to do with workloads and I came to realise that there was never a good time to invite people to participate in the interview. During semester breaks, it was difficult to get a response as the women were often away for a number of reasons including attending conferences, conducting research or taking annual leave – often a combination of all three.

During semester time, workloads were such that people could not commit to a time, and there were several instances where I exchanged multiple emails to say that they would participate but ‘not at the moment’. The second constraint flagged above is that the focus on women and women’s experiences tended to generate polarised responses. For those supportive of feminist research, the response was a willingness to participate and assist in the research. For others, the reaction was the opposite and there was an unwillingness to participate. Again, it is difficult to identify the extent to which this was the case although there was at least one clear refusal made on this basis.

The interview group

The interviewees were characterised according to age, promotion plans, cultural background, faculty, sexuality, parental status, whether they had a partner, whether the partner worked full-time, and length of employment at VU. In making these classifications, I have been careful to categorise in ways that are meaningful, but minimise the possibility that interviewees can be identified. For example, in relation to cultural background, I have classified those born overseas as coming from either an English-speaking or a non-English speaking country. To name the actual country of birth would immediately make the interviewee identifiable. At the same time, I wanted to identify the cultural diversity of the interviewees and so I have also classified Australian-born interviewees as either Australian or Australian culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) to distinguish between first generation Australians and those who have been settled here over a longer period of time. The purpose of this is to identify important differences that influence career progression. The following section describes the sample according to each of the key attributes identified.

Key attributes

The women I interviewed were between 38 and 62 years old with most (19 out of 24) being between the ages of 45 and 58. Fifteen are also mothers and nine out of this group are parents of children of school age or younger. Almost all said that they lived with a life partner and most partners (16 out of 21) worked full-time, three were retired and two worked part-time in order to be the primary carers of children. Four out of the group were partnered with other women. Thirteen of the group had taken short (less than one year) career breaks when having children and seven had longer breaks. Only four had a career that had been uninterrupted.

Most of the women have worked at VU and its earlier incarnations for a long time. Only one had been employed for five years while most (19 out of 24) had been employed for between eight and 17 years. The longest period of employment was 21 years. There was a reasonably even representation from across VU’s three faculties. Seven were employed within the

Faculty of Business and Law, another seven were from the Faculty of Health, Science and Engineering and 10 were employed within the Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development.

The group was also reflective of the multicultural characteristics of the university, where approximately 30 per cent of all staff are born overseas (VU 2008f). More than one third (10 out of 24) of the interviewees were either born overseas or were the children of migrants from a non-English speaking background. English was not the first language of six of the women interviewed. Importantly, two of the women originally entered Australia under some fairly harsh conditions.

Each of the interviewees was asked to estimate their average weekly working hours, which is a theme I explore further in discussion later. Few found this an easy question to answer due to the variation in workloads across the year and the many ways in which work overlapped into home life and into activities that were blurry in terms of whether they are work or non-work. Three couldn't estimate and two were employed part-time. Only one person said that she worked 40 hours a week although she talked about how she needed to use annual leave to undertake research. Most people (17 out of 24) said that they worked between 50 and 60 hours per week. Three calculated that they worked on average 70 hours per week.

Each of the interviewees was asked whether or not they planned to apply for promotion to Level D. Ten of the 24 said that, yes, this was their intention. Nine said they would not be applying and five were either unsure or felt it was unlikely. Only one, however, said she anticipated applying for promotion to Level E. Three were unsure, six said that the prospect was unlikely and 14 were clear that they would not apply to Level E.

Summary of key attributes

While I make no claims here that the group I interviewed is purely representative of all Level C women, the group broadly resembles the characteristics of women employed at Level C at VU and provides a reasonable cross-section from across faculties, cultural backgrounds, ages and other characteristics. Slightly less than half of the group intended to apply for promotion, which roughly matches the diminishing number of positions available the further one goes up the academic hierarchy.¹⁰ Further, only one woman was clear that advancement to Level E was a goal and three were unsure or believed the prospect was unlikely.

¹⁰ In 2005, the number of positions in Australia at Associate Professor level was 4,309 compared with 9,379 positions at Level C. The number of positions at Level E, however, was roughly the same as Level D with 4,283 total positions across Australia.

The following section starts with a summary and discussion of key findings from the interviews. As a starting point, I have separated out those who do plan to seek promotion to Level D and those who don't and identify the rationales for this decision making.

Promotion plans and their rationale

To respond to my core questions, the following section draws on the interviews to identify the rationale that has been given about promotion plans. The aim is to identify the key motivations for aspirations to promotion as well as to identify both the enabling and constraining factors that have contributed to the women's decision making. First I focus on the 10 interviewees who intended to apply for promotion to Level D.

Why promotion?

While this was a direct question asked of the interviewees, the responses were fairly vague about why promotion was being considered. In some ways, it seemed that the question was difficult for people as if there were too many conflicting considerations in making such plans. Similarly, the question was really asking them to 'put their cards on the table', which felt uncomfortably revealing. This was particularly the case when the application for promotion might not be successful and people were understandably cautious about making definite statements. As an initial overview most of the interviewees who aspired to Level D offered at least a partial answer.

One person said that '*movement and growth is important to my development*'. For another, it was very much about recognition and respect. Another said that, because she couldn't afford to retire, she 'might as well'. '*Because its there*' was another reason. Four people had been inspired by participating in VU's 'Women in Leadership' course, which had encouraged them to think about the concept of leadership differently and how they might position themselves better within the organisation. For another, it was about making a major contribution to educational development in her field. One woman wanted to be an Associate Professor so that she could be recognised as a person of status in her homeland as the position of Senior Lecturer was not understood as a position with status. In her case, she was not even sure that she wanted the job but the need for recognition by her family and homeland community was the driving force. There was only one person who had a deliberate career plan, which was to be the first Professor in her particular field of expertise and promotion to Level D was an essential step in this process. Interestingly, she was the only one who expressed clear confidence and deliberate intention that she would achieve promotion.

More generally, it was important to look at the interview in its broader context to gain a sense of what the motivations were and to recognise that decision making was generally fraught with conflicting considerations. These considerations varied for each person but they involved various combinations of concerns about confidence in their own track record, care responsibilities, health management issues, concerns about the potential workload and conflicting thoughts about whether or not they really wanted to be promoted. It was also evident that individual characteristics, background and circumstance positioned the interviewees in ways that either discouraged or encouraged plans for promotion. Major factors included career history, age, cultural background, care responsibilities, field of expertise and departmental management conditions. The following table details each of the 10 aspiring interviewees in relation to key ‘encouraging’ and ‘discouraging’ considerations in their plans for promotion.

Table 6.1 Summary of factors that encourage and discourage plans for promotion

Case	Encouraging factors	Discouraging factors
1 Late 40s A, Ed & HD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointed early to Level C • Long-term employment history at VU • Few care responsibilities • Outgrown current position – am ready • Need for movement • Age – not an easy time in the sector – not ‘sexy’ enough to get promotion by moving outside • Drive created through anger about structural disadvantage caused through the inequitable appointment of men to professorial positions • Support from colleagues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have acted at a higher level with traumatic consequences to home life and research output • Perceptions of competition • Fear of not being well enough liked by decision makers • Didn’t get PhD until quite late • ‘Cruel and unforgiving academic culture’ • Slow to work out ‘The Game’ • Lack of/absence of managerial/structural support.
2 Late 50s A, Ed & HD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for status and recognition of the level that is currently worked • It’s appropriate in view of the work done and the level at which it is done • Few options at other universities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Late to get PhD – outcome of gendered career path, care responsibilities, family trauma through death, lack of good advice and mentoring • Lack of support in structuring career to focus on promotion – stuck with teaching subjects no one else wanted to teach • ‘The Game’ – perceived naivety about it due to working class background and late entrance into academe • Series of career decisions that have contributed to slow progress • Heavy workloads, combined with care responsibilities have reduced research output – exacerbated by bad admin systems and lack of admin support • Excessively complicated promotion process – compares badly with other universities or applying for advertised positions • Field of expertise doesn’t conform to dominant models of academic career – lack of pathways, traditions and mentors.
3 Mid 40s H, S & Eng	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More relaxed requirements about PhD – promoted to Level C earlier than in other fields of study • Support from colleagues • Support from Dean • Strong mentors – ‘which was luck’ • Diminishing care responsibilities – supportive partner • Drive gained from disadvantage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English not first language – makes research and applications more prolonged • Harsh migration experience – delayed progress • Won’t apply until I’m absolutely ready • Criteria for promotion that doesn’t value women’s experiences and journeys.

	<p>experienced in migration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less gendered career socialisation due to cultural background. 	
4 Mid 50s A, Ed & HD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because it's there 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Background of poverty – gendered and frustrated career history Culture that doesn't support research and writing Lack of mentors Culture that doesn't support women Lack of transparency about merit Incompetent men in leadership Aggressive senior management – bullying general environment Boys' club culture Need to support partner due to health issues Goal posts keep shifting – would have fitted criteria several years ago but now don't Catch 22 – teaching and admin prevent research output Expectation of failure No encouragement Taylorist mode of operation.
5 Late 50s H, S & Eng	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Love of job Inspiring mentor (virtue of the Leadership program) Can't afford to retire Early disadvantage through migrant experience – highly motivating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extreme family care responsibilities Heavy admin and teaching load English as a second language Age Not enough publications prevented by heavy teaching load No down time from teaching and supervision due to school structure and field Lack of teamwork and inequities between men and women within school Emphasis on research output for promotion.
6 Late 30s H, S & Eng	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural background – less gendered career history and prestigious education Entrance into academe while young Traditionally male field, high demand for expertise Recipient of two awards for teaching Women in Leadership program – allocated mentor is really encouraging Desire for recognition of status in homeland and by family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desire to have more children – difficult due to work stress Departmental history of making promotion excessively difficult Workloads – people too busy to help – stress on family Child care responsibilities – teaching loads that clash Health issues due to not taking maternity leave – coming back to work too soon Previous application for D unsuccessful – very discouraged – made the wrong choice of categories for selection – subsequent depression English as a second language – non-technical communication difficult.
7 Mid 50s A, Ed & HD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support to complete PhD – scholarship and time Few care responsibilities – academic partner whose work is complementary Prior support for promotion Supportive and cohesive teamwork environment Women in Leadership course – helped to conceptualise skills and offerings – helpful mentor Love of job. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daunting and time-consuming promotions process University practices that do things like – 'dump things on you at short notice' Admin and review processes Heavy workloads Long time to figure out 'The Game' Professional culture that doesn't necessarily value academic achievement – must be competent in the field.
8 Early 40s H, Sc & Eng	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New academic field with opportunities and demand for development Strong mentor at a critical stage of career development Few care responsibilities – no children Partner in complementary academic career Support and time to complete PhD Love and passion for the work and field Traditionally male field of employment – demand for skills – 'best job in the world' Women in Leadership course – strong mentor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circuitous career path Previous experience of bullying at last university Yet to complete PhD Lack of publications.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for international development of programs. 	
9 Late 30s A, Ed & HD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement to undertake PhD early in career • International experience • ‘Workaholic’ approach – high ambition – ‘I’m a climber’ • Need for stimulation and challenge • Flexibility of work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circuitous and gendered career path • Excessively demanding promotions process • Child care, personal illness, limited support from family/partner and traumatic event • Current inability to work full-time • Catch 22 with workloads – will lose points for being part-time – will be hard to catch up • Lack of quality child care that supports work • Poor/incompetent management • Lack of support within department – need to be twice as good • Workloads.
10 Mid 40s A, Ed & HD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in Leadership course helped to reconstruct position • Love of field • Partner shares care responsibilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circuitous and gendered career path • Need to be ready – ‘above and beyond the criteria’ • Child care responsibilities • Workloads – due to what needs to be done, has to carry loads above points model • Bureaucratic obstacles, lack of admin support, high administrative load • Increasing workloads – people leaving with no replacements • No role models – women haven’t been promoted at all since commencement • Patriarchal management – perceived discouragement from Head of School.

Conditions that encourage promotion plans

The table above is constructed as a means to identify the kind of considerations that make up the decision making process. It is also helpful to show that the decision is one that is fraught, and for most cases, one that might not necessarily come to fruition given the weight of disincentives that are in the path of at least some people. At the same time, it is useful to initially focus on those conditions and factors that are encouraging to promotion, which I identify as falling into the broad themes of ‘timing’, ‘absence of care responsibilities’, ‘career support’ and ‘passion and tenacity’. There are also three themes that I identify as being highly ambiguous in that their effects are simultaneously encouraging and discouraging. These include ‘cultural background’, ‘non-traditional field of expertise’ and other factors that are specific to individuals regarding personality and drive. The following section elaborates on these.

Timing

In talking about timing, I am referring to three inter-related conditions that are encouraging to women’s aspirations for promotion. These include relatively early entrance into academe, early completion of a PhD and employment into emerging disciplines or fields of study at a time when new opportunities were opening up.

As discussed in Chapter Three, a major barrier to women’s progression in academe identified throughout the literature is about discontinuous and interrupted career paths that do not

conform to the traditional male model of academic career progression (Folbre & Bittman 2004; Bergmann 2005; NTEU 2006; Probert 2006; Still 2006; Thanacoody, Bartram et al. 2006; Thompson, Valentine et al. 2007). This is clearly the case with my interview group and with the exception of one, none has followed the traditional academic career path where there is a steady and continuous path from undergraduate degree to PhD and along the academic rungs. Most have had meandering pathways to academe, and started their careers in fields where a doctorate was not considered essential. For those born in Australia, the career direction provided was also extreme in its direct channelling into traditionally female career paths. As one interviewee explained, her early career choices were extremely narrow.

My career choices were governed by dire poverty and gender. That's the generation I belong to – I was a baby boomer ... There were few career options for girls in those days. They are very similar to what is available now. You could be a nurse, a teacher, a secretary, a hairdresser, or pregnant at 16. And I don't really think that the options have changed very much at all in that intervening period of 40 years – a generation.

This was a common story across the interviewees with the exception of those born overseas. What it has meant is that most of the interviewees began their career in other fields, most commonly teaching, nursing or administration. Their subsequent career choices were shaped in reaction to or as an extension of this early training. Ultimately, it meant that it took a considerable time for the women to enter academe. Further, the criteria for academic appointment have continued to be increasingly complex and demanding. The major additional hurdle is that before 1997, a PhD was not a requirement for promotion. As such, a large proportion of women at VU have been ‘catching up’ over the past 10 years.

Among the 10 who plan for promotion, there are only two who had the benefit of completing their doctorate before they were 30 years old and an additional two who entered university in their early thirties at a time when there was significant demand for specialised qualifications in new and emerging disciplines. While this was a factor for only four in the group, clearly ‘starting early’ helps in shaping aspirations for promotion. This early start contributes to feeling ready and deserving to apply for promotion, which is also fed by the need for movement and progression. The obvious connection to this is age. A significant reason for those not planning on further progression is that they are looking at retirement or other options if they are at Level C and in their late 50s or older.

One example of this comes from an interviewee who was appointed at what was FIT at Level C in the early 1990s. Even without a PhD, she was in demand for her specialised skills and

international experience. With now 17 years of employment at VU, completion of her PhD as well as numerous publications and administrative service, her drive for promotion comes from the need for progression and a sense of ‘readiness’:

If I was to say the single most significant thing that happened to me was getting such an advanced position at such an early stage ... I spent the first few years desperately trying to catch up and make myself catch up with the position because I wasn't ready for it ... Then I spent a number of years feeling like I was pretty well matched to the level in terms of who I was and what I was doing and then, for the last few years, I've felt that I've outgrown it.

As discussed later, those who have only recently completed a PhD or have recently been promoted to Level C, are often dissuaded from considering promotion before they believe they are absolutely ready.

Relative absence of care responsibilities

Another characteristic of those who sought promotion was the relative absence of major care responsibilities. In talking about care, I am referring to the time devoted to ensuring that physical and emotional needs of family members are met. I also include the care of self in this category, which was a major consideration for at least four of those not planning on promotion due to the management of health issues that were, in three of those cases, directly related to job stress. Again, the literature identifies unequal responsibility for care as being a major explanation for women’s slow progress in leadership positions generally and academe in particular (Probert 2005; Leahy, Doughney et al. 2006; Craig 2006a; Pocock, Skinner et al. 2007). My group of 10 offers further support for this. Four out of the group have no children as well as partners who have complementary working lives. Two others have adult children, which directly liberates them in their plans for promotion. Another has one child but is not the main carer and is supported by her family and partner. The final three actually have considerable and time consuming responsibilities for care. These are not enough to dissuade their ambition (remarkably enough in at least two of the cases) and are motivated by other over-riding goals including financial issues, sheer passion for the job, raw ambition and the need for family recognition.

Support – mentors, colleagues, cohesive work environments

Support and encouragement either through a mentor, management or as an outcome of a cohesive work team environment appeared to be an important influence on aspirations. Five of the group talked about these factors as being directly encouraging of their aspirations. For

one, it was a remarkable relationship with some critical colleagues - one of whom subsequently became Dean and the other who provided supervision for her PhD. She received coaching, mentoring and academic guidance from both, which she directly attributes to her subsequent progress. Another had a similar story about a male mentor at a critical stage of her career development but she, as well as three others, were directly inspired by their participation in VU's 'Women in Leadership' program through which they were assigned mentors who, in each of these cases, were particularly important in their thinking about promotion:

I'm only a new senior lecturer – I was only made senior lecturer last year and what was really fabulous for me is I had toyed with the idea of applying but I had sold myself downwards thinking that I wouldn't go so I didn't apply until last year – I did a program called Women in Leadership and that gave me the most wonderful experience to be amongst women and gave me a mentor. My mentor was fabulous, who really pushed me to go for promotion ...

For another, the influence of the Women in Leadership course, combined with a cohesive and supportive departmental environment, was a major source of encouragement. Within her school, she enjoyed a collaborative environment, a supportive Head of School and, while the workload was extreme, there were active efforts to ensure that this workload was shared fairly. As discussed later, such an environment is not a widely shared experience and its absence is a major disincentive for those who have cancelled out plans for promotion.

While the Women in Leadership course is a planned and strategic initiative of the university, when seen in the context of all 24 of the interviewees, receiving management, collegial or mentor support has been largely a matter of luck and good timing. One interviewee talked about how finding the right supervisor from among her colleagues was luck:

It was luck. I had a previous go at a PhD with another colleague from here years back. He was a Professor but it was nothing but a title as it turned out ... the absolute lack of feedback and the vagueness when it came meant that the whole process was absolutely impossible. After two or three years, I just came to a point where it made me unhappy and with a heavy heart – because I am not a quitter – but I had to – I just could not see the light at the end of the tunnel. It was a stressful decision for me but I had to take it ... With [the next supervisor], we just had the most perfect understanding. I said, 'I just need to see the milestones – do you understand that?' And I still have that first email –

– a PhD seemed such an enormous task when you don't know where to start or how to go about it and he did exactly that – a plan. Whoa! – he knew what to do!

Overall, support from mentors, managers and/or the work environment is an important influence on career aspirations. Access to this support was not the experience of all but for two at least, the desire for promotion was driven almost in spite of unsupportive cultures and managers – a point I discuss below as one of those ambiguous influences on career progression.

Three clear sources of encouragement

As noted above, three clear themes emerged from the interviewees with the 10 women who aspired to Level D. These include good timing in their career progression, the relative absence of care responsibilities and support from mentors, colleagues and/or managers. It is also clear that these influences combine differently according to individual circumstances and are also accompanied by a range of conflicting and discouraging considerations. At the same time, while the presence of these circumstances is important, it does not explain the aspirations of all. Within the group, there are some remarkable stories of those who seemingly aspire for promotion ‘against the odds’. While each has their own story, there are several influences that are ambiguous in their impacts and provide both motivation and disincentives at the same time. The two main factors that are evident through the stories are about cultural background and employment within traditionally male disciplines. In addition, there are some individual responses to seemingly adverse conditions that are paradoxically motivating.

Cultural background

As noted in Chapter Five, a distinctive characteristic of VU is its multicultural student and staff body. The 24 interviewees were similarly multicultural and 11 of the group were either first generation Australians or born overseas. English was not the first language of six of this group. Within the group of aspirants, four were born overseas and three of these are from non-English speaking backgrounds. Two, in particular, entered Australia originally when they were young adults in harsh circumstances with no financial resources, limited or no English language and no family support. All four had major settlement issues on arrival in Australia and have had to overcome, in a couple of instances, adversity, poverty and cultural marginalisation.

Each of these women talked about how their cultural background was a disadvantage to their progression in academe in various ways. The obvious limitation for some was English

language expression. For two, communicating in non-technical terms was a source of frustration. They were extremely cautious about ensuring that the cultural nuances were correct in their writing and sought various forms of support to ensure this was the case. As they attempt to progress further, this form of communication is increasingly important given the need for self-promotion and recognition within Australia as a leader in their respective fields.

In particular, being from a non-Australian background was seen to be a disadvantage in knowing how to ‘play the game’. This was an important theme throughout the interviews. As I understand it, ‘the game’ is about how to effectively self-promote and gain recognition, gain entrance to networks, know how to bargain for manageable workload that will allow research output and to access privileges and entitlements that seemingly flow to those who know how to ‘play’. While this was an issue for many of the interviewees, it was particularly the case for those born overseas. Interestingly, all of the NESB women seemed to gain particular inspiration from participation in the Women in Leadership course. Key benefits included assistance in gaining insight into the informal practices of university processes, establishing new female networks and the formal assignment of a mentor. My impression was that the course filled an important gap in understanding ‘the game’. This gap was, in part, about cultural difference and not understanding the tacit and unspoken rules that shape much of organisational life. One example came in the telling of a story about how the interviewee had been exploited through a misunderstanding about an employment contract in the past:

Again, [it was because I was from a] different background – different system. That is how I see it now – completely different bringing up. You just try to do things that you are supposed to do rather than questioning or challenging the authority. That’s how I look at it now. I wish I had that knowledge. I wish someone had explained it to me.

Other issues or barriers were associated with cultural difference. For one person, her ethnicity gave her a very youthful appearance and she was often assumed to be a student. For another, the need to translate her early training in a socialist economy to a capitalist context meant that she had to work twice as hard to keep abreast of developments in her field. For another, cultural expectations that she take the prime responsibility for the care of elders, children and extended family networks meant that she had to manage what I consider to be excruciatingly demanding care responsibilities on top of a 70-hour working week.

While cultural difference was clearly a disadvantage, paradoxically, it was also a motivating force for the overseas-born women in the group of aspirants. For one, it was important to earn

the title of Associate Professor in order to achieve status in the eyes of her homeland community both in Australia and overseas. For others, their early disadvantage was a driving force for achievement. When they had experienced such disadvantage in the past, continuous achievement within their career was considered a privilege. For at least two women, there was almost an irrepressible joy about their experiences and working life:

But I love it. I really do enjoy it. I love the people here. It's lovely being around people who are intelligent and the students are an absolute delight. I really love them even though some drive you mad. But even the ones that give you the hardest time and then eventually when they get the 'ah, ah' point in their life they come back to you and they say 'I understand now'. I love it – I really enjoy it. In many ways I think you would be really pressed to find a job as good as in academia because it is the sort of job where you know you are changing things and having an effect on people's lives. You can show them an ethical way to make a difference.

While this is sheer speculation, my impression was that when compared to their English-speaking background colleagues, the need to 'get on with it', was much stronger for those not born in Australia. Possibly this was directly related to their feeling that they didn't understand 'the game' as well as they felt they should. As a result, the driving motivation was to succeed within 'the game' rather than feel any sense of entitlement to criticise. What is clear, however, is that cultural background is an important influence on career aspirations that are simultaneously a help and a hindrance. Cultural background also overlaps with other circumstances and conditions. One of the conditions that appears similarly ambiguous in its impact was the employment in disciplines that were traditionally male dominated. Most of the women from non-English-speaking backgrounds were employed in these areas as an outcome of early training in systems that are less segregated by gender than is the case in Australia.

Non-traditional disciplines

Three of the aspiring women were employed in science fields that are traditionally male dominated. As flagged above, all three were also born overseas and from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Generally, entrance and progression for women in non-traditional occupations is widely recognised as highly problematic. As discussed in Chapter One, the Australian labour market is highly gender segregated by occupation and there continues to be considerable barriers to women's entrance. One of the major barriers, however, in the Australian context as well as in other comparable western countries, is earlier career socialisation and the considerable disincentives experienced by young women to enter non-traditional fields (Pyke 1992; Lyall 1993; Bagilhole 2002a; Gerdes 2006; Stevens-Kalceff,

Hagon et al. 2006). Many non-capitalist or developing countries are less segregated and it is the non-traditional background that is an advantage in terms of entrance into academe particularly given the high demand for skills. This is particularly the case in industry areas that attract high salaries and have high demand for academic skills. Attracting academics when salaries are not competitive with industry is an issue of national concern (Heally 2008). Coupled with equity agendas that seek to increase women's representation in non-traditional fields, there is considerable demand for women. Paradoxically, being a female academic in a traditionally male field appears to have provided encouragement for progression rather than the reverse.

Personality?

In reviewing the rationale for promotion for the 10 interviewees aspiring to promotion, on balance, they did so because there were a range of conditions and circumstances working in their favour. This was not the case for all, however, and there were at least two cases that stand out as having the odds and conditions stacked firmly against them, yet they persevered in their aspirations. One was late in her career, worked extraordinary hours and had enormous care responsibilities. At the same time, she maintained a passion for her work and aimed for promotion to Level D. Similarly, one person struggled to be understood in English, worked long hours and managed a family, yet was reasonably confident of being promoted. While this was not the over-riding factor in her decision making, another was driven by anger about what she saw as the unfair appointment of a dominance of men into professorial positions at the time of amalgamation. For these examples, the impression was that they would achieve their aims through sheer force of personality, passion and ambition.

Another consideration that was important to some was a lack of confidence as to whether they would be successful in promotion due to not being universally 'liked' or that they were aware they had a personality that could be considered aggressive or competitive. Paradoxically, these are both traits that were widely identified as being essential in an increasingly competitive academic environment and were identified as both a potential strength and disadvantage. One interviewee thought she might not be promoted because not everyone liked her, but at the same time, she also saw her personality as giving her the ability to achieve what she wanted:

Speaking personally, I have never felt that I haven't got something because I'm a woman. What I mean by that, as if there is such a thing as an average woman ... I'm more aggressive, I'm more assertive, I'm more outspoken than whoever that average woman is. I know how to ask for things, I know how to think strategically.

For some, individual drive and sheer force of will was the over-riding source of their aspirations. While they experienced, to varying degrees, constraints that could be broadly understood as structural, these were not an ultimate deterrent in their plans.

The decision making process overall

The discussion above has attempted to illustrate the extent to which aspirations for promotion are shaped in the context of a set of often conflicting conditions and considerations. Some of the conditions that are supportive of promotion plans include good timing, support and encouragement and relative freedom from care responsibilities. Cultural background, field of study and personal drive also operate in ways that can be enabling. Those who do aspire to promotion generally, but not always, have the balance of these conditions in their favour. It is also clear, particularly evidenced by the women's reticence in making definite statements about plans, is that these plans are open to change and circumstance. Only one was clearly confident that she would be promoted to Level D while most expressed caution. All were aware that circumstances and the probability of promotion might change. For example, one of the women I interviewed had previously been highly driven and accomplished within her field and was a self-confessed workaholic. At the time of the interview, however, a series of recent events had shaken that ambition. Given the circumstances, she found it difficult to see how progression might be possible. At the same time, she still aspired to promotion as this had been her long-term goal yet she was reticent to make clear statements in response to my questions:

Look ... your priorities change. I can't say that I'm a workaholic now ... So consequently my aspirations and my workaholic tendencies certainly changed. Consequently everything has changed ... Give me a couple of years and I'll settle down again.

Overall, the decision to aim for promotion to Level D was not clear-cut for most of the 10 people who aspired to this. Again, while there was variation, it was a decision that was regarded as a tenuous journey. The stories from this group were also not markedly distinct from those who decided not to pursue promotion. They have undertaken similar processes of decision making but, at the time of interview at least, had arrived at a different decision. Later in this chapter, I discuss this in more detail by looking at key considerations in terms of 'encouraging' and 'discouraging' factors. Before doing this, I have identified those who have clearly chosen not to pursue promotion and discuss the reasons given as to 'why not'.

Why not promotion?

Responses about why women were not going to apply for promotion were clearer and more decisive. Nine interviewees told me they would not be applying for promotion and five said that the prospect was unlikely or that they were unsure. There were three main themes to the responses. The first was about discouraging or traumatic experiences that have doused any further ambition within academe. This theme connected with negative organisational cultures, experiences of being bullied, or a lack of support. The second major theme was about timing, changes in promotions policy and a belief that they would not be able to meet the criteria. This was a factor that combined with workloads, care responsibilities and/or health management issues. The third but no less significant reason was about having decided that promotion was not desirable, that they were happy at their current level and/or were unwilling to go through the promotion experience in itself. While these themes can be identified, however, the rationale for this varied according to the story. This section first summarises the main reasons given for deciding that Level C was as senior as they intended to go and why. I then put forward the varying circumstances and considerations that informed these decisions.

Reasons why not

Table 6.2 below summarises the main reasons for not seeking promotion by case and in order of the sequence by which I conducted the interviews. In doing so, the aim is to show the relative importance of each of the themes before discussing these in greater detail. At the same time, I am aware that by listing reasons in such a blunt and summary form, much of the meaning around the issues is lost. It also makes it appear that this group has had a distinctly different experience to the group who say they do aspire to promotion and this is not the case. The women in the former group have overlapping stories to tell but they have made the decision to aim for promotion in the context of complex work environments. Despite these limitations, the summary is telling and shows the major reasons for not wanting promotion as well as how various considerations combine differently according to each individual.

Table 6.2 Reasons for not aiming for promotion

Case	Main reasons why not promotion
1 Late 50s Bus & Law	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Victim of discrimination in the allocation of workloads, lack of recognition for publishing record, and in contractual arrangement• Victim of bullying when acting in senior role• Traumatic experience when seeking compensation for discrimination• Male dominated work culture, lack of leadership and bad management• Chronic health issues as a result of stress• Extreme care responsibilities due to various family members being ill and difficulties in combining work and family.
2 Late 50s Bus & Law	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discouraging experience in applying for promotion in the past• Lack of management systems and no commitment to developing people within department• Discouraging work context for women generally with 'all the women with talent leaving'• Bullying work culture – witness to bullying behaviours• Decision to work at current level and pursue other interests because 'its not worth it'

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care responsibilities for children, partner and parents.
3 Early 50s Bus & Law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While being encouraged to apply for promotion by senior management, is suspicious about what it will mean due to discrimination in the past and concerns about being exploited in the future • Too recently appointed to Level C – doesn't feel ready and lack of training available • Age – believes that by the time she will feel comfortable with promotion she will want to pursue other interests and options.
4 Mid 40s Arts, Ed & HD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only recently appointed Level C • Happy at current level – wants to pursue her own academic interests • Perceives senior roles as ‘boring’ – too much administration • Promotion – not worth it – not enough money.
5 Early 60s Bus & Law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only recently completed PhD and appointed at Level C • Care responsibilities for dependents with illness • Current workload extremely heavy • Lack of time left in her career.
6 Mid 50s Bus & Law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative workplace culture • Perceived lack of support • Conflict with head of department • Lack of recognition for publishing and research record • Student equity issues and heavy workloads.
7 Late 50s Arts, Ed & HD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health management issues – feels she can no longer keep making the incessant changes required • Excessive workload and need to meet obligations to students.
8 Early 50s Bus & Law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traumatic experience of being bullied by senior management when acting in senior roles and consequent illness as a direct result of this • Unsuccessful application made in the past • Care responsibilities for partner and children • Directions of continued restructure and reform are discouraging • Despite being asked to apply for senior roles, has decided to make the best of current position until taking early retirement.
9 Mid 40s Health, Science & Eng.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflictual and generally unhappy work culture • Programs under review and doubtful future • Doesn't believe she would be supported in application • Heavy teaching loads mean she can't generate enough research output.
10 Mid 40s Health, Science & Eng.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't have PhD and doesn't see how she can do this due to heavy teaching load and care responsibilities for children – believes she can't meet promotion criteria.
11 Early 50s Health, Science & Eng	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Poisonous’ management culture • As a long-term employee, believes that her employment history is not valued – that in the context of reform, her corporate history is not wanted • Health management issues • Excessive workload • Discriminatory workload allocations – men do research, women do admin and teaching.
12 Early 50s Bus & Law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hasn't completed PhD – doesn't think she'll meet the criteria • ‘Bitter and twisted environment’ – generated by senior management • Preference to make the most of current position.
13 Mid 50s Arts, Ed & HD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No PhD so can't meet criteria • Decision to combine academic and industry work rather than academic progression.
14 Early 50s Arts, Ed and HD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wants to retain focus on own academic field • Promotion process is seen as too much – ‘why would I spend a month of my life <i>doing</i> that?’

The three key themes about why women ‘choose’ not to aspire for promotion appear very clearly within this list and to an extent, show the flip side of the encouraging factors listed above. Hostile, discouraging and/or discriminatory work environments, heavy workloads combined with care responsibilities, and an unwillingness to take on more senior positions feature clearly. The following section goes on to discuss these themes.

Bullying, bad management and hostile cultures

As detailed in Table 6.2, the career aspirations of seven of the 14 interviewees were influenced by their experiences of bad or discouraging management practice or hostile work cultures. These experiences varied across departments and campuses and they ranged from stories of relatively ‘benign neglect’ to very serious cases of bullying and/or direct discrimination.

Four of the interviewees who were very definite about their decision not to be promoted talked about having lived through very traumatic experiences that were an outcome of being bullied by senior managers, being the victim of direct discrimination and/or of being effectively ‘frozen out’ of collegial networks and decision making within their work area. Three of this group had suffered some serious and stress-related health issues that they understand as being a direct outcome of their negative experiences. These issues were directly related to early retirement plans for two of the three. All four had also been employed with the Western Institute and FIT prior to the creation of Victoria University in 1992. A common thread in their experiences was their individual marginalisation as new management structures have been continuously implemented since the establishment of VU.

Four others talked about similar experiences although the effects had not been quite so dramatic and they had been able to control the situation to the extent that they were less affected and at least not directly damaged. One person talked about how she had never been bullied in a direct way but that there was a culture of bullying that she perceived as stemming from insecurity and constant change. This bullying is a major deterrent to progression and a source of constant tension:

I have witnessed more bullying here than any other organisation that I have worked with ... Now I'm sure that I could have got promotion but it would have been a battle. I certainly have been aware for many years that I made some people uncomfortable. I'm too outspoken, too forthright, all of those things. But being outspoken and forthright means that you don't get bullied. But it still doesn't make you a comfortable person.

A related issue in this case was a lack of any management systems or structures that could nurture academics along a pathway to promotion. This theme was repeated by others where the problem was seen as a general lack of guidance and encouragement:

... you just feel your way in the dark because you know, we have very few females in the school. This is a very male dominated department ... basically, the females have to really encourage each other. Otherwise, the others just leave you alone.

Another related discouraging factor was a growing culture of entrepreneurship within the university. The ways in which recruitment and promotion practices were handled in this climate meant that the process contributed to insecurity and beliefs of not being good enough to expect career progression. For several people, previous experiences of promotion were handled in such a way that they were effectively put off ever trying again for varying reasons – one of which was they were anxious that they were not the right ‘fit’ in the new international order. The perception was that it was necessary to be seen as entrepreneurial and international in order to be competitive for a higher position and that a continuous history at the university was as much a disadvantage as it was an advantage:

So I didn't get that promotion and I was very disenchanted ... My gut feeling was that they didn't want any of the internals, they wanted to get someone in from overseas. It was then readvertised and I was asked if I wanted to reapply. And I said no – nothing had changed. Since I didn't get the position last time round, I saw no reason why I would get it this time around. Again, an outsider was offered the position ...

In a related theme, there was a perception that being part of ‘the old guard’ was badly regarded by management – a belief shared by four of the interviewees. The view was expressed that existing management wanted to erase any organisational history as it is a potential barrier to change and restructure. Half of the interviewees not aspiring to promotion have been employed at VU for more than 15 years. These interviewees were recruited into the Western Institute and FIT and, as noted in Chapter Five, were responsible for developing new programs within a climate that was driven strongly by social justice objectives about enhancing educational opportunities in Melbourne’s west. The ‘new order’ of management, implemented since the late 1990s, has had harsh ramifications. Not only was their early contribution in building the foundations of VU not valued, that very experience is now regarded as an impediment to change:

I really do believe that there were particular kinds of people who came to this university in the late 80s early 90s ... they were a different breed ... they were young, enthusiastic and extremely creative. But I think that in the 80s, everything was starting from the ground up ... When I came here, we had half of the portables and Building 3. Nothing else, it was dust, rabbits and thistles – nothing else.

Now ... anyone who stays in a position for more than five years becomes a liability. So you are speaking to number one liability of the university. Someone who has been here an equally long time as myself said that they wished to obliterate the collective cultural memory.

The view was also expressed that the hostile culture has been sustained and continues through directions currently being set by senior management:

Things might change but I'm not going to hold out here either. The environment is so bitter and twisted I think that this emanates from the senior staff of the university. And that flows all of the way down. The rhetoric that comes from [senior management] is not matched by their actions.

Overall, a major theme expressed by those not planning on promotion is that this is because of management that is at best, unsupportive and at worst, actively discriminatory and hostile. Current practices are shaped by continuous reform and continue under current arrangements. Management practices cannot be seen in isolation, and directly relate to workloads and constantly changing criteria for promotion. These impact particularly on those with care responsibilities and have led a number of women into a sort of 'Catch 22' where they believe that it will be impossible to meet the criteria for promotion.

Catch 22

Another theme expressed by those not planning on promotion was about the combined effects of workloads, care responsibilities, PhD requirements and changing criteria for promotion. Two of the interviewees had only recently completed a PhD and believed that it was too late to aim for promotion to level D. Both were over 55 and felt that by the time they had notched up the experience required for promotion, it would be too late and they would be looking at retirement or developing other interests. Three others were caught in the situation that they had not completed a PhD. One person was working on it but had decided that due to workloads and some health management issues, she was not going to '*kill herself*' in completing. If it happened, it happened and she would just continue to work on it and hope that one day it would be finished. Another had decided that completing a PhD was impossible in the context of her heavy teaching load, her sole responsibility for two school-aged children and increasing uncertainty within her teaching area due to declining student enrolments. A third, in her late 50s, was resolved to stay at Level C, but to work part-time and to put her energies elsewhere. While the stories were all different, each of these interviewees believed that their options were limited by existing workloads, systems and requirements. Meeting the

criteria for promotion to Level D was not an option:

... so how can I bring up my research points because I need to find time for that – I am in a very difficult situation now. The Head of School just allocates more and more teaching and you can never get out of that cycle. With my teaching, and with my family situation, if I am back on a PhD, I work seven days. I could only work on the PhD on the weekend. I don't see any way. I am managing – just managing. It's not easy but I'm managing.

Overall, getting caught in a ‘Catch 22’ was the reason for not aspiring to promotion for five of the interviewees. They could see no way that they could meet the requirements because of a range of circumstances including age, current teaching load, the need for increased research output or PhD completion and care (including self-care) responsibilities.

Perceptions of leadership

The third theme in relation to not aiming for promotion was about perceptions of leadership and the application of a kind of ‘cost-benefit’ analysis about the realities of promotion to a higher level. Two of the interviewees were particularly clear that promotion would prevent them from doing what it is that they most enjoy about their work which is to pursue their own academic interests within their given fields. For one, the idea of progression to Level D was unrelated to the reasons she had entered academe in the first instance:

I sort of don't really expect to have a career – I know that sounds funny because I have a PhD but I did that because someone was going to give me a scholarship to work on a research project for four years that I really wanted to do. And if someone gave it to me again, I'd do it again. I would have that drive. I'm not saying that I'll never apply ... but at the moment it's just not on my list of priorities.

For another, it was the perception of the additional administrative work involved at the next level that was the main deterrent. Her view was that even if the increase in salary was substantial, there would not be enough money to recompense for what she perceived as a very undesirable role:

What I see here is that the further you go, the more crappy stuff you do. Faculty boards and stuff that I really don't want to do ... the real driving thing is the admin and from what I see around here, the money doesn't come close to making it worthwhile – not even close. It's not worth it – the prestige – nothing comes close. If I had to move into

doing a senior admin role – you know, Faculty board, Head of School – there's not enough money. I just couldn't stand it.

A similar analysis had been applied by a third interviewee but in her case it was more to do with needing to feel ready for promotion and that by the time she would be ready, she believed that she might want to do different things. Her views were also tempered by a suspicion of being exploited in a senior position, which was partly an outcome of being employed within a traditionally male field where it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit new academics due to skill shortages and increasingly uncompetitive academic salaries. This person was being actively encouraged to apply for promotion but was very cautious in her decision making. One major influence on this decision making was her previous experience in acting at senior levels in the past. This experience was mixed and while she clearly felt capable, she was unwilling to put herself forward until she felt she could take on the job on her own terms and at a time when she felt ready.

Summary of why not

The three themes discussed above attempt to encapsulate the major reasons expressed as to why 14 of the women interviewed have decided not to apply for promotion. Not all were absolutely definite, however, in a similar way that a number of the women in the group who said that they were applying for promotion were varied in their clarity about working toward promotion. What appears clear from the interviews, however, is that there are three major conditions that deter aspirations for promotion. The first is about unsupportive management, hostile work cultures and university reform that marginalises those with a history at VU. The second relates to how individual constraints including age and care responsibilities combine to make it impossible, in some instances, to meet changing criteria for promotion. The third is about perceptions of the requirements of leadership positions and how these clash with individual perceptions of what academic work should be about. When taken together with those planning on promotion, it can be seen that similar constraints operate, at varying degrees for the whole group. For those who do aspire, however, there are enough conditions and circumstances operating in favour of promotion to inspire a positive aspiration.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to explain and report on the process, outcomes and findings of interviews conducted with academic women employed at Level C at Victoria University. As part of this process, I have discussed how the interviews were constructed, implemented and analysed. I also discuss how I am positioned in undertaking the interviews and how this has influenced the findings. I go on to report on the interview results and the

main findings that relate to women's promotion aspirations and the conditions and considerations that have shaped these aspirations. I divide the discussion of findings into two main parts. First, I put forward the views and opinions expressed by the group of 10 women who said that, yes, they do aspire to promotion. In order to interpret this decision making, I identify both encouraging and discouraging factors that contribute to the decision making process. In the discussion that follows, I argue that this decision making process is not clear-cut but the outcome of a balance of historical, organisational, disciplinary specific and personal considerations that combined differently for each person depending on a range of factors including age, career history, the level of encouragement from management, health, care responsibilities, ethnicity and personality. With only one exception, none in this group was fully confident they would 'make it' to Associate Professor.

I go on to analyse the responses of the 14 women from the interview group who did not plan for promotion. Because this group tended to be more definite in their rationale, I focus on factors that discourage aspirations for promotion. These 'discouraging' factors were common across all interviewees, however, and so I combine the findings from all of the interviewees to discuss the key deterrents for promotion. I discuss these discouraging factors as falling into three main themes. The first is about experiences of bullying, bad management and hostile work cultures. The second theme I call 'Catch 22' where women have decided that it is impossible to aspire due to the lack of alternative options, the combined effects of age, care responsibilities, the need to complete a PhD or teaching workloads that minimise the capacity to produce the research output necessary to be successful in any attempt at promotion. The third theme is about perceptions of leadership, the promotions process itself and beliefs that appointment at a higher level would require work and responsibilities that would take them away from their disciplinary areas and the work that attracted them to academic employment in the first instance. Overall, for the group that did not aspire, the balance of considerations, organisational, personal and professional, overwhelmed aspirations for promotion.

In Chapter Eight, I go on to discuss how these findings inform a response to my core research questions. Before doing so, however, the obvious question relates to the extent to which women's decision making is shaped by gender. In the following chapter, I discuss findings from the interviewees about the 'glass ceiling' and the extent to which the interview group understand their current prospects as being limited by being a woman in the higher education sector. I also look at the women's understanding of EEO, how it operates at VU and its relevance to their career progression.

Chapter Seven: Gendered barriers and EEO

Introduction

The previous chapter explained how I conducted interviews with academic women appointed at Level C at Victoria University. I identified key encouraging and discouraging factors that contribute to the decision making about career aspirations and whether or not promotion to Level D is an aim. As explained in Chapter Six, the interviews also included a further category of questions. The first was about whether or not the interviewees believed that a ‘glass ceiling’ was in operation. The second related to EEO, its implementation within VU and the perceived relevance of EEO in supporting women’s career progression. In this chapter, I summarise the opinions expressed in relation to the presence of a glass ceiling and how that works. Second, I talk about the interviewee’s perceptions of EEO and its relevance to individual opportunities and working lives. I go on to summarise specific suggestions that were made about what needs to be done to improve opportunities for women at VU.

Is there a glass ceiling at VU and if so, what should be done about it?

As discussed in Chapter Two, whether or not a glass ceiling operates to block women’s career progression is a contentious question in the literature (Summers 2003; Eagly & Carli 2007). As a metaphor, the term suggests an impenetrable barrier that clearly no longer exists given women’s entrance into senior roles at least in small numbers. This has led Eagly and Carli (2007) to propose an alternative expression, ‘labyrinth’, to more accurately capture women’s career progression to leadership roles as a gendered and difficult journey. Within the field of feminist economics, however, the term continues to be used as a way of describing and analysing gendered organisational structures with women’s representation progressively declining at each level of organisational hierarchies (Cotter, Hermsen et al. 2001; VanStaveren 2007). Despite these problems, I apply the term in a general sense as a way to describe the additional barriers that prevent women’s progression within the academic hierarchy. The following section reports on the responses derived from the interviews.

Is there a glass ceiling in operation?

As a way to describe the responses to questions about the glass ceiling and whether or not this operates at VU, I organised the responses into some general categories including ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘cautious’. More than half of the respondents (13 out of 24) said that ‘yes’, there is a glass ceiling, meaning that women experience additional barriers to men on the pathway to promotion. Nine did not make a definite statement either way and went on to explain their

perspective. Only two people said ‘no’ but this was generally a very qualified response, which I explain later. The following section elaborates.

‘Yes, there is a glass ceiling’

Of the 12 people who said that ‘yes’ there is a glass ceiling at VU, the responses can be roughly divided into two broad categories. Six were vehement in their experience of, and understanding that the glass ceiling was in operation through direct and indirect practices and cultures that prevent women’s progression. Another six were no less clear about its existence but saw its operation in more subtle, structural and unconscious processes. Within the first group, some strong statements were made:

I just think that there are lots and lots of brick walls – they’re not glass ceilings – they’re brick walls and they are still very [much] in evidence. The ceiling implies that you are climbing up the ladder and you hit this ceiling and yes – I would have agreed with that metaphor before. But I just think that it’s like a brick ceiling. It’s like the brick floor of the floor above you and you hit it and you fall down and you really hurt yourself. I think that it is a very damaging process.

There were two others who similarly understood the operation of the glass ceiling as a result of direct and blatant sex discrimination. One of the interviewees was employed in a male dominated school and her clear opinion was that there was active resistance to the employment of women at all let alone at a senior level:

These men weren’t going to employ any women. They’d employ males and in one case I can remember they took on one man and he’s still here and he’s a complete disaster ... He was employed to do a position in [a particular field] when he’s never done this in his life when the woman who applied [who had experience] wasn’t employed. ... because the boys’ club wanted another boy to join the rest of the boys’ club.

Others, who made equally strong comments, saw the barriers as a direct result of bad management and a lack of process to encourage women. Another identified inequitable workload allocation between men and women as a major issue within her female dominated department. The few men within the department were engaged in research while the women did the teaching and administration. The outcome was that women did not have time to do the research necessary to position them for promotion:

So we are doing the work. Others are carrying that load. (The equivalent men only do research.) He doesn't do anything else. And I'm not sure whether it's because we allowed it to happen or perhaps we have some culture that allows men this or maybe the men are more aggressive. They may be more assertive. I don't know.

These practices were talked about across at least five schools where the interviewees said the workload allocation was unfair. This was despite the introduction of the workloads model that attempted to make workloads fair and transparent. In a number of cases, the view was that women were more likely to take on work beyond their workload allocation simply because it had to be done while men were more likely to stick within their allocated workload. Similarly, men were more likely to have roles and responsibilities that resulted in research output that increased their chances for progression. This finding is also supported by other case study research that shows that while on the surface, workloads appear equitable, the nature of workload allocation is different in ways that serve to reinforce men's relative advantage (Kjeldal, Rindfleish et al. 2005). This comes about partly through gendered attitudes to work. Similarly, it relates back to 'the game' and women's lesser ability to negotiate the most advantageous working conditions:

I would say that women probably have to try twice as hard as men – because in my department, the men will just say, 'I don't want to do this' but the women say, 'well we have to do this because it is for the school'. You know they just have a different attitude. And in this school because there are only [a minority of] female staff and we are the ones who do the real work.

Overall, at least half of the women who acknowledged a glass ceiling saw this as being an outcome of work organisation and management practices that are discriminatory. Others saw the problems as equally real yet less direct in their operation. Six interviewees emphasised how the glass ceiling was generated by a combined set of unconscious practices and deeply structural conditions that are difficult to identify yet no less discriminatory in their effects. The main problem was identified in relation to different histories and greater responsibilities for care. This is the difference that forces women into a situation of making a choice between their families and their career progression – a choice most men do not have to make:

... we have uniform requirements but women have different skills and strengths. Also different demands ... I feel that many of my male colleagues, although they have families, have more opportunity to devote themselves to work only and the wife takes care of the rest ... I don't know whether to attain a certain level in a place like this, you have to make a choice between job or family. I would certainly not make a choice like

that. I would not pursue my academic career to the exclusion of my family life and my life as such, I wouldn't do that.

Another highlighted the extent to which many male managers discriminate due to unconscious practices that are gendered in their effects. This occurs despite awareness of equity principles, which is not enough to shift dominant ideas about women in academe. This is a theme that resonates with the work of Sinclair, who talks about the near impossibility of making concepts of masculinity visible to male leaders (Sinclair 2000b). For example, one interviewee talked about how her direct manager was well intentioned yet unaware of his inability to be truly collegial with female academic staff. The result was that women were rarely seen as being 'leaders' and less well positioned for promotion:

I think he's funny. We don't have barriers ... he's done his gender training and ... he says 'I don't want to be patronising' and he doesn't want to put forward things because that might seem to be paternalistic which I think is. I don't think he's very subtle. He is paternalistic – he can't be fraternal ...

Others talked about how the glass ceiling was evidenced by the dominance of men in senior academic positions but wanted to highlight how many men are discouraged on the way up the academic ladder as well. The role of gender in career progression was hard to 'unpick' from a range of issues that affects both men and women:

I don't think it's simplistic. [It's not just] about how many women are at the top ... it's a much more sophisticated question. I can talk about both sides being sold a pup because really ... there are disadvantages about getting stuck in stereotypical positions [but] the down side is worse for women I think and its harder ... like women are more ambivalent about things like ladders.

This was a view repeated by others and there was recognition that circumstances are such that many men have difficulty managing career progression. At the same time, women have other disincentives that include care responsibilities, a different attitude to competition and career progression and that there is lack of role models in senior positions.

The above discussion summarises the views expressed by those who believe there are gendered barriers to women's progression. Opinions range from being definite that women are held back by directly discriminatory practices, behaviours and work cultures, to those that underscore more subtle processes at play yet ultimately contribute to women's sluggish career path progression. The remaining 11 interviewees were less certain that a glass ceiling was in

operation or that the term was inadequate to explain what the situation really is. Nine people were cautious about whether or not a glass ceiling was in operation. I discuss these views below.

'I'm not sure that you can call it a glass ceiling'

Of the nine people who were cautious in their responses about the glass ceiling, there were three main opinions expressed. The first was about how procedural fairness is largely in place and that the individuals concerned did not feel there were barriers in their own way. At the same time they could identify issues that have had, or could have, unfair and gendered impacts. The second and overlapping theme was expressed by those working within schools where women dominate both as academic staff and as students. In this instance there were more subtle issues that they saw at play that served to reinforce male advantage rather than place barriers in women's paths as such. A third opinion, expressed by two people, was that the situation is changing and that while they may have agreed about the glass ceiling in the recent past, they believed there was little that currently prevented women's progression.

'There are no barriers for me but I can see how it happens'

Four people talked about how they found it difficult to identify a glass ceiling but that they could see how it has happened, how it might happen in future or how the question was too related to broad structural issues about women's gendered career journey to simply talk about a glass ceiling within an organisational context. One respondent talked about how she felt that she had never been held back by gender but continued to be angry about the appointment of many men to Professorial positions who she believed were incompetent. '*They couldn't profess their way out of a paper bag*'. At the same time, she had witnessed highly competent women who had been knocked back in their applications for promotion due to a failure to value high-level administrative contributions in favour of research outcomes. Within the same theme, another pointed to the gendered impact of policies that encourage competition and individualism over collegiality such as the workloads policy and the RAI. Her view was that, '*there is a lot about these policies that is just not going to work for women*'. What she meant was that women, at least in her school, were reluctant to 'play the game' and put their own interests over those of students or the broader interests of the school. As such, they were less well positioned for promotion. Two others talked about how they didn't necessarily see a glass ceiling but that gendered career paths and gendered attitudes to work were likely to hold women back in their prospects for promotion. One talked about how senior positions remained a male domain and this was largely an outcome of their greater ability to self-promote than women.

'It's difficult to see it in operation in my school'

Three of the interviewees worked in schools that are dominated by women both as students and academic staff. These people found it difficult to apply the concept of the glass ceiling within their own contexts particularly when the field had grown from a vocational rather than an academic base. One view expressed was that the interviewee's particular school did not conform to the dominant model of the academic career and so it was difficult to pin down specific and gendered barriers to promotion given all of the other conditions in operation. At the same time, however, she felt that men within the school potentially have an advantage, sheerly by virtue of being male within a female dominated environment. This was complex, however, and age was also an important factor:

I think that younger men are more likely to be perceived as shit hot than if you are a middle-aged woman. You are just expected to be competent. But if a young man is competent well that's surprising! People get really excited when they see a competent young man.

Such a view reinforces the idea that dominant concepts of leadership are, at least in part, embodied in a masculine form as elaborated by Sinclair (2005). Simply being female locates the individual outside of the dominant frame of reference as to what leadership actually is with the effect of marginalising women. Overall, each of those who expressed the views above could see how the glass ceiling can and does operate, but it is a concept not directly applicable to their particular work contexts.

'Things are changing'

Two people felt that the glass ceiling would be an appropriate concept up until recently, but they believed that the situation was changing. One worked within a field that had been traditionally male dominated but had watched women's representation progressively increase. Coupled with the fact that this is a new field of academic study, the possibilities for promotion are actually expanding for women in a way that does not exist in other fields. Consequently the interviewee felt that, while barriers existed in other areas, it was not the case for her or for women working in her area.

Another believed that the Women in Leadership course and the appointment of a female Vice Chancellor was evidence that VU had '*stepped up to the mark*' around women in promotion and that there was lots to show that women were being encouraged in leadership. At the same time, '*if you asked me two years ago I would have answered differently*'.

Overall, the concept of the glass ceiling was difficult to apply for nine of the interviewees for several reasons. This was mainly due to the understanding that procedural fairness is largely in place, that their individual experience is one that is not held back by gendered barriers and that the gender balance within specific fields is changing. At the same time, however, they did not reject the term and could see how the glass ceiling has been or continues to be in operation in very subtle forms. There were only two who rejected the concept as something that was about gender.

'There are barriers but not just for women'

There were two respondents who believed that there were organisational constraints and barriers to progression but this had little to do with gender. One of the respondents felt constrained by poor management practices by women themselves. The issue, as she understood it, was about barriers being in place for 'tall poppies':

... those who have been ostracised across the university are those who have had the ideas, who want to move forward at a pace and they're the people who have either left or who have been pushed aside. It's more tall poppies than it is a glass ceiling for women.

The other person who expressed similar views believed that the problem was as much about being an assertive person as well as having other attributes rather than it simply being about gender. Her feeling was that others found her image threatening and that, in the context of a school that lacked cohesion, her style and manner contributed to her marginalisation and lack of recognition.

The glass ceiling in summary

Overall, the idea of the glass ceiling was a problematic concept even though more than half of the respondents were clear that there are gendered barriers to progression. With a couple of exceptions, however, the glass ceiling is not seen as an impenetrable barrier. Furthermore, the processes that serve to hold women back are still in evidence but are complex. The major barriers identified are largely supported by the literature and these include the continued incidence of sex discrimination, unfair work allocations and the flow-on effects of policies that treat men and women as if they are the same. Similarly, there were many who found the concept difficult to apply, particularly in those disciplines that have a dominance of women. Gender, in itself, is seen as too enmeshed in other factors such as age and organisational politics to be the one explanatory factor for those who are advantaged or disadvantaged in terms of promotional opportunities.

The final set of questions related to EEO policy and the extent to which the organisation supported women's progression within the organisation. The following section reports on this.

Equal Employment Opportunity and its relevance

Interviewees were asked about their awareness of EEO policy, the extent to which it supports their career progression and how it might be strengthened to support them both individually and in general in aspirations for promotion. The following section initially reports on their responses about their awareness and perceptions of the relevance of EEO policy and practice within VU.

What EEO means and awareness of its implementation

When asked about EEO, there were four respondents who had highly specialised knowledge of EEO legislation, the mechanisms through which EEO is implemented at VU and were involved in teaching or research in the area. Overall, however, there was general awareness of EEO as a set of principles, that the university had policies in place, that there was an Equity Unit to deal with equity policy and most were familiar with VU's officer responsible for staff equity. In practical terms, the greatest impact that EEO strategies have had was around the implementation of a Women in Leadership program. Fourteen had attended the program and the rest had at least considered going. Two people had been representatives on their faculty equity committees and one had completed the EEO online training program. One person had sought support from the Equity Unit in a case of discrimination against the university and one had received funding for research through an equity research program. One person saw equity as being more relevant to student issues than in relation to staffing. Overall, there was general awareness of EEO and a few had a detailed knowledge.

The Women in Leadership course attracted the greatest commentary given that it is a current program and had been running for several years prior to the interviews. As noted in Chapter Five, this is a structured program that concentrates on various aspects of leadership and each participant is assigned a mentor from across the university. For a number of people, the program had been transformative and prompted a complete rethinking of their understanding of leadership, their positions in the university and their potential opportunities. As commented earlier, this program seemed to be of particular benefit to those born overseas and particularly for those whose first language is not English. Being assigned a mentor who was encouraging and helpful was of particular benefit, prompting people to consider promotion where previously they had believed this was not an option.

There was a general faith that procedural fairness is in place. No one suggested that EEO is not important as part of the governance infrastructure. At the same time, however, there was considerable cynicism about the extent to which EEO addresses gender equity, the interests that are served in the implementation of EEO and the extent to which EEO is effective in actually addressing equity issues.

Limitations of EEO

Twelve of the interviewees were critical of the extent to which EEO was effective in addressing gender equity within the university. There were three major themes to this. The major comment related to the extent to which EEO is effectively ‘cancelled out’ due to the combined impacts of higher education reform and the seemingly incessant implementation of new policies that are handed down by university administration. The second major theme of comment was about the effectiveness and intent of the Women in Leadership program. The third comment was about interests that are served through EEO policy and practice.

EEO is cancelled out

Five of the interviewees were critical of the extent to which EEO is effective in the context of broader conditions in operation. The major point made was that academics are currently overwhelmed by policy changes and that it was impossible for these to be implemented with any real effect given the scale of the changes and the limited number of people available to implement them. One person made the comment that the university is in a crisis of change and that every new initiative gets ‘lost in the wash’. Gender equity is one casualty of this:

... all the accountabilities and all of the changes and all of the restructures have actually outweighed or put aside general gender issues. I think people are ‘punch-drunk’ from living in that – particularly women – and I think it’s a crisis of morale ...

In a related theme, three people made the comment that while there are no problems with EEO policy in itself, it sits alongside a gamut of other new policies that are ineffectively implemented:

If you look on our website, the policies look terrific. But there is no match which actually takes place. Because policies are written at one level and they expect that it will ‘ripple’ – it’s going to ‘roll out’ – ‘roll out’! Nothing ‘rolls out’. They go and sit at these meetings and they say it’s rolled out now. And I think, ‘who’s rolling this one out’? They say, ‘it’s mature now, and it’s going to walk’.

Others made similar comments but believed that the effect of other policy was more insidious. Again, while EEO policy is fine in principle, this is not the case for other policy directives that are actually responsible for generating new and escalating issues. Examples included workloads policy, workforce renewal policy, the RAI, international student policy and the ways in which there is inequity in who is given the chance to deliver teaching and research at offshore campuses. The understanding is that there is little cross-referencing between new policy development and their equity impacts thereby rendering EEO irrelevant in the face of emerging policy compliance demands.

Overall, a major opinion is that EEO is effectively marginalised and rendered ineffective in the context of larger policy changes. The second major set of comments made was around the implementation of the Women and Leadership program. As discussed, 14 of the interviewees had been recent participants in this which was their major practical experience of EEO strategy.

Women in leadership – ‘you too can be a pretend man’

In a theme similar to the above, only two people were clearly damning of the Women in Leadership program. Most believed it was a generally positive initiative but were critical of the way it was implemented or were cynical about the purposes it served the university. Three people said something to the effect of, ‘it was of limited usefulness’, ‘not helpful’ or ‘mediocre’ in its structure and effectiveness. In a related theme, three others commented that the course was irrelevant and real leadership experience comes from actual engagement in the operations of the university. Another set of comments was made about the matching of mentors to program participants. Not all matches were useful and there was a sense of matching being a very ‘artificial’ arrangement when in fact it should be built into school operations.

The final theme within these comments was about the intent of the program. Three people commented on how the course was focused on changing women rather than helping them to be valued within the organisation. In essence, the course was flawed in its assumption that there is no difference between the opportunities of men and women in the promotion process. The effect is, as one person put it:

... when we have those sessions – and people say there is no difference between men and women – he seems to be saying that anyone can enter this. But what ‘this’ is doesn’t shift. It’s fixed. There are these things and we are completely transparent – but

it's saying 'everyone can be like us'. It's like the notion of the brother. You too can be like us. You too can be a pretend man.

One person, more mildly suggested that, while the program was 'okay', she had the sense that the program was more about the university 'ticking a box' in relation to being seen to be doing the right thing rather than actually trying to generate any real change. Two others were less kind and both used the term 'farcical' to describe their view of the program. Both meant different things when they said this. One was clear that the program was irrelevant to how she would gain any substantial career development that would support her academic career goals. The other was referring to what she believes is a cynical exercise in the university's self-protection against claims of discrimination. This comment leads to the final theme regarding the limitations of EEO and this was about the extent to which EEO is used as a protection for sex discriminatory practice.

EEO as a protection from accepting liability

Two of the interviewees have been victims of sex discrimination with traumatic consequences. One of these women had successfully taken a claim against the university to the Equal Opportunity Commission. While she won the claim, this did not change the discriminatory behaviour and her career has been significantly marred by continued bullying and harassment within her school. Her perspective is that the university fought against her claim rather than supported her in eliminating the discrimination. The second person was the victim of bullying by senior management, again with traumatic consequences. In her case, however, no legal recourse was taken. This was because to do so would in effect 'add insult to injury' and potentially make her working life worse than it was. The other related reason was that she believed it was too difficult to prove that the behaviour she suffered could be proven to be bullying – a step she was not prepared to take in the context of her low morale as well as broader family issues relating to ill health.

Given this background, both interviewees were highly cynical about the way in which the university 'hides behind' EEO policy as a means to avoid liability. Both had different perspectives, however. One of these people could not see how EEO policy could change the practices of key members of senior management. This stemmed from her belief that EEO complaints processes were effectively useless and that to use them would require putting the onus of proof on the victim. The second person held a similar view as a result of her experience but was harsher in her condemnation. She saw the failure of EEO as being a direct outcome of what she describes as endemic corruption and that EEO, as well as any other

policy change, will do little to change practices when there are such serious problems with university management and governance:

I think it's just a management tool. I think that EEO is only any use if you have a management structure that's on the right wavelength and it's not! I think management looks at it as something that's imposed on us and you have to do it. [Their attitude is] ... how can we control that to minimise its impact or help us?

While the comments made above come from two people who have had a particularly traumatic experience, the comments are not unaligned with others who see that the problem with EEO lies not with the policies themselves, nor with those who have the role of implementation. The problem lies with senior management cultures, higher education reform and the limited number of people on staff to implement the incessant waves of policy change. The final set of questions in relation to EEO was about how women might be better supported in promotion to leadership positions. The following section reports on the major themes of the responses.

EEO and how it should be strengthened

Ideas about how EEO should be strengthened to improve women's movement into leadership positions overlapped considerably. The major theme was around improved management systems linked to performance targets. The second theme was around the need for widespread cultural change and changes in policy, not to EEO but to its broader policy context. There were also a number of specific suggestions about the need for structured mentoring, better child care and the provision of part-time work opportunities.

Management and performance targets

Most suggestions in relation to how EEO could be strengthened were around the need for management practices that were attentive to, and supportive of women's career aspirations. Even for those who work within cohesive schools, a major disincentive to progression is an outcome of 'benign neglect' with little encouragement or resources to support career progression. While there were some who were sympathetic to those who occupy Head of School positions as being overburdened, this is an issue in itself preventing active support of women for promotion.

Three people spoke about the need for management to identify and counsel individual staff members about how they might achieve promotion and provide opportunities to enable them to undertake the kind of activities necessary to build the portfolio to meet promotion criteria.

An example is matching early career researchers with experienced researchers to gain the necessary experience to produce research outcomes. Another person suggested that the implementation of SPDP provided the mechanism by which to do this. Another was concerned that within her school, the appointment of Heads of Schools from academic ranks was in itself problematic. While they might have high-level academic skills, they are poorly equipped in the role of managers.

The related theme was about the need for targets and that this needed to be tied to managers' performance outcomes. This was the only way to ensure that the contribution made by competent women would be valued. Existing processes systematically undervalued women due to equal expectations that ignored women's different histories, values and care responsibilities. One person was clear that an element of coercion is necessary to ensure that women's increased representation actually happens. She likened the situation to other areas of equity policy where, despite extensive policy development, unless someone was held accountable, nothing would happen. Another person talked about the need for affirmative action on the basis that it had never really been implemented to any effect. Her argument was linked to the need for broader cultural change and greater diversity at senior levels:

I think affirmative action is brilliant. If we have all these fairly mediocre men, I don't mind being a mediocre woman ... instead of being all really stern and serious about 'rigorous process' which stops woman and people of colour, I'd rather see more women and people of colour actually changing things. I know I'm being playful but I kind of mean it actually.

Overall, the major means for strengthening support was identified as the need for improved management process that is tied to performance targets. The other major theme of response was the need for cultural change and a change in direction in higher education policy. Nobody believed that it would make much difference to the effectiveness of EEO if the broader context in which it is implemented is not changed.

Not policy but reform

Some strong comments were made about the need for complete reform of VU specifically and the higher education sector more generally. One person believed that the only solution was to close down the university. Another believed that a major reform of the people and the university governance structures was the only way to support equity. Another said that a major shift in Commonwealth higher education policy needed to occur before she would contemplate moving into a more senior role (and she was being encouraged to do so). The

broader point that was made was that there needed to be substantial reform in order for the necessary cultural changes to occur at a more local level.

Overall, there were six people who believed that changes to EEO itself would have little effect unless the broader policy context and accompanying cultural change were to take place. In addition to these comments, a number of specific suggestions were made. These included changes to specific policies that impact on EEO outcomes, the need for mentoring that is embedded into the management of schools, improved child care and real opportunities for part-time work.

Mentoring, work-life and collaboration

Four of the interviewees talked about the need for mentoring as a means of supporting and encouraging women's aspirations for promotion. While three of these people had been assigned mentors through the Women in Leadership course, this was seen as overly artificial and contrived and no substitute to working alongside those within one's own field to give guidance about career progression. This suggestion overlaps with comments about more effective management.

Another three comments were made about the need for improved support for managing child care. Only one of the respondents was the mother of a preschool-age child so it is not surprising that there were few comments about child care. Her experience, however, was that there was not adequate child care provision and that she was forced to use care that was inconveniently located and limited her available working time. Two others talked about the need to make part-time work more widely available in order to support women to have a continuous career and manage periods when care responsibilities are most intense.

Another suggestion that filtered through the interviews but was only made specific in one instance was about the need for change to workloads policy and the RAI. As she understood it, both policies discourage collaboration and support competition between colleagues. Men, she believed, were far better positioned to compete as individuals and so changes need to be made to ensure that rewards for collaborative work were put in place.

Overall ...

The means of strengthening EEO were largely seen to be embedded within broader higher education structures. The system, as it progressively changes through waves of reform, is effective in cancelling out the potential impact of EEO as the impact of the reforms are felt down the line in overburdened management and a lack of support or encouragement for

women's career progression. The respondents were clearly asking for more attentive management and systems and processes that would encourage, rather than discourage, career progression. These measures need to be tied to performance targets. In addition, there is a need for better provision to support women to manage work and life responsibilities to ensure that women's careers have greater continuity.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is to report, analyse and discuss the interview findings that relate to if, how and to what extent gendered barriers operate to slow down women's progress to promotion. It also aims to do the same thing regarding questions about EEO, its relevance, effectiveness and how it might be strengthened to support women's academic career progress more effectively. There are some clear themes that emerged through the interviews in relation to each of the core interview questions. The discussion above has attempted to explore these themes and draw together the responses from each of the interviewees without losing a sense of the diversity of stories that each of the women told through the interviews.

Most of the interviewees believe that barriers exist. While a range of opinions was expressed, these barriers are subtle in their operation, are rarely perpetuated through conscious action or intent, and are patchy in how they are operationalised across the university. The character of each disciplinary area influenced the responses to this question and the opinion of each interviewee was influenced by their location within the university. At the same time, there were few who could comfortably talk about a 'glass ceiling' perse. Rather, there were both old and new conditions that operate to support male advantage as opposed to the direct imposition of barriers to women.

Questions about EEO showed that the impact and value of EEO were seen as relatively marginal in the current context. While some had directly benefited from EEO strategic initiatives and almost all implicitly recognised its value, a major theme was that EEO is rendered impotent in the current climate. Largely, it was the sheer weight of higher education policy change, and poor management systems and processes that served to render EEO ineffective and lacking impact on the real conditions of work and opportunities for progression. A small number of respondents believed that EEO was only enacted as a risk management tool as opposed to serving its intended purpose to eliminate discrimination and promote fairness in terms of equal employment opportunity. Overall, the barriers to women that are identified in the literature are seen by the interviewees to be in operation at VU. Similarly, EEO is perceived as having declining influence in the context of rapid policy change and declining working conditions. The following section draws this discussion to

conclusion as a preface to Chapter Eight, which draws from across the case study data to respond to the core questions of this study.

Chapter Eight: Explaining unequal outcomes for women

Introduction

The previous chapters provide the evidence I use to respond to the core questions posed by this research. Chapter Five provides a history of Victoria University as a university, its characteristics and how it has evolved in the context of higher education reform since 1992. Chapter Six goes on to report on the findings of interviews conducted with academic women employed at Level C at VU. In Chapter Seven, I discuss the findings of the second part of the interviews which are about women's perception of the operation of a 'glass ceiling', defined as the existence of additional barriers that operate to prevent women's progression to leadership roles. I also report on findings that relate to perceptions of EEO and its perceived effectiveness in supporting women's career progression.

Drawing on this evidence, this chapter responds to the core questions of this research. That is, why does the transition from Level C to Level D continue to be a barrier to women? Second, are women holding back from progression to Level D just when they have the qualifications and experience to apply? As discussed in Chapter One, these two related questions correspond broadly with exploring the nature of, and links between structure and agency in the reproduction and transformation of gendered patterns of employment. The first question explores the nature of the structural conditions that operate to limit women's progression. The second question focuses on women's individual decision making processes in relation to their career aspirations. The purpose of asking both is to reveal how individual actions combine to reproduce and/or transform structures that, in turn, create the possibilities for individual action. In line with critical realist theory, the questions are based on the understanding that, in order to understand the nature of women's under-representation, neither the role of agency nor structure can be understood in isolation. Similarly, neither agency nor structure has analytic priority. It is these and broader theoretical and methodological considerations that flow from critical realist theory that shape my response to the questions. On the basis of findings, I argue that gendered processes continue to generate structural barriers, both old and new, to women's progression within higher education employment, which in turn create the possibilities for individual decision making. While these operate at all levels of transition, they are particularly intense at the point of transition from Level C to D. The purpose of this chapter is to explain this conclusion by drawing on the evidence to discuss how structural conditions operate to shape the career aspirations and decision making of academic women employed at Level C.

Structure and agency

As noted in Chapter Two, there are three major themes in the literature that provide a focus for how women's location in higher education is shaped. These include women's unequal responsibility for care, institutional barriers and the broader conditions generated by globalisation, neo-liberal informed higher education reform and new managerialism. My view is that each of these conditions is important in understanding women's career aspirations and opportunities and the following discussion is structured around these themes. First I talk about 'inertia' which includes those broader structural factors, including gendered career histories and care responsibilities that serve to shape the nature of participation and slow down women's career development both before and during their entrance into academic employment. The second area of discussion is about institutional conditions and how these generate gendered opportunities within VU. The third area relates to the broader structural conditions generated by globalisation, trends in higher education reform and new managerialism.

Inertia

This section explores all of those factors that operate to slow down women's momentum toward career progression. I use the term 'inertia' as it provides a metaphor that rests on a central concept from Newtonian laws of motion that refers to the principle that 'an object in motion tends to stay in motion with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted upon by an unbalanced force' (Newton, Motte et al. 1729 p. 72). My argument, in common with much of the literature, is that there are gendered structural forces that mean that women's career advancement is slowed down compared to most men. I draw on the research findings to elaborate under the headings of gendered career histories and unequal responsibilities for care.

Gendered career histories

The fact that the academic career path is intolerant of non-standard career paths is well acknowledged in the literature. By 'non-standard', I refer to those career trajectories that depart from the traditional academic model that means the completion of an undergraduate degree, Honours and a PhD in linear progression early in an individual's career before progressing to a junior academic position or post-doctoral fellowship. This pathway is the traditionally male version of entrance and progression and the career histories of women rarely replicate this.

Women tend to enter academic employment later than men within fields that are traditionally female. This is identified as one critical and initial factor that contributes to women's slow

progression (White 2001; Probert 2005; EOWA 2008b). This was certainly the case for those interviewed for this study. With only one exception, the pathway to academe was circuitous and, in most cases, arrived at via initial training in a narrow range of traditionally female occupations including primary or secondary school teaching, nursing, welfare or social work or administration. Those who had more expansive early training interestingly were born overseas in socialist government and education systems less characterised by gender segregation than is the case in Australia. For those women, however, entrance to academe was delayed by the migration experience, the need to acquire English language, the need to gain recognition for and/or convert qualifications according to the Australian higher education system and/or family responsibilities.

The reasons for the interviewees' early career decision making also fits with those factors that are identified throughout the literature (Aveling 2002; Bailyn 2003; Subramaniam 2003; Blickenstaff 2005; Cross & Linehan 2006; Lyonette 2008). Many just drifted into the main traditionally female options of teacher training, nursing and administration due to a perceived lack of other options, inadequate and gendered careers advice, the gendered expectations of families and/or convenience and accessibility. The quote below is illustrative of the seemingly random nature of the early career decision making processes made by many of the interviewees:

This option [teaching] – while I wasn't particularly excited about it – really I chose it because it was something that I hadn't decided that I didn't want to do. It was available and there was a studentship. I think that's pretty fair to say at that point. A lot of students who come into the Bachelor of Education say 'I've always wanted to be a teacher'. Well, that wasn't me.

This channelling into traditional career paths is resonant with Lawson's (2007 p. 146) ideas about how gendered processes work. As he argues, 'society is constituted by a set of positions ... into which agents, as it were, slot'. Most of the women in this study, in the early stages of their career, simply 'slotted' into positions that were seen as a natural progression due to the individual's age, gender, class and ethnicity. Society broadly, and government policy more specifically, made such options possible, and with no active resistance from the individual concerned, most of the women progressed in socially defined gender appropriate roles and educational pathways.

Not all were passive in taking such directions and there were those who talked about how, through the combined influence of class, gender and ethnicity, they had been actively

discouraged from pursuing alternative career goals. For one person from a migrant family, the expectation was that she should be a ‘good wife’ and not change the status quo. For another, the option to pursue chemistry was shifted to nursing due to the combined influence of geography and that to study the non-traditional option of chemistry would require moving interstate. This was seen as untenable given she was young and reliant on family who encouraged her to pursue more traditional options from home where she would be safe. For a few, a working class background meant that they were counselled not to aim for careers that were perceived as being beyond reach:

I actually wanted to join the diplomatic corps but I was laughed at. Two other careers I had thought of: one was journalism and one was design. So any of those three careers is what I would have preferred to have done [rather than teaching]. I got [a] scholarship, through a union member, a worker. He'd left a scholarship for the children of impoverished workers so I got that scholarship. It was a fantastic scholarship but it wasn't enough. So I did that. There was an opportunity (at another university) – they had a briefing about moving over into the diplomatic corps but I was so conservative and so diligent – if I had a contract to do x, I would do that and honour it – and so I had a bond – I served my bond.

This quote is illustrative of the kind of resistance, both direct and indirect, that the interviewees experienced when aspirations did not fit neatly with those roles designated appropriate to the individual’s station in life, so to speak. The pressures to conform to gender, class and ethnically appropriate roles are strong and a major influence on career decision making. These pressures are not all external but are internalised through a sense of obligation and duty. Whether or not this has changed since 20 to 40 years ago when the women in this study commenced their careers is not something I can comment on from the evidence I have from this study. The vertical segregation of the labour market, however, suggests that while some changes have occurred, the changes have not been great enough to shift gendered occupational structures and the gendered pay gap that goes with it (S4W 2004).

The effect of these choices varied across the interviewees and cannot be seen clearly as positive or negative or as closing doors to career advancement. For some, these choices ultimately provided the pathway into academic employment in those fields that were opening up within the higher education system due to reform and expansion. This was particularly the case in fields such as education, nursing, social work and business studies. For others, it meant a wasted and unpleasant delay to commencing an alternative career path:

Both my parents wanted me to be a nurse and I only really stayed in Year 12 because I was too young to start nursing training ... it was something that my parents wanted. After ... nursing, I decided to run away. The nursing experience was long enough. You were locked in at night and they still wore those starched things with buttons on them and so on – awful.

For the example above, the effect of this diversion was harsh but relatively short. Others were taken in directions that took many years from which to change. For all, however, the implication has been that entering academic employment was later than it could have been with many entering well into their thirties. Such a delay is significant in the process of building the experience and research profile necessary for successful application to Level D. While it could be argued that similar processes operate to delay many men and the combined influences of class and ethnicity operate similarly, the key difference is that potential career options considered appropriate for young women were and still are relatively narrow (Pyke 1992; Lyall 1993; Bagilhole 2002a; S4W 2006). To go with this, there are multiple and subtle influences that combine to steer women gently in their ‘place’. Pressures about not leaving home to study, for example, are more likely to come into play for young women, particularly for those from cultural backgrounds that may restrict girls’ freedom. For the women in this study, early career choices have made a major contribution to slow progress to seniority in higher education. These processes also combine with unequal responsibility for care.

Unequal care responsibilities

As noted in Chapter Two, I adopt a broad definition of care referring to the time devoted to ensuring that the physical and emotional needs of family members are met. My usage also includes care of self, colleagues and students. Again, unequal responsibility for care is identified as one of the key factors that contribute to the delays experienced by women in their careers (Folbre & Bittman 2004; Craig 2005; Brooks 2006; Cross & Linehan 2006; Leahy & Doughney 2006; Pocock, Skinner et al. 2007). A theme from the interviews was that this is one of the key reasons for the delay in progress and those with a relative absence of care responsibilities were much more likely to aspire to promotion. This aligns with other research that emphasises the importance of care in generating unequal employment outcomes (Pocock 2003; Craig 2005; Probert 2005) for women and my findings similarly show that responsibility for care, in all of its manifestations, is a major consideration in women’s career advancement. In order to clarify, I discuss this in terms of care of children and families, care of students and colleagues, and care of self.

Care for children and families

As I discuss in Chapter Six, my group of interviewees differed from Probert's (2005) study of women at UNSW and from the national results that show that academic women are far less likely to live with a partner than is the general population. The women in my group were, with the exception of three, all living with a partner and all of these partnerships were long-term relationships (at least five years). Fifteen of the group were mothers and nine cared for children of school age or younger. In line with all that is known about the impact of care, the care of children is a major influence on the possibilities for career development particularly for mothers. This was no less the case for the women I interviewed. At the same time, depending on individual circumstances, these responsibilities were largely manageable. In only one case did care responsibilities for children act as a clear blockage to career prospects. The main effect, however, was to delay progression. The following quote is from someone who has two school-age children and illustrates the daily impact of children on building the capital necessary for promotion:

For lots of men, and for some women as well, I work with a lot of women here whose children have grown up or they don't have any – surprisingly so actually – and if you don't have any children, your life is different. Some used to say to me that they'd finish their work at 5 o'clock and then they would just go home and start work on their PhD and work till midnight. That is so not my life – just soooooo not my life!

For four of the group, responsibility for care was either shared equally or assumed primarily by the father as was the case for the interviewee quoted above. For these women, having children did not cancel out ideas for advancement but it was a major constraint. For more than half of the group of mothers (eight of the 15), however, care of children was a significant barrier. It did not mean that they stopped working full-time while their children were young, but it prevented a singular focus on work. This was perceived widely as a choice but clearly a fairly constrained one and one that generally did not apply to men with similar household circumstances:

I feel that many of my male colleagues, although they have families, they have more opportunity to devote themselves to work only and the wife takes care of the rest. In our case, I'm talking about my female colleagues and myself – we do what we do at work and then we put on Mum's hat and we do everything else as well. I don't know whether to attain a certain level in a place like this, you have to make a choice between job or family. I wouldn't want to think that and I would certainly not make a choice like that. I

would not pursue my academic career to the exclusion of my family life and my life as such, I wouldn't do that.

For the three women who were seriously constrained by child care responsibilities, this was due to having partners who were largely absent due to their own work responsibilities, an absence of extended family support and/or health management issues. For one interviewee, care responsibilities ruled out any prospects for promotion. Without a PhD, with a partner who is absent for large parts of the year, and heavy teaching responsibilities, she believed she would never find the time to complete a doctorate necessary for promotion. The other two also had absent partners but were managing health issues as well and both still desired to have another child. At the same time, they aspired to promotion but wrestled with the competing desires for both a career and a family. Both could not see how they could manage that. A compounding problem for both was the scarcity of quality child care that supported their working lives.

Responsibility for care of family members was not confined to those with younger children, but across the group. Exceptions were the four who identify as lesbians. While each has people in their lives they care for, they were all more likely to be the recipients of care and none spoke about having burdensome care responsibilities. Almost all of the other women had significant care responsibilities for adult children, partners, extended family members and/or parents at least at points in their working lives that similarly impacted on their capacity to progress. Six of the group talked about particularly challenging events that created major disruption arising from illnesses and/or accidents that meant they were required to care for family members. This group were all in their fifties and so were caught in the 'sandwich generation' with the need to care for family members both older and younger. For at least three of this group, the financial pressures that this generated meant that plans for retirement were significantly delayed. Further, the responsibility for care was clearly not shared with the men in their lives. In fact, the men generated much of the need for care due to having illnesses such as heart attacks, and the women in the study assuming responsibility for the care of their partner's parents as they aged.

For most of my group, unequal responsibility for care has clearly contributed to delays in career progression. This is not the case for all, but at the same time, is crushing for some. It is also clearly a factor that affects women more than it does men, which fits with the national data on responsibility for child care (Pocock 2003; Craig 2006b). Women's 'choice' to care is very limited. While there are some exceptions, men generally do not compromise their own career interests to share or take primary responsibility for care. Unequal responsibility for

care is a further mechanism in operation that shapes women's capacity to engage in career progression.

Self-care

Another major factor for some in the group was the inability to properly care for oneself in the context of broader care responsibilities and excessive workloads. This was the case for six of the women whose aspirations for promotion were prevented due to health management issues, which for at least three of the cases, was a direct outcome of excessive workloads, the experience of sex discrimination and/or workplace bullying. One of the women talked about how she still suffers chronic back pain due to coming back to work too soon after having a child. Another suffers multiple and disabling health problems that she believes are directly related to stress caused by bullying and discrimination. Another now manages depression due to an experience of being bullied by a senior manager. Another person is working part-time to manage an illness but realises that this period of part-time work will impact on her capacity to generate the research output necessary for promotion which she earnestly aspires to. These stories suggest that excessive academic workloads are generating some considerable occupational health and safety issues for women who have care responsibilities.

Overall, the nature of academic work requires good physical and mental health to survive the workloads and deliver the outcomes that are required. This is the case for both men and women. Women, however, are less likely to receive care, are more likely to be responsible for care for others and have the additional physical burden of childbirth. Sex discrimination and bullying are also more likely to be experienced by women (Thornton 2005). As a result, women are more likely to need time out to recover, but there are penalties for this. Time out means lower research output and therefore less chance of promotion. Combined, constraints on the ability to manage self-care often delays or halts women's career progression altogether.

Pastoral care and collegiate care

While it is unproblematic enough to argue that women have unequal responsibility for the care of families and communities, it is less easy to establish that women do more of the care work within their roles as teachers and faculty members. However, Probert (2005) argues that women are significantly more likely to be engaged in pastoral care, mentoring and administration than men who are more likely to spend that time doing career-building ventures such as organising conferences.

My research supports this finding and the interviewees from this study generally perceive men to be less likely to compromise their research and career-building ventures than are women. The extent to which this view was expressed was patchy, however, and while interviewees in some disciplinary areas thought that responsibilities are allocated evenly, there were definite pockets where men's neglect of student and collegiate care was seen to be a very real gender inequality and women pick up the responsibility for student and faculty welfare and administration at the expense of their own career development:

I think women have been more or less selfless. They devote their time to teaching and administration – all our administration roles in our school are held by women – where the men get on with their research. And they're better at – I was going to say network – but it's more than that. It's sort of 'I'll do this for you if you do this for me'. They're better at doing that and getting favours and getting their name in print that way in any shape or form than what women are.

The quote above overlaps with a discussion later about institutional barriers and micro-politics, particularly in relation to playing 'the game' which was a major theme in the research. The main point about this was that, for a number of the interviewees, women were seen to be more likely to engage in care work in the very broad sense, irrespective of individual aspirations. Again, this is a factor that delayed career progression. While women are engaged in pastoral care and administration, valuable time is lost for research and professional networking that is more likely to build the necessary capital to be successful for promotion.

Inertia overall ...

The point of the discussion above is that women's location in academic career progression is clearly shaped by broader social forces and institutional arrangements. These operate to ensure that first women are disadvantaged and delayed in their careers by being channelled primarily into a narrow range of education and training options that prepare for traditionally female occupations. This has the effect of slowing down entrance to academic employment, or being channelled into areas that are traditionally female and lower paid. Once within academe, women are further slowed down by responsibilities for care of families, students and departments with the further implication that there is limited capacity to look after themselves as well as concentrate on activities that will lead to career progression. While these findings do not depart from other findings from across the relevant literature, they are central to understanding why women's progress is sluggish to advancement to senior levels. They are also important in the face of widely held views that women's labour market position

is largely an outcome of individual choice (Hakim 2000). An aim of the discussion above is to show how the parameters of choice are highly gendered. The strength of social forces generated by the organisation of families, education and training systems and the combined influence of class, ethnicity and gender all merge to narrow the possibilities for choice. While these are broad and socially generated mechanisms, they operate in concert with gender relations within organisations and institutional arrangements more specifically. The following section discusses how this is manifested within VU.

Institutional barriers

The purpose of the discussion above is to show how women are often disadvantaged before starting an academic career and then further slowed down by responsibilities for care. These make a major contribution to the sluggish career progression of many women and it was clear from my findings that institutional barriers also contribute to women's slow progression. My understanding of how those barriers operate aligns with that of Burton (1997) and Thornton (2008), which is that they are generated by organisational systems and practices that set the masculine model of academic work as the norm and benchmark for performance. These barriers are not rigid, however, and they change as institutional conditions change. EEO strategies, for example, have and do address particular barriers to women's progress and generate circumstances where women's opportunities expand. I don't contest that procedural fairness in terms of the allocation of work and promotion procedures is largely in place despite evidence that direct sex discrimination sometimes occurs. It is this procedural fairness, however, that is the problem given that it operates to compound men's relative advantage in career progression. Equal treatment, as discussed in Chapter One, works against the generation of equal outcomes when gender differences position women disadvantageously to start with. As an outcome, the gendered systems in operation are enduring and as a result, academic systems tend to support and reward those things that men do well. In Lawson's (2007) terms, women are positioned subordinate to men. The purpose of this section is to show how this occurs at VU within the broad themes of management, gendered micro-politics and recruitment and promotion processes.

Management

As put forward in Chapter Six, according to the interviewees, management cultures and policy regimes in place at VU are highly discouraging to academic progression. This was not a universal experience and many spoke about how they had been the recipients of considerable support and encouragement. Whether or not this support was available, however, was largely a matter of luck and there was widespread agreement that policy implementation

and management at a senior university level generates a particularly harsh and difficult environment in which to work. There were also significant local management issues identified at the departmental, school or faculty level. The issues were also not necessarily about how they affect women but that they have gendered effects. I elaborate below under the broad headings of senior management and local management.

University policy and senior management

This section overlaps with later discussion about the impacts of higher education reform and the implementation of corporate models of governance and ‘new managerialism’. In talking about senior management, I refer to the organisational decision making that occurs at the level of Associate Dean and above. It is also inclusive of university council and the decisions that flow at this level. The main point here, however, is that senior management processes are widely seen to have generated a culture and set of processes that are at best ‘difficult’ and at worst ‘poisonous’. Again, this extended across all of the faculties but was experienced differently within different schools and departments. These opinions extended from a range of circumstances including, disillusionment with university governance, individual senior managers who were seen to be incompetent or bullying, policy implementation processes that were top-down, incessant in their implementation, time-consuming for academics and ineffective, and systems that were inadequately implemented to the detriment of students and staff. Part of this negative response arose from a round of redundancies that had been implemented the previous year. This experience had created considerable uncertainty and fear and had impacted particularly in areas in which women dominate in the Faculty of Arts. More generally it came from the constant implementation of policies that depend on implementation and compliance by academic staff:

I think that most of our practices have been ineffective. We have policies but they're never implemented. And it's just the same as everything. This university thinks – I've written a lovely policy, this is great! But there is no match with what actually takes place.

The perceived culture of bullying is a more serious problem. Again, these reports were confined to specific departments and areas but were nonetheless talked about by five of the interviewees. In one case, the bullying was attributed to one particular senior manager. More generally, it was talked about as a culture that had grown in the context of reform and rapid top-down policy change. All of these conditions affect male and female academics and not all bullies identified were men. At the same time, women are particularly vulnerable to being bullied due to their lesser seniority and the masculine character of bullying (Thornton 2004).

'Poisonous' senior management cultures are not good for anyone's career aspirations but are particularly harsh on those who have been delayed in their career progression, who are located lower within organisational hierarchies and have additional care and administrative responsibilities, which is the case for many women.

Local management

The presence of good departmental management, helpful mentors, colleagues and cohesive work environments was identified as a major source of encouragement for promotion aspirations. Where it did not exist, as was the case for most of the interviewees, aspirations for promotion were low. This section is specifically about management at a school or department level.

Comments about problematic middle management were widespread across the interviewees and ranged from relative sympathy for Heads of Schools, who were seen to have no choice but to do the best they could in very difficult conditions, to those who believed that an endemic culture of hostility flowed down to middle-management level. Only two people believed that they were actively supported in their career development and the remaining 22 were either directly discouraged or found support elsewhere. For most of the interviewees, the view was that while management was discouraging and/or ineffective, there was understanding about why this was the case due to a range of conditions. This view was shaped by the fact that six of the interviewees had previously acted in Head of School positions, positions they were happy not to be currently occupying.

Conditions that contribute to bad management included a lack of human and financial resources with which to manage or that managers were appointed on the basis of their academic achievements without the skills and experience necessary to be effective in management roles. In a related theme, there was sympathy that managers are in the invidious position of continuously having to implement poorly conceived policy change that generated conflict when actually 'rolled out'. Four interviewees expressed the view that management was deeply and unconsciously patriarchal in their practice. As such, they were unable to work collaboratively with women in the same way that they could with male academics. Three others talked about how management operated according to divisions generated by the duration of employment at VU. For those who considered themselves part of the 'old guard' and had been employed at VU prior to amalgamation, managers with shorter tenure perceived those with a longer history at VU as a threat to change. The opposite view was also expressed. Those who were relatively new to VU believed that management from the 'old guard' was resistant to new ideas and blocked opportunities for relative newcomers. Five of the

interviewees were scathing about academic management practices, which were regarded as corrupt, incompetent and/or bullying.

Overall, and with some notable exceptions, the assessment of academic management practice at VU was not complimentary and is a major consideration in women's aspirations for promotion. This is a particularly important for those at Level C as it is this level that provides the recruitment pool for roles as Head of Schools and management roles at the course coordination and Head of School level. Experience acting in these roles can lend weight to the promotion application, an opportunity that was being actively sought by three of the interviewees but they believed that they were being blocked due to interpersonal conflict and competitive relationships within the school. As mentioned, six had actually had experience in management roles with varying consequences. Two were literally devastated by the experience due to incidences of harassment and bullying effectively cancelling out any aspiration for promotion. Three others were left deeply cynical about the extent to which the contribution made to the university in management was actually valued within the university and by promotion panels. The danger of taking on such roles was 'burn-out' generated by excessive workloads, and divergence from their research interests and capacity to generate the output necessary to argue for promotion. The sixth person had tried to make the best of the situation and to 'reframe' her experience in management and administration as 'leadership' experience. Overall, most considered that appointment to a management role was detrimental to promotion aspirations. The experience of some was bullying and exploitation when working at a management level.

While the effect of discouraging managers will dampen the career aspirations of both male and female academics, the impacts were identified as gendered. One effect was a lack of management flexibility that failed to consider strategies that would encourage female academics to stay. In this case, there was a reluctance to offer part-time academic positions to women with care responsibilities in order to encourage their retention and development at lower academic levels. The outcome was that talented women were lost as they left to pursue options where they could find a balance between their family and career interests. More generally, there was no system of encouragement to support career planning. In other areas, ineffective management meant poor workload allocation with women being left with a disproportionate share of administrative and teaching responsibilities out of service to school interests. Others simply felt completely discouraged from even thinking about promotion in the belief that they would not be supported. Others believed that there was an absolute lack of support at all for their existing work, let alone for career advancement in future. When I asked one interviewee about whether or not there was any encouragement for her career

development, the response was very clear: '*Shit no! Of course not! You've got to be joking. Where would the encouragement come from?*'

Overall, ineffective management was considered a major discouraging factor to women's career aspirations. In a number of cases, this combined with gendered micro-politics, the existence of 'boys' clubs', and the centrality of 'the game', that served to marginalise women and discourage career aspirations. I discuss this in the following section.

Gendered micro-politics

A major theme raised by the interviewees was about 'the game' and women's perceptions that they were naïve about how to 'play' to the detriment of their own career progression. 'The game' is about how to effectively self-promote and gain recognition, gain entrance to networks, know how to bargain for a manageable workload that will allow research output and to access privileges and entitlements that seemingly flow to those who know how to 'play'. Largely, the 'game' was talked about as being broadly associated with gendered politics, with men generally being better at the game than women, although there is a hierarchy within women as well in relation to being 'players' or not. The idea was also associated with higher education reform where it was understood that the conditions of the 'game' were becoming harsher, increasingly individualised and competitive. These were supported by policies that encouraged individual performance within a framework of 'excellence' such as the RAI and the research funding criteria that reward those fields that can more easily demonstrate a profit in terms of research income.

In a few cases, this was closely identified with the existence of a clearly visible 'boys' club' that actively prevented women's entrance and full participation in opportunities for development and participation. This was particularly clear and insidious in one school where senior and middle-level women are a distinct minority. In other areas, it was seen to operate in a more benign but no less powerful way in several other schools where men held senior positions and actively valued their male colleagues above women. As one interviewee said, '*I'm in a [male dominated] environment and there used to be [just] two females ... I had to be twice as good in order to be recognised [and that] I wasn't just this blonde-haired person*'. In another school, it was seen to operate out of completely unconscious patriarchal values where men were only capable of being 'paternal' rather than genuinely fraternal with women.

In other areas, and in those disciplines that are female dominated, the processes at play were less easy to identify but they were about the perception that men, generally, were better able to negotiate more manageable workloads and access opportunities that would benefit their

own career. This was expressed with greater intensity by those from CALD backgrounds who felt less able to challenge authority and ‘play the system’. For others, the view was that women have a different working style that makes it uncomfortable to engage in self-promotion and act explicitly in their own interests above those of students and/or colleagues. How this plays out is seen to be complex and interviewees were reluctant to make essentialist claims about a ‘women’s style’ as opposed to men’s. At the same time, there was a widespread belief that women often contribute to unequal relationships through tendencies to minimise their own achievements and interests:

The complexity is the whole idea of how women are perceived, the extent to which they are or are not mentored – the extent to which other people take the credit for achievements or fail to give credit for achievements. But then there is the stuff that we do to ourselves. How we spend our time. I know male colleagues who will cancel lectures to write papers. Women don’t do that. We have a commitment to our students. We don’t cancel lectures unless we are dead or dying – or one of our family – that’s it. So you do put energy into your students and you’re diligent about things. Men don’t do this to the same extent that women do.

The experience of women at VU is consistent with the body of literature that shows that gendered micro-politics makes a significant, albeit subtle, contribution to unequal outcomes for women (Blackmore & Sachs 2003; Morley 2003; Morley 2006; Thornton 2008). It is the daily, largely invisible and informal actions that gradually undermine the development of a career profile. Combined with other constraints, women are relatively disadvantaged in the progress toward tangible academic achievements but also through being less recognised and ultimately less rewarded for the work they do. These processes are complex, however, and it is difficult to make generalisations about behaviours that are consistently associated with male and female behaviour. Rather, there is a subtle set of micro-politics at play that ultimately works to contribute to women’s relative disadvantage. This is not a simple game where men are the masters and women are the victims. Women contribute to how the game is played and some women are winners. There is a game, however, and an increasingly competitive one, that must be played to advance in an academic career. According to the women I talked to, they are struggling with not only how to play the game, but whether or not to play.

Recruitment and promotion processes

The perceptions of women about their prospects for, and experiences of applying for promotion were central to the interview questions. These understandings of the promotion

criteria and assessments of their chances of being successful guided decision making about the prospects and/or desirability for progression. I draw on these findings to respond to the second part of the research question, which is about whether or not women are pulling out of the promotion process when they have the experience and qualifications to be successful. Four key factors were identified as influencing aspirations, which include changing and hidden criteria. The option of promotion by external appointment processes was also discussed as being a limited option for many of the women. The fourth factor is about perceptions of what is involved, formed through either the experience of having been unsuccessful or being in the process of thinking about it.

Changing criteria

One of the major factors influencing promotion aspirations is that the criteria for promotion have progressively changed. One of the most significant changes for all academics has been the PhD as a prerequisite for appointment at Level C, which became a formal requirement in 1997. The other has been the introduction of choice for the applicant for the basis for their appointment. Until the early 2000s, a uniform set of criteria was applied where demonstrated research output was the major criteria for promotion to Level D. As explained in Chapter One, applicants can now choose whether they want to be considered for promotion in one of four categories including teaching, research, service or teaching and research. This change has been in part motivated by EEO considerations where it is understood that many academics and women in particular are more focused on teaching. The new criteria are designed to recognise and reward excellence in both teaching and the scholarship of teaching.

The compulsory requirement of a PhD has been a major influence on women's promotion aspirations at VU since the early 1990s. While this has been an imperative nationally, it has a particular meaning in new universities where the organisational history is vocational as opposed to academic. Many of the interviewees were appointed at a time of expansion during the 1990s on the basis of their professional skills and experience in new academic fields including social work, tourism and hospitality, nursing, law, education, youth work, computer programming, accounting, professional writing, electrical engineering, human movement, paramedics and so on as detailed in Chapter Six. A characteristic of these new disciplines was the lack of a research culture and academic history and this was reflected in the career histories of the interview group. Only four of the 24 interviewees had been awarded a PhD prior to their academic appointments and two were still in the process of completion. Two had given up on the idea of even trying. The remaining 16 had completed PhDs over the past 10 or so years, mostly part-time while holding down full-time academic jobs.

The completion of a PhD has been particularly difficult for some women when combined with responsibilities for care as well as their location in fields that lack a research tradition. For one interviewee, it is an impossible goal due to her responsibility for two school-age children, a heavy teaching load and a partner who is overseas for at least half of the year due to work commitments. Most, however, have succeeded but it has taken a long time due to a range of other responsibilities and events. The need to deal with various crises and major life events such as death and childbirth was not an uncommon story that delayed completion:

I started my PhD when I was pregnant which was in [the early 90s]. I had just started my PhD before I was pregnant – part-time. I hadn't done a lot of work. I had done some [but] it was still the full disaster ... there was the kid – here I was part-time and then I needed to go full-time – and I do have a partner but [his] income is very sporadic – so it took eight to nine years to complete the PhD. I actually finished in 2002–03. So that's a long time. You can't believe how long those things take. I think the idea of a PhD is modelled on the old bachelor boy.

The requirement to complete a PhD, combined with a delayed career start, engagement in a field that required professional experience prior to appointment, and the need to manage family responsibilities, has meant that many of the women are not positioned for promotion to Level D until they are in their 50s. Irrespective of the merit of a PhD as an academic performance criterion, it is one which has a particular meaning for women at this point of history in which Level C academics are located.

The other changes in promotion criteria have impacted in different ways for different women. For some, it has actually opened up opportunities through its recognition for teaching as a pathway for promotion. As discussed in Chapter Five, there is also now a national infrastructure for the recognition and reward for teaching, the scholarship of teaching and there are awards for teaching that will be recognised by promotion panels (Wheelahan 2007). For others, however, the changes have lessened the opportunities for promotion as well as further complicated the process through the need to select one particular category on which to base their promotions application when their expertise and experience is broad based. Three interviewees talked about how they believed that they might have been successful in promotion had the criteria remain unchanged. As one person commented:

... one of the things that all of us have to realise here is that the goal posts keep changing. A few years ago, around 2000, it was that you had to have a book. Well I

have a book. Now it's not good enough and you have to have research funding and then there's this and then there's that.

Two other people had similar stories about how their relative opportunities for success in promotion have declined in light of changes in promotion criteria and in broader industry and higher education policy change.

Hidden criteria

A related issue is that there are hidden criteria within promotion processes. Depending on the advice and mentorship received in preparing an application, it is difficult to assess the possibility of success depending on the composition of the promotion panel, how the application will be assessed and whether or not the right categories have been selected to focus on. In her application for promotion to Level C, one interviewee talked about how she had submitted almost exactly the same application except that she switched categories for selection. Her first attempt was unsuccessful and the second was successful. Her interpretation was that the difference was a different panel membership:

In the second application, I changed the words from research to scholarship of teaching and learning. Now, I don't know what that means ... but I know there were different people on panels – but somebody could argue that here's the application for the teaching category and here's the category for the research category – she didn't get her C appointment for research, but she got her promotion for the teaching category.

Again, this criteria applies similarly to men and women. The difference for women is that, combined with the kind of gendered micro-politics discussed above, women's approach to promotion is likely to be more tentative. Further, it was identified that women are also more likely to feel a need to be absolutely 'ready' and feel less able to play the 'game' that lies behind the promotion process. This is a tendency that is reflected in research on women's relative reticence to apply despite the fact that they are slightly more likely to be successful when they do (Probert 2005; Winchester, Chesterman et al. 2005) Couple that with the multiple delays experienced in career progression, the internal promotions process becomes a fraught process.

Options for external appointment

The options for promotion via external appointment were also discussed. However, opportunities for this were seen to be remote for many through the combined impact of age,

gender, mobility, university status and higher education employment trends. As one interviewee put it:

... you have to be a lot better known and sexier than I am at my level and at my age [late 40s] I think in terms of output to have someone want to take you on at that level when they could get a bright young post-doc for cheaper who they think is going to add value for years to come.

The conclusion drawn by this interviewee was that, if the option was to move to another university, you are better served to stay at Level C in order to keep potential employment options open. Once appointed at Level D, the range of future opportunities is likely to narrow and, even if you are prepared to do so, it is difficult to be appointed later at a lower level. The other related problem was about the potential for movement upward from a low-status university like VU. There is a possibility of moving up a level from a Go8 university to a new generation university. The possibilities for doing the reverse are less likely.

While the view expressed above is not an impenetrable barrier for all, it does highlight a key difference in opportunities for progression from Level C to D, than that which operates at more junior levels. In part, this is brought about due to the trend for universities to address the ‘age heaping’ characteristics of universities as discussed in earlier chapters by prioritising the appointment of new academics at more junior levels. This is a specific priority at VU articulated by the ‘workplace renewal’ strategy detailed in Chapter Five. As such, opportunities for appointment at Level D are narrowed overall, and particularly narrowed for those who have been delayed in accumulating the qualifications and experience to be considered for a Level D position. Women perceive themselves as ‘too old’ to be marketable when they approach 50 and over, which is the time that many accumulate the necessary human capital to be eligible.

Perceptions, experience and limitations of the promotions process

As noted in Chapter One, the promotions process to Level D is demanding and takes two years to prepare. It requires careful and strategic consideration and voluminous evidence of performance must be gathered and ‘pitched’ in order to convince the promotions panel that you, as the applicant, look like you are made of the right ‘stuff’ to be an Associate Professor. To be successful requires considerable confidence, strategic planning and hard work. It also requires the wholehearted support of referees who must be prepared to write an extensive testimonial on your behalf. Irrespective of the merits of the requirements of the process, the sheer work involved is a barrier to aspirations, leading some to delay the timing of their application until they are absolutely ready.

Two interviewees had applied unsuccessfully in the past. For one, this experience cancelled any plans for a future attempt. This was not only because of the extensive work required, but also because there was minimal feedback provided about why she was unsuccessful nor any encouragement to try again. More discouraging was that she was short only a percentage of one point in the scoring system. Her bitterness about this was that the process failed to consider the ‘big picture’ in terms of her long-term contribution to the university and her significant achievements in teaching and research. This included being central to the development of a series of programs, having provided service through acting in middle-management roles and having driven considerable reform and policy change in her area. This service was also undertaken at a time when she had burdensome care responsibilities and the promotion application coincided with her husband being ill and her mother’s death. Her direct response was to be reconciled with the outcome and not to pursue promotion in the future:

I did apply for promotion to Associate Professor and I wasn’t successful. That’s okay. I didn’t really want to be an Associate Professor anyway.

This experience was resonant of other opinions expressed throughout the interviews by those who had yet to apply. This was that the promotions criteria did not reward many dimensions of academic work that women are good at. In particular, it does not capture teamwork, the capacity to care, and the capacity to achieve academically in the context of major obstacles. In fact, the system increasingly rewards those who are not good at these things. Success in promotion is clearly boosted by freedom from care responsibilities, a singular focus on career, the ability to compete successfully with one’s peers and to be good at professional networking and self-promotion.

There were several stories that struck me as particularly illustrative of how the existing promotions criteria will fail to deliver university leadership by those who have much to offer. These stories came from women who maintain incredible optimism, who carry enormous workloads and seemingly have achieved miracles to have been appointed at their current level, with a research track record and widespread acknowledgement in their fields. Among these examples, there were women who had arrived in Australia with no English language and no money, husbands who left them, children who became ill, few family networks or support, qualifications that were not recognised in Australia and yet they are now comparatively high achievers within the university. It seems to me that people such as these, with such capacities for work, care and academic achievement and the sheer ability not only to survive but thrive, are those who should be in leadership roles. The promotions criteria and

process as it currently exists have no capacity to consider the individual applicants' achievements within this broader life context. As one interviewee put it:

... are you worth more net if you have done your PhD in your twenties or should you be appreciated more for doing that in your forties when you have done this and that and whatever and on top of that, here you go? Of course if you do it later on in life, you will have already missed out on the potential research output that you could have produced in your twenties and thirties. How do you measure that and what is more valuable? It's not up to me to decide but I don't think that the criteria for promotion take this kind of issue into consideration at all.

Recruitment and promotion in summary

In summary, recruitment and promotion processes are a major hurdle to be negotiated. Again, there is nothing from my interviews or the policy frameworks that suggest that the processes and opportunities are unequally applied for men and women. Women, however, are located differently within the system, take a long time before they have met the criteria and become eligible to apply and, in the current policy context, are constrained in their options to use external application as a vehicle for career progression. There are also hidden criteria at work that women believe are difficult to read. Further, and perhaps most importantly, those qualities that would, in my ideal world, contribute to good academic leadership are not valued within existing promotions criteria. In fact the opposite is true. I shudder to think about future university leadership when success rests so clearly on individual achievement, self-promotion and competition. Together, the promotion process itself is a major hurdle to be negotiated and women and men approach the hurdle from different positions. Trends in higher education organisation policy also mean that criteria and conditions keep changing in ways that value individualism and competition above care and collegiality. I discuss this in the following section.

Higher Education Reform

As discussed in previous chapters, the parallel and related processes of globalisation, higher education reform and 'new managerialism' provide the overlay to understanding career progression in higher education in that they generate the conditions and context in which the higher education system is designed and operates (Gibbons, Limoges et al. 1994; Anderson, Johnson et al. 2002; Blackmore & Sachs 2003; Thornton 2005). Each also has its own specific and, as I argue in Chapter Two, gendered impacts. The purpose of this section is to discuss how these conditions operate at VU and contribute to prospects for women's career progression to Level D.

In common with much of the literature on globalisation, the effects of globalisation more broadly, and higher education reform specifically, are ambiguous in relation to women's opportunities for academic career progression (McNay 2000; Thornton 2008). Clearly, they have provided the means for women's entrance into higher education in real numbers. The development of information technologies allows greater flexibility and assists in the management of work and life responsibilities. The expansion of the higher education system has meant the many of the occupational fields that are traditionally female have been brought in within the higher education system creating academic opportunities for women that previously did not exist. Internationalisation has created opportunities for career and research development that were almost unimaginable 20 years ago. All of these benefits have contributed directly to women's entrance and advancement within VU.

More recently, further opportunities have also expanded in the fields that have experienced skill shortage generated by the needs of the knowledge economy in fields such as accounting, engineering and computer science although my findings suggest that this is somewhat of a 'double-edged sword' (Harman 2008e). Part of the reason for academic skill shortages is that academic salaries have been unable to remain competitive with those offered in the private sector (Horsely, Martin et al. 2005). These fields are generally where men dominate such as in Science and Engineering. Women are more likely to stay within higher education due to flexibility, at least in some industries as identified by Subramaniam (2003) while men are more likely to leave for more lucrative opportunities. The reason that this is a double-edged sword is that while women are being encouraged to progress within some fields, as is the case at VU (Harman 2008e), they effectively fulfil the prophecy of the 'reserve army thesis' where women get the jobs that men do not want and enter with lesser pay and conditions than their male counterparts, who have broader options, greater mobility, and can command better salaries and conditions in the private or government sectors.

Similarly, among my group of interviewees, there were women who were strategic in their decision making about whether or not such opportunities were worth it. One interviewee, in particular, was in this position where she was under pressure to apply for Level D and to take on Head of School responsibilities. She was suspicious, however, and still undecided about whether to pursue that path. One of the reasons is that she believed there was a danger of being exploited and that she would be 'thrown in the deep end' in charge of much of the difficult policy change, and implementation work of the department would be left in her hands, leaving those at professorial level (who are all men) to engage in less 'hands-on' and

managerially difficult work. In her mid-fifties, she believed she might be better off making other plans:

... he [the Dean] suggested getting experience to be set up as an Associate Professor. And I am not sure whether this is what I really wanted to do or where I want to go ... I've seen what an acting Head of School does first hand ... I can do this operationally ... but I was never given an opportunity to go off and do a leadership course or anything like that ... and I've said that to him: You just throw people in the deep end! It turned out that the only reason why I was asked was because there were probably four other more senior people [men] in my school and what had happened was that a couple of them were away and a couple of them – let's say were not considered to be appropriate acting Heads of School even though they were more senior ... and so I was Steven Bradbury – if you remember him in the Olympics and he was the skater and he was running last and everyone else fell and he just happened to get the Gold medal – so that was my situation.

The purpose of this quote is that this situation occurred in a field characterised by skill shortages that in part are caused by uncompetitive academic salaries relative to the private sector. These are exactly the opportunities that the current Vice Chancellor promotes as being the opportunities where an increase in women's representation in leadership can be achieved (Harman 2008e). As the example above shows, the conditions of these opportunities are not necessarily desirable, nor wanted by the women who are positioned to 'step in'. In this case, the interviewee was simply not willing to be a 'Steven Bradbury'. The prize was potentially a 'poisoned chalice' and she was not going to consider promotion unless it was on better terms or she believed she was prepared.

While much of the change is encouraging, conditions in higher education have also generated some clear discouragement for career advancement. As noted in Chapter Six, there were three major themes expressed by women that served to dampen aspirations. These were grouped within the themes of 'bullying, bad management and hostile work cultures', 'Catch 22', and 'negative perceptions of leadership'. Each of these factors is strongly associated with structural conditions that have been generated by directions in higher education systemic and management reform. I understand these factors as being associated with two major conditions. These include first the application of corporate principles in the organisation of academic work, and second, declining working conditions caused by increased work intensity and complexity. While I have discussed how these operate throughout, they have had a particular bearing on Level C women at the point of transition to Level D.

Many of the women interviewed in this study, as noted in Chapter Six, entered employment at VU either before or immediately after its establishment as a university in 1992. This was a time of major expansion and opportunity in the sector. In VU's case, it was also driven by a clear vision of social justice through the creation of a higher education infrastructure in the disadvantaged western region where previously there were no services (Selway 1986). Eight of the interviewees talked about this as being a good time to be employed at VU. Much of this had to do with having control over course development and implementation and being creatively engaged and challenged. Until the late 1990s, interviewees felt recognised and rewarded for their considerable efforts:

At that time there were probably about seven staff in my area. They were teaching a whole range of subjects. It was really exciting – I loved it. We were doing things and we also had ... a marvellous leader. He was very inclusive ... it was all very inspirational. And of course everyone was there [to] bring the western suburbs into higher education which at that time, was very much needed. We had direct responses from the students who were so grateful for being there. In 1999, that was when the school moved over [to Footscray Park]. The Faculty ... had to move here. It was all right up to that point but we had this sense of the grey men getting a little bit closer all the time. We got a sense of stolidity and bureaucracy taking over what had been a very vigorous and energetic place – it gradually encroached and took over.

Academic working conditions have changed with the rapid implementation of organisational restructures and expansion. In common with universities nationally, new layers of management were introduced and these layers were heavily male dominated. Departments were integrated into schools within enlarging faculty structures. For some of the interviewees, these reforms generated new opportunities and integration into areas where they could continue to pursue their academic interests within relatively cohesive collegiate environments. For others, such as the person quoted above, the experience has meant declining control, the experience of bullying, hostile work cultures and impossible conditions that have literally made her sick. For at least five of those I interviewed, it is these conditions that have contributed directly to the decision not to aspire to Level D despite the fact that they have progressed to earn a PhD qualification and have continued to work in various management and course coordination roles at various times within their departments. The clear decision on the part of these women was that Level D is not worth it and that they probably would not be successful if they tried.

The second related factor flowing directly from organisational restructure is that workloads are now such that some women have been caught in the ‘Catch 22’ that I discussed in Chapter Six. This is the outcome of increased student–teacher ratios, increased administrative and compliance responsibilities and increased demands to generate research income and output. In VU’s case, this is compounded by a highly disadvantaged and international student population and the need to work from multiple off- and onshore campuses. All of the women, with the exception of one, estimated that they worked at least 50 hours a week simply to keep up with their core teaching and administrative responsibilities. For a few, when combined with care responsibilities and the need to earn a PhD, the prospect of aspiring to Level D was not an option:

I coordinate the post-graduate courses ... I coordinate subjects, I coordinate [a] Grad Dip ... Second semester, I coordinate a [specific subject] – that's a Year One subject this time. There's about 300 students in both of those subjects. I also do honours and a [masters program]. There's lot of coordination and administration in that which is just overwhelming as you can imagine and I do a heavy teaching load. Like for the third years, they have all of their teaching in five weeks so you're teaching around the clock because then they go out [field work]. Year One is in eight weeks because – you can get these weeks where you are doing nothing but coordinating lectures and seeing students and stuff and then they will go out on [field work] but you have still got post-graduates who have got the 12-week programs. You do everything from letters and making phone calls – everything. I'm on the faculty courses committee at the moment ... I'm actually involved in four bits of research (all with different community agencies). I've also been involved in (the professional association). I'm always up very early – by 5 o'clock and I'm either preparing lectures or answering emails or doing something preparing lectures or whatever. Then coming in and putting in a full day and then I often go and see my mother [at a nursing home] after work. Then I fall asleep in front of the TV. On Saturday, I'm marking, preparing, cleaning, washing, shopping – although sometimes my husband will do the shopping now. On Sunday, I have family responsibilities. I spend time with my mother and do things that don't get done during the week. Then – on top of that – my [close relative] has got [a form of cancer] and he's been very ill.

The point of the story above is partly to illustrate the daunting workloads that are carried by women at Level C that, for most, must be combined with care responsibilities. What this example also demonstrates is how many of the disciplines in which women are engaged depart from the traditional model of higher education course delivery. In this case, education is not modelled on a traditional academic model but combines a heavy field work and

community engagement component that adds considerably to work complexity and workload. The workloads of academics at Level C are immense.

In more recent years, the effect of these workloads and increasing responsibilities has also been compounded with declining job security threatened by two rounds of redundancies. As discussed, one round of 67 job cuts was carried out in 2006 with the rationale that there needed to be a workplace ‘renewal’ – that is, there needed to be a younger academic staff profile to meet the future needs of the university (VU 2006). There is a larger round of redundancies being implemented in 2009 and the plan is to cut at least 150 academic jobs and 270 jobs in total (Harman 2008b). The broad direction is to cut those courses with the fewest enrolments and the likelihood that many of these courses will come from the Faculty of Arts where female academics dominate. Both of these plans have caused considerable industrial unrest and the conditions do not create a climate of optimism for anyone, particularly women at Level C who are already into their fifties as was evidenced by the interviews.

In summary, the conditions of academic work have declined as a direct outcome of two decades of reform which has demanded that academics do ‘more with less’ through a major expansion of student numbers while at the same time reducing funding and resources. As such, promotion to Level D is not necessarily desirable given the conditions and circumstances that govern academic work in the current climate. My view is that these conditions are not good for anyone but the point of this section is to show how the conditions contribute directly to narrowing women’s options and/or desire for career progression. There are many features of reform that have created new opportunities. At the same time, these opportunities are set in the context of a highly competitive, resource-starved, heavily administered and complex environment. Given these conditions, Level C is as high as many women ‘choose’ to aspire to due to sheer physical and emotional limits and/or the perception that the goal of Level D is not worth it.

Summary – structure and agency

The purpose of the discussion this far has been to support my responses to the two central questions of this research. This is discussed in line with my understanding about the inter-relationships between structures and agency. That is, that it is not possible to distinguish clearly between agency and structures given that, as noted earlier, each is reliant on the other. Structures are the result of individual actions and actions are only possible due to the possibilities available within structures. At the same time, neither is reducible to the other and so it is analytically useful to interrogate both separately and show how each shapes the other. Through doing this, I am particularly interested in highlighting the structural constraints on

choice and how the parameters of choice are shaped and moulded by a set of mechanisms that operates through gender.

What I have attempted to do here is to show how gendered processes continue to operate through the structures of the family, the household, the education system more broadly and within organisations to generate patterns of gender inequality in academic employment. This inequality is particularly intense at the transition from Level C to D largely as a function of the time it takes to accumulate the necessary human capital required to be successful. Most women are delayed through the combined effects of gendered career histories, unequal responsibilities for care, institutional barriers and gendered micro-politics, and the gendered impacts of globalisation, higher education reform and new managerialism. Each of these mechanisms works variously on individuals in ways that are shaped by gender, class and ethnicity but that ultimately slow down women in ways different to men. Over the course of an academic career, many women are stopped at the point of transition to Level D. This is a direct result of these structural influences that, in some cases, manifest in sheer physical and mental exhaustion, because time has run out or because women have decided that the ‘prize’ of promotion is not worth having given current conditions.

This clearly does not apply to all. A proportion of the interviewees, while affirming the reality of the gendered structural conditions that I have discussed, has found a way through the barriers due to a mix of luck, individual circumstances and characteristics that make the aspiration to Level D a real and desirable prospect. My discussion of structural barriers is not intended to suggest that women are acted on as passive victims of patriarchal control. Nor do I suggest that the patterns of employment participation are not transforming and that gender relations are rigidly determined and fixed. None of the structural barriers I discuss is insurmountable and there are aspects of change in recent decades that clearly have served to open up opportunities for women’s advancement. Part of my motivation is to account for the rapid change and progress that has been made in terms of women’s increased opportunities and participation in academic employment. At the same time, Lawson’s (2007) theory about how gendered structural processes result in gendered products resonates. The product of the processes noted above is women’s sluggish progress to equality at senior positions in higher education. Overall, women generally, continue to be situated as disadvantaged relative to men in terms of promotion to Level D. This final section responds specifically to my core questions which I aim to do in light of the discussion above. I examine each of these in turn.

Barriers to promotion

The barriers to transition at from Level C to Level D for women are multiple and cumulative. They occur due to being delayed in career progression from the entry into post-compulsory education by being channelled into a narrow range of traditionally female occupations and fields of study that ultimately take time to translate into an academic career, and in fields that are disadvantageous in terms of their relation to the market values that guide higher education performance. Women are delayed further by care responsibilities for children, families and communities. These responsibilities sometimes combine to crisis points at critical times in the career journey that can deliver ‘knock-out’ blows. As carers, women also are less able to care properly for themselves and, for some, ill health serves as a barrier to progression. Women’s tendency to place others’ interests before their own means that they are more likely to undertake activities that are not as individually advantageous to their own career than is the case for many men. They are delayed further by promotions criteria that arguably take decades to meet even in the best of circumstances. When they do apply, the criteria exclude attributing any value to those qualities and experience that delayed them in the first place. These are experience in caring, teamwork, and achievement in the face of obstacles. The system most values those who are free of care responsibilities, have a singular focus on individual achievement and can strategically play ‘the game’. By the time women accumulate the experience to be successful, they perceive it is either too late and/or the goal is not worth it any more. Trends in academic work have led, in many cases, to unsustainable workloads, which may have contributed to ill health and depression. The nature of leadership and management within the system is not attractive to many and experiences both under management and in acting in management roles have served to discourage aspirations. All these circumstances combined provide barriers to progression to Level D. Many of these structural barriers are particular to Level D because of the time it takes to meet the criteria for appointment at this level. Getting to Level C was onerous enough for many of the women in this study although some were appointed early due to new opportunities that occurred in the system due to its expansion in the 1990s. Changing and expanding criteria implemented over this time have meant that the time required for appointment to Level D has expanded, in a context where time is an increasingly scarce resource.

In addition, there are two new barriers to the transition to Level D that have emerged over the last decade. One is about the trend toward external recruitment at a senior level, which, at least at VU, strongly favours men. The second additional barrier is that just when women have finally achieved the human capital necessary to be successful for Level D, there are plans in place to ‘renew’ the ageing workforce. At VU, women in senior positions were particularly vulnerable in the redundancy round implemented in 2006, and three of the very

few Level D women were made redundant. It will be interesting to observe the gendered outcomes of the current round of redundancies.

So in conclusion, the transition to Level D is a barrier because women are delayed in ways that men are not generally, are discouraged and/or diverted by poor management and gendered micro-politics and because the conditions of employment at Level D are no longer as attractive and/or sustainable as they once were. These barriers are recognised in the literature and are well understood. There are new barriers generated by higher education reform and continuous restructure and policy change. What this means to women who have finally accumulated the human capital necessary to be successful in an application for promotion is that they are no longer wanted due to age. Redundancy packages make it attractive to leave.

Are women pulling out from promotion?

The answer to the second question, about whether women are giving up on promotion just as they are positioned to be successful overlaps with the first and the discussion above goes part of the way to answering this. That is, that many women, at least at VU, withdraw aspirations for promotion because they feel they are too old, too tired and/or sick and that it is not worth it. At the same time, there are a number who are potential aspirants although for most of this group, this aspiration is a qualified one and it depends on certain conditions as to whether they might follow through on these plans. Those who are relatively clear about both the desirability and likely success in promotion have a number of conditions and circumstances working in their favour. First, they have a relative lack of care responsibilities and women who are lesbian and/or childless are clearly advantaged in this respect. The related condition is about timing and that they have entered academe relatively early in their working lives and have been able to progress in an uninterrupted way. The second condition is the presence of encouraging mentors, managers and/or colleagues, which for some has worked to overcome all other barriers. For those in my study, although my reading of their stories suggests good management played a role, whether or not this occurred was attributed largely to luck. The third condition was about structural location and disciplinary area. For some, engagement in an emerging and/or non-traditional discipline meant that opportunities were available that were open due to the developmental stage of the field as an area of academic enquiry or because of skill shortages generated through economic change. Together, these factors combined for some to generate the desire and real opportunity to aspire to Level D.

Only one person in my group had what could be seen as a clear pathway to Level D and similarly, this was the only person who had appointment at Level E confidently in her sights.

For the other nine aspirants in my group, the aspiration to Level D was an outcome of weighing up a series of often conflicting considerations that included care responsibilities, broader university developments, fears about being successful, fears about being too old and whether or not they could maintain the output and performance levels necessary to be successful. Each of the aspirants had decided that, on balance, they would try. There were a few examples of people who aspired seemingly against all odds and they were driven by sheer force of personality and ambition. With the exception of one, the decision to aspire was a carefully weighed decision making process that was open to change depending on events and circumstances. This process, and the expressed preference for promotion, clearly has been shaped by gender.

In conclusion, not all, but many women are pulling back from promotion when they have the human capital to be successful. To reiterate, this is because they get to this point too late in their careers, they are discouraged, tired and sometimes unwell from heavy workloads, bad management and constant change, they believe that the odds are against them to be successful, and they ‘choose’ that it is not worth it.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to draw on the research findings to discuss how gendered processes operate to constrain the choices of women to promotion to Level D. This discussion is organised to show how individual agency and structural conditions are inter-related. Structures create the possibilities for action and actions in turn operate simultaneously to reproduce and transform structures. Women’s ‘choices’ about careers show how the gendered characteristics of academic employment are relatively enduring. There is change, however, which occurs when structural conditions change and some women, depending on circumstances, are finding openings in academic career pathways to progress. Part of this is due to luck and the sheer force of will and tenacity of some particularly resilient individuals. More broadly, it is because the conditions change. These openings are patchy, however, and the broader trend is that women ‘choose’ not to aspire to academic leadership roles due to structural constraints.

One of my aims is to show that explanations for gender inequalities that rest on theories of preference and differences in human capital (Hakim 2000; Ward 2001; Wooden 2008) are deeply flawed in that they disguise the deeply gendered and structural dimensions that shape choice and preference. I have shown this by discussing how women negotiate broader structural conditions that generate the parameters of choice in terms of promotion and career advancement. These conditions also have diverse effects depending on the particular

biography and characteristics of each individual. The broader outcome, however, is that many women ‘choose’ not to aspire to Level D. Not all, but many women are pulling out from promotion when they are positioned, in terms of human capital, to be successful. Those who continue to aspire have a particular set of circumstances, characteristics and to an extent, luck, which makes the decision to aspire a viable one. Even then, they generally make the choices within a set of conditions that generally do not apply to men particularly in relation to their capacity to combine care responsibilities and a career (Doughney 2007).

At one level, the individual decisions made are an expression of individual freedom based on preference. The often conflicting considerations, on which these decisions are based, however, are shaped by multiple and interacting generative mechanisms which are powerful in their capacity to reproduce gender relations in which women are positioned as relatively subordinate. Clear mechanisms at play include the broader and gendered nature of the operation of the labour market, the organisation of families and the unequal distribution of responsibility for care, gendered organisational micro-politics and neo-liberal ideology and the belief in free market principles as a framework for the organisation of work. Each of these mechanisms is embedded in historical processes and within each, a system of gendered processes is in operation. Each is also simultaneously reproductive and transformative in its effects on gender relations. Women’s opportunities in higher education have expanded and women’s location has improved. None of these mechanisms, in themselves, works to make it impossible to achieve leadership positions. An increasing number of women do. At the same time, the value of the ‘prize’ of leadership in higher education has declined. Together, the mechanisms identified here both reinforce male advantage and women’s position remains relatively subordinate. In terms of reaching gender equality, my prediction is that it is unlikely to happen any time soon, and never if the current practices and trends operate across the system. In VU’s case, women’s shot at getting to Level D relative to men’s is roughly about 1:4. They have around a 50:50 chance of being successful through the use of internal processes, which assumes that women apply in numbers in proportion to the available pool. Chances of being appointed through external appointment, based on VU data, are close enough to zero. This leads me to my conclusion, which is that barriers, old and new, at best discourage, and at worst prevent, most women’s aspirations for promotion to Level D. By the time women reach this point in their careers, the combined effects of age, health, care responsibilities and whether alternative options are available come in to play in the decision making process. For the sake of their own, and often their family’s wellbeing, most women ‘choose’ not to aspire.

The following chapter examines the implications of these findings and what might be done about it if gender equity in higher education leadership is the goal. In this, I first highlight what women's reticence means for the university but in my view, more importantly, what it says about the broader objective of socially just and sustainable employment. I go on to discuss what this might mean for EEO policy and strategy before summarising and concluding this thesis.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion and priorities for change

Introduction

The previous chapter responds specifically to my research questions where I identify mechanisms that operate to prevent women's progression from Level C to Level D in the academic hierarchy. I also discuss how these mechanisms operate to shape individual choices and decisions about aspirations for promotion, which are made within gendered constraints. I argue that the weight of disincentives means that aspirations to Level D are often doused for women because they arrive too late at the point where they have the necessary experience and qualifications to apply. While not the case for all, the decision to aspire to Level D is one that is fraught with a host of often conflicting considerations leading women to stop applying for promotion.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss what could be done about improving women's representation in senior academic roles. In discussing this, I refer to the theoretical assumptions discussed in Chapter Three. Central to this is that the purpose of social research is to understand how patterns of subordination and oppression are reproduced and transformed with the larger goal of human emancipation and the creation of a 'good society' (Lawson 2007 p. 159). The condition of emancipation is the liberation of human capabilities meaning that the gendered processes that prevent the exercise of capacities need to be changed (Lawson 2007). Through the examination of VU as one university that shares characteristics with others operating in the higher education system, the aim of the discussion in Chapter Eight was to make visible the operation of processes and practices that leads to subordination. In doing so, opportunities for change can be identified. As I have argued, women's choices about career progression are shaped by the operation of powerful generative mechanisms that simultaneously reproduce and transform structures through the actions of individuals. While such structures are relatively enduring because generally people keep doing the same things, the possibilities for human action can be expanded by exposing the mechanisms at play and by strategic action that changes the conditions in which choices are made. Before discussing what these changes might be, the following section starts by identifying the implications of this research.

Implications

Part of the rationale for undertaking a case study and to focus on women in academic higher education employment was to reveal processes that operate in the broader labour market to reproduce patterns of gender inequality. The need for this stems from the feminist contention that gender inequality is harmful and detrimental to individual and social wellbeing and

detrimental to the broader feminist intent which is about justice and equality for women (Nussbaum 1999). One of the central problems of research of this nature is about whether or not equality of representation of men and women is any measure of justice. The feminist objective is that, as a prerequisite of social justice, women should be represented in positions of authority equal to men (Bergmann 2005). The counter position stems from theories of ‘choice’ and the argument that gender inequalities are a direct outcome of individual freedom and agency (Hakim 2000). If women are positioned freely to ‘choose’ not to pursue career over other interests, and they do not, this is a ‘just’ outcome.

This is particularly problematic in relation to the subjects of this study who, compared with other social groups or populations, are relatively advantaged with considerable freedom and privilege by virtue of resources, education and social status. As Hakim (2000) argues, women in such a position exemplify their claim that they are now positioned to make free and genuine choices about career investment and aspirations. From this perspective, in the absence of legal, cultural or procedural barriers, numerical inequalities can be explained as an expression of women’s preferences and choices. Justice, from this perspective, is freedom to make such a choice and women’s under-representation in leadership roles is an outcome of this freedom.

In Chapter Three, I explored choice theories and offered a critique. To recap, the fundamental problems are threefold. First, ‘choice’ theories rely on arguments that women do not make the same investment in human capital as do men, ignoring the extent to which differences in human capital between men and women have declined thereby eliminating their explanatory value (VanStaveren 2007). Second, the assumption is that individuals make rational and free choices in order to maximise individual self-interest ignoring that extent to which the self-interests of women in particular are intimately tied to the interests of others (Folbre 1996). Third, it ignores the problem of ‘adaptive preference’, where preferences are not fixed but predetermined but are shaped by available possibilities, customs, prior experiences and a gamut of conditions (Doughney 2007). In short, individuals cannot prefer an option if they do not know about it or they have been led to believe it is not available and/or desirable. Similarly, choice theories ignore the practical dimensions of expressions of preference that are not simple. The enactment of preferences is an outcome of often conflicting considerations. Whether or not an option is chosen is usually the outcome of deliberation between a set of often contradictory and/or conflicting needs and considerations within a given circumstance (Leahy & Doughney 2006). What one prefers is usually the best option within a range of alternatives and it may not be what the individual would have chosen had other circumstances been in place. Overall, the problems with choice theories are that they

ignore the role of structural conditions and the extent to which these generate unequal and gendered freedom of choice. Acceptance that conditions of ‘choice’ and ‘freedom’ for women are already in operation serves, in the context of this research, to disguise the extent to which women negotiate their careers within gendered constraints that are disadvantageous to career advancement.

Through the lens offered by a critical realist perspective (Lawson 1997; 1999; 2007), the purpose of the research has been to show how and why women exercise their relative freedom to ‘choose’ career trajectories within the possibilities made available by structures that shape the experience of academic employment in higher education. My aim has also been to show how these freedoms are influenced by gender, which generally constrains the possibilities for choice for most women in ways that do not apply to most men. The combined influence of unequal responsibility for care, unequal histories, organisational arrangements that rely on a full-time and uninterrupted commitment to work, a disadvantageous structural location and policy reform that rewards individualism and success in the academic ‘market’ mean that women make ‘choices’ within a different set of circumstances than do most men. These circumstances are less advantageous and they present additional constraints.

A further aim is to show how women operate as reflexive beings who deliberate options within the conditions at hand and in the process serve simultaneously to shape and be shaped by the structures in which they operate (Cruickshank 2003). Women’s ‘choice’ to give up on promotion, or to aspire irrespective of the disincentives, has both transforming and reproductive effects. Those decisions and actions constitute the structures of the university. In this point in history, as I have shown, the outcome is that some women are successfully working toward advancement but the weight of gendered constraints continues to prevent the advancement of many others. As such, there is a growing of minority of women in senior academic roles but the nature of this growth is patchy and undertaken in conditions that present continuing struggles for women in ways that most men do not experience (Chesterman, Ross-Smith et al. 2004; Sinclair 2005).

Finally, my research has shown how gendered processes continue to position women relatively subordinate to men through the gendered structural arrangements, unequal responsibility for care, gendered micro-politics and policy developments that have harsh impacts on women given unequal histories. While different women experience these conditions in different ways depending on individual characteristics and histories, sometimes this subordination is crushing with serious consequences in terms of health, earnings and wellbeing. The outcome is relatively low representation of women in senior academic

positions. Those who do aspire generally make hard choices in order to continue and the costs are considerable. To an extent these ‘choices’ are common to all who aspire to leadership in higher education, which are about maintaining heavy workloads over decades, the constant management of change, the relentless requirement to produce outcomes in a corporatised environment and to be an international leader within a disciplinary area. However, the possibilities for succeeding in this context are far greater if an individual’s career history resembles the traditionally male model. That is, relative freedom from care responsibilities, an uninterrupted career trajectory, placement in a discipline that has opportunities to generate income in the market and networks that provide support, connections and mentorship throughout the career. Further, as Sinclair (2005) shows, to be recognised as a leader, it is best be a man. To return to Lawson (2007 p. 147):

... society is ... constituted in a fundamental way by both social relations and positions [and] any segment of society is highly differentiated in terms of the obligations and prerogatives that are on offer.

While there is considerable overlap between men and women, women are generally positioned with lesser prerogatives and greater obligations. As an outcome, the ‘choice’ to advance through promotion is constrained relative to men as an outcome of gender rather than capacity or willingness to achieve seniority.

The implications of gendered constraints are an under-representation of women in academic leadership roles. This is a loss to individual women whose career advancement is constrained by unequal barriers with implications for lifetime earnings, general wellbeing and sometimes health. It is a loss of potential talent to the university and to the professions. Further, it is a social and economic loss where the voices of women are marginalised in social and economic policy and public discourse. Finally, the career trajectories of the women in this study are illustrative of the kind of processes that operate to reproduce labour market gender inequalities more generally. The following section looks at what to do about this.

What to do about women’s under-representation

On the basis of my findings, there are numerous potentially useful strategic actions that become evident. In discussing these, I am mindful of the extensive research and comprehensive strategic directions that have previously been developed (White 2001; Morley 2003; Whitehouse 2003 ; Chesterman 2004; Eveline 2005; Probert 2005; Winchester, Chesterman et al. 2005; Morley 2005b; Dever, Morrison et al. 2006; Doughney & Vu 2006; Whitehead, Lewis et al. 2007; Dever, Boreham et al. 2008). While some of this research is

directed at addressing specific issues, there is a general understanding in the literature that the causes of gender inequalities are multidimensional and strategies for change need to be directed at a policy, organisational and individual level. I am of a similar view that for change to occur, strategies for change need to be implemented at all of these levels. What I aim to contribute is current insights that are revealed through my approach in this research.

With this in mind, my suggestions are twofold. First, the structures that shape the unequal conditions of choice in higher education need continued interrogation and change. Such change needs to be directed at enhancing the possibility that EEO policy and strategy can have traction in a system that is driven primarily by market-based criteria. Similarly, the capacity of women to negotiate and manage within the system needs support in the context that they are unequally positioned relative to men in how they enter and progress through higher education systems. By this, I do not mean ‘fixing women’ but affirmative action strategies are required to address disadvantage caused through unequal histories and structures that reinforce male advantage. Such strategies should be aimed at helping women not only to ‘play the game’ but to change the game in a way that equally allows both men and women to exercise and develop capabilities. I make these suggestions in the context of the broader imperative to build work regimes that, as Pocock (2006 p. 1) puts it:

meets the fundamental tests of justice: that, from the perspective of a just society, work regimes should enlarge and assure particular human capacities that can be seen as universally essential for those who labour in a civilised society.

Within this vision, the goal is not to make women less caring so that they can better compete within an unjust system but to ‘make real – through … workplace practice … an “ethic of care” to partner our well developed “ethic of work”’ (Pocock 2006 p. 1). A number of specific suggestions flow from this approach for potential adoption within universities to do with changes in policy, processes and practice alongside strategies better to support women’s academic career development.

National policy

Before talking about specific strategies that could be considered at VU or in other universities, the viability of these are shaped by Commonwealth policy directions. As such, these specific strategic suggestions are prefaced by the broader policy context. There are three major priorities highlighted below that relate to the underfunding of universities at the expense of academic working conditions, the gendered impacts of policies aimed at measuring quality and encouraging ‘excellence’ and the relatively low priority given to

gender equity in academic staffing. Each is an essential setting for any strategic approach that could be adopted within particular institutions.

University underfunding and the erosion of academic work

First, as has been the well-supported claim, the Australian higher education system has been allowed to run down through chronic underfunding (OECD 2008). As discussed throughout, the cost of these cuts has been largely borne by academics. Increased staff to student ratios, a growing administrative burden and increased pressure to generate funding through research funding and student enrolments all contribute to increasing academic workloads. This is particularly harsh on women who often have a greater responsibility for care both in the household and in the organisation. As I have argued, this has particularly serious impacts on the possibilities for career progression in part due to the health risks associated with carrying such a large burden over long periods of time.

The workloads issue is one that is being responded to by the NTEU and is central to current industrial campaigns (NTEUa 2008). For this discussion, however, the important priority is that workloads be controlled and that future funding models recognise the impact that reform, expansion and reduced funding has had on academics. There is much evidence that academic workloads have reached their limits as evidenced by the work-related illness reported in this study (Houston, Meyer et al. 2006; Coates, Goedegebuure et al. 2008; NTEUa 2008). Further, the capacity to engage in academic work, that is research and teaching, is seriously undermined by administrative responsibilities. As Brennan and Malpas (2007) comment:

... the past decade or more has not just been a period of over-administration and under-funding, but of sustained attack by government on the independence and the value of academic work in general. It is therefore urgent that the capacity of academics to do their jobs is better supported and that funding initiatives and models reflect this.

As noted earlier, funds generated by universities over the last decade have been directed largely to the expansion of bureaucracy and administration and/or facility development. Most universities now devote more than half of their income to non-academic costs. (Brennan & Malpas 2007; Marginson & Eijkman 2007). The support of academic work has been low on the list of priorities and it is easy to argue that academics have been undermined deliberately. As Wheelahan (2007 p. 36) comments, much of recent Commonwealth higher education policy development has been directed toward overcoming the problem of ‘producer capture’ – that is, that academics will use the system for their own individual interests. Such a climate generates declining work satisfaction and conditions for all academics. It has particular

impacts on women's capacity to progress to leadership. If only in the interests of gender equality, academics must be better supported as the lynchpins of what it is to be a university as opposed to the 'enemies of efficiency' as they effectively have been cast.

The gendered impact of 'quality' and 'excellence'

The second issue that needs to be explored is the gendered implications of policies aimed at the measurement of quality and the promotion of excellence, which has been a major priority of policy development under the Nelson reforms as noted in Chapter Five. As discussed in Chapter Two, this is a theme that has been explored to a limited extent in the UK (Morley 2001) and in Canada (Acker & Armenti 2004) but there has been a relative lack of analysis in the Australian context with Thornton's (2005, 2007, 2008) work as a significant exception.

While 'quality' and 'excellence' have been dominant themes across all higher education policy development, there are a couple of specific examples that stand out. The first of these is the development of the Research Quality Framework (RQF), which is now being replaced with a similar system called the Excellence in Research in Australia Initiative (ERA) (ARC 2009). Broadly, the scheme is a framework for assessing research performance across institutions in order to provide an evidence base for funding and supporting 'excellence'. Proposed by the Howard government, the scheme was widely critiqued as flawed and enormously expensive. As Brennan (2007) comments, there are estimates that the scheme would have cost each university around \$10 million to administer, for a national pool of research funding of around \$600 million. My intention here is not to deliver the critique but to highlight that such systems are inherently value driven and reliant on assessments of what research and what publications represent 'excellence'. Given the dominance of market values in deciding what is 'excellent', coupled with women's structural location in disciplines that are less competitively placed in relation to the market, there are important implications to be explored regarding how such systems reinforce gender inequalities in research funding and opportunities.

The Howard Government's Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) is another case in point. As noted in Chapter Five, this fund was established to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Australian universities. The stated intention was 'to reward those institutions that best demonstrate excellence in learning and teaching' (Nelson 2003 p. 29). The aim of the plan was to meet an identified gap, which was that research performance is rewarded while there is an absence of recognition and reward for teaching and learning. Funding is allocated to institutions on the basis of performance against a set of quantitative indicators and the program is also linked to a teaching award program. Again, this program

has been critiqued as reinforcing the advantage of the resource-rich Go8 universities, as being inherently flawed in its use of indicators and measurement of performance and as failing to meet its own policy objectives through a range of program design and implementation problems (Wheelahan 2007). I accept this critique, but the gendered implications of the program, also beg analysis. The tendency for women to be concentrated in academic teaching, the convoluted and administratively complicated nature of applying for funding and the relative low level of funding compared with research programs, all suggest that the program is yet another mechanism for reinforcing women's relative disadvantage within the system.

Overall, over the past decade or so and particularly during the years of the Howard government, there has been little interrogation of the gendered impacts of policy reform (Summers 2003). Coupled with the underfunding of the higher education sector as a whole, there has been much system development that has been implemented 'gender blind', therefore operating to disguise the structural conditions that reinforce male advantage. The demise of attention to gender equity in academic staffing, as explored below, further compounds the problem.

EEO in universities

A theme running throughout the discussion so far has been about how EEO has been marginalised and rendered ineffective in the face of continued higher education reform. Many observe that EEO was never really given a chance to be effective in the first instance (Noble & Mears 2000; Thornton 2008). The regressive influence of the Howard government has also been to substantially weaken and/or eliminate the infrastructure established by previous governments to address gender inequality (Summers 2003). On top of this, broader social developments such as the combined and ambiguous influence of globalisation, postmodernism and neo-liberal economic policies based on expanding individual 'choice' (Hakim 2000) have worked to disguise the structural operations of gender inequality. All of these influences have played out within the higher education sector, and as discussed in Chapter Five, little priority has been given to gender inequality in higher education staffing in the face of market-oriented reform (Thornton 2008).

This is not to suggest that EEO has disappeared and, as discussed, universities continue to comply with EOWA requirements. Further, as is the case at VU, individual universities implement various strategic initiatives to support women's career progression. Universities Australia also sets targets for women's representation and administers a modest research program to investigate issues around gender equity. Further, women's overall representation in higher education staffing continues to increase. The problem is that these measures have

not been robust enough to prevent the general marginalisation of EEO in the face of market-based reform, nor to articulate and address emerging issues within a competitive and deregulated higher education framework. Gender equity issues for academics are now difficult to identify. A compounding problem is that there is a widely held belief that equitable processes and practices are in place within universities. For example, Probert (2005 p. 70) concludes that ‘the lack of representation of women at levels D and E cannot be attributed to the presence of a “glass ceiling”, let alone more directly discriminatory practices in appointments, promotions or workloads’. Such beliefs suggest that the priority is to look outside the higher education system for the causes of gender inequality.

The reason I raise Probert’s (2005) conclusions is that it illustrates the way in which EEO is conceptualised and informed by neo-liberal models of choice which ignores the structural conditions that shape the possibilities for individual action. From this perspective, the ethical policy imperative is to ensure that unfair barriers are removed. A further implication is that any affirmative action measures are limited to ‘fixing women’ in order that they might better compete within existing systems of participation and reward. Universities, as Probert (2005) argues, have largely done this. The existing rules, and I do not disagree with this, are largely applied similarly to men and women.

One of the implications is that universities are ‘off the hook’ in terms of doing anything more to support gender equality besides ensuring that procedural fairness is in place. If the problem is in the allocation of labour within the household, there is not a great deal that universities can do about that. A second implication is that it further disguises the effects of women’s gendered career histories, the structural location of women within universities and the micro-politics that serves to reinforce male advantage. Third, it ignores the gendered effects of globalisation, market-based reform and managerialism that combine with women’s delayed career progress and the gender-segregated labour market to mean that ‘equal treatment’ further compounds disadvantage. The outcome is that the pathway to the professoriate becomes only really clear to those women whose circumstances and career trajectories resemble those of the traditional male model.

If gender equity is the goal, attention to equality in academic staffing needs to be given a higher profile with resources attached. There are gaps in the research that need to be addressed and these are about the relationships between gender inequality, market-driven higher education policy and the real costs of inequality in terms of social and economic wellbeing. The application of the ‘gender lens’ on policy change has largely been absent over the last 10 years. Making this a priority has been marginalised by the ‘profit imperative’ and

by the fact that women are working in higher education in greater numbers. EEO requires a greater focus in light of new conditions.

Summary

The purpose of the discussion above is to highlight and detail priorities for change at the national level. In doing so, I have discussed three areas necessary for change. First, gender inequality is reinforced by higher education policy and practice that have been targeted at ‘managing’ academics and making them progressively do more with less over recent decades. I believe that academics generally have been pushed to the limit but women are particularly affected. The second priority is to undertake critical analysis of the gendered effects of policy implementation. Substantial critique is required on the effects of change on gender equality that has been largely absent over the past 10 years or so. Finally, there is a need for EEO to be conceptualised so that it has traction. One of the biggest problems is that issues around gender inequality have been rendered difficult to see and that EEO efforts have been marginalised by the dominant imperative of success in the market place. EEO needs to refocus away from ‘fixing women’ to exposing the contemporary nature of gender inequality, and on system change that makes it possible for capable women (and men) to succeed.

While the discussion above is about the broad national picture, the conditions of inequality are experienced at the level of the university and there was much that was revealed specifically within VU that could usefully take place better to support women’s progress to leadership. The following section addresses this.

Change within the university

As discussed, my approach to gender inequality incorporates the need to understand structures, agency and the relationship between. This requires a focus on the broader structural conditions that generate the conditions for individual action, which will in turn work to reproduce and transform structures. The following discussion is therefore considers priorities and potential changes that can be implemented at the organisational policy level before examining the priorities for supporting individual women.

Organisational change

This section looks at organisational policy and practice and how these might shift to better support women’s capabilities to progress to leadership roles. I do this within four areas of focus. These include improvements in academic working conditions, senior management commitment to gender equality in leadership and shift in policy and practice to go with that,

addressing urgent issues related to bullying and sex discrimination, and changes in management practice at a faculty and school level.

Improving academic working conditions

First, and as discussed throughout, VU is disadvantaged compared with many other universities due to a range of conditions. These include its responsibility to the western Melbourne metropolitan region characterised by low SES and new migrants, the absence of a wealthy alumni, its newcomer status as a university lacking a research culture and tradition and the added administrative complexity due its dual-provider status. The main problem, in relation to academic progression to leadership, is that senior management at VU has particularly embraced national trends in ensuring the decline of academic working conditions in an arguably heavy-handed way as evidenced by the waves of redundancies implemented currently and in 2006 (Hare 2008). The point for this study is that current workloads for academics are excessive and waves of redundancies will exacerbate that. With one exception, none of the women I interviewed worked less than 50 hours per week, which is a direct barrier to academic progression and the cause of stress-related illness. These and other changes are implemented with little regard to academic workloads and the quality of the academic experience. This contributes to low morale and, as explored earlier, serves as a major disincentive to advancement. While this applies to all academics, those who get through are able to ‘play the game’ and survive in a climate that seeks to control and cut back on academic conditions rather than support improvements. If women specifically, and academics generally, are to be encouraged, the general conditions of academic work, particularly workloads, need to improve.

Changing policy

The second major priority for senior management is the need for a shift in the rationale and substance of policy and planning for women in leadership. As discussed, there is some support for women in promotion, which is delivered mainly through the implementation of a ‘Women in Leadership’ program as well as through career development support strategies that are available to all academics. Many women benefit from this as detailed in Chapter Six. My concern about the intent of these strategies is that they are largely in place to ‘fix women’, as reflected in the Vice Chancellor’s address to the 2008 Higher Education Summit, examined in Chapter Five. The rationale for supporting women into leadership rests on the ‘business case’, which is that the university cannot afford to waste talent and that skill shortages create the imperative to ensure that women are there to fill the gaps. The Vice Chancellor is also explicit in her commitment about not ‘lamenting women’s under-representation at senior

levels in higher education or rehearsing arguments about the barriers yet to be overcome' (Harman 2008e p. 1).

The first problem with this is that denial, or at least reluctance to speak about structural barriers, contributes to the general silencing of EEO issues that I have discussed throughout. It is also a characteristic of the 'business case' discussed earlier. Without due attention to changing the structural and organisational barriers that both operate and continue to emerge, there is likely to be a continuation of the trend of the pathway being open to only a few, who are those who can compete within the system as it already exists. Further, those who do progress, do so in unenviable conditions. What is necessary is a policy commitment that not only acknowledges the old barriers, but is mindful of and attentive to emerging issues such as those generated by 'new managerialism' and by external recruitment practices enabled by increased organisational 'flexibility'. More substantially, such a policy needs to appreciate the need for changing concepts of leadership that value what women do well. Finally, such a policy needs to be supported by strong strategic action and the establishment of targets for women's representation at the school and faculty level.

Fix the bullying

One of the urgent and related priorities is the need to address the issue of bullying. The careers of two of the interviewees were effectively destroyed by this, which is serious enough. More broadly it was a theme raised repeatedly in terms of there being a 'poisonous culture' or of there being a generally aggressive environment, particularly at the senior management level. This was one of the key discouraging conditions that interviewees identified in relation to decision making about career progression. This was not the experience of all interviewees, but certainly existed in at least four schools to a degree that it was a risk to health. Even for those who operate within relatively cohesive schools, there was a general perception that bullying was an entrenched culture at the executive and senior management level. While the intention here is not to be specific about how bullying be addressed, it is clearly a feature of the organisational culture that needs to change.

Management within schools

As noted in Chapters Six and Eight, a major disincentive to promotion identified was about the lack of capacity within schools to encourage and support aspirations for promotion. While there were various explanations given for why this is the case, one reason was about excessive management workloads so that Heads of Schools were prevented from implementing systematic career-development strategies. Another was that there was a divisive, patriarchal and/or incompetent management in place. The outcome was that

receiving support for promotion was largely a matter of luck. Making suggestions for change about this is difficult given that the causes relate so closely to issues about academic workloads, gendered micro-politics and a senior management culture that is aggressive.

A closely related issue is that one of the outcomes of burgeoning administration, alongside a proportionately shrinking pool of academics, is that more policy keeps being generated with fewer people, that is, academics to actually implement it. I discussed in Chapter Five how this has been the case at VU and the inability to effectively operationalise changing policy at the school and faculty level was identified. Arguably, the relatively new ‘Staff Performance Development Plan’ (SPDP) is the instrument by which academic staff can be guided and supported in career planning, which is its intention. The problem of understaffing and heavy workloads clearly operates to prevent such policy tools as being effective as was the comment made by a number of interviewees. Discouraging management remains a barrier to academic progression and this is a symptom of some larger problems about funding and academic workloads. This should be addressed.

Organisational change in conclusion

The discussion above aims to highlight priorities for action at the organisational level to improve women’s capacity to progress from Level C to Level D. These include the need to improve academic working conditions overall, make changes in policy and strategic planning, fix the bullying that is reported in this research and make it possible for Heads of Schools to support the career aspirations of academics. All of these strategies apply for the benefit of all academics, however, and at each stage of the academic career journey. The second and more directly related theme about change applies more specifically to supporting women specifically to progress.

Supporting women

In the discussion above, I suggest a range of priorities that need to occur at the national policy level and at the organisational level which, if addressed, would do much to expand the opportunities for transition for women from Level C to D. Manageable workloads and the elimination of bullying would mean that other gendered constraints, such as unequal responsibility for care, would lose much of their power to hold women back in their aspirations for career progression. At the same time, many women are disadvantaged before they start in academic work and barriers continue to operate throughout the career journey. As identified in Chapter Six, three key themes operate to encourage women’s progression. These

relate to timing, the presence of supportive management and location within a discipline where there are expanding opportunities. The focus of support strategies, therefore, is to both minimise barriers and to support conditions that expand opportunities.

Speeding up progression

As discussed, women's careers are delayed in ways that men are not. These include first being channelled into a narrow range of traditionally female career paths, and subsequently developing academic careers in disciplines that are relatively new within the higher education system. These disciplines, such as social work, nursing, education, paramedics and so on, do not conform to traditional academic traditions and incorporate teaching and research practices that are more complex and incorporate requirements that further delay the time it takes to progress. Social work academics, for example, are often appointed on the basis of experience in the field. The outcome of that is another delay if the goal is to reach the professoriate. Care responsibilities, both for families and within the organisation, and childbirth also serve to interrupt careers and investment in career-enhancing activities. Further, and most obviously, the requirements for meeting the criteria for promotion to Level D are also incredibly time-consuming particularly when combined with care. Getting a PhD, producing research outcomes and establishing recognition for academic 'excellence' would rarely be possible to complete in less than 10 years in the best of conditions. The internal promotions process in itself is recommended to take two years to prepare (VU 2008c). Together, women are slowed down in ways that men are not. Strategies are required to speed up potential progress and address some of the penalties that effectively are served on women for having interrupted careers in the first instance.

Given the differences between women in terms of care responsibilities, class and ethnic differences, histories and disciplinary location, any strategic approach needs to be sensitive to individual difference. There needs, however, to be formal scope to implement strategies such as giving additional paid leave to complete PhDs or undertake research. Similarly, there could be greater scope to 'fast-track' women through the ranks in recognition of career delays and the accumulation of other experience outside of the normal academic criteria. Equally important is to minimise the extent to which women effectively are penalised for the delays. For example, periods of part-time work due to care responsibilities could be awarded pro-rata points against academic performance measures. This would ensure that the disadvantage of part-time work does not compound. More generally, there is a need to implement measures that recognise and address the disadvantage caused through women's delayed career trajectories, and the long-term impacts of that, should be responded to.

Help with playing the game

As discussed, strategies such as the Women in Leadership program have been beneficial to many. They are designed to assist women to understand the system of higher education progression and how they might improve their chances of promotion through better self-management and strategic planning. They also serve to build networks within the universities as well as link women to mentors who can advise and assist in career development. While the Women in Leadership program was not universally applauded, when it worked, it worked extremely well. It was transformative for some women and was directly responsible for the development of aspirations for promotion, greater job satisfaction and increased self-confidence. Such initiatives should continue with the caveat of the need for constant review and evaluation to remain relevant to a changing pool of academics and conditions. At the same time, on its own, this program does little to change ‘the game’ that generated the barriers in the first instance. As such, it is necessary to look at a range of changes that will address these.

Changing the game

There are a number of aspects to the ‘game’ that is higher education that could be changed. One of the direct challenges is to modify the promotions process and criteria so that women are more likely to be eligible to apply before retirement age, as well as to be valued for those things they are good at. First, I question why the process has to take so long given the enormously time-consuming nature of accumulating the skills and experience necessary to apply. I suspect it could be streamlined and still be effective in assessing the quality of an applicant.

Second, the qualities that are accorded merit in promotion need expansion to recognise the experiences and skills that many women have acquired. While this has been a direction supported by EEO strategies, and as discussed earlier, the greater recognition of excellence in teaching is one step toward this. There is also a need to go further so as to include recognition and reward for teamwork and collaboration, pastoral care, organisational service, and achievement in the face of obstacles. Most importantly, there needs to be capacity for recognition of the value of care work, in its broadest definition, that is integral to the functioning of universities. To apply the over-used word of ‘excellence’, I suggest that excellence in care for oneself, one’s family, students, colleagues and the community, seems to me to be an attribute that is important in academic leadership and could be better incorporated into promotions criteria. The capacity to care, within the promotion system as it exists, is actually penalised through the multiple ways it detracts from the singular focus on

accumulating the experience and quantifiable outcomes that must be demonstrated in order to be successful.

Overall, strategic change to better support women's progression needs to be oriented, not so much at changing women, but ensuring that systems of reward and recognition are less biased in favour of men and less punishing of women, in part due to their unequal responsibility for care.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to conclude this thesis by discussing the implications of the research findings and identifying priorities for change. I argue that my research gives further evidence that women's under-representation in higher education leadership is not an outcome of unfettered choice but a product of systemic processes where women are positioned relatively subordinate to men. Women negotiate careers in higher education within a set of conditions that is generally disadvantageous and face a relatively constrained set of options for career progression. The outcome is that many women 'choose' not to aim for promotion even when they have the experience and human capital to be eligible and potentially successful. This is an unjust outcome that is harmful at many levels.

The second aim was to identify priorities for change to increase the chances for gender equality in higher education leadership. These include the need for better conditions of academic work, the need to interrogate policy change that emphasises 'excellence' and 'quality' in academic performance in relation to their gendered impacts, and a need for the strengthening of EEO in the face of market-driven higher education reform. I go on to identify priorities for the university. First, I talk about organisational change, which includes the improvement of academic working conditions, shifting EEO policy away from a narrowly proscribed and ultimately flawed business case, the need to stop bullying and strategies to support the career aspirations of academics. I then discuss how women might be better supported to ensure they are eligible to apply for promotion before they reach retirement age. This includes the need for initiatives that will address the penalties for women's lives that are currently in operation and help to speed up women's capacity to accumulate the necessary skills and experience required for appointment at Level D. These include leadership training but, more importantly, it is necessary to review current processes of reward and recognition, which in themselves serve to slow women down further and penalise them for their roles in undertaking a disproportionate load of the care work required within organisations. Together, strategies both to change organisational practices and to support women better are required to open up the possibilities of 'choice' to aspire to promotion to Level D.

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Attachment 1: VU Minimum standards for academic levels (MSALs)

POLICIES AND ASSOCIATED PROCEDURES

POLICY NUMBER: POH071114000

PREVIOUS POLICY POH051125000 (*amended 19/11/07 via review*)

NUMBER:

POLICY NAME: Academic Classification

DATE APPROVED: 15 November 2007

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: Director Human Resources

FIRST EFFECTIVE DATE: 22 November 2005

1.0 PURPOSE

To broaden the minimum standards for academic levels (MSALs) (for teaching and research academic staff) through the introduction of the Victoria University Standard Academic Levels (VUSALs). The VUSALs have been developed with the intention of building on from the MSALs to provide greater clarity for staff and assist the operation of related policies and processes, such as the Higher Education Academic Promotion Policy and the Academic Workload Model.

2.0 BACKGROUND

The Higher Education Salaries Award 2002 (the Award) introduced the minimum standards for academic levels, known as the "MSALs", for all academic staff except casuals. The Award established a role for the use of MSALs for incremental progression, annual staff development/performance review and identification of development/training needs of academic staff. In acknowledgement that the responsibilities of academic staff may vary according to the requirements of each institution to meet its specific objectives, it was intended, within the provisions of the Award, that the MSALs would be built on by each institution in order to address different discipline requirements and/or to individual staff development requirements. Victoria University has developed the VUSALs as the mechanism to build on the MSALs. These were endorsed in principle by the Education and Research Board in October 2006.

3.0 DEFINITIONS

MSAL – Minimum Standard for Academic Level – the MSALs for each level of academic staff are set out in *Appendix 1*

VUSAL – Victoria University Standard Academic Level ('the standard academic level') – the VUSALs for each level of academic staff are set out in *Appendix 2*

RAI – Research Active Index

4.0 KEY WORDS

Academic promotion; position classification standards; standard academic levels.

5.0 POLICY

5.1 Victoria University provides a standard of academic levels as defined by the VUSALs. These VUSALs expand on the minimum standards provided under the Higher Education Salaries Award.

5.2 The VUSALs are differentiated by level of complexity, degree of autonomy, leadership requirements of the position and level of achievement of the academic. The work is anticipated to increase in complexity, the degree of autonomy and required level of achievement as the level increases.

5.3 The VUSALs set out the scope of work to be undertaken at each level. It will cover academic staff currently working within support areas. There is no expectation that an academic at a particular level will be required to undertake every activity identified within that level. Nor is it expected that Academics will

only undertake the activities indicated at that particular level as defined in *Appendix 2*. The activities to be actually undertaken will be determined through processes such as the academic workload allocation and the Staff Performance and Development Plan (SPDP).

5.4 All academic positions at Victoria University, except casual academic positions and Academics in Teaching and Learning Services where they do not fit the models, will be allocated an appropriate standard academic level in accordance with the VUSALs.

5.5 An Academic appointed to a particular level may be assigned and may be expected to undertake responsibilities and activities at any level up to and including the level to which the Academic is appointed or promoted, for example, tutoring can be required at all levels. In addition, an Academic may undertake elements of the work of a higher level in order to gain experience and expertise, for example where the Academic is working towards promotion to the next level.

5.6 Academics employed at VU will normally be General Teaching and Research academics. However, an academic may be appointed to a research-focused position and will usually undertake activities as listed in the VUSALs excepting Teaching and Learning and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. As well, research-focused academics would generally undertake the research activities listed at greater depth and breadth compared to General Teaching and Research Academics.

5.7 It is expected that these descriptions in the standard academic levels document at *Appendix 2* will evolve over time to reflect changing circumstances and VU's strategic priorities.

5.8 The VUSALs will underpin and guide academic position description development, and recruitment, promotion, professional development and SPDP processes.

5.9 The VUSALs must **not** be used as a basis for claims for reclassification.

6.0 PROCEDURES

6.1 When an academic position is created or becomes vacant and is to be filled, the Head of School or Centre must review the required duties, develop a position description and recommend the standard academic level that will apply to the position.

6.2 The Executive Dean/ Principal Officer/Vice Chancellor who authorises the establishment or advertising of the position in accordance with the Human Resources Delegations Policy also authorises the appropriate standard academic level for the position.

7.0 CONGRUENCE WITH LEGISLATION AND RELATED POLICIES

- *Victoria University (Academic and General) Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 2005*
- Educational Leadership Policy
- Recruitment and Selection of Staff Policy
- Higher Education Academic Promotion Policy
- Staff Performance and Development Plan (SPDP) Policy
- Human Resources Delegations Policy
- Academic Workloads Model
- Research Active Index (RAI) Policy

8.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

9.0 CONSULTATION

Education and Research Board in October 2006.

10.0 REVIEW

The policy will be reviewed again in three (3) years.

11.0 ACCOUNTABILITIES

11.1 RESPONSIBILITY

The Director – Human Resources has responsibility for the implementation, maintenance and update of the policy.

11.2 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

A report is to be provided to the Education and Research Board on the implementation of the VUSALs in mid-2007 by the Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor Education Programs. This policy should be referred to when developing position descriptions for academic roles. The policy is also referenced in the SPDP template plans for academic staff.

11.3 TRAINING PLAN

Human Resource Advisors will ensure academic staff in their portfolios are aware of this updated policy.

11.4 COMPLIANCE

All academic positions except casuals are allocated to one of the VUSALs.

11.5 EFFECTIVENESS OF THIS POLICY

All academic positions except casuals are allocated to one of the VUSALs.

12.0 FORMS

None

13.0 APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Minimum Standards For Academic Levels - For Teaching And Research Academic Staff

Appendix 2: Victoria University Standard Academic Levels

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR ACADEMIC LEVELS – FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH ACADEMIC STAFF

Level A

A Level A academic will work with the support and guidance from more senior academic staff and is expected to develop their expertise in teaching and research with an increasing degree of autonomy. A Level A academic will normally have completed four years of tertiary study or equivalent qualifications and experience and may be required to hold a relevant higher degree. A Level A academic will normally contribute to teaching at the institution, at a level appropriate to the skills and experience of the staff member, engage in scholarly, research and/or professional activities appropriate to their profession or discipline, and undertake administration primarily relating to their activities at the institution. The contribution to teaching of Level A academics will be primarily at undergraduate and graduate diploma level.

Level B

A Level B academic will undertake independent teaching and research in their discipline or related area. In research and/or scholarship and/or teaching a Level B academic will make an independent contribution through professional practice and expertise and coordinate and/or lead the activities of other staff, as appropriate to the discipline. A Level B academic will normally contribute to teaching at undergraduate, honours and postgraduate level, engage in independent scholarship and/or research and/or professional activities appropriate to their profession or discipline. He or she will normally undertake administration primarily relating to their activities at the institution and may be required to perform the full academic responsibilities of and related administration for the coordination of an award program of the institution.

Level C

A Level C academic will make a significant contribution to the discipline at the national level. In research and/or scholarship and/or teaching he or she will make original contributions, which expand knowledge or practice in their discipline. A Level C academic will normally make a significant contribution to research and/or scholarship and/or teaching and administration activities of an organisational unit or an interdisciplinary area at undergraduate, honours and postgraduate level. He or she will normally play a major role or provide a significant degree of leadership in scholarly, research and/or professional activities relevant to the profession, discipline and/or community and may be required to perform the full academic responsibilities of and related administration for the coordination of a large award program or a number of smaller award programs of the institution.

Level D

A Level D academic will normally make an outstanding contribution to the research and/or scholarship and/or teaching and administration activities of an organisational unit, including a large organisational unit, or interdisciplinary area. A Level D academic will make an outstanding contribution to the governance and collegial life inside and outside of the institution and will have attained recognition at a national or international level in their discipline. The academic will make original and innovative contributions to the advancement of scholarship, research and teaching in their discipline.

Level E

A Level E academic will provide leadership and foster excellence in research, teaching and policy development in the academic discipline within the institution and within the community, professional, commercial or industrial sectors. A Level E academic will have attained recognition as an eminent authority in their discipline, will have achieved distinction at the national level and may be required to have achieved distinction at the international level. A Level E academic will make original, innovative and distinguished contributions to scholarship, researching and teaching in their discipline. The academic will make a commensurate contribution to the work of the institution.

Research academic staff (inclusive of creative disciplines)

Level A

A Level A research academic will typically conduct research/scholarly activities under limited supervision either independently or as a member of a team and will normally hold a relevant higher degree. A Level A research academic will normally work under the supervision of academic staff at Level B or above, with an increasing degree of autonomy as the research academic gains skills and experience. A Level A research academic may undertake limited teaching, may supervise at undergraduate levels and may publish the results of the research conducted as sole author or in collaboration. He or she will undertake administration primarily relating to their activities at the institution.

Level B

A Level B research academic will normally have experience in research or scholarly activities, which have resulted in publications in refereed journals or other demonstrated scholarly activities. A Level B research academic will carry out independent and/or team research. A Level B research academic may supervise postgraduate research students or projects and be involved in research training.

Level C

A Level C research academic will make independent and original contributions to research, which have a significant impact on their field of expertise. The work of the research academic will be acknowledged at a national level as being influential in expanding the knowledge of their discipline. This standing will normally be demonstrated by a strong record of published work or other demonstrated scholarly activities. A Level C research academic will provide leadership in research, including research training and supervision.

Level D

A Level D research academic will make major original and innovative contributions to their field of study or research, which are recognised as outstanding nationally or internationally. A Level D research

academic will play an outstanding role within their institution, discipline and/or profession in fostering the research activities of others and in research training.

Level E

A Level E research academic will typically have achieved international recognition through original, innovative and distinguished contributions to their field of research, which is demonstrated by sustained and distinguished performance. A Level E research academic will provide leadership in their field of research, within their institution, discipline and/or profession and within the scholarly and/or general community. He or she will foster excellence in research, research policy and research training.

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY STANDARD ACADEMIC LEVELS

Level A

Qualifications Completion of undergraduate degree and enrolment in PhD or Professional Doctorate (or equivalent professional standing)

Teaching and Learning

- For new employees, undertake Induction for Teaching Program
- Prepare and deliver lecture, tutorials and practical classes however described
- Consult with and provide feedback to students
- Undertake marking and assessment
- Collaborate with colleagues about teaching program
- Participate in teaching teams within and across sectors
- Participate in teaching programs involving external partners
- Participate in teaching evaluation
- Undertake teaching and learning training provided by Staff College and other approved professional development and complete Graduate Certificate within Tertiary Education or equivalent in 3 years.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

- Participate in professional development activities in the scholarship of teaching and learning
- Develop, trial and implement improved methods of teaching
- Participate in group application for teaching and learning awards

Research and Creativity

- Conduct research in accordance with the RAI expectations for this level
- Complete doctoral degree and publish findings as appropriate
- Present conference papers based on research
- Participate in research teams in relevant centres and institutes
- Assist in the research training of postgraduate students
- Undertake research training provided by Research Office and other approved professional development

Service to the University

- Participate in SPDP process
- Attend School and Faculty meetings, sit on committees as required
- Undertake administrative tasks
- Provide student advice and support
- May undertake unit coordination
- Participate in the administration and operation of the University as appropriate
- Active membership of professional and/or industry associations
- Participate in University relationships with external partners

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY STANDARD ACADEMIC LEVELS

Level B Qualifications PhD or Professional Doctorate (or equivalent professional standing)

Teaching and Learning

For new employees, undertake induction for teaching program and complete

- Graduate Certificate within Tertiary Education in 3 years
- Prepare and deliver lectures, tutorials and practical classes however described
- Develop high-quality unit and course material
- Consult with and provide feedback to students
- Undertake marking and assessment
- Collaborate with colleagues about teaching program
- Participate in teaching teams within and across sectors
- Participate in teaching programs involving external partners
- Participate in teaching evaluation
- Undertake teaching and learning training provided by Staff College and other approved professional development

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

- Participate in professional development activities in the scholarship of teaching and learning
- Develop, trial and implement innovative teaching methods
- Undertake scholarly review of teaching methods and practices
- Present material developed in scholarship of teaching and learning
- Participate in group application for teaching and learning awards

Research and Creativity

- Conduct research in accordance with the RAI expectations for this level
- Participate in grant submissions
- Develop skills in research project management
- Serve as a registered supervisor of research students
- Present conference papers based on research
- Participate in research teams in relevant centres and institutes
- Assist in the research training of postgraduate students
- Undertake research training provided by Research Office and other approved professional development

Service to the University

- Participate in SPDP process
- Attend School and Faculty meetings, sit on committee as required
- Undertake administrative tasks
- Provide student advice and support
- Undertake unit coordination as required
- May undertake course coordination
- Participate in the administration and operation of the University as appropriate
- Active membership of professional and/or industry associations
- Participation in University relationships with external partners

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY STANDARD ACADEMIC LEVELS

Level C Qualifications PhD or Professional Doctorate (or equivalent professional standing)

Teaching and Learning

- For new employees, undertake induction for teaching program and complete Graduate Certificate Program within 3 years

- Prepare and deliver lectures, tutorials and practical classes however described
- Develop high-quality unit and course material
- Undertake course design activities
- Consult with and provide feedback to students
- Undertake marking and assessment
- Collaborate with colleagues about teaching program
- Develop curricula, pathways and linkages within and across sectors
- Participate in teaching teams within and across sectors
- Participate in teaching programs involving external partners
- Participate in teaching evaluation
- Undertake teaching and learning training provided by Staff College and other approved professional development

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

- Participate in professional development activities and demonstrate achievement in scholarship of teaching and learning
- Develop, trial and implement innovative teaching methods
- Undertake scholarly review of teaching methods and practices
- Present material developed in scholarship of teaching and learning
- Apply for teaching and learning awards

Research and Creativity

- Conduct research in accordance with the RAI expectations for this level
- Seek external research funding
- Provide leadership in research grant applications
- Participate in research teams including cross-institutional research teams
- Participate in research programs involving external partners
- Effectively manage research projects
- Contribute to the leadership of research projects
- Supervise as a registered principal supervisor of HDR students
- Assist research students in the publication of their research
- Provide research mentorship to early career researchers
- Present papers based on research at conferences
- Undertake activities to achieve a national research profile
- Assist in the research training of postgraduate students and new research staff
- Undertake research training provided by Research Office and other approved professional development

Service to the University

- Participate in SPD process
- Attend School and Faculty meetings, sit on committees as required
- Chair School and Faculty meetings or working parties
- Contribute to Faculty planning
- Manage administrative activities
- Provide student advice and support
- Undertake unit and/or course coordination
- Act as external examiner for PhD theses for other Universities
- Participate in significant University and cross university meetings and processes like promotion
- Participate in the administration and operation of the University as appropriate
- Mentor early career staff
- Active membership of professional and/or industry associations
- Participation in University relationships with external partners
- Manage established links with industry, community, government and professional bodies

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY STANDARD ACADEMIC LEVELS

Level D

Qualifications PhD or Professional Doctorate (or equivalent professional standing)

Teaching and Learning

- For new employees, undertake induction for teaching program and complete Graduate Certificate within Tertiary Education in 3 years
- Prepare and deliver lectures, tutorials and practical classes however described appropriate to time fraction and research activity
- Develop innovative teaching activities
- Undertake course design activities
- Consult with and provide feedback to students
- Undertake marking and assessment
- Develop curricula, pathways and linkages within and across sectors
- Participate in and manage teaching teams within and across sectors
- Participate in and manage teaching programs involving external partners
- Participate in teaching evaluation
- Participate in the development of teaching and learning training provided by Staff College

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

- Lead professional development activities and demonstrate significant achievement in the area of teaching and learning
- Implement strategies to ensure Faculty staff are aware of and able to apply developments in field
- Develop, trial and implement innovative teaching methods
- Undertake scholarly review of teaching methods and practices
- Publish material developed in scholarship of teaching and learning
- Apply for teaching and learning awards

Research and Creativity

- Conduct research in accordance with the RAI expectations for this level
- Seek major external research funding
- Provide leadership in research grant applications
- Provide leadership in achieving strategic University research directions
- Participate and provide leadership in research teams including cross-institutional research teams
- Develop and provide leadership in research programs involving external partners
- Manage research projects
- Provide research mentorship to early career researchers
- Present papers based on research at conferences
- Undertake activities to achieve a national and international research profile
- Provide research training for postgraduate students and new research staff
- Undertake research training provided by Research Office and other approved professional development
- Serve as a registered principal supervisor of HDR students
- Attract high quality research students
- Assist research students in the publication of their research
- Provide research training at School, Faculty and/or University level

Service to the University

- Participate in SPDP process
- Chair School and Faculty meetings
- Chair university committees, working parties
- Lead Faculty planning and policy development
- Lead professional development activities in management
- Design and manage student advice and support systems
- Undertake activities to improve performance against Faculty and University KPIs
- Undertake unit and/or course coordination

- Act as external examiner for PhD theses for other Universities
- Participate in significant University and cross university meetings and processes like promotion
- Participate in the administration and operation of the University as appropriate
- Mentor early career staff
- Take responsibility for effective teaching strategies and curriculum development within Faculty
- Take role as Head of School or organisational unit
- Take role as Associate or Deputy Dean
- Active membership of professional and/or industry associations
- Lead the development of strategic University relationships with external partners
- Develop and manage links and establish collaboration with industry, community, government and professional bodies
- Represent University on external committee
- Undertake activities to improve performance against engagement KPIs

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY STANDARD ACADEMIC LEVELS

Level E

Qualifications PhD or Professional Doctorate (or equivalent professional standing)

Teaching and Learning

- For new employees, undertake induction for teaching program and complete Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Education in 3 years
- Prepare and deliver lectures, tutorials and practical classes however described
- Develop innovative and high quality unit and course material
- Advance major innovations in course design and delivery including cross sectoral activity
- Develop innovative approaches to significant teaching issues within the Faculty
- Consult with and provide feedback to students
- Undertake marking and assessment
- Participate in teaching evaluation
- Undertake effective cross sectoral liaison on the development of curriculum, pathways and linkages
- Develop and manage teaching programs involving external partners
- Participate in the development of teaching and learning training provided by Staff College

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

- Lead professional development activities and demonstrate national/international recognition in scholarship of teaching and learning
- Implement strategies to ensure Faculty staff are aware of and able to apply developments in field
- Provide University wide leadership on teaching and learning
- Develop, trial and implement innovative teaching methods
- Undertake scholarly review of teaching methods, practices
- Publish material developed in scholarship of teaching and learning
- Apply for teaching and learning awards

Research and Creativity

- Conduct research in accordance with the RAI expectations for this level
- Develop major research initiatives that attract external funding
- Provide sustained leadership in research grant applications
- Provide sustained leadership in achieving strategic University research directions
- Participate and provide leadership in research teams including cross institutional research teams
- Provide sustained leadership in the development of research programs involving external partners
- Lead and manage large research projects
- Provide sustained research mentorship to early career researchers
- Present conference papers based on research at national and international conferences
- Undertake activities to achieve an international research profile
- Serve as a registered principal supervisor of HDR students
- Attract and retain high quality research students
- Assist research students in the publication of their research

- Provide research training at School, Faculty and/or University level
- Membership of significant committee or government advisory body
- Contribute to the development of research policy and strategy for University

Service to the University

- Participate in SPDP process
- Chair School and Faculty meetings
- Chair university committees, working parties
- Take responsibility for Faculty planning and policy development
- Take responsibility for professional development activities in management
- Provide sustained leadership in activities to improve performance against Faculty and University KPIs
- Undertake unit and/or course coordination
- Lead and oversight the development and operation of student advice and support systems
- Act as external examiner for PhD theses for other Universities
- Participate in the administration and operation of the University as appropriate
- Take responsibility for effective teaching strategies and curriculum development within Faculty
- Mentor early career staff
- Membership of significant cross-university committees and/or government advisory bodies
- Take role as Head of School or organisational unit
- Take role as Associate or Deputy Dean
- Take role as Executive Dean
- Engaged Service to the University
- Active membership of professional and/or industry associations
- Lead the development of strategic University relationships with external partners
- Develop and manage links and establish collaboration with industry, community, government and professional bodies
- Represent University on external committee
- Undertake activities to improve performance against engagement KPIs

Attachment 2: Information to participants

Victoria University

Women and the transition from academic Level C to D

PhD research

Information to participants

You are invited to participate in an interview to contribute to a Doctoral research project that aims to critique gender equity policy and practice in Australian universities. The research is being undertaken by Joanne Pyke through the School of Applied Economics, VU, under the supervision of Dr Jamie Doughney (Work and Economic Policy Research Unit) and Dr Penny Weller (School of Law). The broad aim of the research is to evaluate the progress that has been made towards equity goals over the past twenty years and to identify policy alternatives for the achievement of gender equity. A particular area of research focus will be on the concept of 'individual choice' and 'adaptive preference formation' as a contributing factor in gendered organisational structures. As a method of focussing on this, the research will use Victoria University as a case study and examine the reasons for women's concentration at lower academic classifications within the University and their under-representation at more senior academic levels.

In the higher education sector, there is continued debate and competing explanations about why women remain concentrated in the lower levels of the academic hierarchy. Continued indirect discrimination, masculine cultures of authority, workplace reform that impacts more heavily on women, the additional care responsibilities of women, the idea that the gender division is a simple expression of women's natural interests and attachment to the workplace, and the gendered impacts of globalisation all contribute to theories of why women continue to be concentrated at the lower ends of the academic hierarchy. While each of these theoretical threads will be explored, my research is particularly interested in the extent to which 'choices' and aspirations for promotion and progression within academe are gendered and constructed within what constraints.

The interview will ask for information about your background, your current employment, your aspirations for promotion, your beliefs about your prospects and opportunities for promotion and any perceived constraints you believe will impact on your ability to achieve your career goals. Interviews will take approximately one hour and be arranged to take place at a time and place that is convenient for you. A detailed list of interview questions can be made available prior to an interview.

Your participation in an interview is entirely voluntary and there will be no impact on you, your workplace or your promotional opportunities whether or not you choose to participate. The one potential risk is that the interview may bring up issues about your working life and any difficulties or problems that may be affecting you at the time of the interview. All efforts will be made to ensure that the interview will be conducted in a way that is not distressing to you but, should this occur, arrangements can be made for you to meet with an appropriately qualified counsellor.

Prior to the interview, the researcher will ask your permission to tape record the interview and will only record if your permission is given. All taped and written information gathered through the interview will remain confidential and will be used for research purposes only. It will not be possible to identify any one individual in any of the papers or publications that are produced out of the research. Before conducting the interview, it is necessary to receive your signed consent on the form provided below.

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to Joanne Pyke on 0432 682 834 or Dr Jamie Doughney on 9919 4144. If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, phone (03) 9919 4710.

Attachment 3: Interview schedule – Summary Version

How did you get here? Can you tell me a bit about your background starting with your undergraduate degree?

- **Career breaks**
- **Part-time work**
- **Parental leave**

Can you tell me about your current position?

- **Key responsibilities?**
- **How many hours do you work?**
- **Is it manageable with the rest of your life?**
- **Do you like your job?**

Plans for promotion?

- **Are you satisfied with the level you have reached at this stage in your career? If not – what has held you back?**
- **Do you plan to/have you applied for promotion?**
- **Do you plan to get to Level E?**
- **Are you supported? – by who and how?**
- **Do you think there are barriers to women for promotion?**

Equal Employment Opportunity

- **Do you think there is a glass ceiling?**
- **Do you feel that the practices at VU are discriminatory against women?**
- **Are you aware of EEO policies being applied within the university?**
- **How do these translate in your local area?**
- **As opposed to policies, do you think that EEO is embedded within the practices of your faculty?**
- **How do you think EEO could be strengthened/more relevant?**

Attachment 4: List of acronyms

Acronym Meaning

AA	Affirmative Action
AEN	Australian Education Network
ANU	Australian National University
ASX200	The top 200 companies in terms of earnings listed on the Australian Stock Exchange
ATN	Australian Technology Network
AUQA	The Australian Universities Quality Agency
AVCC	Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (now Universities Australia)
CAE	College of Advanced Education
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
EOWA	Equal Opportunity for Women Agency
FIT	Footscray Institute of Technology
Go8	Group of Eight Universities
HEWRR	Higher Education Workplace Relations Requirements
IRU	Innovative Research Universities
MSALs	Minimum standards for academic levels
NGU	New Generation Universities
NTEU	National Tertiary Education Union
NVIVO	A qualitative software package for the analysis of qualitative data
PDRI	Plan, Do, Review and Improve
RAI	Research Activity Index
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University
RQF	Research Quality Framework
S4W	Security for Women consortium
SES	Socio-economic Status
SJTU	Shanghai Jiao Tong University
SPDP	Staff Performance and Development Plan
TAFE	Tertiary and Further Education
VC	Vice Chancellor
VUT	Victoria University of Technology
WIT	Western Institute of Technology
CGS	Commonwealth Grants Scheme
ERA	Excellence in Research in Australia