**Gender, management and life course issues**

**in Australian and New Zealand Universities**

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**Abstract**

1. Purpose

This paper explores the issues arising for women and men in senior management in New Zealand and Australian universities where life course and career trajectories intersect. The ways in which the stereotypical masculinist culture of universities can create additional problems for women is discussed.

1. Methodology

The data presented here comes from 47 interviews undertaken with women (27) and men (20) senior managers – a total of 26 interviews from New Zealand universities and 21 from Australian universities. “Senior Management” was defined in this study as those academic managers at the level of Dean or above with university wide responsibilities, who were currently or who had been in senior management in the past five years.

1. Findings

In spite of an acknowledgement of the importance of diversity and the benefits that brings, it is still difficult for women to attain senior management positions. Early career intersections with life course imperatives make it problematic for women to progress at the same rate as men. For example, women are still seen to have the primary care-giving responsibilities and taking time out for child bearing or rearing is interpreted as a sign of lesser commitment to a career. Life-course issues for women aspiring to senior management roles in universities are therefore framed around hegemonic constructions of masculinity; notions of academic careers subsuming personal life into professional roles; and structural constraints making rational choice impossible for many women. Furthermore, the excessive hours worked in such roles equate with the definition for extreme jobs which take precedence over evry other aspect of life. The way in which women and men in these senior positions endeavour to balance work and family life are discussed.

1. Implications

The way in which universities in Australia and New Zealand are structured and operate make gender diversity and management difficult to operationalise, given the competing imperatives of work and other life course trajectories. It is crucial to reframe the way in which life course and career intersections are conceptualised to ensure that diversity and the realisation of potential in the university sector can be maximised.

1. Value of the paper

This paper draws together the experiences of women and men who have ‘made it’ in terms of attaining senior management positions in New Zealand and Australian universities. In discussing how generalised perceptions become proscriptive in determining the way an institutional cultural affects the intersection of career and life course trajectories the detrimental outcomes for individuals and the resultant lack of diversity are highlighted.

Key words: Gender, senior management, diversity .life course

**Introduction**

There is an accepted and continuing perception of a standard model of what an academic career in a University entails. This is based on inbuilt formal and informal patriarchal support systems that benefit men (Bagilhole and Goode, 2001) and reflects gendered trajectories and constructions of leadership. Thus, workplace assumptions about diversity and life course entrench the under-representation of women in senior positions despite the introduction of and expressed commitment to policies of equal opportunity (Mann, 1995).

It has been widely noted that constructions of leadership reflect hegemonic constructions of masculinity (Connell, 1995). However these may be so taken-for-granted that they are not even recognised. Lynch and Lyons (2008: 181) talk about a ‘the way masculinity is constructed as a care-less identity’. Sinclair (1998:40) suggested that Australian corporate leadership was very much a man’s world ‘in terms of its culture and team work’ - a homogenous kind of environment characterised by a kind of ‘matey solidarity’. It also included working very long hours; rarely taking sick leave and seeing sacrifice of personal and family time as essential for the job - these practises being seen as reflecting heroism, physical toughness, emotional toughness and self reliance in a model of heroic leadership that offers ‘a chance to be great, to be revered, perhaps even to glimpse immortality’ (Sinclair, 1998: 48). The consequences of such constructions of leadership are un-doable jobs. Hewlett and Buck Luce (2006, 52) found that most of those in what they called ‘extreme jobs’ (i.e. characterised by 70 hour working weeks plus performance pressures) carried high risks for an individual’s health and personal relationships, especially for mothers. At least some of those in senior management positions in universities are effectively in extreme jobs (Riordan 2011). Such work practices also assume a total commitment to paid employment regardless of life stage without any consideration of work life balance.

Even in 2011 Koenig et al. (2011) concluded from a meta analysis of leadership studies that leaders are still seen as culturally masculine. Males are considered to be agentic, a quality strongly associated with leadership. Hult et al. (2005) support this idea that a gender stereotypical schema operates where women are seen to inhabit the domestic sphere and men that of paid work. Thus women and men can be held to different standards and different expectations in their working life based on these assumptions creating more difficulty for women when trying to balance their work and personal lives. While these are broad stereotypes, they are consistently applied over 20 years after Schwartz (1989) suggested that the gender differences relevant to business/leadership related to either maternity or the different traditions and expectations of the sexes. She indicated that in terms of maternity the impact can be reduced and the expectations addressed, particularly those which ‘turn a relatively slight disruption in work schedule into a serious business problem and a career derailment for individual women ... we need to address the issues that arise when female socialisation meets the male corporate culture and masculine rules of career development...” (p66).

Such issues can be examined through the lens of life course, a sequence of status passages involving both the timing and ordering of events as the individual moves through life (Macmillan 2005, Shaw 2005). Macmillan (2005 p6) points out while acknowledging the immense heterogeneity of the life course, there is a prescriptive timetable for the ordering of major life events. Such norms may reference an array of institutional practices that produce homogeneity in life course patterns though individuals increasingly occupy several roles simultaneously. In the university context ‘changes in both individual and institutional position produce different sets of expectations for work (p13).’ Thus at a certain career stage there are specific expectations that are adopted as the norm and ‘are proscriptive of action’ (p14).

The issue of parenthood and the effect it has on careers has been explored from a number of angles. In the United States for example there are problems for women around timing of children and gaining tenure. Jacobs and Winslow (2004b) point out it is not feasible for most women to wait till they have tenure before starting a family because of age constraints, yet having a family earlier can be seen to ‘derail’ the tenure process because of taking ‘time-out’ even though there may be leave provisions available. Riordan (2011) notes that a strong academic research record as an important management competency is likely to be achieved later by women, when compared with men, because of women’s additional care-giving responsibilities.

One of the key work life balance policies supporting women (and men) in the labour market is paid maternity (or parental) leave. As an employment provision, this acknowledges the reality of people’s lives and the way in which aspects other than employment take supremacy at different stages. For two decades, the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987 has enabled New Zealand parents to take leave from employment on the birth or adoption of their child. Its precursor, passed in the early 1980s, provided only for maternity leave. In 2002 the Labour-led government introduced paid parental leave for the first time. Initially it was for a period of 12 weeks, which was increased to 14 weeks in 2005 and extended eligibility to employees who had six months service or more with the same employer. In July 2006, the entitlement was extended to self-employed parents. Parents are entitles to claim up to 52 weeks leave which can be shared with a partner. In Australia the first formal provision for maternity leave was the *Australian Public Service Maternity Leave (Australian Government Employees) Act, 1973.* This legislation provided 3 months' (12 weeks) paid maternity leave in the Commonwealth public service and statutory authorities. The 1979 Maternity Leave Test Case decision of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission granted a 12 month *unpaid* maternity leave entitlement to all permanent workers. The parental leave entitlement, 1990, extended existing maternity leave provisions, should the child's father wish to spend some time as the primary care giver. Australia's first national Paid Parental Leave scheme started on 1 January 2011. It provides eligible working parents with 18 weeks of Parental Leave Pay at the National Minimum Wage.

Decisions are made based on the perception by the individual of what choices are available to them at the particular juncture. Family demands are seen to limit the time available to devote to work. Jacobs and Winslow (2004a) suggest that while both partners in dual career families put in excessive hours of paid work, men with children work more hours than women with children and further, women of non childbearing age spend more time in paid work.

Managing academic careers therefore is a challenge for many women academics. It involves making choices at the outset of their career, navigating their way through the demands or teaching, research and administration, making strategic choices about a research focus, and quarantining time for research (Neale and White 2004). Women are also more likely to be involved with ‘administrivia’, which does not have an equal weighting with research when it comes to promotion. The “domestic” work of academia is a trap and increasingly women are wary about stepping into that role.

Work-family conflict is one of the key gender dynamics seen to contribute to the ‘leaking pipeline’ effect (Bailyn 2003, Mason & Golden 2004). At every stage of the career trajectory a higher proportion of women exit the pipeline compared to their male colleagues as they generally have a more negative experience of the university as a workplace. The gendered nature of academic rules such as the criteria for how academics are evaluated, the expectations around timing, and conventions of authorship, all work in favour of men (Bailyn 2003). An academic career is based on the gendered assumption that the incumbent is in a position to wholly devote themselves to their work, sacrificing a personal life to a professional one with freedom from competing responsibilities (Armenti 2004, Wolf-Wendel & Ward 2006). This is exacerbated by the support for a gendered division of labour in universities, where women undertake more of the teaching and pastoral duties, and then these aspects are evaluated differently (Armenti 2004; van den Brink 2009). The ideal worker norm in tandem with the question of time interact with socialisation to create a situation where structural constraints make the opportunities for so called ‘rational choice’ – where the individual chooses options for maximise benefit – an impossibility for women academics (Wolf-Wendel & Ward 2006).

This rational choice is even more difficult for women in science disciplines. The concept of a “scientist” is male and the organisational culture of the science workplace remains male. Consequently the linear career path of male scientists has been considered the only route to success (Moir 2006). Thus homosociability within the science community has a negative impact on the careers of women scientists (Husu and Kiskener 2010). However, it has been argued that departments and universities should be encouraged and funded to experiment with alternate life course options (Ceci and Williams 2011).

Evidence of the impact of relationships and children on the careers of women scientists is not clear, but suggests there is not a strong link between children and lower ambition and research productivity. Rather, it is the perception of senior colleagues about the research focus of women with children that appears to have more impact in the workplace and can become a huge obstacle to the academic reputation of these women (Moir 2006; Ceci and Williams 2011; Fox 2005; Fox and Colletralla 2006; Hartley and Dobele 2009; Corley 2005; Mavriplis et al. 2010; Lane 2009).

Life-course issues for women aspiring to senior management roles in universities are therefore framed around the following: hegemonic constructions of masculinity; notions of academic careers subsuming personal life into professional roles; and structural constraints making rational choice impossible for many women.

**Research Method**

The data analysed in this paper comes from an eight country study on women in higher education (HE) senior management (Bagilhole & White 2011). A sample of male and female senior managers, including current and former Rectors/Vice Chancellors/Presidents was interviewed. “Senior Management” was defined in this study as those academic managers at the level of Dean or above with university wide responsibilities, who were currently or who had been in senior management in the past five years. The interview sample in the study is purposive rather than representative. In some countries all universities were covered and in others the sample was drawn from a selection of universities reflecting the larger size of the sector. In New Zealand there are only eight universities and the sample included senior managers from them all. In Australia, where there are 39 universities, interviewees were selected only from those that are publicly funded.

Table 1: Interviewees by Country

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Country | Female | Male | Total |
| Australia | 14 | 7 | 21 |
| New Zealand | 13 | 13 | 26 |

The Australian sample represented eight per cent of senior managers in the 37 publicly funded universities. Interviewees were identified from the Universities Australia list of senior managers, and contacted by e-mail. Once they agreed to participate the plain language statement, interview schedule and consent form were forwarded to their executive assistants. All interviewees were required to complete the consent form before the interview commenced. There were fifteen tape recorded face to face interviews. Telephone interviews were undertaken with the remaining six academic managers due to the challenge of distance. The researcher took notes during these interviews. Interviews varied in length from 45 minutes to two hours.

In New Zealand, initial contact was by email with a follow-up phone call. Because of the relatively small size of the university sector identification of the senior managers was straightforward and only two of those approached to participate were unable to do so due to time constraints. The formal letter, consent form and interview schedule were sent to each of the participants once they had agreed to be interviewed. Twenty-four interviews took place in the office of the interviewee and the other two were undertaken by phone. Overall, interviews lasted between 30-90 minutes. Extensive notes were taken and the subsequent transcripts transferred to computer.

**Findings**

In addressing the workplace assumptions around diversity and life course, a number of salient areas affecting women’s progression through the system, and ultimately absence from the higher echelons of the university, were identified by senior managers.

Interviewees from both countries considered that in their universities the traditional academic [male] career path prevailed, moving through the more junior ranks to Professor, Head of Department or School, and Dean to senior manager. This model impacts on the orientation of university managers and differentiates them from leaders in other sectors. Many attempt to juggle vast university wide portfolios while remaining research active. Australasian senior managers were similar to their Irish counterparts, for example, in that “virtually no-one explicitly referred to the fact that requiring academics to be at professorial level dramatically reduced the availability of women for appointment to senior executive positions” (O’Connor 2008). So, barriers encountered early on in a career acted as an impediment for women as they found it difficult to get promoted to a level where they could contemplate a senior management position.

**Barriers to promotion**

Although both women and men felt that there are no inherent blockages in the recruitment system many suggested that in a variety of ways society’s gendered nature/nurture dichotomy still has an impact on women’s career advancement, particularly in relation to promotion. At the stage where academics are ready to move beyond the more junior levels, the different life course trajectories of women and men came into play. For example in relation to family commitments, women are often perceived to be more involved with family issues. As one senior woman explained:

The heavy workload and the difficulty of maintaining an asymmetrical burden of child and other dependent care are common barriers to promotion for women (NZ woman 26).

Furthermore, family responsibilities may limit options as a “lack of mobility is certainly a barrier for women seeking promotion” (AUS man 2), while a New Zealand man considered that

...another issue that may depress the numbers of women entering senior management is that their blooming mid-life career may be threatening to their partners and lead to relationships breaking up. This is an old Kiwi male thing and worse for Māori [indigenous New Zealanders] (NZ man 3).

The issue of interrupted careers came up in many guises and was used as an explanatory factor for women’s slower progression in academia, as one senior male manager opined:

The main barrier to promotion for women I think is the old chestnut of the interrupted career and taking time off for family. It creates a gap that takes years to come back from. I don’t see it as a culture within the organization (AUS man 5).

Another male respondent shared this view:

I think career interruptions are still a major barrier for women. It is hard to exit for a while and come back in and be back at the top level in research and teaching innovation right away. Good teaching innovation and research takes uninterrupted periods. To the extent that women have time out of the workforce, it does create an extra hurdle (AUS man 11).

The current New Zealand Performance Based Research Funding (PBRF) system and the proposed Research Evaluation exercise in Australia do not take account of any break in a career or the conflicting roles and responsibilities of women. As a result women are often less likely to have the necessary contacts in research institutes or the public sector, may be unable to maintain an ongoing vigilance for business opportunities and are less likely to attend conferences. This severely reduces their ability to network and foster the multi-teams that are required to do the job or build their CV, as the following respondent explains:

It is the same in many workplaces, women do think it is acceptable and expect to go part-time or casual while they raise children. That is a clear barrier because in universities promotion is based on research track record, and that gets interrupted. If they’re doing the balancing act, one way or other they’re less likely as I was to be involved in research (AUS woman 4).

Although selection panels vary tremendously there are the inherent biases against those with shorter CVs. In this respect it is not a level playing field because in senior positions the person with the ‘heavier’ CV usually wins out, a situation occurring in both Australia and New Zealand:

It is hard for women if they have a child rearing as well as academic roles. If you look at the CV of an academic male against the CV of an academic female, there is this period where not a lot happened. If you are going to develop an international research career either you need to do it cumulatively – keep churning out research, or you come up with the spectacular breakthrough that very few of us achieve. Men don’t typically take time out. I did make a breakthrough early on in my research (AUS man 8).

I would like to think that the barriers that prevent women’s advancement were changing but a lot is the same. Although there are no inherent blockages in the system a gendered nature/nurture dichotomy still has an impact. The level of competition is set very high and any break in a career is disadvantageous. This with the conflicting roles and responsibilities of women, make it harder for women to manage their careers. Although selection panels vary tremendously there are the inherent biases against those with a smaller and less impressive CV. Therefore it is not a level playing field. As a result women’s prizes tend to be early in their career because in senior positions the person with the heavier CV usually wins out (NZ man 24).

It was also suggested that women were more “inclined to be risk adverse" and to “be sure they will not be rejected” when applying for jobs or promotions where men “will chance their arm”.

Women clear the bar by a great deal when they apply. But women wait until they are certain they can get over the bar before applying for promotion or new jobs. Women also spend more time in caring and teaching roles. Changing the promotion criteria for teaching has made a difference. The success rates [for women] are now higher (AUS man 21).

As an Australian woman perceptively noted, barriers to promotion are gendered:

Barriers are linked to career development at the right age. Reward systems do not take into account performance relative to opportunity. Junior female academics will never star for getting reward and recognition, because it is not equally weighted for women. The majority of junior academic appointments are still women. Promotion panels are dominated by old males. There is a habit of giving high teaching loads to women, while males go into a research intensive mode (AUS woman 16).

The life course trajectory of women collides with the academic progress trajectory early in their career and thus makes it even harder for women to progress into senior management.

A couple of New Zealand men expressed their concern around the lack of women in senior roles and the discrimination they experience:

It is difficult to attract women to senior management positions. One comment you hear about female managers is that they’re bossy—just means they’re demanding and you wouldn’t say that about male managers. Many women in their mid-30s have children, and this is a factor holding them back from being able to do a bit more in teaching and research. They say they are still seen as mothers rather than career academics (NZ man 3).

Women often are put off applying for senior positions because they have significant family commitments; they may also perceive overt bias. Other women may put off applying for senior positions until they feel they have a cast iron case (NZ man 5).

An Australian woman also identified confidence as an issue:

The barriers are over personal confidence. You need the opportunity to act in the role. Some women would think: “Why do it?” given their responsibilities for children, parents etc. Some of the most successful women here have retired husbands, or stay at home husbands (AUS woman 12).

And a New Zealand man agreed that confidence was an issue but took a more judgmental stance, dismissing the effect of gender:

In regard to the gender profile of senior management, I remain bemused and concerned that there are far more opportunities for women than they realise. I think that the barriers such as confidence, family etc may be more perceived than real. In all my dealings with professional people gender has not been of significance (NZ man 25).

But barriers went beyond promotion panels; one New Zealand woman also highlighted the wider organisational culture as a barrier:

In some areas it’s very tough to be a woman - blokes being blokes rather than anti-women. Lots of women see they aren’t being given the opportunity. Barriers derive from the domestic sphere and reflected in dual commitment and broken service. Net consequence is that for women to reach the same sort of levels as men is hard. The institutional barriers include the competitive nature of men; an ego thing. Women often don’t appreciate their own worth and don’t push universities. Men bluff whilst women tend not to do that (NZ woman 23).

Overall there was general agreement that there were barriers to promotion of women academics, including lack of mobility due to family responsibilities, interrupted careers, and promotion processes. However, in and of themselves these are not necessarily impediments. While a New Zealand man believed “There are no barriers to women getting promotion ... The barriers for women are their different life experiences: taking time off for child rearing and bearing and career breaks are an issue (NZ man 8)”, an Australian woman suggested that “The barriers come with the holistic roles that women have – family demands, interrupted careers, managing motherhood and how their career interruptions are perceived by promotion panels (AW10).” While in the former case women are ‘blamed’ for creating their disadvantaged position, in the latter comment there is appreciation that it is more of a structural issue in the way that difference is perceived.

**Structure of the university**

Not only are family issues considered an impediment to promotion. Holmes and O'Connell (2007) suggest that they can cause women to abandon academia at every rung of the career ladder. While there has been some attention paid to getting more women on to the lower rungs of the ladder, solutions at the higher levels are proving more difficult (Barrett & Barrett 2010). Several respondents asserted that the biggest barrier lies in the structure of academia:

Difficulties in becoming a senior manager were imposed by the structure. I didn’t apply for senior roles when I thought my kids were too young. So I delayed applying until I thought it was easier to manage.( AUS woman 1).

I couldn’t do this job if I had responsibilities for children or any other responsibility such as caring for aged parents. It also reflects the idiosyncratic aspects of the university with campuses in different locations. In my previous senior management position in another state the hours were very long and unpredictable. I had to work late, work extra hours at the weekend. I couldn’t plan life outside work (AUS woman 12)

Eagly and Carli (2007) argue that there are vestiges of prejudice against women, and family responsibilities are just one of their challenges. For instance, married mothers now devote even more time to primary child care per week than they did in earlier generations (12.9 hours of close interaction versus 10.6), despite the fact that fathers, too, put in a lot more hours than previously (6.5 versus 2.6). Pressures for intensive parenting and the increasing demands of most high-level careers leave women with very little time to socialize with colleagues and build professional networks. Woodward (2007) also identified issues with high workloads requiring long hours crowding out other activities. A way of managing this tension was to establish strong boundaries between work and non-work. Women without dependent children though were more likely to be able to redefine boundaries when necessary to favour work. The following male respondent described an absence of boundaries, with work hours typical of those in extreme jobs (Hewlett and Buck Luce 2006):

Academics work very long hours. They also have discretion about when and where they work. Most academics would work in excess of 50 hours a week, or even 60 hours a week. If you are going to be a serious researcher, that’s how long you have to work. Being PVC is particularly challenging. Last year I spent over 100 days overseas on business. If I had young children I don’t think I could do the job. But my children are grown up. My role as senior manager has been intrusive of my private life. I work 70 to 80 hours a week (AUS man 8).

In contrast, one woman worked hard to maintain clear boundaries between work and family:

It is difficult to keep these jobs under control. They can consume your evenings. I always keep one day of a weekend when I don’t work. I refuse as many breakfast meetings and evening engagements as I can. I have a child who is still at school and a husband who often works away and no family support (AUS woman 9).

However, it is possible for the university to work proactively with women in senior positions when they have children, as the following Australian examples illustrate:

My first management role was at a predecessor institution of this university. I went in there and had my first baby. It was a great place to work with babies. There were two female senior managers and the culture was supportive of women in the workplace. No meeting was ever organized before 9 a.m. It was okay to take your children to meetings, even senior meetings. The senior women managers were really supportive of women staff with young children and encouraged women to apply for management roles (AUS woman 1).

When I was made Deputy Dean I had young children. The Dean said: “you are going away on a retreat”. I said “How can I do that. I have got to breastfeed and I have a three year old. He said: “I will pay for a nanny”. It’s more about people saying: “I think she can do something or add something here”. And they have hung in there with me, saying “yes we want you”... and a couple of key men in the organization who took a risk with me and put me into positions and then left me to it to get on with the job (AUS woman 13).

The structure of universities therefore creates difficulties for women wishing to move into senior management roles. The long hours culture and the challenge of putting boundaries around work are key issues. These are exacerbated, particularly in Australia, by the rapid transition to a managerial culture (O’Connor 2011).

**Work/life [im]balance**

Most respondents considered that senior management affected their work/life balance. A job in senior management at a university by its nature implies a single mindedness that leaves little room for other aspects of the life trajectory. Three women commented on the effects it had on their personal life, especially on their levels of fitness, as work became all-consuming:

I am unfit. I have had to reduce my circle of friends because of being time poor. I just can’t sustain a friendship. I check on my mother once or twice a week. I don’t spend much time with siblings. We do take a family holiday every January. But it is more personal company. I work such long hours I don’t do any physical activity. Any spare time I spend with my children and husband (AUS woman 13).

With regard to life/work changes, I have become more rigid about [including] exercise and things like that for myself. I work fewer hours than when I was an academic, but the job is ‘full on’ and I operate at full strength the whole time (NZ woman 22).

As a senior manager I have given up all sport and [voluntary organisation] administration. Having other commitments was not feasible because the job is all-consuming. About five years ago I decided that I needed to factor in time for myself and that it was reasonable to not have to do everything. That’s particularly a woman’s thing - not saying ‘no’ and doing everything. Sometimes adequate is fine, excellent isn’t needed (NZ woman 23).

Work could consume the lives of senior managers during the week and intrude into their weekends as the following Australian male respondents explained:

I have spent some of my career in regional institutions. You have to have exposure, as does your partner, throughout the region. It is an all consuming job. You are out six of every seven nights per week. Management of that is time consuming. The ability to lead a private life in a regional university is difficult (AUS man 2).

Work life balance absolutely goes out the window. As a DVC I am expected to be at every Council meeting, Council Committee meeting, and community events. In a typical week that is three to four nights a week and then I spend one day in the weekend, usually Sundays, catching up with emails and getting on top of the paperwork. The job certainly comes with a very serious work-life imbalance and I think that is part of the DVC role (AUS man 5).

And while one woman merely saw the change in role creating a different work emphasis at weekends, another tried to restrict weekend work:

As an academic I worked at weekends on my research, but now I work on Sundays on emails (AUS woman 19).

I try not to take work home, and have it down to a half day at the weekends but is sometimes at work until 7pm. My partner keeps a close eye on that aspect (NZ woman 10).

Several women argued that they had gained a different perspective and/or more varied experiences since becoming senior managers, with one seeing positive benefits for her family:

At senior management level the boundaries between work and life are much more blurred. The quantum of work is greater. Yet you also have a lot of autonomy around the organization. You sometimes have the power to make time for family life that you would not have in a role that was more scheduled – like a teaching role. Some of my work has involved a lot of travel. For six years I was out of the country for two months of the year. That was challenging for my husband and I had to organize family life around that. But there are some positives for my daughters; seeing me and my friends having interesting jobs and being empowered. It has been quite positive for them to see that. The benefit outweighs the cost (AUS woman 1).

This job inevitably puts strains on other parts of my life, and at one point I had to live apart from my husband for 18 months. However, juggling work and life commitments has had a positive side effect in that has been good confidence wise, and it has provided a good insight into how an organisation works and in-depth understanding of the tertiary sector. I was offered a DVC job, but turned it down because of family commitments (NZ woman 2).

Furthermore, some women have been able to balance life stage and work, and then successfully move into senior management:

It is difficult to balance work and life. At one stage I was part-time deliberately to try to keep a balance, but the things I was doing were too hard. I still have a kid at school.

I spent over 10 years of my career as a sessional teacher because I had little kids and I love teaching. In those roles you would see issues and various possibilities but you had no chance. So when I got back into an ongoing position in a university I decided I would try to get into a place that was interesting. And for those reasons I percolated into management (AUS woman 4).

I have always been busy and this has meant that becoming Pro Vice-Chancellor has not had as big an effect on my work/family life balance as one might expect, although it is less flexible and has way more meetings (NZ woman 4).

However, for many in Australia and New Zealand, a long working week made it difficult to balance work with family life and the main disadvantage of a job in senior management for both women and men was the huge time commitment. They described ‘extreme jobs’ in Hewlett and Buck Luce’s (2006) terms, with the pace being unrelenting:

Senior management has affected work/life experience significantly, it consumes you. It involves very long hours, very high expectations I would say my personal life has been particularly affected (AUS woman 7).

Academics work very long hours. The stress of the position is the affect on my private life and especially on my wife. My role as senior management has been intrusive of my private life (AUS man 8).

[It] takes up a lot more time; both ‘actual’ time as well as ‘thought time’ than (I) had it imagined it would (NZ man 13).

Three New Zealand men specifically recognised the difficulty of maintaining a reasonable work-life balance when there were children at home:

The task of finding time to maintain a family life around the demands of the job is devastating. The vice chancellorship is all-consuming and all-demanding, and requires a huge level of commitment: There are some things you can’t say no to—it would be like letting down the institution. Even getting one day off a week is a major chore (NZ man 6).

I enjoy the job but have no time for anything other than work and sleep. I do try to take time off in the weekend. This situation would be terrible for someone with children (NZ man 8).

There is always the risk of destroying family life- constant tension and 70 hour week and kid’s homework to be done: the higher up, the more the demands (NZ man 21).

Taking on a high profile management position – coinciding with other responsibilities - assumes that the latter can be subordinated and this can create problems for both women and men. In the past it has been assumed that women will be available to undertake caring responsibilities, and although women are now increasingly in demanding senior roles it is expected that they can and will juggle the differing aspects of their lives so that work takes supremacy.

**Barriers and life course**

To what extent can women in universities plan and navigate their way into senior management? A number of those interviewed had made decisions about what management positions they would take up and at what stage in their career, based on their caring responsibilities:

I could not have taken on the role if we had young children. There is too much to do in the evenings and at weekends (NZ woman 12).

The work/life balance was a factor in making the decision to move to this university. I had to be in a more family-friendly environment - either marry the institution or move out (NZ woman 17).

You don’t have much life. The job is a very full-on one, very absorbing and easier to do when one does not have families (NZ woman 19).

And while respondents could identify advances in thinking about ways of managing ‘life’ and ‘work’ in universities more reforms were required to ensure that women could successfully position themselves for senior management roles, as this Australian woman explained:

There are things we can do. We do have some good things in place. Maternity leave provisions are incredibly generous, but there are other things we can do because it is still an incredibly male organization. Like most universities there are a limited number of career paths available. And we have to make sure women get experience so that they can do these jobs (AUS woman 4).

There are possibilities for more flexibility both through formal and informal processes in universities. Family responsibilities and career breaks do not need to be seen as career-defining for women or as indicators of a less serious approach to their work, and this culture is perpetuated by mainly male colleagues. There are a number of aspects of senior management and the way in which the positions are conceptualised that are unhealthy for both women and men – as well as the institution - and do not take into account the possibility of diverse life courses.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The way in which universities in Australia and New Zealand are structured and operate make gender diversity and management difficult to operationalise, given the competing imperatives of work and other life course trajectories. While Australian universities had moved further along the path to managerialism where it has been suggested that there is more opportunity for women to attain senior positions (Carvalho and Machado 2011), this was not the case in New Zealand. Many of the interviewees said that a typical career path to senior management in New Zealand universities would involve becoming a high achieving academic and gaining a degree of authority early in one’s career, often not a possibility for women. It was also believed that where men will move out of universities because the salary is poor, women are more likely to accept a lower salary because working conditions at universities are more flexible allowing for some variability but not the enhancement of career prospects, reflecting Reskin and Roos’ (1990) argument that women gain access to a profession when it is no longer attractive to men.

In the present study there were clear barriers to promotion for women academics, including lack of mobility due to family responsibilities, interrupted careers, and promotion processes. Given that university senior management careers are based on the male academic career model, the barriers to promotion represent an additional obstacle for women, especially given that only 21 per cent of full professors in Australia are women and 15 per cent in New Zealand (Goransson, 2011, p. 54).

# The study also found that the structure of universities creates difficulties for women wishing to move into senior management roles. The culture of long hours and the challenge of putting boundaries around work are key issues, which were also identified by Riordan (2011). These are exacerbated, particularly in Australia, by the rapid transition to a managerial culture. Moreover, there was strong evidence that organisational cultures had not shifted significantly in relation to gender inclusiveness. Men tended to cite deficit models to explain women’s under-representation in senior management – interrupted careers, family responsibilities, and lack of internationally recognised research. Women, on the other hand, talked about the overt and covert discrimination that they experienced, reflecting Goransson’s (2008) findings that recruitment of women to senior management is not a priority and women applicants are passed over. She concluded that “women at the top see structures and men’s role as a problem on the way up, while men tend to blame women themselves (saying they do not apply to a sufficient degree” (p6). Respondents in the present study similarly found that entrenched organisational cultures made it difficult for women aspiring to – or currently holding down – senior management roles to effectively address life-course issues.

Therefore, it is crucial to reframe the way in which life course and career intersections are conceptualised. Early intersections strongly influence how later intersections are managed. The perceptions around women and career and their family/caring responsibilities become generalised and proscribe how they progress through the system. For individual women and men in our study though, stereotyped ways of behaving and career paths were not universal even though a generalised male bias was evident. It would be beneficial for both to consider how stereotypical masculine beliefs around career and life course shape leadership possibilities. In among the attributes valued in university senior management teams there are those that are not necessarily gendered, making it possible for either women or men to fulfil such roles. In reality the senior managers interviewed saw themselves placed at various points along the gendered continuum rather than at either end suggesting that they drew from a number of possible paradigms when carrying out their roles. However, this is not necessarily obvious from the outside and it is easier to deal with broad generalisations.

The possibility of new models for senior management were evident in Australia where universities worked proactively with women in senior positions when they have children, but generally the single-minded focus on work and the extreme hours were the accepted model. Thus while a great deal of lip service is paid to diversity and the particular gender-based skills and attributes women bring to senior roles, the reality is that for many women the actualisation of aspirations is almost impossible to achieve, to their personal detriment and that of the university sector more generally.

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