

# Is senior management in American and Australian Universities still gendered?

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## Abstract

Top and senior women working within universities in 2006 still experience more difficulties than their male peers. This is due to the continued organisational barriers, structural impediments and the difficulties of functioning as women senior and top managers and academics within a “man’s world”.

Today the recognition of these extra difficulties experienced by successful women is often dismissed, both by some of those women who have “made it” and many senior men. This paper is based on research for a Ph.D. thesis that used 24 interviews with top and senior women to explore their experiences of “life at the top” and also their suggestions for improving conditions for other women who wish to participate in the important task of shaping the strategic direction and governance of universities in a complex era of increasing economic and political uncertainty.

It is argued here that the slow but increasing representation of women and other minorities at senior levels enables the possibility of bringing a range of different perspectives to the traditional male-dominated university culture. Due to their experiences as “outsiders” from “within” women and other minorities are positioned to make a difference due to their willingness to embrace strategies that may challenge the existing status quo and support less traditional organisational cultures.

Despite the outward success of EEO/AA initiatives there is an ever present danger that these initiatives are being diluted in the movement towards increased managerialism and corporatisation within Australian universities. These trends are in danger of re-constructing and solidifying the mainstream organisational culture in universities which remains so unattractive to many talented academic and managerial women.

**Keywords:** Top Management; Senior Management; Gender; Universities

## 1.1 Introduction

Despite recent inroads made by women into the senior echelons of academia and university executive management, studies as recent as Wyn *et al* (2000), Brooks and Mackinnon (2001), Singh (2002), Carrington and Pratt (2003), White (2003), Winchester *et al* (2005) and Okpara *et al* (2005) found that gender balances still remain unequal, with women clustered in the less prestigious and lower paid academic and administrative positions. In Australia, women have been under-represented in both the senior academic positions and higher administrative levels (Noble and Mears, 2000; Carrington and Pratt, 2003; White, 2003; Winchester *et al*, 2005). This paper will only briefly touch on the statistical evidence of women's continued under-representation as this has been done elsewhere by this author (Tilbrook, 1998, 2005) and indeed others (Noble and Mears, 2000; Carrington and Pratt, 2003). Instead, it will concentrate on exploring the women's perceptions and responses to the barriers and obstacles that they encountered at the senior levels of Australian and American universities.

## 1.2 The Research Problem

To facilitate understanding as to why there are still so few women in the most senior positions within organisations<sup>1</sup>, the work that this paper is derived from carried out an in-depth exploration of the career trajectories, critical successes and barriers facing women in top / senior management and academic positions in Australian and American universities during 1998-2000. This was informed by the current statistical data which reveals a continuing under-representation of women in senior and top positions. Semi-structured interviews were used to elucidate the thoughts, perceptions and experiences of 24 top women managers and academics.

For the purposes of this paper, "senior" Australia academics are defined as those of associate professor or above, and senior managerial ranks for academic positions are considered as being heads of academic departments and higher, such as deans of divisions or schools (this is similar to Chesterman *et al*, 2004). University administrators in positions classified Higher Education Worker (HEW) Level 9 or above are regarded as "senior".

In the United States, "senior" academic positions are regarded to consist of tenured associate professors and professors; rather than the more junior, entry level, untenured rank of assistant professor. Additionally, "senior" academic positions include the academic heads of departments and also the deans of faculties or schools. In the United States the top academic executive levels are those of President (equivalent in the Australian context to CEO/vice-chancellor), Vice-President (deputy vice-chancellor), Provost (deputy vice-chancellor academic) and Assistant Vice-President. The American senior administrative positions included Assistant and Vice-President women with salaries over US \$150,000 per annum.

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<sup>1</sup> Winchester *et al* (2005: 32) suggest that at current rates of increase it will take another 49 years to achieve equal numbers of women and men in the Australian professoriate.

## 2.1. The Under-representation of Senior Women in Universities

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the concept of the “pipeline” gained currency. The pipeline hypothesis was that more women would follow the pioneering steps of their female predecessors in middle management into senior/top positions and under-representation would be rectified by time (*Halfway to Equal Report*, 1992). Unfortunately, the pipeline phenomenon has not eventuated (*Unfinished Business*, 1998, cited in Beck and Davis, 2003; Allen and Castleman, 2001; Carrington and Pratt, 2003) and a purely quantitative analysis of the available statistics does not answer why so few women have chosen to enter and, perhaps even more importantly, remain in top management (Marshall, 1995; Sinclair, 1998; Rutherford, 2001).

An additional difficulty for the “new” female vice-chancellors/presidents, is that the Australian and American university systems are currently confronted by a more complex environment characterised by policies of increasing deregulation and government withdrawals from traditional financial support (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Currie *et al*, 2002) leading to staff downsizing, higher student/staff ratios, more social and political expectations (Harman, 2002), and enormous stresses on libraries and from decaying infrastructure at the very time when the staff in these institutions have been waiting to see and evaluate the products of female leadership (Conway, 2001).

Australia’s proportion of women vice-chancellors in 1997 (12.5%) was only slightly higher than the USA two decades ago. It is also interesting to note that the number of Australian women vice-chancellors only increased from 3 (1991-6) to 6 in 1997, to 11 in November, 2004. A worrying recent trend has been the replacement of retiring women vice-chancellors with men as new incumbents. This has already happened in four Australian universities and now women are no longer represented at vice-chancellor level at the elite, “sandstone” or group of eight Australian universities. By February 2006, the proportion of women vice-chancellors had dwindled from the high point of 11 in 2004 to only 7 out of the 37 Australian public universities (AVCC, 2006).

Despite the significant improvement in the percentage of women occupying the top executive position of vice-chancellor during 1999 – 2004, this trend has not been matched as strongly in the deputy vice-chancellor positions, and is even less apparent among the Level E (Professorial) positions. The improvement characterizing the Level E (Professorial) positions has been minimal during this period, increasing from 13.3% to only 16.3%. A recent headline of an article in the *Campus Review* describes the “move to equity for female professors [as] still glacial” (Healy, 2006:9). This is a matter of on-going concern because the deputy vice-chancellor, pro vice-chancellor and Level E positions are feeder positions for the vice-chancellor positions.

## 2.2 The Organisational Culture and Universities

The organisational culture of universities, like most large institutions, is based predominantly on male managerial norms and values (Acker, 1990, 1992; Eveline, 2004). Consequently universities are not free of entrenched gender bias, despite the fact that they fill the vital role as intellectual, social and cultural leaders (Eveline,

2004). Numerous studies have criticised the dominant “malestream” (Burrell and Hearn, 1996) culture which still permeates tertiary institutions and is a symptom of the broader social and political inequalities which continue to impede women’s success in the public sphere (Walby, 1986, 1990; Pateman, 1994; Eveline, 1996: 65, 2004). These inequalities are evident in the marked disparity of research profiles between men and women who are divided into what Yeatman aptly terms, “privileged researchers and proletarianised teachers” (Yeatman, 1993, quoted in Castleman *et al*, 1995: 23). Women are over-represented at the lower academic ranks which are characterised by heavier teaching and administrative loads and a relative lack of access to research assistants and infrastructure (Castleman *et al*, 1995; Eveline, 2004). Even in academic disciplines where women have been historically well represented: such as in Arts/Humanities, Social Sciences and Education; “male employees are more likely to gain permanency and senior positions” (Castleman *et al*, 1995: 4; see also Currie *et al*, 2002; Carrington and Pratt, 2003; Okpara *et al*, 2005).

These pressures are particularly severe for the minority of women who reach senior levels as they may feel obligated to informally mentor and support other promising junior women and they are also often tagged as “equity change agents” (Yeatman, 1995) by their universities. Senior women also face higher visibility through their minority status and the pressure of continually proving their competence to their male colleagues (Burton, 1997; Bradley, 1997a, 1997b; White, 2003; Olsson and Walker, 2004; Wilson, 2005). This is another unrelenting subtle pressure as the male managerial norm (Sinclair, 1998) guarantees that male competence is taken for granted until there is usually substantial evidence to the contrary.

Malestream (Burrell and Hearn, 1996) culture persists in academic management at the most senior levels: “...[b]ecause management and leadership have for long been predominantly male enclaves, the picture of the ideal manager is grounded in masculine attributes” (Middlehurst, 1997: 13). Compounding this, universities in Australia and the United States are a curious mixture of academic individualism and collegiality, superimposed on increasingly managerialist/economic rationalist bureaucratic structures (Yeatman, 1995; Burton, 1997; Dixon *et al*, 1998; Harman, 2002; Kouzmin and Dixon, 2005). In response to a hostile environment of greater competition and shrinking government funding levels (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Brooks and Mackinnon, 2001; Singh, 2002; Eveline, 2004), universities have moved towards greater entrepreneurial activity in the form of closer industry links, new research partnerships and increasingly frantic fund raising initiatives, in order to try to safeguard core activities within universities.

This relatively recent trend could facilitate more opportunities for entrepreneurial women, however, it may have the opposite effect and further marginalise the position of women as universities depart from the older “academic machismo” to the more seductive “newer machismo of business culture” (Spurling, 1997: 44; Priola, 2004). Discourses of economic rationalism and “corporate managerialism” (Dixon *et al*, 1998; Harman, 2002; Eveline, 2004) can function to inhibit practices of flexibility, diversity and student support (Blackmore, 1995; White, 2003; Eveline, 2004; Reimer, 2004).

Despite more than two decades of EEO/AA legislative provision, most women still face a “cultural dilemma” (Still, 1996: 11) when working with their male colleagues

at senior levels. Still (1996) views organisational culture as the remaining barrier confronting women and she pessimistically concludes that “little change has been effected in it in the last twenty years despite tinkering around the edges” (Still, 1996: 19). Consequently, many women in universities are faced with several major structural problems. Firstly, they are forced to work within a dominant malestream (Burrell and Hearn, 1996) organisational culture that is disadvantageous and perhaps even destructive to them (Marshall, 1984, 1995a; Rutherford, 2001; White, 2003). Secondly, they face a need to change these structures and values (Cox, 1996; Burke, 2005) in order to ensure their greater participation and productivity whilst lacking the seniority and critical mass to effect these necessary changes (McCracken, 2000; Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000; Meyerson, 2001).

### **3.1 Barriers and obstacles facing the senior women in the study**

All of the women interviewed in this study described barriers or obstacles occurring at some stage during their careers as top managers or senior academics. Often this occurred at the entry level to their permanent academic careers, especially for American women desirous of gaining academic tenure. For the women commencing their careers in the sixties there were major structural barriers such as marriage bars (Interviews: AUS 2; AUS 13; US 4<sup>2</sup>), sexist attitudes towards young women wanting to do law and wishing to become more than secretaries “to a famous man” (Interview: US 2: 1), and the numerous colleges in America during the 1960s that did not offer scholarships to undergraduate and sometimes postgraduate women since they were considered a “poor risk,” i.e. likely to marry and withdraw from their studies (Interview: US 2). When one associate professor became pregnant whilst on a postgraduate scholarship at an Ivy League university during the 1960s, her monetary benefits were halved and she had to pay for tuition that was previously free (Interview: US 2). The prejudice against Australian women undergraduate students extended to male student petitions to ban them on geology field trips (so that the boys were “free to be boys,” uncontaminated by the influence of women) (Interview: AUS 13). Overt prejudice took the form of thesis supervisors stating that they would not support women who undertook work in non-traditional areas and also attempting to limit the range of acceptable prospective employers (Interview: AUS 13; see Eveline 1996, 2004, for further examples of strategies men use to confine women to male sanctioned women’s work).

Academic work in fields such as political science and teacher education in Australia in the 1970-80s was male dominated, and this meant that often these young women were the only female academics in an otherwise totally male department or faculty (Interviews: AUS 6; AUS 13; US 1; US 2). One academic woman, growing tired of her continuing status and isolation as the sole woman academic in her political science discipline (despite the fact that 50% of the undergraduate students enrolled in political science subjects were women), resorted to influencing the academic selection process in favour of employing more women in her previous University’s political science department. Her strategy to rectify this gender imbalance greatly increased the

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<sup>2</sup> In order to preserve the anonymity of the women, the interview code and country are cited to indicate the level of agreement with the statement in the paper (i.e. 3 out of the 24 interviewed explicitly stated they experienced this).

employment of talented women academics and resulted in an increase sufficient to achieve a gender balanced political science department over the 10 years of her involvement (Interview: US 1). When she was the sole female academic, her male colleagues often joked that the frequent long queues of women students wishing to see her resembled that of an SP bookie or some other nefarious activity (Interview: US 1).

For the women working at the chief executive level in universities and colleges, their isolation as lone women at the top of their institutions, coupled with their pioneering role as trail blazers, meant that obstacles and negative experiences sometimes became very overt (Interviews: AUS 6; US 3; US 4; US 6). All of the 10 university presidents and vice-chancellors interviewed for this study were the first women chief executive officers (presidents/vice-chancellors) hired in their respective organisations. Often their career paths had been a succession of “firsts” - first woman professor, department head, dean, chair of academic board, and deputy vice-chancellor/vice-president (Interviews: AUS 2; AUS 6; AUS 10; AUS 11; AUS 12; US 2; US 4; US 6; US 8; US 10). This was undoubtedly because the majority of current Australian and American women university chief executives are the first of their generation to occupy these roles. Usually they were the first successful women at these senior managerial levels (Kanter, 1977; Astin and Leland, 1991) in their respective organisations and this inspired some resentment and retribution in some cases.

Particularly negative incidents that these CEO level women encountered included dog excrement smeared on one of the women’s car windscreen during the night (Interview: AUS 6), all the executive women’s car tyres being slashed at an American community college (Interview: US 4), slogans and banners draped across their university campuses protesting against their pay rises as vice-chancellors in Australia (Interview: AUS 6; according to her this happened to the first two Australian women vice-chancellors) or their management styles (Interview: AUS 9). These incidents, most of which occurred during the early 1990s, were the result of some of these women being the first of a small and very visible (Kanter, 1977) minority (less than 5%) of top executive women. Hopefully, their pioneering role will facilitate greater acceptance of women so that their successors will encounter fewer difficulties in the future (Interview: AUS 6; US 4). Even today the women who achieve top managerial positions are highly visible, often regarded as “tokens” because of their minority status (Kanter, 1977; Rutherford, 2001; Olsson, 2002; Drew and Murtagh, 2005) and they are, to use Marshall’s (1984) memorable phrase, “travellers in a male world”.

Sometimes these highly career oriented women pay a price for their success by undergoing a “metaphorical sex change” (Bennis, 1988, 1993; Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 1997; Wajcman, 1999) in order to work successfully in what Still and Mortimer (1994) refer to as male formed, male organised and male led senior managerial regimes that require successful women to adapt to these “malestream” organisational cultures (Acker, 1990, 1992; Still, 1995, 1996; Mills and Tancred (eds.), 1992; Rutherford, 2001; Eveline, 1994, 1996, 2004). Consequently, success comes at a price, as women are forced to become “exiles” or “immigrants” because of the requirement for them to “sacrifice major elements of their gender identity” (Wajcman, 1999: 11,160).

Consequently, this becomes not only an individualised problem, but a systemic one that must be addressed, not only by challenging the specific barriers women encounter, but also the deeply embedded organisational practices and working conditions that disadvantage women and privilege competitive career oriented men (Interviews: AUS 2; AUS 12; Edwards and Wajcman, 2005; Eveline, 1994, 1996, 2004).

### **3.2 Social and Cultural Expectations**

We all live “gendered lives” (Wood, 1994) and are, to greater or lesser extents, the products of our individual upbringings, tempered by the society and culture within which we live. Organisations are permeated by these gender ideologies and the putative “neutral”, genderless organisation is, in fact, permeated by “masculine” values such as “efficiency and rationality” (Kanter, 1977; Burton, 1991, 1992) and the “male dominant” (Morgan, 1986) or hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 2002) resulting in “malestream” practices (see Hearn and Parkin, 1987; Mills and Tancred (eds.), 1992) that normatively serve to give men pre-eminence. Collinson and Hearn (1996), and Eveline, (1994, 1996, 2004) provide critiques of normative masculinity and male “advantage” in organisations. This traditional male dominance relegates most women to secondary, supporting or servicing roles within organisations (Kanter, 1977). Relatively recent economic changes requiring dual income households in Australia and the United States (Bittman and Pixley, 1997; Bittman *et al*, 2004; Hochschild, 1997, 2003), and the impact of the women’s movement (Eisenstein, 1996; Kaplan, 1996) in western democracies, are gradually eroding these traditional gender expectations (Klenke, 1996; Maushart, 2001).

Although many of the women in this study were fortunate to have family backgrounds that encouraged them to embrace non-traditional gender work roles, all of these women initially assumed that they would marry and eventually produce children. Their individual family situations often gave them the extra confidence and encouragement to embark on professional and managerial careers, and achieve considerable career success; however, in only two cases (Interview: US 2; US 5) did these women seriously explore and question at length their “gender destiny” to have families. For the three other childless women, this choice was foisted on them either by reproductive / physical problems (Interview: US 6), living in relationships with partners who did not want children (Interview: AUS 8), or remaining single due to the unavailability of suitable partners (Interviews: AUS 13; US 7).

It does appear that, over time, the dominant influence of their careers may have modified their initial expectations and led many of the women to have fewer children than they initially assumed (Interview: US 3), requiring their husbands/partners to assist in domestic support (Interview: AUS 7) or employing nannies, housekeepers or other domestic staff to assist with child care and home maintenance responsibilities (Interviews: AUS 2; AUS 5; AUS 7; AUS 9; AUS 12; US 3; US 4; US 6; US 8). Yet, for the most part, they still retained primary responsibility for the smooth running of the domestic sphere and the well being of their children (Interviews: AUS 2; AUS 5; AUS 6; AUS 9; AUS 11; AUS 12; US 2; US 4; US 8; US 9; US 11). Only one senior Australian woman travelled widely overseas for several years during her children’s pre-teen years (Interview: AUS 7).

Women still enter the job market as different players to men (Burke 2005; Drew and Murtagh, 2005; Edwards and Wajcman, 2005; Todd and Eveline, 2004, 2005) because they are not “free” of their private sphere domestic responsibilities (Pateman, 1994; Maushart, 1997, 2001). Even if women consciously decide to relinquish them, by remaining unmarried or childless, they are often tainted by the traditional expectations and perceptions of employers that because only women can choose to have children they will choose to do so eventually, and this represents an additional complication for women that does not encumber the male workforce (Marshall, 1984, 1995a; Wajcman, 1999). Recent debates over the past few years in Australia regarding proposals to introduce some form of widespread paid maternity leave have highlighted this issue (see Baird, 2005). For this reason, women do not enter a level playing field when they compete for jobs with men (Bacchi, 1996; Wajcman, 1999) and their “difference” (Bacchi, 1990) from men becomes increasingly an issue when they are competing for top managerial positions (see Bacchi, 1996; Marshall, 2000; Wajcman, 1999: 25 for explorations of this). This issue becomes starkest at the highest level in organisations where the greatest levels of “commitment” are demanded and reimbursed accordingly, and organisations routinely expect employees’ entire lives to be devoted to them (Interviews: AUS 2; AUS 6; US 6).

Other deeply ingrained structural barriers also persist, such as gender differentiation in male and female jobs in which traditional women’s work is less valued, has lower status, and is poorly paid in comparison to that of men (Burton, 1997; Eveline, 1994, 1996, 2004; Todd and Eveline, 2004). Even at the top executive levels of universities (this is a well documented international phenomena within private corporations: see Babcock and Laschever, 2003), university employers are aware that CEO level women are often cheaper to employ than men because they are often divorced or single (and so they do not require cars for their spouses) or are just less financially motivated in comparison to their male peers (Interviews: AUS 6: 8; see More, 1998: 10<sup>3</sup>; Farrell, 2005; O’Keefe, 2006).

For example, the first two women vice-chancellors employed in Australia did not enjoy the same salary and fringe benefits as their male peers in comparable Australian universities (Interview: AUS 6; Garcia, 1998; Rivers, 22 October, 1999). Indeed, because senior executive salaries in her university were tied to her own (Interview: AUS 6) one Australian vice-chancellor eventually gave way to unrelenting pressure by her male deputy vice-chancellors to seek parity of conditions with her male peers for herself. This same vice-chancellor felt compelled by the resulting public outcry, to donate her first year’s salary increase to charity.

Earlier studies had suggested that remuneration is often not a pre-eminent issue for women (Davidson and Cooper, 1992; White, Cox and Cooper, 1992: 116), taking a secondary place to other factors such as job preference, being more motivated by intrinsic issues (Marshall, 1984, 1995; Davidson and Cooper, 1992), as well as sometimes a lack of appreciation of their own market worth or, even possibly, a lesser degree of assertiveness or negotiation skills (Babcock and Laschever, 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> More (1998: 10) suggests that Professor Di Yerbury (1<sup>st</sup> woman VC) and then 3 years later Professor Fay Gale (2<sup>nd</sup> woman VC) “...appear to have been less well financially rewarded than the majority of their male counterparts”.



Another less documented problem encountered was “hostility” from the wives of university executive men who believed that the entry of an external, high-profile, successful woman at the top was denying their husbands career opportunities (Interviews: AUS 6; AUS 12; US 1; see More, 1998; Cox, 1995, 1996; Morley, 1997: 7, cited in Wyn *et al*, 2000; Morley, 1999, on the hostility of women towards their successful female peers).

### 3.2 Gendered Competence

Numerous popular accounts of women in corporate management and business document the “double standard” that women face when compared with men (Marshall, 1984, 1995; Babcock and Laschever, 2003; Interviews AUS 6: 19; AUS 10; AUS 12; US 2; US 3; US 4; US 6; US 8; US 10). Estimates vary as to whether women have to be better by 50% or 150% (Pratt Interview, Sarros, 1991). An American community college president agreed that in the 1970s women had to be 50% better than a man (Interview: US 8: 24). Women are not given the male privilege of being “mediocre” (Cox, 1996; Wilson, 2005). Moreover, a successful woman is often the representative of other women in a way that a competent male chief executive does not represent his gender (Interviews: AUS 2; AUS 6; US 3; US 6; US 8). The position of women of colour is even more difficult because the double intersections (Bottomley *et al* (eds.), 1991) of racism and sexism make the standards of competence even more exacting (Sokoloff, 1992). As the senior administrative Afro-American woman commented when she was describing her upbringing:

And so I had to assume that that’s a function of being more black and not a function of being more female...those issues are issues that in this society if you’re born when I was born and you’re looking like I look, then you know that you couldn’t be average and be where I am now...it wasn’t an option (Interview: US 5: 27-28).

In the study the most obvious examples of the double standard for competence were given by the women at or close to the chief executive level. One Australian female deputy vice-chancellor stated that she sometimes found that it is difficult to judge whether opposition is “gender” or “personality” based, however, her personality was a self confessed “strong” one so this could suggest a gender bias (Interview: AUS 7). Several comments suggested the difficulty of differentiating these complicated issues and perceptions. As an American president of a large private university stated:

... my experience has been, with a few exceptions what happens is not that...obstacles are put in your way, or that you are held to a different standard or tested [pause] you’re just watched (Interview: US 3: 9).

For this successful older American president “It is a very subtle reality ... and every now and then it becomes kind of public” (Interview: US 3: 9). Yet this “subtle reality” has a far reaching effect on the individual as: “It’s just that they never really give you their trust... They never relax ... it’s far more that, that at any moment you could lose it” (Interview: US 3: 11).

Another American president of a similar age (early sixties), whom the interview revealed was her peer and also a long standing colleague, when asked about personal or structural barriers initially responded that, as a woman in a man's world, it is always a matter of proving competence over and over again:

Well, I think that you were never taken as seriously initially because you were a woman and so you just have to prove everything [laughs] ... Oh, every day, every day you had to prove yourself (*Interview: US 6: 15-16*).

She stated that, although "it doesn't get easier," over time she became less affected by it as president of a Catholic university. Another example she gave was her experience of the lack of "air time" (*Interview: AUS 2*) given to women in comparison to men. In meetings with other vice-presidents, her voice was less heard and her agendas were not taken up unless supported by a man, in which case they often became "his" ideas (*Interviews: US 6: 17*; this was supported by another American president of a large networked US university - *Interview: US 10*). After detailing several examples of sexism that she had witnessed over the years, she concluded that, in contrast to the optimism of younger men and women, she believed that it "will take a while" to disappear (*Interview: US 6: 18*).

Another American president of a community college stated that she did not disagree with the 1970s feminist posters saying that "a woman had to be twice as good as a man" (*Interview: US 8: 24*). Reflecting on her role as president for four years in a community college, she believed that, in some cases, she worked less hard in terms of fund raising and found that building links with her college's community was easier (*Interview: US 8: 19*); however, as the first woman president she had worked harder due to her gender. She believed that:

Probably the ways that I work harder, or at least it seems to me that I have to prove myself more ... and justify my decisions more often than if I were a man at my age who; you know, in a three piece suit with a gruffer voice [who] can command a more immediate attention. This is an environment where there was a man with a rather hierarchical approach. Where there is a model of it... (*Interview: US 8: 24*).

Yet, she was hired specifically as a "change agent" (Yeatman,1995) and to provide a more consultative approach from the former more authoritarian male president (*Interview: US 8: 9-10*). A focus on the physicality of gender differences was also obvious in the comment by the Afro-American administrator who suggested that her students still viewed authority as male, embodied in the persona of an older, balding, pipe smoking senior administrator, and not a younger woman of colour (*Interview: US 5: 17*).

An Australian deputy vice-chancellor when asked about barriers also replied "Yes you are always aware...of the gender element ..." (*Interview: AUS 7: 5*). She also stated that it was difficult for both men and women as they progressed higher in the organisation; however, the gender issue remained salient as especially male colleagues "underestimate you" (*Interview: AUS 7: 22*). This was also an issue for another Australian vice-chancellor who stated that she consciously uses the ingrained assumption of male superiority by some men as an indicator of her staff's

organisational “basic smarts” (Interview: AUS 2: 8). As vice-chancellor, she had several instances with “new blokes” being “cheeky” who initially assumed that she was “a pushover” (Interview: AUS 2: 8). The women interviewed were also aware of the implications of gender in terms of high visibility for women chief executives:

... but equally it also means that all the observers out there...[are waiting] if you win or fail... So there’s even more pressure to ... get it right... And that’s a gender thing...So both genders need to plan strategically but the audience is watching with an extra bit of relish (*Interview: AUS 7: 22*).

Another Australian vice-chancellor, detailed the significant structural barriers early in her career as a teacher when, because she was already married, she was ineligible for both superannuation and long service leave and as a result could not accrue these benefits until well into her career (Interview: AUS 2: 3). She has written extensively on women, gender and equity, and policy issues in secondary and tertiary education throughout her career, and has concluded that it is harder for women to succeed at the top managerial levels because, in her words: “I believe that women have to be much better than men to get to the same level” (Interview: AUS 2: 5). Again, she alluded to the higher degree of competence expected from women when she stated:

I just have a view that the difference between men and women is that men go into a job and they have to fail to have people question them. And women go into a job and they have to succeed in order for people to stop questioning them (Interview: AUS 2: 5; see also Burton, 1997).

### **3.3 Conclusion**

This research derived from semi-structured interviews with 24 top and senior university women suggests that even in 2006, it appears that it is still more difficult or at the very least more complicated for senior and top women working in universities than their male colleagues employed at similar levels. For successful women must first overcome traditional social expectations as well as the ingrained organisational bias that makes it difficult for them to compete on completely equal terms with senior men. This inequality is still evident in women’s continued under-representation at the top levels in American and Australian universities and indeed throughout the world (Singh, 2002). It is also confirmed by these women’s personal accounts of their perceptions and experiences during 1998-2000 when they were employed within Australian and American universities.

(The author is very grateful to the 24 senior women who so willingly made their thoughts, perceptions and experiences available to her during her doctoral research).

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