

Stream number 04, Gender, Diversity and Indigeneity

Competitive Stream

**Gender and Careers: Women in academia.**

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### ABSTRACT

*Prior research has investigated the barriers in the academic pipeline that result in the unequal representation of female academics in senior positions at Australian universities. There appears to be, however, a lack of research into the significant bottlenecks that occur between the two mid-level academic levels and the two most senior academic levels and the role that these bottlenecks play in the consequent gender inequity at senior organisational levels. To progress the gender agenda at universities, Federal legislation and organisational policies may be complemented by organisational strategy and we contend that these strategic efforts could be directed to the points at which the inequity commences. Understanding the dynamics of these pressure points could unlock career opportunities for female academics.*

**Keywords:** Women and work, Equal employment opportunity, Gender in organisations, Public Sector Management.

### INTRODUCTION

Women have been entering the workforce in increasing numbers over the last few decades, however, this surge in workforce participation has not resulted in an equal share of women in all levels of the organisational hierarchy Glass and Cook (2016). Pedulla and Thébaud (2015) suggest that the thrust towards gender equity has in fact come to a halt. Kelan (2009b) proposes that gender fatigue, the loss of the will or ability to address gender inequity, may play a part in this stalling.

Academia is no different. Vertical segregation in this sector has been widely recognised (Marchant & Wallace, 2013) with female academics less likely to progress in their careers than their male colleagues. Eversole, Harvey, and Zimmerman (2007, p. 2) suggest that universities may be losing “some of the best and brightest women” as female academics are more likely to withdraw from academic positions for employment in the private sector in order to improve their work-life balance (WLB). This exit of female academics has been referred to as the “leaky pipeline” (Eddy & Ward, 2015, p. 6), and places, according to West and Curtis (2006, p. 4), “serious limitations on the success of educational institutions themselves”. Various barriers have been identified to explain vertical segregation and the “leaky pipeline”. These can be categorised into cultural, organisational and individual barriers.

Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Steffen, 1984) posits that differences in career outcomes can be explained by socially stipulated gender roles. Role congruity refers to people perceiving an incompatibility between a person’s characteristics and the requirements of a role that the person aims to occupy (Eagly, 2004). It has been proposed that female academics are not advancing in equal

numbers to men due to the characteristics of women being perceived as incongruent with the requirements of these roles. Female academics progress up to a certain point in numbers equivalent to their male colleagues, but not beyond. This situation may indicate that role congruity exists in the lower classifications at universities, but to advance would create incongruity and is therefore less likely to occur.

Self-efficacy expectations relate to an individual's beliefs about his/her capabilities to successfully "perform a given task or behaviour" (Betz & Hackett, 1997, p. 384). Self-efficacy theories can be argued to be directly related since organisational norms about congruency relating to gender and employment will directly influence women's self-efficacy beliefs. In terms of female academics, role incongruity is likely to affect their self-efficacy, shaping their confidence in relation to promotions and career aspirations, particularly for non-traditional occupations (Betz & Hackett, 1997).

It has been proposed that the pipeline theory (Gregory, 2003), or the assumption that women's advancement will improve over time, with the increase of women in the workforce, may be misguided (Ezzedeen, Budworth, & Baker, 2015; McCall, Liddell, O'neil, & Coman, 2000). A study by Everett is of particular interest as it suggests that 20 years ago, male academics at eight Australian universities believed that equal opportunities for women had been attained, while women did not (Everett, 1990). This finding may indicate that, for the past 20 years, male academics have not been fully aware of the persistent barriers faced by women in the academic environment and not actively engaged in aiding the solution. Kamberidou (2010) and Kelan (2009a) refer to this as gender fatigue or employees claiming that a workplace is gender neutral when gender discrimination is, in fact, still present. Clearly, implementing gender equity legislation and policies does not automatically translate to better gender equity outcomes. In light of the challenges to the sustainability of the academic profession (Hugo & Morriss, 2010) the need for additional research into the careers of female academics is highlighted.

It has been widely acknowledged that the careers of female academics progress more slowly than those of their male colleagues, both internationally, in countries such as Mauritius (Thanacoody, Bartram, Barker, & Jacobs, 2006); Iceland (Heijstra, Bjarnason, & Rafnsdóttir, 2015); England (Unterhalter, 2006); the United States of America (Su, Johnson, & Bozeman, 2015), as well as in Australia (Marchant & Wallace, 2013; Probert, 2005; Pyke, 2013). Data from the Department of Education and Training

(2016) suggests that in Australian academia there are specific sticking points, or bottlenecks (Yap & Konrad, 2009), for female academics between Levels B and C (Lecturer and Senior Lecturer) and, less significantly, between Levels C and D/E (Senior Lecturer and Associate Professor/Professor). The reduction in the number of female academic between these levels is significant. As Levels D and E are combined in data from the Department of Education and Training it is not possible to ascertain the reduction in female academics between these classifications.

This paper will explore the literature surrounding the evolution of academic careers, acknowledging that the traditional collegial nature of academic careers has been uprooted and replaced with a top-down managerial model (Marchant & Wallace, 2013). While initially increasing the staff profile of female academics, gender equity remains a concern and large discrepancies currently endure in the representation of male and female academics in higher classifications despite Federal legislation and numerous organisational policies (Probert, 1998; Pyke, 2013). The literature surrounding women and careers in the context of Australian universities has identified various barriers along the academic pipeline (Bain & Cummings, 2000; Diezmann & Grieshaber, 2010; Heijstra, Steinhorsdóttir, & Einarsdóttir, 2016; Pyke, 2013). These barriers will be explored in this paper to explore whether these are specific to the identified bottlenecks. The career aspirations and career satisfaction of female academics will be discussed to identify whether these play a role in their lack of career progression. The paper will conclude with recommendations for universities, policy makers and further research.

## **THE EVOLUTION OF ACADEMIC CAREERS**

Organisational changes affecting Australian universities in the past few decades have been widely documented; in particular relating to the negative outcomes for academic staff (Bellamy, Morley, & Watty, 2003; Bentley, 2012; Christopher & Leung, 2015; Thornton, 2008). The Dawkins reforms (Gamage, 1993) and the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) (Christensen & Lægheid, 2011) in the early 1980s drastically altered the demographics and operating procedures of Australian universities resulting in the “corporitising” (Szekeres, 2006, p. 135) of these organisations through the amalgamation of universities and colleges and the implementation of new management practises.

While women were historically strongly underrepresented in academia, the Dawkins reforms, which merged 19 universities with 51 colleges between 1986 and 1992 boosted the number of women in the staff profile of the newly established 36 Australian universities (Gamage, 1993). At the same time, academic positions were ranked into five levels (A = Associate Lecturer, B = Lecturer, C = Senior Lecturer, D = Associate Professor and E = Professor) (Peetz, Strachan, & Troup, 2014) thereby introducing a new hierarchy of authority (Guthrie & Neumann, 2007). The subsequent growth of the internet, globalisation and the increase in student numbers resulted in an additional reshaping of Australian universities, economically and academically, particularly in light of the “new systems of competition and demonstrable performance” (Marginson & Considine, 2000, p. 5).

Pratt and Poole (1999) concur and suggest that Australian higher education has changed drastically from being local and insular to global and uncertain. According to Gamage (1993) this demand for post-graduate education overseas allowed Australia’s tertiary education to evolve into Australia’s 3rd largest export industry with an annual revenue of \$20 billion (Universities Australia, 2017).

The Australian public sector was an early adopter of NPM in the 1980s (Parker, 2011). NPM refers to the “global wave of administrative reforms that has had an impact on many countries’ public sector over the last 25 years” (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011, p. 1). Performance management, competition, privatisation (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011), decentralisation and increased competition (Christopher & Leung, 2015) are central to this new type of management. As the majority of Australia’s universities are publicly funded, NPM directly applies and these institutions were, as a result, held to new standards and expected to use their resources more efficiently. Ferree and Zippel (2015, p. 561) have referred to this approach as “academic capitalism”. There is an emphasis on managerial authority and economic accountability (Broadbent, Troup, & Strachan, 2013). The Australian Government, as a result, cut funding to universities by a third, forcing universities to shift towards a consumer based market approach (Subramaniam, 2003, p. 508). To increase student contributions, universities commenced marketing education as a commodity, particularly to the new overseas market (Gamage, 1993). Christopher and Leung (2015) suggest that universities have reduced the inherent tension between the traditional, collegial culture of universities with the newly imposed corporate culture by adopting an altered NPM or “pseudo-management approach”.

The reliance on private funds in universities increased the pressure on academics to conduct research as an alternate source of income (Baumann, 2002, p. 14). According to Lafferty and Fleming (2000) this situation has exacerbated the gendered nature of academia as it has been widely reported that female academics spend more time teaching and performing service-based tasks, rather than conducting research (Guarino & Borden, 2016).

The combination of these changes have resulted in a declining attractiveness of the academic profession (Dorman, 2000; Lafferty & Fleming, 2000) with an increasingly corporate environment supplanting the historically collegial character of academia (Lafferty & Fleming, 2000). This element is corroborated by Coates et al. (2009) who compared the job satisfaction of academics from 18 countries and found that Australian academics reported significantly lower levels of job satisfaction than the majority of their international colleagues and Australians in other professions. According to Blackmore (2014) two-thirds of Australian academics indicated that work conditions have deteriorated.

The changes to academia are currently on-going with the Australian Department of Treasury (2017) announcing proposed additional funding cuts to universities in the 2017 Budget. To minimise the effects of these funding cuts on universities, student fees will increase. This action is likely to result in universities further intensifying their marketing campaigns as well as increasing the pressure on academic staff to obtain funds through research and to deliver optimal service in order to attract and retain the university's 'consumers'.

## **GENDER EQUITY**

The economic effect of globalisation has resulted in the generation of jobs for women, albeit mainly in lower classifications (Moghadam, 2015). The disintegration of the Male Breadwinner Model (MBM) (Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015) has further contributed to an increasing number of women entering the workforce over the last few decades. Women remain, however, concentrated in lower classifications and are drastically underrepresented in senior positions (Glass & Cook, 2016). The inequity at senior management levels has given rise to various terminologies describing this phenomenon. A *threshold* is a barrier located at the point of recruitment (Toren & Moore, 1998), while the *sticky floor* describes the large concentration of women employed in lower classifications and the lack of career opportunities

they experience (Yap & Konrad, 2009). *Funnelling* (Peetz et al., 2014, p. 7), *bottlenecks* (Yap & Konrad, 2009, p. 593) and *hurdles* (Toren & Moore, 1998, p. 267) are described as barriers that women face around middle management, rather than in lower classifications or just before senior levels of employment. The *glass ceiling* is a term that has become part of modern day vocabulary, describing the invisible, yet powerful barrier that prevents women from reaching higher classifications (Powell & Butterfield, 2015). International charters and Australian Federal Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action legislation have been attempting to address gender equity with the aim of offering women opportunities on par with their male colleagues, however, progress is slow. With the influx of women in the workforce new approaches to the traditionally gendered nature of careers were investigated, allowing for employees to take a more active part in the planning and management of their own careers (Grimland, Vigoda-Gadot, & Baruch, 2012).

## **CAREERS**

A career can be defined as a series of work experiences over a certain amount of time (Grimland et al., 2012). Wilensky (1960, p. 554) defines a traditional career as a “succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered, predictable sequence”. Patton and McMahon (2014) highlight that traditionally male careers were continuous and steady while female careers were seen as temporary until such time as their career as homemaker commenced. The economic crisis, the ageing workforce (Gahan, Harbridge, Healy, & Williams, 2016), the different expectations from Generation X and Y (Ismail, 2016) as well as from working women, have resulted in new approaches to the concept of careers. Grimland et al. (2012) suggest that these changes have resulted in employees taking a more active part in the planning and management of their own careers. Accordingly, organisations have taken an interest in employees’ career aspirations and career satisfaction in an effort to retain the most suitable staff for excellence and diversity (August & Waltman, 2004). The existing knowledge on these two career considerations, particularly in relation to gender, will be discussed in the following sections to identify potential explanations for the bottlenecks in the academic pipeline.

## **Career aspirations**

Domenico and Jones (2007) suggest that women's career aspirations and workforce participation have progressively increased in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of decline of the MBM and the increasing prominence of the gender equity model.. Women's increased involvement has led to research investigating their career aspirations (Dubey & Tiwari, 2014). Aspirations refer to the goals that an individual sets for himself/herself in life (Dubey & Tiwari, 2014) and career aspirations can therefore be described as the career goals that a person aims to achieve during their working-life. Research investigating the career aspirations of women have resulted in contrasting findings. Bailey (cited by Hite & McDonald, 2003), as a result of a longitudinal study, found that women had lower career aspirations than men. Bradley, Brown, and Dower (2009), on the other hand, found that in the public sector, women have the same career aspirations as their male colleagues but achieved less promotions across their careers, while Watts, Frame, Moffett, Van Hein, and Hein (2015) concluded that female students at a college in the USA had slightly higher career aspirations than their male counterparts. The contention put forward by Hakim (2006) and the human capital theorists (Correll, 2004) that women are not achieving higher levels of employment due to their career choices requires further consideration. Correll (2004) emphasises the importance that self-efficacy plays in a person's career aspirations. She calls for a recognition of the embedded cultural constraints or limits placed on the possibilities and appropriate goals of individuals, which will in turn shape one's aspirations and preferences. Pajares and Urdan (2006) highlight the important role self-efficacy plays in the choices people make. These decisions will be based on how competent they feel at achieving the alternate courses of action. In terms of career aspirations, one would expect self-efficacy, or the person's assessment of their own ability, to determine whether a person applies for a certain role and aims to achieve certain goals in their career.

## **Career satisfaction**

Career satisfaction, according to Gattiker and Larwood (1988, p. 573 & 585), can be defined as "the overall effective orientation of the individual toward his or her career or job role" and "the degree to which the individual believes his or her success criteria have been met". A person's career satisfaction is only a small facet of their overall job satisfaction, since an employee may be satisfied with their



career, but may not be happy with their working conditions, which would affect their overall job satisfaction. Different individuals will assign different weight to different criteria and the concept is therefore very subjective. According to Martins, Eddleston, and Veiga (2002) various organisational benefits, such as organisational commitment and leave intentions, are positively related to an employee's career satisfaction. Furthermore, as satisfaction is negatively related to leave intentions (Matier, 1990) it is imperative to investigate the career satisfaction of female academics, particularly in response to the large number of women "opting out" of the academic pipeline (Almer, Baldwin, Jones-Farmer, Lightbody, & Single, 2016; Eddy & Ward, 2015). As stated by Tschopp, Grote, and Gerber (2014, p. 152) career orientations, or the "way a person considers their career" directly influences their career direction, which will in turn affect their intention to leave. Identifying whether the career outcome of female academics is affected by a reduced career satisfaction due to unmet career aspirations is an important area for future research.

### **GENDER EQUITY IN AUSTRALIAN ACADEMIA**

The underrepresentation of female academics at higher classifications has been widely publicised; nationally (Asmar, 1999; Kloot, 2004; Pyke, 2013), internationally (Erwin, 1997; Fritsch, 2016; Su et al., 2015; Toren & Moore, 1998) as well as across disciplines (Clark Blickenstaff, 2005; Subramaniam, 2003). Toren and Moore (1998, p. 268) investigated the "career stages and junctures at which faculty women encounter obstacles leading to gender-based disparities that disadvantage them as compared to men" at an Israeli university. They concluded that "hurdles" is a more accurate description of the career progression of women, clearly indicating the barriers that women have to overcome at multiple stages. Notwithstanding the substantial number of studies exploring the careers of female academics there appears to be a lack of research exploring the barriers surrounding particular "hurdles" in the academic pipeline. Toren (1993, p. 269) defines these "hurdles" as "obstacles that occur at the middle stages of the career trajectory, not initially at entry, nor just before the top", comparable to the term bottlenecks utilised in this paper. These terms appear particularly accurate when investigating the career trajectories of female academics in Australia.

## **BARRIERS TO FEMALE ACADEMICS' CAREER PROGRESSION**

The existing literature has pointed out that the cause of the academic gender gap is “complex and multi-faceted” (Aiston & Jung, 2015). Identifying the barriers to the career progression of female academics has been the aim of much research, both domestic and internationally (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Chesterman, Ross-Smith, & Peters, 2005; Heijstra et al., 2016; Reilly, Jones, Rey Vasquez, & Krisjanous, 2016; Thanacoody et al., 2006). The barriers identified can be categorised as cultural, organisational and individual barriers and can be either conscious or subconscious. Peetz et al. (2014, p. 2) suggest that the existing barriers are “inter-related” as each category effects and interacts with the other two categories. Research indicating that just one of these barriers can have a serious effect on a woman’s career (Diezmann & Grieshaber, 2010) is a further catalyst for additional research into this phenomenon.

### **Cultural barriers**

The idea of the ideal worker, who is present in the office between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm and actively advocates his/her organisational commitment, as introduced by Williams (2000), still appears to resonate strongly in today’s work environment. This expectation leads to a “bias against caregiving” with women reportedly delaying marriage and/or children and concealing family responsibilities in order not to damage their career prospects (Burke & Major, 2014, p. 324). Employed women can experience anxiety about falling short of this standard while simultaneously not meeting the cultural expectations, or the mother mandate (Russo, 1976), that family must come first. These societal expectations are a two way street with men reporting a fear that their choice to ask for leave may result in colleagues and supervisors questioning their loyalty and commitment to the organisation. According to Huang (2003) this fear is not ungrounded, reporting that the wage penalties for men that requested leave were higher than the penalties for women who requested the same. It appears that both men and women are locked into the gender expectations that have been reiterated for centuries and are not only judging themselves, but are expecting others to judge/punish behaviour not contained within the clear boundaries of the MBM.

## **Organisational barriers**

The phenomenon of the gendered organisation as proposed by Acker (1992) has been identified as a barrier for the career progression of female academics. A gendered organisation refers to the “job design, career ladders, work practices, recruitment and selection methods, and the culture of the organisations that are invested with assumptions and expectations about gender appropriate rules” (Fagan, Menendez, & Anson, 2012, as cited in Heijstra et al., 2016, p. 4). The processes and structures of gendered organisations are not gender neutral but rather favour the characteristics of one gender (Timmers, Willemsen, & Tijdens, 2010).

Academia has historically been identified as a particularly gendered setting (Asmar, 1999; Peterson, 2016; Uhly, Visser, & Zippel, 2017). Knights and Richards (2003, p. 15) suggest that “academia appears to be one sphere in which men and masculinity are locked into one another in ways that, whether or not by intention, exclude or marginalise women and femininity”. The fact that both academic and general staff at universities suffer from vertical segregation (Strachan et al., 2016) suggests that it may be the outcome of the organisational culture. Heijstra et al. (2016) conducted a study at a university in Iceland, which was ranked number 1 in the Global Gender Gap Report at the time of the study. They concluded that even with a high level of gender equality at the societal level, the nature of the academic promotion process, somewhere along the academic pipeline, disadvantages female academics as they are less likely to become full professors and report more stress and strain than men (Heijstra et al., 2016). This indicates that an organisational culture can in fact overshadow societal culture and that gender equity needs to become a more prominent concern for universities themselves in order for real progress to be achieved.

## **Individual barriers**

Various individual barriers have been identified in the literature, such as women publishing less (Aiston & Jung, 2015), teaching more (Angervall, 2016), ongoing family commitment (Winchester & Browning, 2015), lack of career confidence (Subbaye & Vithal, 2016) and choice and aspirations (Probert, 2005). Identifying how these barriers relate to gender roles, and associated self-efficacy, appears not to have been explored. Particularly the findings that women publish less, teach more and have more family commitments may be directly affected by the cultural stipulations and barriers that

tend to favour men's careers (Baker, 2010) and lay the foundation for gender expectations (Winchester & Browning, 2015).

### **BOTTLENECKS IN THE AUSTRALIAN ACADEMIC PIPELINE**

The significant decrease in the number of female academics between Levels B and C is obvious in both Australian and Western Australian (-36% and -37%) data (Department of Education and Training, 2016). This decrease persists, albeit less significantly, to Level D/E (-11% and -17%). As Levels D and E are combined in data from the Department of Education and Training specific data relating to the career progression of female academics from Levels C to D, and Levels D to E, is non-existent. The literature investigating the reasons behind the inequity at senior levels has focused on female academics along the entire academic pipeline rather than at the points of specific bottlenecks. Limited data is available regarding female academic's experiences around these sticking points. An exception is a study by Pyke (2013) who investigated the progression between Levels C and D by interviewing 24 female academics employed at Level C at one Australian university. She concluded that female academics are slowed down by multiple restrictions that do not affect men to the same extent, such as care responsibilities, timing and support. While Pyke (2013) contributed greatly to the understanding of barriers between Levels C and D and particular issues that female academics face, the study appeared to disregard the fact that the biggest bottleneck appears to, in fact, be between Levels B and C. This seems to have been largely overlooked in the literature. In Australian academia, the transition from Level B to C suffers, by far, the largest reduction in the number of female academics. Once female academics have advanced to Level C their chances of further career progression are statistically higher than they were at Level B.

Research by Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2006, p. 512) recognises the influence a university's culture has on the careers of female academics and highlights the importance of investigating academic female's careers "through the lens of institutional type". Clark (1989) concurs and suggests that disregarding faculty and university type when considering university staff may be too simplistic. Investigating the different types of universities highlights the understanding that not all institutions are the same and

factors like prestige, location and mission may complicate or simplify the balance between work and family.

## CONCLUSION

A review of the literature regarding the careers of female academics indicates that their careers progress at a significantly slower pace than those of their male colleagues with particular points at which women's progress through the career levels diminishes. International charters, Federal legislation and organisational policies have, as yet, clearly not been successful in achieving gender equity at universities. Previous research has identified various barriers that are hindering female academics from achieving senior positions within universities. There appears to be a lack of research, however, around the bottlenecks that are clearly visible when examining data from the Department of Education and Training (2016). The bottlenecks between Levels B and C, and Levels C and D/E, in particular, warrant further investigation. Without addressing these bottlenecks, and creating avenues for female academics to progress their careers, universities will not be able to achieve gender equity in senior roles, resulting in a loss of talent and missed competitive advantage.

The data available indicates that Australia-wide the transition from Level B to C significantly slows down the career progress of female academics (Department of Education and Training, 2016). Rather than generalising these findings across universities, however, it is apparent that further investigation is needed into this phenomenon at different types of universities. The data regarding all universities does, besides recognising that gender equity is a concern across Australian universities, in no way, provide practical data in relation to individual universities. Identifying differences across university types, particularly in relation to policies and successful outcomes, will allow simulation at other universities.

Identifying factors that are contributing to these bottlenecks, in addition to the identification of successful strategies at different universities, can assist universities and policy makers, in conjunction with policies already in place, to increase the thrust towards creating an environment where female and male academics will genuinely have the same career opportunities.

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