

On the right track? Women only programs as a gender equality strategy

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This paper uses Australian universities in a 'case study' approach to explore the efficacy of Women only development programs (WODP) as a gender equality strategy. The study will have practical implications for the sector and for all who wish to create more gender equitable organisations.

Many WODP have been criticised for their focus on women as the problem, who, by inference, need fixing. This approach is out of step with current understandings that the organisation itself is gendered and that therefore organisational cultures form the major barrier to women's advancement and the achievement of more gender equitable organisations. This then becomes one of the central ironies for WODP to address. In creating a women only program, how do we avoid focussing on the women as the problem? Equally, if women are not the problem, then how can we continue to justify WODP?

This review of programs and publications spans the 15 year history of WODP in Australian higher education. Nineteen universities identified the need to move beyond the 'fix the women approach'. Thirty-eight publications were selected (out of 88) and examined in order to explore how universities responded to the challenge of moving beyond seeing women as the problem. What philosophical approach have they adopted? Have they in fact turned their attention to organisational cultures as the problem? How is this reflected in their program design?

After 15 years of practice it is important to reconsider the role and effectiveness of WODP as one strategy to address the gender equality issues that are entrenched in university landscapes. It is also imperative that universities share this knowledge with organisations facing those same challenges.

Keywords: Women only staff development, organisational culture, gender equity

Introduction

Organisations have struggled in their efforts to redress strong existing horizontal and vertical gender segregation in the workplace. The most notable or visible symptom of this gender inequality is the ongoing lack of women in senior ranks across all sectors and types of organisations. Given this slow progress it is imperative that we reflect on the effectiveness of gender equity strategies that have been implemented within organisations to date.

This paper examines the effectiveness of one strategy commonly used to address gender inequality, that is, in-house women only development programs (WODP). While such programs have waxed and waned in popularity in different countries and sectors at different times, they remain a feature of the organisational landscape. This rise and fall in popularity of WODP over time, has not been in response to serious critical scrutiny or review of their

effectiveness. Reviews and critiques of women only programs are sparse and scattered. Rather, practitioners and decision makers are left to approach these issues from ideological and pragmatic 'face value' perspectives. This paper seeks to address this gap by drawing on the experience of the university sector in Australia, where there is a documented history of women only development programs (WODP), from the early 1990's through to the present. Not only have in-house WODP endured over time, they remain remarkably prevalent, with programs in 31 out of the 36 (86%) public universities in 2007.

This review article is based on an overview of current women only programs in Australianⁱ universities, combined with an analysis of the extensive body of practitioner literature available. The prevalence of programs in the sector, combined with this richly documented body of experience, provides a valuable opportunity to examine the effectiveness of WODP as a gender equality strategy. Aggregating and analysing this data will allow our past practice to inform our future endeavours, useful in higher education and beyond.

The paper begins by providing some contextual background to WODP in higher education in Australia, before introducing a theoretical framework to assist in reviewing the effectiveness of programs.

A unique case study

The higher education sector in Australia provides a unique setting for exploring these issues. At first glance WODP here, as elsewhere, appeared to be under-documented and under-evaluated. However over time a substantial body of work, much of it in the unpublished 'grey' literature, was unearthed. In all 87 articles from 25 universities were found. While some of the history of establishment of WODP, and their early funding has been documented elsewhere (2004), there are a number of unique enablers which have contributed to the development of WODP in the sector, thus creating a useful 'case study' site.

Factors which contributed to the vibrancy, prevalence and continuity of programs, not always within institutions but across the sector include: the stimulus of early external commonwealth funding, the presence of a practitioner network established in 1998 linking practitioners specific to women only programs across the higher education sectorⁱⁱ; the propensity of equity practitioners to use national and international benchmarking to achieve internal leverage in their institutions (if University X has one, we should too); and the competitive edge encouraged through striving to achieve the Employer of Choice for Women accolade (awarded by Equal Opportunities in the Workplace Agency). Despite this competitiveness there is also a history of collaborative practice across the university sector, with generous sharing of resources and expertise among practitioners.

The development of such an extensive body of literature has been further enabled by factors unique to higher education such as; organisational cultures which encourage conference attendance and publication of conference papers and journal articles; well educated practitioners, some of whom are engaged in further research study in the area; access to institutional research expertise and resources; and a range of recurring conferences, detailed further under the literature.

While higher education provides a unique case study site, the difficulties in achieving gender equality are shared by all organisations. It is appropriate that the higher education sector be able to provide guidance to the broader community regarding the effectiveness of WODP and the best practice approaches that will facilitate gender equitable outcomes in all workplaces.

The insider view

In this paper I aim to review the existing literature and practice surrounding WODP, taking a critical look at their claims and current relevance. This is from a practitioner stance having coordinated and delivered women's program in various university and public sector settings over the last decade. I am not separate to the work being examined here - this is an overview and critique from an insider perspective.

There have been others 'insiders' who have questioned the effectiveness of WODP. Brown (2000), reflecting on programs in UK universities commented on the apparent lack of impact on numbers of senior women, while Devos, McLean and O'Hara (2003), writing from an Australian perspective ask if this is a realistic expectation for WODP. Perhaps more importantly, there is critiquing of the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of programs. Gray (1994) expresses disquiet concerning the "decontextualised, unreflective and pragmatic representation of women only management training in most of the literature" and a lack of application of "theories and practice within feminism" to the design and content of programs over the last two decades (Gray, 1994:203). This results in programs that re-inforce rather than challenge the status quo, assisting women to adapt to cultures (Bhavnani, 1997) and positioning women as "receptacles of remedial skills repertoires" (Moultrie & de la Rey, 2003:418).

I would echo the disquiet expressed by Gray. Have WODP kept pace with current understandings of gender and organisations? Or have they become 'decontextualised, unreflective and pragmatic'? Are they a strategy that can be effective in addressing gender equality issues in today's organisations?

A theoretical framework

Colleagues at the Centre for Gender in Organizations (CGO), Simmons Graduate School of Management, (Ely, 1999; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000) in building on the work of Calas and Smircich (1996) have developed a 'four frame' approach for understanding organisational approaches to gender equity. Each frame links a theoretical perspective with a corresponding understanding of gender and the gender equity problem, which, when taken together, translate into recognisable organisational approaches to gender equity interventions. They argue that organisations need to move beyond what they label as Frame 1 'Equip the woman'; Frame 2 'Create equal opportunity'; and Frame 3 'Value difference' towards a Frame 4 'Re-visioning of the workplace' approach. Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) critique Frames 1, 2 and 3 as offering piecemeal fixes, that will not be able to destroy the deeply embedded roots of organisational discrimination. In other words – they tinker at the edges of the organisational game without fundamentally altering the rules or the way in which it is played.

In Frame 4 the focus shifts away from seeing gender as a property of individuals, instead viewing organisations as maintaining a gendered social order. A frame 4 intervention would therefore be one that "continuously identifies and disrupts that social order and revises the structural, interactive and interpretive practices in organizations accordingly" (Ely & Meyerson, 2000:9). While this sounds like a revolutionary approach to creating gender equitable organisations Meyerson and Fletcher in their 'Modest Manifesto' article outline a 'small wins' step by step process to their proposed re-visioning of workplace cultures.

Typically WODP would be seen as falling within a frame 1 ‘assimilation’ approach, where the focus is on teaching the women to ‘play the game’. Some WODP may also fall within a frame 2 ‘accommodation’ approach where special measures are taken to make up for some of women’s deficits, but again the main game remains unchanged.

This fix the women/blame the women thinking has been problematic for many women and has been one of several criticisms aimed at WODP over the years. Yet WODP persist and are popularly received by participants themselves, despite, in some cases, initial misgivings (Willis & Daisley, 1997).

This highlights a central irony WODP must address. In creating a women only space, a women only program, how do we avoid focussing on the women as the problem? Equally, this dilemma can be framed as; If women are not the problem, then how can we continue to justify WODP? This then becomes the central challenge for WODP, to re-position themselves away from a singular focus on the women, and the simplified understanding of gender equality epitomised in Frames, 1, 2 and 3, towards operating as a frame 4 strategic intervention aimed at re-visioning workplace cultures.

Is culture change the key?

The idea that benefits from professional development would accrue to the organisation as well as to participants is not new. Presumably many staff development programs, particularly leadership programs, aim to benefit the employee and positively influence the organisation’s culture. What may be different however is the nature of the desired benefit to the organisation and the degree of challenge to the organisational status quo, implied in the ‘re-visioning of workplace cultures’ conceived of by Meyerson and Fletcher (2000). As Pyner states “Women in Leadership is a program for women, and yet it’s target is unashamedly the institution” (Pyner, 1994:23). How does one carry this organisational agenda forward? Are WODP with their inevitable focus on the women in any way equipped or able to take on a mantle as an organisational change strategy?

Methodology

Data collection for this paper included firstly, an overview of WODP in the sector and secondly, the published literature.

The program overview data was primarily based on a 2007 sector overview undertaken by the University of Western Australiaⁱⁱⁱ, based on contact with each university and augmented by web data^{iv}. Some historical data, although not complete, was also available (ATN WEXDEV, 1999; AVCC, 2003). The literature was collected over many years of involvement in the sector, and in conjunction with current practitioners, and while no doubt incomplete, is sufficient to provide depth to our analysis.

Each university program and piece of literature was individually categorised. Programs and literature were selected for inclusion in this review study if they positioned themselves as more than or moving beyond a ‘fix the women’ approach (referred to below as ‘beyond frame 1’). The program overview data provided insufficient detail for analysis beyond initial categorisation. While it provides useful context for this exploration, the literature allows for more nuanced exploration of the ways in which universities approached the challenge of moving beyond frame 1.

Sector overview

Thirty-one out of 36 (86%) of Australian public universities currently offer WODP. In addition the Australian Technology Network Women's Executive Development (ATN WEXDEV) provide programs that run across the five member universities, and is counted as one program. This brings the total to 32 for the 2007 data (see Table 1).

A large majority of programs in 2007 were based on a 'fix the women' approach with 22 classified as this in contrast to 10 universities who claimed a 'beyond frame 1' approach. Historical data shows a similar emphasis; in 2003 the distribution was 21 and eight respectively; and in 1998 just over half the universities represented at the meeting (an incomplete sample) were 'beyond frame 1' in approach. In total 14 Universities were categorised as 'beyond frame 1' at some point over the three sample points, with seven universities counted once, three universities twice and four on all three occasions. In some cases this lack of continuity is due to missing data, however on seven occasions the program was categorised differently in a different time frame indicating the ways in which program approaches can vary over time.

Table 1: Overview of programs by approach over time

Approach	1998	2003	2007
'Fix the women'	6	21	22
'Beyond frame 1'	7	8	10
Total	13	29	32

Eighty-eight publications were reviewed; with 38 of these categorised as 'beyond frame 1' and selected for further analysis here. They include 21 conference papers (refereed and un-refereed), 13 institutional reports (for institutional or broader purposes), a journal article, book, book chapter, and unpublished thesis. While the 88 publications came from 25 universities, the 38 selected for this review come from 12 universities including WEXDEV. The majority were contributed by four programs – Edith Cowan University (ECU, 9) University of Western Australia (UWA, 8), University of South Australia (Uni SA, 6), and WEXDEV (6), with eight institutions contributing the remaining nine papers.

The remainder of this article will focus on the 38 publications selected. The majority, but not all, of the articles will be cited in the discussion below.

What frame are we in? The challenge of moving beyond frame 1

Taken together, the data from the overview of current programs and review of the literature allows us to identify that, at some stage over the last 15 years, 19 universities have grappled with the desire to move beyond a 'fix the women' approach. However, with the exception of the 1998 data, which was incomplete, at any one time the large majority of programs (22 out of 32 in 2007) are working from a 'fix the women' paradigm. This is itself a concern, raising questions about why this is the dominant or preferred approach, particularly given current understandings of the ways in which gender inequality is imbedded in workplace practices and cultures.

Two key features of programs have been chosen to provide insight into the ways in which WODP in Australian universities have taken on this challenge to move 'beyond frame 1'.

They are program philosophy, aims and objectives and how these translate into program design. Program evaluation, another useful way of exploring these issues is beyond the scope of this article.

Program philosophy – how is the problem framed?

There is a broad recognition that women not be seen as the problem requiring fixing. Bjork-Billings & Lawrence (2006:4) in writing about the Deakin program are adamant their approach;

would not be one of implying that being a woman was somehow a problem or an impediment to career progression, but rather that there should be acknowledgement that the culture, structures and processes in Universities need to be analysed (Bjork-Billings & Lawrence, 2006:4).

The theoretical framework outlined above, which clearly shifts the focus from the women as problematic, towards the gendered organisational culture as problematic has certainly been embraced by the university sector. This foundational concept for practitioners and academics alike has been broadly pursued under the notion of ‘chilly climate’, a term coined in Canada, but reflected in themes for a number of conferences in Australia. The 1995 conference *Women, Culture and Universities: A Chilly Climate? National conference on the effect of organisational culture on women in universities*, was followed by the more optimistically titled *Winds of Change: Women & the Culture of Universities* in 1998 and then a *Change in Climate: Prospects for Gender Equity in Universities* in 2006. A number of the publications examined here are included in these conference proceedings and sit alongside significant bodies of work (often in the same universities) verifying the impact of Australian university culture on women.

As we will see below, a number of the Australian WODP were careful to include references to changing organisational culture in their aims. However, understanding of the limitations of the frame 1 approach, with its exclusive focus on the women, may not necessarily or easily translate into an alternative framework or approach. Key questions to ask in examining program philosophies in relation to any culture change agenda are, ‘who is responsible for changing organisational cultures?’ and ‘how is this to occur?’

A small number of programs, had clearly articulated frameworks or philosophies that underpinned their programs aims, however more commonly program’s aims and objectives provided the main clues as to their approach to their frame 1 dilemma. Of those programs with frameworks, ECU were unique in developing a conceptual framework for themselves - consistent with their pioneering status in terms of women’s programs. This framework was based on a sense of entitlement to claim a place – and they developed a framework of leadership capacities necessary to take their place (Pyner, 1994). True to their feminist approach their model was applied to their own practices as planners and developers of the program, as well as providing the foundation for their program design.

Others have developed a theoretical framework over time (UWA) or been able to base their approach on the programs that have gone before them (ATN WEXDEV). Both UWA and the ATN WEXDEV have drawn heavily on the work of scholars from the Centre for Gender in Organizations (CGO), and this influence will be explored further below.

Program aims and objectives

While the majority of programs include in their aims something that refers to culture change, it is often listed as one of two or more aims, and usually follows the primary aim or focus on skills or leadership development. Those that focus on culture tend to read more like a wish list, where the program and/or the women support and/or influence the growth of a more positive, inclusive, welcoming organisational culture (at VUT, Brown, 2003), a more women friendly Griffith University (Browning, 2007), to build a culture at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) to encourage and welcome the participation of women (McPhee, 2000), to promote a more inclusive leadership culture (Queensland University of Technology, 1996). Some strengthen the wording to ‘contribute’ to institutional change (de Vries, 1998; Devos, McLean, & O’Hara, 2003), rather than support or influence, suggesting a stronger mandate or sense of agency.

Some include a focus on the university being able to recognise and value the contributions of women (Brown, 2003; Gustavson, 1997) which at least implicitly undermines the idea that women need to be fixed. Others more strongly link the personal and the organisational, seeing the development of women as then enabling women to play an important role in the future of the organisation “by shaping its structures and culture in ways which will recognise and reward women’s contribution”. (Milligan & Genoni, 1993:7, at ECU). Monash and Uni SA (James, 1996; University of South Australia, 2001) echo this “achieving a culture change” through the women approach.

Devos, McLean and O’Hara (2003) articulate a different linkage in their description of WomenResearch 21 at University of New South Wales (UNSW). The program had a clear focus on the women, aiming to improve “the research effectiveness, confidence and productivity” of the women, which was combined with a desire to use the program as “a platform from which to advocate on behalf of this group of researchers and to seek changes to university research policies and practices where they negatively impact on women” (Devos, McLean, & O’Hara, 2003:146). Here the program becomes the agent of change, rather than the women. While their description of the ways in which the program engaged with broader institutional policies appeared to be opportunistic rather than planned, equally they may not have been so readily able to capitalise on the windows of opportunity had they not had this underlying philosophical approach.

WEXDEV (1999) were unusual when articulating their two aims in 1996; in placing “encourage the growth of an organisational culture...” ahead of their second aim focussed around the development needs of the women. Interestingly these aims were later increased to four and re-ordered in 1999. Their cross-institution perspective, working across five institutions may have (temporarily) strengthened their capacity or resolve to act as an external agent for change. WEXDEV were also singular amongst the organisations reviewed here in explicitly stating the need to work with men in improving organisational cultures.

What would a program look like if it was able to state culture change as its primary aim? As Eveline (2004) notes, the organisational change process is the ‘more radical goal’ (Eveline, 2004:82). This highlights an interesting dilemma for those involved in building and maintaining WODP. How overt should they/can they be about their potentially radical goals of transforming organisations? Is the written word then an accurate representation of the aims and goals of those closely involved in WODP, or is there perhaps an element of choosing to soften or camouflage their approach. The culture change process required of a frame four approach could indeed be seen as a radical and subversive act.

The ‘dual focus approach’ as a response to moving ‘beyond frame 1’

Clearly those in the sector who wish to move ‘beyond frame 1’ are doing so by including a focus on organisational culture. More recently I have, in writing about the UWA program (J de Vries, 2006) referred to this linking of women’s development needs and culture change as a ‘dual focus’ approach. I argue that the women only development aspects, integral to WODP can be seen as part of a frame 4 approach to the re-visioning of workplace cultures. This brings the focus on women and the organisational culture together, beginning to see them as mutually attainable, perhaps even mutually supportive goals, not separate or ordered with one following on from the other. This more explicit ‘naming’ brings the inherent tension of a primary focus on working with women, without fixing the women, to the foreground. A ‘dual focus’ program engages the organisation and the women in an organisational change process. This re-situating of WODP as a broader organisational strategy is intended to challenge and extend the ways in which WODP are viewed within the sector.

The WEXDEV model, while operating across campuses is also explicit in linking a focus on the organisation and the individual, making the point that these two aims are often mutually beneficial. In their 1999 report they state “Yet there is no dichotomy between these two aims” and that the “program aims to develop synergies between the contextual, systemic and cultural issues on the one hand and the professional development needs of individual women” (ATNWEXDEV, 1999).

Hutchinson and Pike (1995) in reviewing the ECU program after four years, logically extend this dual focus approach to seeing their program, with its clearly articulated model of leadership as moving from being a staff development program “to being seen as a key strategy for organisational change” (Hutchinson & Pike, 1995:119). This encapsulates a frame 4 approach where the focus is no longer on the women. This clarity of purpose in moving the program from the margins to the centre, encountered significant backlash.

In summary, despite the commonly shared understanding of the need for culture change, and the strongly expressed desire for universities to be better places for women, the links between this acknowledgement and the role of programs in doing so is tenuous. In many cases the onus appears to be on the women to improve organisational cultures. It remains unclear to what extent programs focus specifically on the women and in what ways they engage, if at all in a broader organisational culture change process. It would also appear that WODP, judging by their aims and objectives, do not have a strong mandate for organisational culture change.

In the next section I examine how this gets translated into practice, by examining program design.

Designing a ‘dual focus’ program

In order to explicitly explore the notion of the ‘dual focus’ as an approach to moving beyond frame 1, I have grouped elements of program design around those that focus on the women and those that focus on the organisation.

Program design that focuses on the women

All programs, by virtue of bringing women together, benefit the women by breaking down isolation and building networks across campus. Connecting with other women opens up

possibilities for women to realise 'it's not just me', that many issues they face are systemic rather than personal, which is empowering of itself. While increased networking can be dismissed as minimalist in impact, Browning (2007:18) highlights that networking can be used "for personal gain and cultural shift", thus contributing to a dual focus approach.

Likewise, all programs contain some elements of skills development or enhancement. The women themselves are keen to improve their skills, be they in applying for promotion, improved assertiveness, better meeting skills or greater skill in dealing with difficult staff. However a focus entirely on skills leaves the program open to critique and positioning as a 'fix the women' approach.

A more critical approach

A number of articles identified program elements that, while maintaining a focus on the women, do not position the women as deficient. Often a development focus, primarily around leadership was evident. A further outstanding feature of several programs was taking a more reflective and critical approach to the organisation and the endeavour in which participants were engaged. At UWA for example these include a critical focus on organisational culture and gender, 'gendered' leadership development and change agency (de Vries, 2005).

Taking a development, rather than a training approach is more likely to support dual focus aims. Willis and Daisley (1997) in their evaluation of women only programs in the UK, make a useful distinction between development and skills training. They describe development as participatory, holistic, participant driven, process rather than content driven, reflective, with no magic solutions, and with self determined outcomes. Training, in contrast, is seen as content driven with right and wrong answers, with a defined agenda and outcomes, is not holistic in approach, and where the trainer is primarily conveying ideas, information or procedures.

A number of researchers have been critical of the skills training approach, seeing it as of limited worth in tackling the real issues. As Lewis and Fagensen (1995) point out that if programs focus on skills development but the real problem facing women are to do with a much broader range of factors including context and culture, then it is not surprising that programs have not contributed to a significant increase in the percentage of women in management. Likewise Moultrie & de la Rey note that;

professional development programs for women have to guard against paying attention to personal skills presented in a gender- and race- blind way that ignores or elides the hostile organisational cultures which render such skills pertinent (Moultrie & de la Rey, 2003:418).

The development approach, which often includes an emphasis on leadership, sees women as more active agents in the organisational context. It is perhaps no accident that the majority of 'dual focus' programs included here have a focus on leadership. Eveline (2004) in exploring what she terms companionate leadership in one Australian university comments on the link between leadership and cultural change. "The message of these studies of organisational reshaping, and indeed the position of most researchers in the field, is that leadership (however defined) is vital to cultural change" (Eveline, 2004:34). A leadership program may therefore be well positioned to pursue the 'dual focus' agenda.

Some but not all of the leadership development programs took a critical approach to understanding gender, leadership and organisational cultures. Several programs facilitated this more critical approach through the use of collegial groups at ECU (at ECU see Milligan & Genoni, 1993; Pike, 1995; Pike & Lord, 1997; Pyner, 1994) peer learning groups at UWA (see de Vries, 2005) and collaborative enquiry at UWS (see Treleaven, 1995). In all cases this design element focuses on building trust in a supportive learning environment, where women are able to engage with more critical approaches over time within frameworks provided for engaging in that process.

Treleaven (1995) at the University of Western Sydney (UWS), puts forward collaborative enquiry (a form of action research) as one approach that moves WODP's away from a training program based on deficit towards one based on a model of organisational change. She sees this as a process of "unsettling gendered discourses and creating new subjectivities within a masculinist university culture". Her assumption is that women's full participation will challenge existing norms, and makes the link to a focus on leadership that moves "beyond hierarchical position and status as the only source of women's power and influence" (1995:179). This linking of leadership and change agency is an important one.

Collaborative enquiry as described by Treleaven bears a remarkable similarity to the 'small wins' culture change process developed by Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) and used in the UWA program (de Vries, 2005). Small wins, which links local individual change to systemic cultural change, is dependent on a process of enquiry and intervention. Treleaven also emphasises the incremental, almost diffuse nature of change that occurs in this way, describing individual women's action in challenging established norms. The women were clearly disrupting the status quo, as she expresses it, "fundamentally challenge existing regimes of power" (Treleaven, 1995:183). Likewise collegial groups at ECU were built on similar understandings of leadership and change agency. Indeed Hutchinson and Pike (1995) go on to make the link between the nature of the program and the consequent difficulties in measuring outcomes, which will be explored further below.

A focus on leadership development does not always translate into a dual focus program, or position women away from a deficit model. (Bjork-Billings & Lawrence, 2006) at Deakin take a leadership through personal empowerment approach, which as they state, does not sufficiently acknowledge the cultural constraints on the exercising of leadership.

From this discussion it is possible to identify program design elements that support a dual focus approach; they are a development approach, a critical approach in a supportive environment, and a focus on leadership and change agency. It is also important to note that not all of these occur together, although they are all complementary. What is missing though is a clearer articulation through program design to the aim of culture change.

Critical mass is an idea that is often used to make the link between women's programs and culture change (for example, Chesterman, 1998a, 1998b; Pike & Lord, 1997). It assumes that once there are sufficient senior women, organisational cultures will inevitably change. It is not always clear if this means, any women, or women who are politicised and empowered. However critical mass, while a popular concept rests on a number of assumptions. As Devos et al. (2003) highlight "this is a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition for bringing about the culture change needed to achieve gender equity in our institutions." (italics in the original) (2003:144). Devos et al.(2003) argue there is a need to explicitly address gendered organisational cultures and practices.

The idea of critical mass is echoed by participants themselves. Browning (2007) quotes a participant “A critical mass of women with the same aims is imperative for achieving this goal” (of making Griffith more women friendly). The participant however goes on to note the limitations of this approach to organisational change. “The WiL (program) has contributed to this but I believe that there is still scope to do more...”(Browning, 2007:16).

Some Monash women (James, 1996:9,10) noting the emphasis on individual action wished to see the program ‘as an agent of change in its own right’, and have been disappointed that this opportunity has been ‘so little exploited’. The response of the author in this case is to note reasons why this is difficult to achieve, with co-ordinators too overcommitted to take on this task and noting there are other established mechanisms for achieving change. It is interesting that while co-ordinators are committed to developing the women, the organisational change aspect can be seen as falling outside the role and/or too hard. I suspect that, despite not being openly acknowledged elsewhere, this author is not alone in confronting the difficulties of an active ‘dual focus’ agenda.

Is it sufficient to ensure that women are not positioned as the problem and through program design, build more critical and empowered women leaders? While undoubtedly these women challenge their organisations both through their presence and their leadership, this approach is uncomfortably close to a ‘women needing to fix the organisation approach’ which fails to engage the men in challenging and changing organisational cultures. This falls short of a frame 4 approach which does not focus on the women but on a re-visioning of workplace practices and cultures. How are programs themselves engaging more directly with the organisational culture?

Program design that engages with the organisational culture

The mere existence of a WODP is seen as a positive benefit by many. Program presence is seen as symbolic of the organisations commitment to increasing the participation of women in leadership positions (Browning, 2007), signalling that the organisation is serious about women’s inclusion and success (Bjork-Billings & Lawrence, 2006), acting as a safety net regardless of participation (Lord & Knight, 1997) and as having symbolic and actual value as a site of challenge to institutional policies and practices (Devos, McLean, & O’Hara, 2003). Brown (2003) goes further, in my view somewhat optimistically, making the connection between the symbolic declaration of organisational commitment made by the existence of a WODP and “the cultural change aspirations that form its core” (2003:1). I would argue that the organisation is most often making a commitment to improving the position of women, which is not necessarily underpinned by an understanding of, or commitment to, an organisational change process.

One extension to the programs organisational presence is the capacity of the program to provide feedback to the organisation. This is designed into the UWA program for example, through the peer learning group presentations to an invited audience at the end of the program. This “mirroring to the larger University community the issues and concerns for women in the organisation” (de Vries, 2005:38) provides an important reality check to the organisation and through highlighting existing issues for women in the organisation builds organisational support for change. This is perhaps an under-utilised capacity of programs, and one picked up in the Griffith evaluation as a recommendation for improvement (Browning, 2007).

Program elements that created links between participants and other organisational members were also evident. While this could usefully be viewed as a means of ‘building constituencies’ for change, a notion explored more fully by Kolb (2003), as part of an organisational change approach, it was not always framed or understood in this way.

This was most evident in the Quality Women in Leadership program (Queensland University of Technology, 1996) which included numerous opportunities to interact with Executive and senior university staff. These opportunities ranged from participation in the residential Senior Staff Conference (where their presence significantly enhanced the gender ratio) to breakfast briefings with members of the Executive. While citing the involvement of senior management in the learning of the participants as a main characteristic of the program, there was no overt link to the culture change capacity of this design aspect. This understatement or lack of awareness was evident, to a lesser degree in other programs, such as the senior women’s programs at Monash (James, 1996) and RMIT (McPhee, 2000).

Mentoring is a popular program or program element, present currently in 15 of the 31 universities that have WODP. This is an obvious aspect of programs which can be designed and viewed as part of the organisational change process, precisely because mentoring is a two way process, whereby mentors can be influenced and changed. Butorac (1998) in a WEXDEV report on successful mentoring explores this dimension, stating that “well-planned and integrated schemes can work towards transforming the culture of organisations” (Butorac, 1998:5). This potential goes unexplored in many mentor programs (Brown, 2003; Lord & Pike, 1998), reducing it to an incidental benefit. Research undertaken at UWA by de Vries, Webb and Eveline (2006) found that mentoring “has made a space for men to hear women’s stories and has changed men’s understandings of gender and the gendered organisation”. A more conscious approach to maximising the dual focus capacity of mentoring will be reflected in program design. This can be achieved in various ways, including the targeting of key stakeholders, involvement of senior men, the mentor training, mentor follow-up and the ways in which mentor choices are made.

Some programs while based on a skills approach, but supported by a critical stance on the part of the practitioners, are nonetheless able to be opportunistic in grasping organisational change opportunities. For example the UNSW program for research staff (Devos, McLean, & O’Hara, 2003) resulted in membership of a working party writing a Management Plan, and the opportunity to highlight many issues of concern to women. However for Devos et al. there is a recognition that the program is not doing enough to contribute to culture change. They conclude with more questions than answers as they grapple with how to most effectively develop more effective cultures at the school level, experienced as the major site of discouragement for their participants.

Halliwell and Brown (2001) describe an interesting initiative to bring in experienced female professors on secondment for up to a year, in each faculty, to redress gender imbalances at the senior level. While this is not strictly speaking a WODP, it certainly had an impact. Reports from the visiting women academics include a focus on organisational culture and barriers to women’s progress at Victoria University. This provides excellent credible feedback to the University and gives a glimpse of alternative models of engagement around culture change issues within the organisation.

One inevitable outcome for WODP is some form of backlash, and it would be expected that programs with a successful ‘dual focus’ might experience a greater degree of backlash.

Interestingly only two papers discuss backlash, Hutchinson and Pike (1995:120) in relation to the ECU program and Treleaven (1995) at UWS. At ECU they saw the tensions arising because the project refused to adopt a deficit model in relation to women's skills, and moreover were trespassing in male territory in proposing a leadership capacities model applicable for men and women. Treleaven saw the resistance and backlash as a result of the women challenging existing regimes of power. There are, I suspect, many untold stories about backlash, and further exploration of this would provide useful clues to the impact of various strategies for organisational change.

In summary, not all of the programs wishing to move beyond a frame 1 approach have been able to reflect this in their program design. It is however possible to make clear recommendations regarding those aspects of program design with a focus on the women that support a dual focus approach. Leadership development (as opposed to skills) programs that take a critical approach and provide critical frameworks within supportive environments cannot be criticised as taking a 'fix the women' approach. The application of new skills, confidence and crucially, more critical understanding of leadership and gender by these women will have an impact on organisational cultures, when viewed from the perspective of the small wins approach. Therefore culture change does and should take place through the women. However it appears overly optimistic to hope that provision of this kind of program to enough women will create a critical mass of women that will lead to the required organisational change. The organisational culture will continue to provide a moderating or blocking effect to women's progress.

It is imperative that programs more actively engage with the organisational aspect of the dual focus, and not just rely on achieving 'culture change through the women'. As discussed above the task has been approached in various ways, from feedback to the organisation, building constituencies for change through mentoring and other ways of engaging with senior staff, and grasping opportunities to influence policy and decision-making. A minority of programs actively and intentionally engaged with the organisational aspect of the dual focus approach. There was little effort to build constituencies for change and little documented involvement of engaging men as allies in this process.

As pointed out previously, the mandate for organisational change is the less clear and the 'more radical goal'. It will be easier under any sort of duress to revert to safer ground, with a focus on the women. This duress could include workload, any sort of organisational backlash, a lack of practitioner skills, diminishing resources, a lack of underpinning frameworks, a lack of support, short term priorities and crisis, the list could go on. Working with the women is certainly the more tangible and immediately rewarding aspect of WODP. While WODP are themselves fragile, as is evidenced by programs that come and go, I believe that a dual focus approach is even more fragile.

Looking back, looking forward

This paper has examined the practices of WODP in Higher Education in Australia over the last 15 years. Thirty-eight articles (including published works, conference papers and institutional reports) were selected for further analysis from a total of 88. These authors in some way positioned their programs as moving beyond a fix the women approach. In doing so they clearly identified the need for organisational cultures to change. I have termed this a 'dual focus' approach, where the program works with the women and the organisation, engaging them in an organisational change process. In doing so programs needed to confront

the irony of working with women where the 'real target is the organisation'. A 'dual focus' approach provides a clear challenge to rethink the more traditional approach to women only programs. This review, which focussed on program frameworks, aims and objectives, and program design has highlighted the difficulty of this task, even for those who wish to engage with it.

A number of the programs highlighted in this article in fact no longer exist (eg ECU, Monash, Deakin, UWS) leaving current practice rather thin on the ground. However on a more optimistic note there are lessons to be learnt from the examples outlined above, and a great deal of room for creative engagement with the 'dual focus' approach.

It appears that 'women only' initiatives by their very nature invite a 'fix the women' understanding of the problem, requiring careful and ongoing positioning of the program to maintain the more radical agenda. It appears it is much easier to continue to view the women as the problem and the organisation as benevolent in supporting women only initiatives that will 'help' the women. This is the current approach of 22 institutions. Ironically perhaps WODP, which as Devos et al point out, "are paradoxically the most palatable form of positive or affirmative action for women" (Devos, McLean, & O'Hara, 2003:146) may be too palatable. They offer institutions ways of expressing concern for gender inequality, and placating their female staff, without necessarily engaging in some of the hard work of re-visioning workplaces. In this sense the program provides value for the University in 'being seen to be doing something'. The question is, is that something anywhere near enough?

To conclude this review article I think it is useful to turn to a question raised by Devos et al; "what can women's programs contribute to addressing gender inequities and creating more inclusive working environments?"(2003:144)

Maintaining women only space serves to acknowledge the different experiences of women in the workplace, and their relative disadvantage. There are significant gains to be made in addressing these differences, providing critical frameworks and strengthening skills that assist in navigating the masculinist organisational cultures which most women find themselves in. However this focus on individual women and groups of women if undertaken in isolation from the organisation is never going to achieve lasting organisational culture change. It is critical to engage with organisational cultures on as many fronts as possible. Building partnerships, challenging policies, educating mentors and gender equity champions, working with men around gender issues, can all be part of women's development programs that position themselves as strategic interventions.

While I maintain that WODP do have a place in the re-visioning of workplace cultures, it is important to note that the entire burden of change should not rest on the WODP. Eveline (2004) makes that point in responding to the extremely positive remarks of the Chair of the Review of Academic Women staff at UWA. LDW should not be saddled with the "sole symbolic responsibility for what is clearly a mammoth task" (Eveline, 2004:97).

Conclusion

Universities as they move further into the twenty-first century must continue to address gender advantage and disadvantage. While the looming shortage of academics, the decline in PhD enrolments, the ongoing search for talent all provide impetus, the status quo is notoriously resistant to change. Women can play a key role in the dismantling of men's

advantage in the academy, and women only programs can provide a platform for enabling women to be more active leaders. Programs must also do more than this – themselves seeking out ways to influence and change organisational culture. However as we have seen women's programs coming out of a 'fix the women' approach re-inforce the status quo, assisting women to play the game, without ever querying the rules of the game. In doing so, programs do a disservice to their women and their institution, failing to deliver a more empowered female leadership and ultimately doing little to make the academy a place where new generation men and women will wish to make their contribution. However men must be more than interested or resistant bystanders. They too must ultimately be engaged in examining the rules of the game to ensure that universities remain vibrant intellectual communities relevant to all our futures.

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ⁱ While the development of WODP in New Zealand is linked to their development in Australia, inclusion of NZ programs is beyond the scope of this article

ⁱⁱ The Australia and New Zealand 'staff development for women' (SDFW) practitioners group

ⁱⁱⁱ Thanks to Lucienne Tessens, who undertook this review

^{iv} Summary data available on sdfw website at

http://www.osds.uwa.edu.au/about/activities/ldw/sdfw/melbourne_2007/overview