

**A realistic agenda?  
Women only programs as strategic  
interventions for building gender  
equitable workplaces**

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## **Statement of candidate contribution**

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

This thesis does not contain work that I have published, nor work under review for publication.

.....

Jennifer de Vries



# Abstract

This thesis examines an organizational change intervention designed to build more gender equitable workplaces. The intervention relies on what could be considered a tried and true gender equity strategy: a women only (WO) development program. However, while women only programs remain popular as a gender equity strategy, few would consider that WO programs represent a challenge to the gendered nature of organizations themselves. Rather, WO programs are criticised for being exactly the opposite – ways of maintaining and sustaining current gender inequalities by focussing on women as the problem to be fixed (Meyerson & Kolb 2000). The work of reconceptualizing and putting into practice a WO program that is designed to challenge and change the status quo, as I will outline in this thesis, becomes an attempt to rehabilitate WO programs. Are they capable of contributing to the transformation of workplaces that is called for by feminist scholars such as Cockburn (1991) Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) and Sinclair (1994)?

This thesis draws heavily on the work of Joan Acker (1990) and her theory of the gendered organization in defining the problem of gender inequality and the nature of the transformative change required. Fortunately others, in particular researchers associated with the Centre for Gender in Organizations (CGO),<sup>1</sup> have preceded me in designing and implementing organizational interventions building on the work of Acker. I have used their experience as a launching pad for developing the ‘bifocal approach’. Rather than a sole focus on the women, this approach includes a focus on the organizational change that is needed to achieve gender equity goals. The bifocal approach is therefore underpinned by the engagement of individual women and men as change agents, harnessing, in the words of Kolb (2003), ‘constituencies for change’.

This thesis examines the ‘bifocal approach’ as applied by the Leadership Development for Women program (LDW) delivered in two historically masculinist institutions, the University of Western Australia and a policing organization. Qualitative data from the three potential

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<sup>1</sup> Researchers associated with the Centre for Gender in Organizations (CGO), Simmons Graduate School, Boston. Oft cited CGO collaborators in this thesis include Gill Coleman, Robin Ely, Joyce Fletcher, Deborah Kolb, Debra Meyerson, Rhona Rapoport, Ann Rippin and Maureen Scully.

constituency groups that form the heart of the bifocal approach – executive level champions of the program, senior female and male mentors, and the female participants – is used to examine the effectiveness of the bifocal approach.

There is a certain inevitability to the problems experienced by interventions that challenge the gendered status quo (Acker 2000). In this research, the men and women who were considered potential constituents for change often represented gender as an individual characteristic, and therefore organizationally irrelevant. Yet within each group there were some who did engage with the gendered change agenda.

While this research did not set out to justify WO programs which have a single focus on the development of the women, the stories of the LDW participants provided strong endorsement for the strategy of developing women's leadership. The innovative curriculum supported women to do the 'identity work' of leadership (Sinclair 2007) in ways that enabled them to more confidently contribute as leaders and change agents within their institutions. In this way, the development of the women contributed to the organizational change strategy.

The bifocal approach met with partial success, often falling far short of the transformative ideal. This research documents the many ways in which 'losing gender' (Coleman & Rippin 2000) occurred. In particular the WO focus, with its inevitable spotlight on the women, proved to be the achilles heel of the intervention, by undermining the intervention's capacity to keep the focus on men, masculinity and the gendered organization. While men were engaged as 'allies' within the program, future interventions need to find ways of encouraging men to become co-journeymen through reflection on their own gender identity.

Despite its shortcomings, the bifocal approach used in the LDW program did engage some organizational members in the gendered change agenda and was able to position the LDW program as more than a 'fix the women' approach. The bifocal approach provided a novel vehicle for a transformative intervention, one which provided a sustainable model for radical WO programs, access to a broad range of organizational partners, and the strong 'fallback' position of being able to develop and empower the women to be agents of change.

This thesis makes a significant contribution to re-situating WO programs as contributors to the transformative agenda in organizations. My conclusion is that both the bifocal approach and a sole focus on developing women leaders have merit, if they are pursued within the frameworks provided by critical feminist theory on leadership, gender and the gendered organization.

# Table of Contents

STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE CONTRIBUTION .....	I
ABSTRACT.....	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	V
LIST OF TABLES .....	X
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	XI
ABBREVIATIONS.....	XIII
<b>CHAPTER 1 .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Where to from here?.....	5
<b>CHAPTER 2 .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Women only development programs: Still relevant in today’s workplaces?.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Introduction.....	7
Gendered advantage and disadvantage.....	8
The ‘Gendered Organization’.....	11
The ‘Gendered University’.....	13
Policing organizations.....	15
Organizational responses to gender inequality.....	18
Applying gendered organization theory to practice .....	20
Putting a Frame 4 approach into practice.....	20
Critical issues for Frame 4 interventions.....	24
Why so hard?.....	25
Gender and power.....	25
Visibility and relevance .....	28
Backlash and resistance to change.....	29
Making it possible.....	30
The individual and the structural in organizational change .....	31
‘Small wins’ .....	32
Change agency.....	33
Positional leadership for gendered change .....	37

Women only programs as a gendered change intervention .....	38
The scope of women only programs .....	39
Critique and controversy .....	41
Pragmatism and the ‘feel good’ factor .....	43
Mentoring: different or more of the same?.....	47
Organizational co-option or cop out?.....	52
A sense of possibility?.....	53
Conclusion .....	54
<b>CHAPTER 3.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>The LDW program: Developing the ‘bifocal approach’ .....</b>	<b>57</b>
Introduction.....	57
The inception and early years of LDW at UWA: 1994–2000.....	58
Program elements and design.....	59
Program governance and relationship to the wider community .....	60
Program evaluation and success.....	61
CGO insights: Looking backwards and taking stock .....	63
Looking backwards: a ‘two pronged’ approach.....	64
Taking stock.....	65
CGO Insights: Moving forwards .....	67
Peer learning groups (PLGs) .....	68
Leaders and change agents.....	69
Teaching the ‘gendered organization’ .....	70
Small wins as the change agency process .....	71
The ‘bifocal approach’ .....	72
The ‘bifocal approach’ in practice.....	74
Conclusion .....	75
<b>CHAPTER 4.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Researching the ‘bifocal approach’ .....</b>	<b>77</b>
Introduction.....	77
Doing feminist research.....	78
Feminist positioning.....	78
Researching gender and the gendered organization .....	79
Research Approach .....	80
Foregrounding the photographs against the movie backdrop .....	81
The ‘practitioner story’ behind the research .....	82
Intertwining research and practice.....	84
Reflexivity in research.....	85
Research sites.....	86

Male professors and policemen .....	87
A ‘sandstone’ University: The University of Western Australia.....	88
The policing research site.....	90
When the research began .....	93
Ethics, access and participation .....	94
Research participants .....	96
Champions.....	96
Mentors .....	97
Peer learning groups .....	98
The interviews .....	99
Institutional documents and participant observation .....	102
Data analysis .....	103
Conclusion .....	104
<b>CHAPTER 5 .....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Championing a gender equity cause.....</b>	<b>105</b>
Introduction.....	105
Champion introductions .....	108
The University of Western Australia.....	108
Policing.....	112
CEOs Alan and Mark: Doer and Commander .....	116
Male champions: a powerful combination.....	116
Performing the role, positioning the program .....	118
Cecilia and Geoff: Same rank, different story .....	124
Gendered group membership and gendered ‘choices’ .....	124
Championing for a different audience? .....	130
The hard work of being a champion.....	131
Margaret and Belinda: Gendered expectations and choices .....	133
Am I a champion? .....	133
Gender duty.....	137
Engaged as gender change agents? .....	139
Positioned by gender .....	139
Gender marked roles: expectations and choices.....	141
Champion building.....	142
Measuring up to the bifocal approach?.....	143
Conclusion .....	145

<b>CHAPTER 6.....</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>Mentors: Engaging in gendered change or validating the status quo? .....</b>	<b>147</b>
Introduction.....	147
Gender insight.....	148
‘And gender, if it has relevance...’.....	149
Gender progress: ‘we have gone ahead in leaps and bounds’.....	150
‘I don’t see them as being men or women’.....	154
Greedy academia: A single issue approach to gender?.....	154
Gender hesitancy .....	156
No need for women only programs.....	158
Women’s place .....	160
Female mentors: Drawing on their own experience .....	162
A more complex systemic view?.....	165
Mentoring approaches .....	168
Mentoring for ‘organizational fit’.....	168
Mentoring for development.....	173
‘Transformative mentoring’ .....	176
It’s all about opportunity .....	179
An ideal mentor?.....	180
Measuring up to the bifocal approach?.....	181
Success by a different measure.....	186
Conclusion: A shaky platform.....	187
<b>CHAPTER 7.....</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>Developing leaders and gender change agents?.....</b>	<b>189</b>
Introduction.....	189
The women’s stories.....	191
‘Stand your ground’ .....	191
‘How do we define ourselves as leaders?’.....	196
‘Managing Change’ .....	199
‘Putting ourselves first without fear or guilt’ .....	204
‘Situational Leadership’.....	209
‘Are flexible staff committed staff?’ .....	213
‘Holding up the mirror’ for the organization.....	217
Measuring up to the bifocal approach?.....	220
The peer learning group process.....	221
Small wins and gendered cultural literacy.....	222
Leadership and change agency .....	224
Conclusion .....	225

<b>CHAPTER 8 .....</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>A different kind of women’s program: Women’s development as strategic intervention .....</b>	<b>227</b>
Introduction.....	227
Re-visiting the ‘bifocal approach’ .....	229
Gender change agents.....	230
Women – as co-journeymen .....	232
Men – as supporters.....	234
A sustainable and robust intervention for transformative change? .....	236
Losing gender.....	238
Losing gender, gender = women.....	238
Losing gender, losing masculinities .....	239
Can the ‘bifocal approach’ be saved? .....	240
Is leadership development for women enough to transform organizations? .....	243
Conclusion.....	247
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>249</b>

## List of tables

Table 1 Summary of Research Participants .....	96
Table 2 Peer learning group research participants.....	99
Table 3 Executive level champions.....	107

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Many people participated in this research directly through the group and individual interviews, and their voices bring this thesis to life. Champions, mentors and participants were gracious, generous in giving their time and happy to engage with me. Many more have been part of my and our LDW journey over the years in both institutions. I am grateful to all of them for their contribution, and for how they have shaped the program and my own understanding of gender and the gendered organization.

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I am looking forward to reclaiming my life, helping Jeremy with his new garden, taking photos and re-engaging with Year 11 homework with Keayn, and catching up on my share of the domestics. Weekends will take on a whole new shape that I hope will delight us all.

# Abbreviations

CGO	Centre for Gender in Organizations
CIAR	Collaborative Interactive Action Research
EO	Equal Opportunity
LDW	Leadership Development for Women
PLG	Peer Learning Group
WO	Women only
WODP/WOMT	Women only Development Program/ Management Training
WOM	Women only mentoring
<b>Specific to universities</b>	
DVC/SDVC	(Senior) Deputy Vice-Chancellor
HE	Higher Education
HEW level	Higher Education Worker level
SWN	Senior Women's Network
UWA	University of Western Australia
VC	Vice-Chancellor
<b>Specific to policing</b>	
ACWAP	Australasian Council of Women in Policing
COP	Commissioner of Police
WAN	Women's Advisory Network



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Gendered advantage and disadvantage within the workplace has proven to be both resilient and resistant to change. Gains for women have been modest and slow. Joan Acker (1990; 1992), in her groundbreaking work on the gendered organization, argues that what is required to understand this inequality and to work for change is a systemic understanding of organizational gendering processes. By putting the spotlight on the way organizations are gendered and problematic, Acker's work provides the keystone concept that is the starting point for this thesis.

This thesis questions the capacity of women only (WO) programs to realistically contribute to the organizational change required to achieve greater gender equity. WO programs as longstanding gender equity strategies were designed to redress the low representation of women, most often in senior ranks. However, more recently they have been criticised as part of the problem rather than part of the solution (Meyerson & Kolb 2000). By focussing on women as the problem to be fixed, WO programs perpetuate a lack of focus on the organization, obscuring the need for organizational change. WO programs therefore, at first glance, seem to be unlikely vehicles for a strategic intervention that aims to challenge and change the gendered status quo.

This thesis re-theorises WO programs to take on this much broader mandate, to engage in what Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) describe as a 're-visioning of work cultures'. The thesis question of whether WO programs can build more gender equitable workplaces is addressed by examining a particular WO program which has been systematically re-focussed and re-positioned over time to address the need for organizational change. The

## Introduction

Leadership Development for Women (LDW) program, initially developed at the University of Western Australia (UWA) and subsequently implemented in a policing organization, provides the WO program and the two research sites for this investigation.

Since 2000, the development of the LDW program at UWA has been guided by the conviction that for women only development programs to have any relevance in today's organizations as a gender equality strategy, they must *directly* tackle issues of organizational culture change. The process of translating the theory of the gendered organization into a practical organizational intervention using the pre-existing LDW program has been greatly assisted by the work of researchers from the Centre for Gender in Organizations<sup>1</sup> (CGO) at the Simmons Graduate School of Management in Boston, who themselves draw on the work of Acker. The re-positioning of LDW became a process of experimentation, a cycling between theory and practice, adapting materials from CGO scholars and elsewhere.

The work has been guided by the development of what I term a 'bifocal approach'. This term encapsulates the idea of maintaining two foci, in the same way that bifocal lenses allow for switching almost seamlessly between near and distance vision. In the case of WO programs, this means developing the capacity to focus on the development of the women *and* on the organizational 'gendered change'<sup>2</sup> process (Morley, Unterhalter & Gold 2001). For the LDW program, the bifocal approach became a way of operationalising a gendered change agenda, specific to WO programs. The ongoing challenge was to design these two foci into the program to become simultaneous, interdependent and compatible goals.

I think of the development of the 'bifocal approach' within the LDW programs at UWA and policing as a *journey towards a 'bifocal approach'*. This journey provided the impetus for the research project, the framing of the research question and acts as a continuing backdrop to the research process. My work with the LDW program began in 1997, three years after the program began in 1994. However it was the clarity and sense of purpose that I brought back from my visit to the CGO in 2000 that marked the beginning of the journey towards the bifocal. There is no sense of arrival at a final destination and the process is ongoing.

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<sup>1</sup> Researchers associated with the Centre for Gender in Organizations (CGO), Simmons Graduate School, Boston. ([www.simmons.edu/som/cgo/](http://www.simmons.edu/som/cgo/)) Oft cited CGO collaborators in this thesis include Gill Coleman, Robin Ely, Joyce Fletcher, Deborah Kolb, Debra Meyerson, Rhona Rapoport, Ann Rippin and Maureen Scully.

<sup>2</sup> I have borrowed this term from Morley, Unterhalter and Gold and use it here (in preference to talking about culture change) to refer to the organizational transformation that is required to make organizations gender equitable. I explore terminology further in Chapter Two.

## Chapter One

Importantly, my journey was not undertaken alone. It has been shared with my consultant colleague Maggie Leavitt<sup>3</sup> who was already working with us<sup>4</sup> at UWA in delivering the LDW program. While much of the early development work was undertaken at UWA, our journey together has taken us beyond the university into other organizations including into policing. The strength of this partnership with Maggie is evident throughout this thesis. I have struggled with the use of ‘I’ and ‘we’, and have resisted the temptation to retrospectively tidy it up. The development of the LDW program on which this thesis is based is ours, the research I undertook. When I write in the first person about the program I am claiming the account as mine, not the ideas, which were jointly developed. While Maggie and I form one team, LDW depends on many others, and the use of ‘we’ sometimes specifically acknowledges other partners in each institution.

My research approach lies within a feminist qualitative methodology. The work of building and researching more gender equitable workplaces is a feminist endeavour. Moreover a feminist approach that requires the location of the researcher to be visible and encourages vigorous reflexivity on the part of the researcher is congruent with my own values and practices. My positioning locates this research at the intersection of scholarship and practice.

I am deeply embedded in this research, as both practitioner/participant observer in the ongoing development and practice of the LDW program and as the formal researcher analysing, critiquing and reporting my findings. In the methodology chapter I use the analogy of my researcher self as a stills photographer capturing a moment in time, the research interviews, and my practitioner self as part of a moviemaking crew with a longer term view of the LDW program. This thesis draws on data from both perspectives. The snapshot of LDW gleaned from the interviews represents the formal research while the ongoing LDW ‘moviemaking’ has much in common with participant action research. The moviemaking role of practitioner/participant observer provides the backdrop to the formal research, informing my stills photography (the interviewing) and helping me make sense of my photographs (the transcripts). It has provided me with insights – data – from before and after the photography/research moment, giving this thesis a much richer and longer

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<sup>3</sup> I am enormously indebted to Maggie. There is no doubt that the LDW we have developed together is much stronger than anything either of us could have done on our own. And it was and is so much more fun working together. I doubt that either of us could have sustained this work without the support of the other given the inevitable challenges of working in WO programs that seek to change the gendered status quo.

<sup>4</sup> When I use ‘us’ here I am referring to all those involved in running the program at UWA, and in particular Claire Webb, an important part of the LDW team over many years.

## Introduction

contextual view than would otherwise be possible. In addition I have drawn on a large number of institutional documents and records as a third source of data and used these extensively throughout the research process.

The two organization types researched here, universities and policing organizations, were historically masculine enclaves. The particular university, UWA, and policing jurisdiction (which remains anonymous in this thesis) studied here shared, until recently, the lowest respective participation rates for female academics (of all universities) and policewomen (for all states) in Australia. Despite this common characteristic, the two organizations represent very different expressions of the 'gendered organization' (Acker 1990). The particularities of each organization and their engagement with the bifocal approach allows for a comparison between organizations. This introduces aspects of a comparative case study to this research, adding a degree of robustness and generalisability.

The organizational gendered change process rests with the recruitment of individual 'constituents for change' (Kolb 2003) and their willingness and capacity to contribute to a gendered change agenda. Three groups, champions, mentors and participants, and the ways in which the LDW program is designed to engage with them are the focus of the formal research. Thus the program participants form an integral part of the gendered change process and the program seeks to engage women and men in the broader organizational community, in particular through the roles of mentors and executive level 'champions', in the gendered change agenda.

It is the linking of the individual 'constituents for change' and the broader organizational gendered change process that holds the key to my research question. Gender, as it is understood and practised by the individuals in this study, becomes the basic building block for my research. Examining the capacity for the LDW program to educate, influence and equip individuals to become change agents in the gender equity project is the foundational layer of the research. My contention is that making gender individually relevant serves as a precursor to making gender organizationally relevant, building the capacity of the LDW program to hold onto a bifocal approach in each organization. Fostering gender awareness, at both the subjective and systemic level, is a cornerstone of the bifocal approach. Without it, WO programs are remedial training programs for women, and organizations remain the same.

## **Where to from here?**

Chapters Two and Three provide the frameworks and background to the ‘bifocal approach’ and how the questions for this thesis arose from theory *and* practice. A research question that emerges out of theory and practice, rather than a gap in the literature is unusual in a thesis and presents the challenge of doing justice to both the theory and practice in a not too muddled and not too lengthy fashion, when in fact the development process was both lengthy and muddled. Striving for brevity and clarity superimposes an order and I have followed a largely conventional path, in keeping theory and practice separate, with Chapter Two presenting the majority of the literature and theoretical frameworks. Chapter Three introduces the LDW program and outlines the way in which the application of theory to practice (and vice versa) resulted in the ‘bifocal approach’. It is then possible to examine the effectiveness of the bifocal approach.

Chapter Two begins by highlighting the broader problem of gender inequitable workplaces. Joan Acker’s (1990; 1992) work on the ‘gendered organization’ is introduced as foundational to understanding why gender inequity persists and the limitations of organizational interventions and strategies used to address this problem. Having clearly named the various shortcomings and difficulties with strategies to date, I begin the seemingly improbable task of situating a Women Only (WO) program as a potential contributor to the larger gendered change agenda required to build gender equitable workplaces. As I will illustrate, a review of the WO literature, while confirming the shortcomings of WO programs proves largely unhelpful in contributing to this re-positioning. However, the CGO Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR) approach provides a starting point for re-positioning WO programs as potentially relevant to the problem. Their account of this work (Coleman & Rippin 2000; Ely & Meyerson 2000a; Meyerson & Kolb 2000; Symposium Team 2000), together with responses by Jeff Hearn (2000) and Joan Acker (2000) highlight issues that need to be addressed in any organizational gendered change intervention. This chapter includes an overview of the theory that underpins the research, firstly anticipating the difficulties of intervening in the gendered organization by exploring gender and power, visibility and relevance, and backlash and resistance. This is followed by an exploration of what makes change possible, linking the individual and the structural, ‘small wins’ and change agency.

Chapter Three introduces the LDW program, providing an account of the milestones in the development of the program at UWA. Using the CGO visit as the pivotal moment, I

## Introduction

then retrospectively critique the LDW program, and take stock of what I call the ‘good bones’ of LDW, those aspects of the program that predispose it towards a ‘bifocal approach’. The journey forward from that point describes the inspiration and integration of materials from the CGO and others in moving towards the bifocal. The majority of this chapter takes place at UWA, the developmental ‘home’ of LDW. The chapter concludes by describing the LDW program that was introduced into policing in 2004 and that formed the basis for this study in both institutions when the research began in 2006.

Chapter Four outlines the methodology and methods I used. It describes my feminist approach and the use of qualitative methods to explore the gendering processes in depth. I expand the analogy of photographs and movies that I have already referred to in order to bring together my two roles. The chapter covers the practicalities of the research, including how the research was conducted, who was involved, the issues and challenges I faced as a researcher, and the approach I adopted to data analysis. I also introduce the two research sites in more detail in order to provide the history and context which are critical to understanding the subsequent successes and failures of the gendered change intervention.

Each of the following three chapters explores one group: Chapter Five covers Executive Champions; Chapter Six, Mentors; and Chapter Seven, Participants. Each constituency group and the program elements designed to engage them provide particular insights into the capacity of the LDW program to implement and sustain a bifocal approach. Because at heart the bifocal approach depends on recruiting change agents, the efficacy of the program as an intervention depends on making gender individually relevant. Each chapter explores how the research participants engage with the gendered change agenda and how this contributes or fails to contribute to gendered change within their institution.

The final chapter brings together the themes and insights that emerged across all three constituency groups. Rising above the level of detail in the preceding three chapters, this chapter reflects on the capacity of WO programs to contribute to the broader transformative change agenda. I return to the issues identified in Chapter Two, from the work of the CGO, exploring the shared and unique difficulties inherent in an intervention strategy that gains entrée through working with the women. While concluding that slippage between the bifocal as theorised and the bifocal in practice was inevitable, the thesis concludes on a positive note. Both the bifocal approach as a gendered change intervention, and the participants’ leadership development, when informed by the work of gender theorists, show promise in contributing to gendered change.

## Chapter 2

### Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

But my concern is that it is very easy to relate with women, it is very easy to learn with women, because we also have a similar way of socialising and learning. I think we are still missing the mark with men. In the past it has been fix the problem, fix the women, fix the problem type thing, but it is not about that because until we fix or deal with some of the issues that are across the board, then all you are doing is putting women as part of an organization so they can deal better, but what about the other half?

Katherine, LDW participant, peer learning group interviewee

### **Introduction**

This chapter establishes the theoretical frameworks for this research and reviews the literature of WO programs. It juxtaposes past and current practices of WO programs and WO mentoring programs with current understandings of the gendered organization and the nature of interventions required to bring about change.

The chapter begins by examining the broader context of gendered advantage and disadvantage within workplaces. Introducing the work of Acker (1990; 1992) and the gendered organization, and those who have built on this work, provides frameworks for understanding the persistence of gendered inequality and the inadequacy of the majority of change strategies. The review of WO programs highlights the shortcomings of focussing on women and not organizations, suggesting that WO programs are of limited relevance in tackling gender inequality in today's workplaces. However the chapter finishes on a positive

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

note suggesting, on the basis of the literature, that WO programs may have as yet unrealised potential as vehicles for organizational change.

### **Gendered advantage and disadvantage**

Men thrive in today's organizations, or so it appears when considering men's dominant presence, status and pay. The same cannot be said of women.

This research takes place in the Australian context, within two distinctive types of organizations. Universities and policing organizations, both operating within the public sector, have particular histories, gendered staff group and gender profiles and this will be explored in some depth. However, the place of women within these organizations is not unique to the organizations or to Australia. It is therefore essential to consider women's failure, relative to men's success, to thrive in today's organizations more broadly, across employment sectors and in a global context. Where possible I reverse data in order to highlight men's advantage, often concealed by a focus on women's disadvantage (Eveline 1994).

Data from the Australian Census of Women in Leadership (EOWA 2008) on corporate women in the top 200 ASX listed companies shows that progress has stalled or is going backwards. Men chair 196 out of 200 boards, hold 92% of directorships, 196 of the 200 CEO positions and 89 % of executive management positions. Half of all companies have all male executive teams, as do half of all boards.

In Australia men hold 66% of the seats on Government boards, 78% of chairing roles on those boards, 68% of Federal parliamentarians are male and 64% of senior executive positions in the public service are male, with that percentage increasing in the higher level executive positions. 2008 data show women comprised 45% of the workforce, 70 % of part-time positions, and 30% of women did not receive leave entitlements. The gender pay gap remains high. Based on average weekly earnings, women earned 83.8 cents for every dollar males earned (Australian Government Office for Women 2008a; Australian Government Office for Women 2008b). Combined with breaks in employment, these extrapolate into substantial differences in lifetime earnings and superannuation (Cassells et al. 2009). The labour force is highly gender segregated by occupation and industry, most marked in the construction and mining industries which are overwhelmingly male and education, health and community services which are overwhelmingly female (Australian Government Office for Women 2007).

## Chapter Two

Male advantage is not confined to Australia, neither is it confined to the world of work. The Global Gender Gap Report, produced by the World Economic Forum (Hausmann, Tyson & Zahidi 2008) rates some 130 countries (using internal comparison data to control for relative wealth of the country) across four measures: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival. Using combined scores across the four measures the highest ranking for women (relative to men) is 0.83. Most relevant to this thesis is the measure of *Economic participation and opportunity* (which covers variables such as labour force participation, wage equality, female income relative to men, measures of seniority and occupation). Once again the highest score is 0.83, with Australia ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> on a score of 0.73. The authors conclude that:

Women account for half of the world's population and half of its talent. The costs of not developing this talent are huge...In the current economic environment, there is a danger that investment in gender equality...may fall (2008:22).

The Global Gender Gap Index demonstrates a compelling relationship between improving the gender gap index and economic prosperity. In addition, data supporting the business case for gender equity within organizations is also strengthening (Catalyst 2004; Chesterman, Ross-Smith & Peters 2005; Hewlett & Luce 2005; Palermo 2004) and the cost of privileging the public domain over the private, for women, men, families, and communities is increasingly evident (Acker 1998). The way in which work is organized proves toxic for women and men in different ways (Pocock 2005; Pocock, Skinner & Reina 2009). Pocock, Skinner and Ichii (2009) no longer use the term work-life balance, instead referring to work-life interference. Work-life balance, they argue, suggests that clever individuals can make it happen, when in fact it is structural issues that are critical.

Gendered advantage and disadvantage is global and historically entrenched. Acker (1990:145) describes this as '...the extraordinary persistence through history and across societies of the subordination of women'. Not only is gender seen as an organizing principle of society' (Rapoport et al. 2002:10), but gender in organizations reflects 'the symbolic order of gender in society' (Gherardi & Poggio 2001:257).

Quick or easy answers to dismantling the gendering processes at play in organizations have not materialised. Many organizations have made concerted efforts to reduce gender disadvantage, with some success, but find it increasingly difficult to obtain substantial gains. The issue bubbles to the surface when Australian census of women in (corporate) leadership (EOWA 2008, quoted above) data are published, with commentators seemingly

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

mystified by the lack of progress. Katie Lahey, Chief Executive of the Business Council of Australia, casting around 'for the missing piece of the jigsaw', went so far as to suggest quotas, a highly unpopular, almost desperate suggestion in the Australian context (O'Carroll 2009:19).

How organizations understand the issues or the problem plays a large part in the solutions they are prepared to entertain. Indeed, not understanding the problem is part of the problem. The lack of senior women often becomes a proxy or symbol of gender disadvantage and if that problem could be solved all would be well. And for some organizations even the absence of senior women is not a problem (Sinclair 1998). Faith in the pipeline theory, that the under-representation of senior women is a legacy of the past rather than the result of current practices and that women will come through the pipeline in due course, is becoming increasingly untenable with the passage of time, mounting evidence of barriers to progression and women's strong continuing participation in education and training and therefore availability in feeder positions for senior positions (Allen & Castleman 2001; Bailyn 2003; Krefting 2003; Sinclair 1998; van den Brink 2009). Debates increasingly focus on women's choice and women's right to choose. This suggests that women do not want senior positions, while masking the structural constraints within which these choices are made. Sex Discrimination Commissioner Liz Broderick argues these are an adaptive response rather than a choice (O'Carroll 2009).

Organizational cultures have often been blamed as the reason for women's continued lack of equal representation in the senior ranks. While organizational culture is often deemed to be the culprit, it is rarely usefully defined. Sheryl Bond (2000:80), writing about culture in respect to academic leadership, describes it as 'the single most important factor in creating an environment in which women were undermined and/or blocked from assuming the highest levels of leadership'. Bond (2000:80) goes on to provide some useful ways of thinking about this, suggesting culture is the most significant variable, in that it:

...held women and men within socially prescribed roles...; ascribes to the contributions of men a greater significance than it ascribes to those of women; extracts a much higher personal cost from women who seek and/or accept leadership positions than it does from men; and assigns a particular, often implicit, norm to the behaviours expected of a leader...this norm is so exclusive...that it drives out alternative patterns of leadership.

This takes the debate well beyond the discourse of individual choice to an inkling that individuals and organizations may be 'doing gender' (Acker 1990; West & Zimmerman 1987) within their organizational cultures, norms and practices, systematically creating

gendered disadvantage and a lack of fit for women as leaders. Focussing on organizational culture has not, however, translated into successful intervention strategies in the workplace. As a barrier to women, organizational culture has proved to be a slippery concept, and one that senior men may not necessarily subscribe to (Wellington, Brunit Kropf & Gerkovich 2003). The gaze, often and not surprisingly, returns to a focus on the women (Piterman 2008).

Over time, the coming together of gender and organizational theorists and the growing theoretical understanding of workplaces as gendered and gendering has proved fruitful in providing a foundation for organizational interventions. In particular, the work of Joan Acker (1990; 1992) has been pivotal in understanding the ways in which gendering processes in organizations contribute to structures that privilege (some) men. Issues for individual women or women as a group will not be resolved without challenging and changing these entrenched organizational gendering processes.

### **The 'Gendered Organization'**

Joan Acker's (1990) groundbreaking article, *Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations*, argued that organizational structures are not gender neutral, and that this fact is commonly masked or obscured through a gender neutral, asexual discourse. In Acker's (1990:140) view, recognising the limitations of this discourse and developing a more systematic theory of gender and organizations is critical to understanding the 'gender segregation of work, including divisions between paid and unpaid work', 'income and status inequality between men and women', the invention and reproduction of 'cultural images of gender', and the production through organizational processes and pressures of 'some aspects of individual gender identity, perhaps particularly masculinity'. Perhaps most importantly, she saw this more systematic understanding as necessary for the 'feminist project...to make large scale organizations more democratic and more supportive of humane goals'. Acker's work on the gendered organization is indeed critical to my feminist project, seeking to re-position WO programs to play a part in building more gender equitable workplaces.

Acker's interest is in understanding the ways in which gendering processes as constructed within the gendered organization contribute to inequality in the workplace. As Acker (1990:146) notes:

To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is *gendered* means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion,

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine (emphasis added).

This production of gender or 'gendering' occurs through at least four interlinked processes:

The production of gender divisions. Ordinary organizational practices produce the gender patterning of jobs, wages, and hierarchies, power and subordination;

The creation of symbols, images and forms of consciousness that explicate, justify, and, more rarely, oppose gender divisions;

Interactions between individuals, women and men, women and women, men and men, including patterns that enact dominance and submission and create alliances and exclusions; and

The internal mental work of individuals as they consciously construct their understanding of the organization's gendered structure of work and opportunity and the demands for gender appropriate behaviours and attitudes (Acker 1992:252-3).

These gendering processes are built upon 'gendered substructures', that is 'the spatial and temporal arrangements of work, in the rules prescribing workplace behaviour, and in the relations linking workplaces to living places'. It is in this gendered substructure that the assumption 'that work is separate from the rest of life and that it has first claim on the worker' can be found (Acker 1992:255).

Acker shows that the disembodied universal worker is in fact an unencumbered male worker whose life centres on his full-time job and whose wife takes care of the domestic and caring responsibilities. This organizational logic actively excludes and marginalises women who cannot hope to meet these requirements. For Acker (2006), this issue of balance between the public and private spheres, where women carry more obligations outside of work, is critical to maintaining gender inequality within organizations, perpetuating the unequal distribution of senior men and women. In challenging these apparently gender neutral concepts of jobs and workers, Acker uncovers gendered concepts, practices and structures.

A major contribution of Acker and those who have built on her work is in making these processes and the assumptions embedded in the gendered substructure *visible*. The gendered organization, understood in this way, calls attention to the ways gendered advantage and disadvantage are produced and sustained. This insight provides a much firmer foundation for organizational interventions than a poorly defined notion of organizational cultures as being the problem.

The two organization types in this study, universities and policing organizations, are exemplars of the gendered organization. Understanding the particular and different ways in which each of the organizations 'do gendering' will be important to examining the LDW program as an organizational gendered change intervention. I introduce these organizational types below and describe the specific organizations in Chapter Four.

### *The 'Gendered University'*

Universities have been seen as bastions of male privilege, originating as they do in the cloisters of the Middle Ages (Howie & Tauchert 2002), and historically run by men for men (Brooks & Mackinnon 2001). Jan Currie, Bev Thiele and Patricia Harris, in their book *Gendered Universities in Globalised Economies* (2002:1) have this to say:

Based on our study and review of the literature, we conclude that universities are dominated by masculine principles and structures that lead to advantages for male staff and disadvantages for female staff (whether academic or general). The most valued activities in universities are those that reflect male patterns of socialization: individualist rather than collective, competitive rather than co-operative, based on power differentials rather than egalitarian, and linked to expert authority rather than collegial support.

Ann Brooks (1997:1) takes this one step further by emphasising the way in which this reality, of 'masculinist institutions' is far removed from the 'the model of the academic community characterised by equality and academic fairness'. There is a rhetoric reality gap between the 'liberal ideology and egalitarian aims of the academy' and the 'endemic sexism and racism in defense of male privilege'. Gender discrimination in higher education hides behind an educated veneer using traditional concepts like maintaining excellence and selection based on 'merit' to maintain privilege.

Fogelberg, Hearn, Husu and Mankkinen (1999:11) in their book, *Hard Work in the Academy*, note that 'addressing gender inequalities and pursuing gender equality in the academy is hard work...It involves working against the grain of academic wood, moving against the flow of the malestream'. Moreover 'it is striking how similar and how persistent, the gendered structures seem to be all over the world' (Fogelberg et al. 1999:13). Kearney (2000:13), reflecting on the extremely small number of universities led by women worldwide and with women holding only about 7% of professorships worldwide, concluded that, '[u]niversities thus have the dubious privilege of likely remaining the most male-dominated establishments in the world in relation to career advancement'.

Comparative data in a nine-country research project in 2007 showed the percentage of

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

female full professors varying from a low of 11% in Ireland to a high of 27% in Turkey, with the UK on 16% and Australia on 19% (White et al. 2008:519). Bond (2000:82), writing in the same edited volume as Kearney, concluded that '[t]he continuing underutilization of the talent and expertise of women within the university is a significant detriment to the quality and adaptability of the institution to the society it serves'.

Universities as gendered institutions are well studied, with a well established critique produced by academics turning their attention to their own experiences within the academy (for example, Brooks & Mackinnon 2001; Currie & Thiele 2001; Martin 1994; Morley 1999; Morley, Unterhalter & Gold 2001). The literature demonstrates the multiplicity of intertwined gendering processes which serve to produce gendered disadvantage for women in the academy. For example, there are critiques of universities as 'greedy institutions' (Currie, Harris & Thiele 2000), where academia is constructed around the unencumbered ideal (male) academic (Bailyn 2003; Martin 1994) and which particularly exclude those with caring responsibilities (Raddon 2002). Gendering processes produce narrow definitions of career paths and merit (Bailyn 2003; Benschop & Brouns 2003; Harding 2002; Knights & Richards 2003; Krefting 2003), limits what counts as (scientific) knowledge production (Benschop & Brouns 2003; Martin 1994), and fosters competitiveness and individualism (Thomas 1996). Women experience an unhelpful or discouraging climate (Brooks 1997; Caplan 1994; Falkenberg 2003; Gersick, Bartunek & Dutton 2000), discrimination, sexist behaviours and gendered expectations (Leonard 2001; Wylie, Jakobsen & Fosado 2007). Barriers continue to exist, including men operating as gatekeepers (Bagilhole 2002a), bias in allocation of grants (Benschop & Brouns 2003), and exclusion from networks and mentoring (Bagilhole & White 2003; Martin 1994; Morley 1999; Morley, Unterhalter & Gold 2001; Ramsay 2002). Women experience continuing inequalities in pay and benefits, rewards and recognition, security of employment, promotion processes (Currie & Thiele 2001; MIT 1999; Probert, Ewer & Whiting 1998; Ramsay 2002), and biased processes in appointment to Professor (Bagilhole 2002a; Bailyn 2003; Husu 2000; Knights & Richards 2003; Krefting 2003; van den Brink 2009). Academia and men/masculinity, according to Knights and Richards (2003:229), 'are locked into one another' in ways which serve to exclude and marginalise women in the academy.

Australia is no exception. Kerry Carrington and Angela Pratt (2003:1) argue in *How far have we come? Gender disparities in the Australian Higher Education System* that despite the healthy representation of female students and despite significant progress in the last two decades;

## Chapter Two

As staff, the majority of women in universities are still employed as general staff, while men are predominantly employed as academic staff...women account for two-fifths of the academic workforce...remain concentrated at the bottom of the academic hierarchy, while men account for more than 80% of the most senior academics...the vertical divisions between men and women...extend to senior executive levels in the university sector.

Progress across the sector for women at senior levels, according to Bell (2009:3) based on a 2008 Universities Australia report, is characterised as 'slow, role and portfolio specific and fragile'. 2008 sector wide data, reversed to emphasise men, show that men occupy 56% of the highest level professional positions despite making up only 37% of professional staff. Men occupy 58% of academic positions, 75% of senior academic roles, including 79% of Professorships. (QUT Equity Section 2009). There was a sector wide gender pay gap based on average salaries of 16.8% in 2008 (University of Western Australia 2009).

In contrast to the large body of literature relating to women academics (cited above), professional/general staff women, with a few exceptions, 'suffer from a longstanding neglect among researchers' (Eveline & Booth 2002). Women predominate in the professional staff, with a sector average of 63% and several universities approaching 70% (QUT Equity Section 2009), however their clustering at lower levels remains. There is a gap, often referred to as the academic/general staff divide, where general staff are clearly attributed second class citizenship. As Eveline (2004:160) argues, 'their ivory basement work is feminised as a women's occupation linked to an accompanying lack of value'.

### ***Policing organizations***

Women entered policing in the early 1900s, 1910 in the USA and 1915 in the UK and Australia (Bradley & Tynan 2009). However, despite this long history of female participation, policing has always been and remains a male dominated profession (United Nations Development Fund for Women [UNIFEM] 2007). The substantial literature on policing has by and large ignored gender; however, this is beginning to change (Fleming & Lafferty 2003; Silvestri 2003). Women's struggle within the male bastion of policing has become a site of interest to feminist researchers, providing as it does, a robust example of the gendered organization. Marisa Silvestri (2003:22) notes the importance of studying

police culture as a site of gendered meanings...Police organizational cultures are powerful sites where symbols, images, and forms of consciousness that explicate and justify gender divisions are created and sustained.

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

Policing is often referred to as having a 'command and control' culture. Joseph Soeters (2000) refers to police as one of the 'uniformed organizations', along with the military, and fire and emergency services, that share distinctive cultural trademarks such as a communal life that overrides or controls personal life, heavy emphasis on hierarchy and a chain of command, with associated discipline and control. Sue Lewis<sup>1</sup> refers to such organizations as 'densely masculine'.

Barton (2004:196) characterises policing organizations as particularly intransigent to reform, due to their strong occupational culture. Police officers constitute 'close knit communities of interdependence where solidarity and loyalty become central to their social identity (Crank 1998). This police culture is perpetuated through new recruit training and further reinforced by new recruits' vulnerability to peer pressure on their first posting. Barton (2004:196) concludes that 'the nature of police operations encourages a tendency to introspection or inward lookingness, as a form of defence against external scrutiny and criticism', an 'us and them' attitude that contributes to corruption.

Women are not easily included in an 'us' based on masculine conceptions of what it means to be a police officer. Joan Eveline, Susan Harwood and Michael Booth (2004:1-2), in summarizing their scan of the international literature, have this to say about women police:

Women police officers face negation, exclusion and harassment from male colleagues and are trained into a police culture built around military values imbued with misogyny and anti-women language.

At the core of women's difficulties in policing everywhere is the belief that policing is for men. Brown (1997:13), in her comparative study, concludes:

Researchers and commentators from any cultural tradition testify to the dominance of masculine values in policing and the beliefs about its inherent unsuitability as a job for a woman.

As would be expected in organizations built around a shared belief that women are unsuitable for the job, aspects identified by Itzin (1995:50-1) as characteristic of a gender culture, such as sex-stereotyping, sex-discrimination, a sexualized environment, sexual harassment, and sexist and misogynist behaviour, are strong features of police environments. Women continue to be seen as outsiders in policing who fight for acceptance into the 'all boys' club (Rabe-Hemp 2008). While research does not support the

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation at the Gender, Work and Organization Conference, Keele, 2005

## Chapter Two

notion that women cannot do the job, 'the resistance comes from the belief that women are not fit to do a man's job' (Garcia 2003:340).

This difficulty in being accepted is universally reflected in the low number of policewomen. Jennifer Brown (1997:15), in her comparative study of European policewomen, argues that '[d]espite nearly 100 years of the involvement of women in policing in some countries, they are still a marginalised minority'. No European Police Service at the time of Brown's study approached the 25% which she considered to be the point at which minority status becomes less critical. Accompanying the low representation of women is the crippling low number of senior women.

Australia is no different to the rest of the world. Policewomen were first on the scene in 1915 and had grown to a mere 1.8% of police officers by 1971. By 1991 this proportion had grown to 12%, and in 2001 to 19% nationally (Harwood 2007). By 2006 this had grown to 23% (Australian Institute of Criminology 2006). This male dominance, with men making up 77% of police nationally, rises to 89% male by the relatively junior rank of sergeant and stays above 90% for all ranks above this (Australian Institute of Criminology 2006).

Increased opportunity for women in Australian policing has been actively resisted despite legislative frameworks designed to remove discriminatory practices against women (Eveline & Harwood 2002; Fleming & Lafferty 2003). Prenzler (2002:69) argues that policing organizations engage in 'intense resistance and diverse strategies of evasion', for example replacing the wall to be scaled or height restrictions with physical ability tests that were equally discriminatory (Prenzler 1996). Male officers report distrust of women's ability and admit to opposing parity for policewomen (Prenzler 1996:315). In Australian policing, sexual harassment remains pervasive and gender harassment is rife (Circelli 1999). Susan Harwood (2008:241) concludes that '[t]he dominance of masculinism within policing goes hand in glove with the subordination of women to male power within that gendered culture'.

When women do make it through the ranks into senior positions, it seems they do so against all odds. Few Australians would not know the name of the former Victorian Police Commissioner, Christine Nixon, who made Australian history when she became the first female Commissioner of Police in 2001 (Bradley & Tynan 2009). During her term as Commissioner, Nixon was subjected to unprecedented public and media scrutiny and intense undermining from within her ranks (Etter 2008). Her positioning as 'other' was

reinforced at every turn. However Nixon led from this position of difference (Sinclair 2007), proving to be an extraordinarily positive role model for women in policing<sup>2</sup>.

The focus in much of the research and in the statistics cited so far has been policewomen. Female public service officers are even less visible than their policewomen colleagues, being referred to as the 'forgotten others' (Eveline, Harwood & Booth 2004). Engaged in 'subservient, invisible and femininised aspects of police work', their problem is not so much a lack of numbers but a lack of status and seniority (Eveline, Harwood & Booth 2004:3).

## **Organizational responses to gender inequality**

Universities and policing departments share historically entrenched male domination and privilege that is resistant to change, exemplifying the extraordinary persistence of the subordination of women, as described by Acker (1990). This is despite significant legislative, policy and other interventions that have been directed towards creating more equitable universities and policing organizations. Understanding the limitations of organizational equity interventions to date is a critical next step.

Members of the Centre for Gender in Organizations (CGO), drawing on Acker's work and based on earlier work by Calás and Smircich (1996), set out a 'Four Frame' approach to gender and organizational change, reported with minor variations in various CGO publications (Ely 1999; Ely & Meyerson 2000b; Kolb et al. 1998; Meyerson & Kolb 2000; Meyerson & Fletcher 2000). The frames are designed to categorise or differentiate between organizational approaches to achieving gender equity. Each of the Four Frames is predicated on an understanding of what the 'gender problem' is, which in turn rests on an implicit understanding of the nature of sex/gender. Frame 1, for example, is labelled as 'Fix the woman' and highlights the ways in which organizations focus on (individual) women as the problem. Frame 2, 'Celebrate differences', aims to capitalise on women's differences in positive ways, exploiting what women supposedly do well. Frame 3, 'Create equal opportunity', focuses on structural barriers to women's recruitment and advancements, using legislative and policy frameworks to overcome gender discrimination.

Frames 1, 2 and 3 share a common focus on the women. All three Frames offer piecemeal fixes that are unable to address the deeply embedded roots of organizational discrimination

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<sup>2</sup> *The Journal for Women and Policing* (Issue 24, Winter 2009) was devoted entirely to Christine Nixon, as a tribute to her on her retirement.

## Chapter Two

(Meyerson & Fletcher 2000). Frame 1, for example, teaches women to play the game but leaves the rules of the game unchanged. The difficulty with Frame 2 is that women's 'special' qualities, may not be rewarded, while a focus on 'difference' or 'otherness' continues to contribute to the stereotypical polarisation of the masculine and the feminine and the gender segregation in the workplace, which already disadvantages women. Frame 3 is insufficient for achieving lasting gains as it has little impact on the informal rules and practices that underpin organizational cultures.

In contrast to the first three frames, their Frame 4 approach, 'Re-vision work culture', shifts the focus from the women to the underlying and systemic factors in workplaces that lead to workplace inequity. Gender is no longer seen as the property of individuals, instead organizations are viewed as maintaining a gendered social order, 'in which men and various forms of masculinity predominate' (Ely & Meyerson 2000a:590). 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 2000b:9).

Amanda Sinclair's (1994; 1998) 'Phases of Executive Culture' shares some common ground with the CGO 'Four Frames'. Based on interviews with Australian CEOs probing their attitudes to the absence of senior women in their organizations, the phases provide valuable insight into the view from the top of organizations and how gender equity issues are understood. Sinclair's (1998:19) phases in fact begin with Stage 1, 'Denial', where the absence of senior women is not regarded as a problem or key business issue. Sinclair's remaining stages cover various degrees of engagement with the notion that the absence of women is a problem. Stage 2, 'The Problem is Women', is similar to the CGO's Frame 1 where the onus is on women to adapt to existing cultures. Stage 3, 'Incremental Adjustment', involves some adjustments at the margins of the organization, often with the appointment of a few senior women who are not considered high risk. The problem of women can thus be delegated to these women and the problem is resolved. Similarly to the CGO, Sinclair's stages 1 to 3 are women-centred explanations for gender inequity, while Stage 4, 'Commitment to a New Culture', puts the spotlight on the organization.

Others echo the need for organizational transformation. Cynthia Cockburn (1991:12) critically reviewed the potential of Equal Opportunity to contribute to progressive change, contrasting what she terms the 'short agenda' with the 'longer agenda'. The short or limited agenda is one of 'equality for individual women' while the longer agenda is a '*project of*

*transformation* for organizations' (Cockburn 1989:218, original emphasis) that engages with issues of power and the way in which power reproduces inequity.

Shared across these accounts is the conviction that approaches that focus on the women *without* addressing organizational cultures that reproduce inequality are fundamentally flawed. '[E]qual opportunities programs are bound to fail if they are implemented in organizational cultures that reproduce a dichotomous symbolic order of gender keeping women to 'their place'' (Gherardi & Poggio 2001:246).

The question then becomes how to challenge and change the gendered organization? What is known about transformative gendered change interventions? The CGO scholars are one group which has sought to bridge the gap between feminist theory and practice by implementing a Frame 4 intervention (Symposium Team 2000).

## **Applying gendered organization theory to practice**

Interventions using the notion of gender as systemic and organizations as fundamentally gendered are innovative and rare (Acker 2000). CGO scholars use a Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR) approach for their Frame 4 intervention. The following account<sup>3</sup> of their work is based on the *Moving out of the Armchair Symposium* special edition of *Organization* (2000, vol.7).

### ***Putting a Frame 4 approach into practice***

If putting a Frame 4 approach into practice required transforming the workplace, what would a re-visioned workplace look like? CGO researchers have resisted answering this question for themselves and others.

Because we ourselves are limited in our vision of a gender-equitable state by the gender relations of which we are currently a part (Flax, 1990), we resist anticipating in any detail what precisely a transformed, end-state looks like, and suggest instead that this process of transformation – of resistance and learning – continues indefinitely and itself constitutes the gender-equity goal (Ely & Meyerson 2000a:592).

Joyce Fletcher, in her keynote address at the *Engendering Leadership Conference* (Perth 2008), labelled Frame 4 as an experimental frame, emphasising it as a process rather than a destination. Applying Frame 4 is a process of discovery, where each organization is unique and there is no template for the required transformation. This sense of experimentation

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<sup>3</sup> See Rapoport et al. (2002) for a complete listing.

## Chapter Two

extends to their method, and their generosity in sharing a method still ‘under development’ serves as an invitation to join in that process (Rapoport et al. 2002:200).

The CGO implemented their Frame 4 intervention in a global retail and manufacturing company. The company CEO and the CGO researchers shared the goal ‘of creating a gender-equitable workplace’ (Symposium Team 2000:549). In the following account I have sacrificed comprehensiveness in favour of highlighting the more broadly applicable issues highlighted by their collaborative Frame 4 intervention.

The intervention relies on building partnerships, a ‘research with people’ approach (Coleman & Rippin 2000), in this case a partnership between knowledgeable expert insiders and academics who could provide theoretical frameworks for critique and intervention (Symposium Team 2000). Together they would decide on and implement small scale experiments that disrupt the gendered organization *and* increase organizational effectiveness, as part of a ‘small wins’ approach to organizational change.

This combined goal of advancing gender equity and increasing organizational effectiveness is what the CGO call the ‘dual agenda’ (Meyerson & Kolb 2000). Linking gender outcomes to business outcomes effectively builds in a business case for the gender intervention, based on their experience that ‘[t]he same assumptions, values and practices that compromise gender equity often undermine effectiveness as well’ (Meyerson & Kolb 2000:556). The assumed harmony of these goals in a capitalist environment has been critiqued by both Hearn (2000) and Acker (2000). However, CGO researchers consider the ‘dual agenda’ (business case) an essential plank in gaining and maintaining organizational access because it makes their work ‘politically viable’, ‘decreases resistance’ and ensures ‘change efforts are aligned with the mission of the organization’ (Meyerson & Kolb 2000:555).

The role of the ‘expert insider’ is critical to the CGO approach. The change process itself is never complete as it relies on an ongoing process of experimentation to produce generative change. Any change effort therefore needs to be owned and maintained from within the organization. Insiders must be convinced by and build their own operational understanding of the ‘dual agenda’, to effect change. However, the CGO partnership building process proved problematic, the organizational partners were in relatively powerless positions, predominantly female (Meyerson & Kolb 2000), and constantly changing, often through downward delegation (Coleman & Rippin 2000). Partner relationships proved to be insufficiently robust for the kinds of challenges presented by the

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

approach (Coleman & Rippin 2000). The nature of the gendered change initiative meant organizational partners (the insiders) were presented with the unusual and challenging task of understanding and working with the 'dual agenda' approach, one that the researchers themselves were also finding difficult (Meyerson & Kolb 2000). Despite collaboration being central to their approach, Coleman and Rippin (2000:585) describe it as trying to 'find a way to work *with* people on something they preferred to overlook'. Their experience underscores the difficulty of combining a collaborative approach with a transformative gender agenda which is difficult to operationalise, is radical in intent and disruptive of the status quo.

The achilles heel of the intervention proved to be the difficulty of maintaining a 'gender focus' as the internal partners increasingly focussed on organizational effectiveness (Coleman & Rippin 2000; Ely & Meyerson 2000a). While organizational 'buy in', negotiated with the CEO, was based on creating a more gender equitable workplace, all subsequent 'buy in' appeared skewed towards the ways in which organizational effectiveness would be enhanced. CGO researchers progressively compromised or camouflaged their gender agenda in their efforts to maintain buy in and leverage. As Coleman and Rippin (2000:577) describe:

We were constantly making judgements as to how far we could go with foregrounding the gender aspects of the work without appearing to sideline the business issues or incurring resistance, which might damage the collaborative relationship.

In summary then CGO researchers, using the 'dual agenda' CIAR approach, identified numerous tensions between the partnership building necessary for a sustainable change process and the nature of the gendered change agenda. This tension culminated in the problem of gender slipping off the agenda, or what they termed 'losing gender' (Coleman & Rippin 2000).

Acker (2000), in her reflections on the CGO intervention approach makes the distinction between the difficulties that were experienced as a result of the process used (collaborative action research approach) and those that were due to the ultimate goal of the intervention (gendered change). While Acker (2000) does not pursue this distinction in her critique, because in reality many of these difficulties become intertwined, it is nonetheless a useful distinction. It somewhat artificially separates out the issues to do with the vehicle or platform for the gendered change intervention, in this case the 'dual agenda' CIAR approach, from what Acker (2000:631) describes as:

## Chapter Two

[the] *general problems* faced in attempting to achieve organizational change in gender relations, especially change in the deeply embedded and fundamentally gendered assumptions about and designs for organizations (emphasis added).

Acker's critique suggests that many of the problems remain the same for any transformative intervention. These 'general problems', Acker (2000:630) argues, result from the deeply embedded assumptions that contribute to a 'pervasive cultural representation of organizations as gender neutral'. Acker describes this belief as 'endemic in our culture, contributing to the difficulty in making gender visible and...to the disappearance of gender even as it is the focus of change efforts'.

Much of Acker's (2000:626) critique of the CGO work centres around 'contradictions between their [the researcher's] goals and methods and the organization's goals and methods', resulting in a series of 'Catch 22s' that appear inevitable. For example, the action research approach required top down power to gain organizational access, yet sought to challenge the authority of long-established patterns and practices. The use of top-down power worked against building egalitarian collaborative relationships and reinforced the power of management. A further contradiction existed in Acker's view between the gender-equity goals and other organizational change goals linked to the equity goals. This linking then constitutes a 'double bind', where 'dealing with linked problems obscured the gender issues' (2000:627-8). Many of the 'Catch 22s' noted by Acker are a result of the connections between gender, power and class, to be explored below.

Acker (2000) is also pragmatic about transformative change, noting that the short term timeframes of organizations are antithetical to projects such as this that are open-ended, requiring time and extensive commitment to reflect, collaborate, and experiment.

Others basing their transformative interventions on the CGO dual agenda approach (Charlesworth & Baird 2007) or using a different intervention approach, such as gender mainstreaming (Bacchi et al. 2005; Benschop & Verloo 2006; Eveline & Bacchi 2009), have encountered similar difficulties. These include: finding appropriate partners, time and resources (Bacchi et al. 2005); the feminisation of researcher and insider teams (Charlesworth & Baird 2007; Eveline & Bacchi 2009); a lack of senior involvement/championing (Eveline & Bacchi 2009); a focus on women rather than gender and difficulties making gender understandable and/or relevant (Eveline & Bacchi 2009); the power of organizational partners undermining collaboration (Benschop & Verloo 2006); changes in business imperatives or organizational circumstances (Charlesworth &

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

Baird 2007); and losing the gender focus in preference to a work/life balance focus (Charlesworth & Baird 2007).

Several researchers noted their difficulty in holding their ground with the gendered change agenda, for fear of losing their project or the co-operation of organizational partners. Charlesworth and Baird (2007:401) describe the difficulty of 'not burying or avoiding reference to gender in our interactions for fear of backlash or reprisal'. Benschop and Verloo regard this as a more generic problem, stating that the 'risks of conflict avoidance and even self-censorship are not specific for this project, but are inherent to gender mainstreaming' (Benschop & Verloo 2006:30). Benschop and Verloo (2006:29) describe the 'ongoing dominance of a 'short agenda'' where gender neutrality is assumed, a difficulty that is echoed by Bacchi et al. (2005).

Rao et al. (1999:21) concluded from their overview of a number of transformative gendered change projects (including development projects and CGO projects) that the linking of other goals, such as the business case or social change agenda to the gendered change agenda, is problematic. While Acker refers to this as the 'double bind', Rao et al. refer to this pairing as a 'fundamental dilemma'. While it eases organizational access, it nonetheless decreases the gender focus as people revert to what is perceived as more important and less threatening.

### ***Critical issues for Frame 4 interventions***

These frank accounts of the difficult terrain of Frame 4 interventions outlined by CGO researchers and others serve to highlight both the difficult nature of gendered change and the shared nature of the challenges that are recognisable across a number of interventions.

These are questions that gender interventions of a transformative nature will necessarily have to address in their design and implementation.

**How can access to the organization be negotiated for a gendered change agenda with a radical intent?** A Frame 4 approach strikes at the heart of how organizations 'do gender' to maintain the status quo. Pairing gender equity with other organizational goals becomes problematic in undermining the long agenda. Does the vehicle and/or method for the intervention undermine the change effort by minimizing/camouflaging gender?

**Who are the organizational partners, the potential change agents? How can these partners become engaged with the gendered change agenda?** Who is

interested in/resistant to this change process and how does power influence the partner building process?

**How can the intervention be made robust and sustainable?** Transformative change is a long-term strategy, taking place within organizations in states of constant change. How can the intervention be made sufficiently robust to withstand the state of constant change in organizations and be sustained long enough for change to occur?

**What can be learnt about the achilles heel of losing gender? What dangers for co-option exist?** Each of the three points mentioned above is implicated in 'losing gender', thereby undermining the intervention and keeping it to the 'short agenda'.

## **Why so hard?**

These accounts of Frame 4 interventions serve to underline the fact that this is hard work. Cockburn's long transformative agenda is not only long, but difficult. For the purposes of this thesis it will be important to understand why challenging the gendered organizational status quo is hard work.

### ***Gender and power***

Gender is variously defined and still evolving within feminist usage (Eveline & Bacchi 2005; Hearn & Parkin 2001), however for the purposes of this thesis I draw on a definition from Joan Acker (1992:250):

*Gender* refers to patterned, socially produced distinctions between female and male, feminine and masculine. Gender is not something people are...Rather, for the individual and the collective, it is a daily accomplishment (West and Zimmerman 1987) that occurs in the course of participation in work organizations as well as in many other locations and relations (original emphasis).

This definition of gender lies at the heart of the Frame 4 experimental intervention. Ely and Meyerson (2000a:591) express their hopes that their intervention 'will eventually be transformative for organization members by challenging and transforming their sense of what it means to be male or female, masculine or feminine'.

These two quotes link the systemic with the personal and highlight the critical importance of individual transformation. If as Ely and Meyerson (2000a) suggest, the intervention

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

transforms organizational members' understanding of themselves as masculine or feminine, then defining gender is far from an intellectual debate. Concepts such as gender, power, and the gendered organization need to be operationalised and made meaningful to organizational members in order to build partnerships in the change agenda. This is not about individualising gender, but connecting the gender agenda at the individual level.

West and Zimmerman's (1987) notion of gender as accomplishment has profound implications. It requires shifting our conceptualising from 'gender as being' to 'gender as doing', from thinking of gender as a noun to a verb (Eveline & Bacchi 2005). Gendering, the doing of gender, takes place within a context, as a situated practice. It is effortful and always unfinished (Eveline 2005) because individuals must accomplish gender against a backdrop of an already gendered social system. Gender is a 'complex set of social relations enacted across a range of social and institutional practices' (Fletcher & Ely 2003:6). In other words, organizations 'do' gender (Gherardi & Poggio 2001).

As discussed earlier, Acker brought together gender and organization precisely because, without a gender analysis it was not possible to understand advantage and disadvantage in the workplace. Similarly, we cannot understand the way gender plays out in organizational settings without linking gender and power. According to Scott (1986:1067), 'gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power', while Meyerson and Kolb (2000:554) argue that

...gender inequities in organizations are rooted in taken-for-granted assumptions, values, and practices that systematically accord power and privilege to certain groups of men at the expense of women and other men.

Gendered power is asymmetrical. When gender is disconnected from a power analysis, the problem of men disappears. Collinson and Hearn (1994; 1996a; 1996b) have highlighted this in their work 'naming men as men' in order to make masculinity within organizations visible, open to scrutiny and problematic. The power of men and the problem of men/managements are largely rendered invisible by any of the first three frames or the short agenda for change. Masculinised cultures remain undisturbed.

In Acker's (2006) later work she coined the term 'inequality regimes' to emphasise that not only gender but race and class are intertwined with power. 'Inequality regimes are the interlocked practices and processes that result in continuing inequalities in all work organizations' (Acker 2006:441). This intertwining becomes powerfully reinforcing. In critiquing the CGO Frame 4 intervention, Acker (2000) notes that because class

## Chapter Two

distinctions within organizations are seen as legitimate, challenging gender inequity may well fail because it simultaneously challenges class privilege.

An analysis of power imbues the Frame 4 project:

We wanted to transform work and its relations to other aspects of people's lives in ways that would fundamentally alter power relations in organizations and make them more equitable (Meyerson & Kolb 2000:554).

However, power in the gendered organization does not reside solely in individual agency. Lukes (1974:24) provides a more radical way of thinking about power that is useful here because it moves beyond seeing power as something exercised solely by individuals or as a means of agenda setting to the systemic, unobtrusive exercise of power, where:

Is it not the most insidious exercise of power...[to have people] accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they see or imagine no alternative to it, or they see it as so natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial? (1974:24).

Drawing on Lukes, Joyce Fletcher (2001:17) links this understanding of power to the 'system of common everyday assumptions that create reality...systems of shared meaning that reinforce mainstream ideas and silence alternatives'. It is this normalising of asymmetrical gender power relations in the workplace and the ways in which this is maintained by gendering processes that makes the work so challenging. These systems of power are sustained by individuals and by organizational structures, practices and processes, themselves often rooted in the past. Power then '...is embedded in the fibre and fabric of everyday life' (Hardy & Clegg 1996:631).

Because Frames 1, 2 and 3 lack an analysis of power and fail to challenge systems of power, they play a part in obscuring the power relations that underpin the gendered organization. Making gendered power visible is what makes a Frame 4 approach radical. Ely and Meyerson (2000a:590) describe this as the 'more ambitious – perhaps audacious – project of resisting and ultimately eliminating gender as an axis of power'.

It is this intertwining of gender, power, class and race that helps explain why building gender equitable organizations has proven more difficult than most people and organizations anticipated. This explains why the lack of senior women in organizations has been a relatively intractable problem over the last few decades.

### ***Visibility and relevance***

Benscop and Verloo (2006) highlighted the point that gender blindness and gender bias are symptomatic of the gendered organization, and further to that are normalised, thus any organizational gender project encounters this as the first hurdle. Making gender visible goes far beyond an intellectual exercise, challenging people's understanding of the way their world and the gendered relations within them are organized. In the CGO approach, participants had difficulty in following the dual agenda analysis. Not only were the connections 'cognitively complex and new...they are disturbing as well...[requiring them] to suspend and take a critical stance towards many long held beliefs and assumptions' (Ely & Meyerson 2000a:600).

The preceding accounts of doing gender and power demonstrate that they are deeply embedded, infrequently examined and for the most part, unreflexively practiced. This is not just about individual men setting out to exclude women from the senior ranks, although this may occur. It is not just about individual women discounting themselves as leadership material and not applying for promotion, although this may also occur. It is about the embedded assumptions regarding for example the public/private divide, the nature of leadership, work, and the ideal worker that make these behaviours possible. In themselves they are reflections of the way people understand the world and their place in it.

Lukes' notion of power as unobtrusive assists in understanding why it is so difficult to 'see' gender in practice. The normalising of gendered power means that everyone, those who benefit and those who are disadvantaged, are complicit in maintaining the gender/power status quo (Fletcher 1999).

A structural view of power taken to the extreme can undermine the notion of individual power and agency. However, my view is that Lukes' (1974:24) notion of power as unobtrusive or invisible leaves room for building the capacity of organizational members to question that which previously they have seen as 'natural and unchangeable', or valued as 'divinely ordained and beneficial'. This is the crux of the change effort.

The difficulty in 'seeing' or understanding gender works against getting it on the agenda and keeping it there. In reflecting on their gender mainstreaming project in the public sector, Eveline and Bacchi (2009) describe the difficulty of getting gender on the agenda:

The *lack* of gender relevance, we suggest, is so familiarized in organizational life, that a key plank of any gender mainstreaming effort must be altering the practices through which the normalizing of irrelevance occurs (2009:568, original emphasis).

Obedying the organizational ‘rules of relevance’ serves to disappear gender, situating it ‘below the horizon’ of what matters (Eveline & Bacchi 2009:566). Connell (2005), also in a public sector context, describes many mechanisms for not seeing gender, for example treating gender as emblematic, distancing gender and denying gender. As Schofield and Goodwin (2005:26) stress, it is important for practitioners and researchers

to analyse and understand local and distinctive gender arrangements that operate in specific public sector organizations, and the opportunities such arrangements present for advancing gender equality.

Uncovering the ‘rules of relevance’ so that organizational partners can ‘see’ gender thus making gender organizationally relevant, becomes critical to transformative interventions.

### ***Backlash and resistance to change***

It should come as no surprise when organizational change efforts experience resistance and backlash. As Acker (2006:455) observes:

Inequality regimes can be challenged and changed. *However, change is difficult and change efforts often fail.* One reason is that owner and managerial class interests and the power those interests can mobilize usually outweigh the class, gender, and race interests of those who suffer inequality (emphasis added).

Or as Cockburn (1991:17) puts it, ‘[w]e should not expect men to relinquish their privileged position voluntarily’. Men, she says, are ‘not about to let down the drawbridge on their castles’.

Understanding the inevitability of resistance and backlash is helpful in several ways. Firstly, it can serve to moderate our expectations of ‘success’. Searching for big revolutionary wins may need to be replaced by searching for ‘small wins’ (Meyerson & Fletcher 2000).

Secondly, studying resistance and backlash may well be as illuminating as looking for success:

The study of change efforts and the oppositions they engender are often opportunities to observe frequently invisible aspects of the reproduction of inequalities. The concept of inequality regimes may be useful in analyzing organizational change projects to better understand why these projects so often fail and why they succeed when this occurs (Acker 2006:441).

Cynthia Cockburn’s *In the Way of Women* (1991) is the most widely cited study of resistance to equality projects. Documenting resistance in four British organizations she concludes that ‘[t]he majority of men, however were unmistakably engaged in a damage-limitation exercise, holding ‘equal opps’ to its shortest possible agenda’ (Cockburn 1991:216).

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

UWA Vice-Chancellor Fay Gale used to say that 'you can have the best men and the second best men, or you can have the best men and the best women'. Fewer senior men is the unpalatable and often unspoken flipside of increasing the number of senior women. Even when senior men are supportive of gender equality agendas, they experience a conflict of interest where they may be 'obliged to sell out the gender interests of less powerful men' (Cockburn 1991:216). These less powerful men, in middle and upper, but not executive management are the men with the most to lose. However resistance does not only come from men. Women are also divided in their support for the 'short' or 'long' agenda.

Cockburn (1991:220) describes women and men as

...being caught up in the compulsion of patriarchal relations...male power is not occasional, incidental or accidental. It is systemic...longlived – though not timeless...It is also to say it is adaptive, with a tendency to reproduction.

The reproductive capacity of gendered power relations is observable in periods of organizational change or restructuring and despite EO efforts. 'Ready, easy solutions for change are unlikely as there always exists the risk of change bringing with it the importation of new and unintended oppressions' (Harlow, Hearn & Parkin 1995:92).

Backlash, a readily understandable idea, is painstakingly documented in Faludi's (1992) heavy tome of the same name. It is the covert and insidious mobilisation of hegemonic masculinity in response to even small advances made by women. Fear of backlash, expressed in the question '[w]hat would the men say?' keeps women in their place (Cockburn 1989:221). Backlash works to undermine women's push for equality and to divide women against each other. Feminism, according to Cockburn (1991:1), has been 'anathematised by men, in an attempt to put a stop to its appeal to women'. The fear of backlash prompts the impulse to work for change covertly, 'staying under the radar', a subtext evident in much of the WO literature. Backlash, like resistance, can teach us more about the mobilising of masculinities, and on the positive side, can be a sign that progress is occurring.

### **Making it possible**

Harlow, Hearn and Parkin (1995:94), argue that gendering processes within organizations, are always in a state of 'change, flux and becoming'. This dynamic nature of gendering opens up possibilities for change, leading them to conclude:

Thus, while men's dominance is profound it is neither monolithic nor unresisted. It has to be continually re-established, and in the process it can be challenged, subverted and unestablished (1995:94).

I wish to explore the ways in which individuals can engage in this process of gendered change.

### ***The individual and the structural in organizational change***

The linking of the individual and individual agency to structural change provides hope. Every organizational actor 'doing' gender is implicated in maintaining the gendered status quo. Organizational interventions, which seek to change the 'rules of relevance', are in effect challenging systemic gendering processes. However, the engagement is still with individuals. Change occurs when gender becomes visible to individuals, and this is not easy to achieve. As Eveline and Bacchi (2009) stress, in their work this only occurred for those with the highest level of engagement with the project.

Making gendering visible to individuals opens up the possibility of them acting in ways which subvert the gendering processes that maintain the status quo. This focus on individuals 'seeing' gender is not to suggest that all gendering in the workplace takes place through individuals. This would ignore the ways in which gender is embedded in the structural design of organizations and organizing. Drawing on her earlier work with Knopoff, Martin (2006:255) comments that '[e]ven if people could leave gender at the door, gender would still be present because it was already there'. This is not to argue that gender structures are impervious to individual agency, but serves to emphasise that gendering is sustained when the gendered substructure and gendering processes remain unexamined and taken for granted.

Martin (2006:269) sums up this circularity in the relationship between the institution and the individual, in regard to doing gender. 'The gender institution makes gendering practices available for practising, and practising them keeps the institution going'.

Eveline and Bacchi (2009:570) draw on the 'practice turn' in gender studies:

Thus the focus is on members' practices, and what members of groups and societies *do*, in response to societal and/or group expectations of behaviour and self presentation, and how the *doing* of those practices is a core element of what many call 'structures'.

Martin (2006) and Eveline and Bacchi (2009) draw the connection between individual practices and organizational structures, and it is this connection between the two that

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

provides the point of intervention, where working with individuals can change the gendered organization.

Rao, Stuart and Kelleher (1999) have reviewed five transformative interventions, including that of the CGO. They describe the developing of 'new work practices' as a promising anchor in the organization change process because it challenges the taken for granted assumptions about basic aspects of organizational life (the deep structure) and the ways in which it is gendered by those work practices. Once again the focus of the change intervention is the interlinking of individual and collective practices. This shared element across the five interventions reviewed differentiates their approaches from those gender interventions that for example, develop gender policy or engage in gender awareness training. The intervention has to take place at this basic building block level of seeing and therefore doing gender differently in order to change the way work (or organizing) is done.

### ***'Small wins'***

CGO scholars argue that organizational change, rather than taking place in 'episodic and revolutionary' ways, is based on adaptive change that is 'continuous and fragmented' (Meyerson 2003:12). The time of the revolution is past; today's organizations, Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) suggest, will only be transformed through a more modest and incremental change process. Ely and Meyerson (2000b) advocate incremental change for three reasons: firstly, large scale organization wide change efforts often fail; secondly, change that involves challenging existing power relations is too pragmatically and politically difficult to tackle in an all encompassing change effort; and thirdly, due to the deeply embedded nature of gender arrangements, change 'must be highly context-sensitive; emergent; in tune with local politics, constraints, and opportunities; and pervious to experimentation, reflection and learning' (Ely & Meyerson 2000b:133).

The idea of 'small wins', based on the work of Weick (1984), is therefore proposed as a way of linking individual action to systemic change. 'Small wins', that is 'limited doable projects' (Meyerson 2003:102) or experiments, become the process for discovering and destroying the 'gender discrimination [that] is now so deeply embedded in organizational life as to be virtually indiscernible' (Meyerson & Fletcher 2000:127). The 'small wins' process using ongoing cycles of diagnosis, dialogue and experimentation is integral to the CGO's Frame 4 intervention. This is a very different way of thinking about organizational change, where change is understood to be slow, incremental, diffuse, cumulative and often easier to see in

retrospect. The notion of ‘small wins’ is a useful and empowering tool for individuals wanting to make a difference.

### *Change agency*

Transformative interventions rely on engaging people in the gendered change agenda. Deborah Kolb and Deborah Merrill-Sands (1999:13) refer to this as building ‘constituencies for change’. Constituents were organizational members who ‘held the [gender] narrative and supported change’. Each constituent then is a part of the larger whole, and at least in a political sense a body of (vocal or active) constituents can often add up to more than the sum of each individual constituent.

Others have explored this notion of change agency and if, when and how women and men become engaged in gendered (and sometimes more broadly diversity) change. Much of the research emphasis has been on women (Colgan & Ledwith 1996; Eveline & Hayden 1998; Marshall 1984; Pringle 1992; Pringle 2004; Rindfleish & Sheridan 2003), sometimes explicitly feminist women (Hart 2005; Morley & Walsh 1995). Studies have taken place within different contexts, including universities (Blackmore 1999; Eveline & Goldflam 2002; Eveline 2004; Eveline 2005; Meyerson & Tompkins 2007) and policing (Silvestri 2003).

This literature is broad in scope, ranging from documenting the change efforts of committed feminists (Eveline 2005; Morley & Walsh 1995), to exploring the diversity of ways in which women present themselves and adapt to male dominated workplaces (Pringle 2004; Martin & Meyerson 1998; Maddock & Parkin 1993), and highlighting the journey that women may take towards an increasing feminist consciousness (Colgan & Ledwith 1996; Marshall 1984). I wish to pick up on the last point because of the focus on women’s development within this thesis.

Marshall (1984:151-3) studied women managers within male dominated settings and identified three groups. The majority of her sample she described as ‘mute[ing] their own awareness of being women and different from men’. These women appeared aware of some of the risks of increased gender awareness, for example some were fearful of becoming too paranoid or too angry, so were ‘happier to disregard these issues in their surface consciousness’. A much smaller group Marshall identified as being in ‘painful turmoil’ due to their ‘acute consciousness of themselves as women’. The third group ‘had already developed a clear sense of themselves as women’. These women fit Marshall’s

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

(1984:222) definition of feminist, that is 'willing to express an interest in and identification with women's issues', although she does not suggest they would describe themselves in this way. Marshall suggests these three groups as 'a possible sequence of increasing awareness which some women follow as they integrate being female more fully into their sense of themselves in relation to others'.

Colgan and Ledwith (1996:24-29) draw on Judi Marshall's work and their own analysis to develop what they call 'a trajectory of women's consciousness and activism'. They begin with 'traditional women', who are broadly accepting of women's gendered place in society. Next are 'women in transition', who are unsure of their identity and role. Colgan and Ledwith then differentiate women within Marshall's last group, into 'women aware' and a 'fuller feminist position', where those who are 'women aware' are able to adopt a more pragmatic and short agenda approach to change, without adopting the 'feminist' position of 'putting women's rights in the centre' of their work. Of course even at the feminist end of this continuum there will be many differences in approach just as there are many feminisms.

Colgan and Ledwith (1996:23) then build on this trajectory, incorporating women's consciousness into a broader exploration of women as organizational change agents. This results in a detailed examination of the variables that will affect women's choices and strategies:

The degree to which women accept, conform to or challenge gendered patterns...will depend on a balance between their consciousness of discrimination and career barriers; their reading of organisational politics and their willingness to adopt individualist, collectivist and/or separatist [WO] strategies.

This is useful in highlighting the need for consciousness *plus* organizational savvy *plus* a willingness to act.

Louise Morley and Val Walsh (1995:1), exploring feminist academics as change agents, pick up on the importance of feminist consciousness. While not underplaying the difficulties women experience, feminist consciousness and analysis is powerful, in their view, in providing 'a framework for deprivatizing women's experiences and influencing change' (Morley & Walsh 1995:1). Discrimination, with this awareness can be 'transformed into knowledge, action, analysis and change...This repositions women from victims to change agents'.

## Chapter Two

However, there are many reasons why women may choose not to engage with gender equity. In her early work on organizations, Kanter (1977a) highlighted the reluctance of many female executives, often with 'token' status due to their low numbers, to speak publicly on what are seen as 'women's issues'. Kram and McCollom Hampton (2003), in their article *When Women Lead: The Visibility - Vulnerability Spiral* detail the intense scrutiny women in top jobs experience. Women seeking to establish themselves as leaders may do so 'by uncoupling their sexual identity from their leadership persona' (1998:162). This strategy of women seeking to camouflage their gender and sexuality includes 'not allowing oneself to be associated with 'women's issues'' (Sinclair 1998:178). Not surprisingly then, Rhode (2003) when exploring the circumstances under which women leaders support women's issues, found mixed results. Rhode's research, together with that of Ashford (1998) in her work entitled *Championing Charged Issues*, highlights the risks involved for women advocating women's interests.

Hearn and Piekkari found no link between the presence of senior women (excluding women on boards) and gender equity plans, concluding that women in top management 'operate within their own specific gender positionings and constraints' (Hearn & Piekkari 2005:434). Part of the difficulty is gender group membership. Women are seen as self-interested 'just another feminist looking after her own' (Blackmore & Sachs 2007:239). This view personalised the issue in a way that does not occur for men. Mavin (2008) takes this a step further by querying the gendered expectation that women should work for gender equality.

Men are much less frequently examined as gender change agents, however this thesis identifies them as important potential constituents for change. The Catalyst publication *Engaging men in gender initiatives: What change agents need to know*, begins by asking: 'what factors influence men's awareness of gender bias?' (Prime & Moss-Racusin 2009:5). Their report identifies three factors that predict men's awareness of gender bias: defiance of some masculine norms, having women mentors, and a strong sense of fair play. Many of the examples are based on childhood and family influences. However, there are also workplace examples, such as an increase in gender awareness when women mentors and colleagues say it 'like it is'. On the other hand, organizational practices such as competitiveness and an unquestioning belief in "meritocracy" undermine men's gender awareness and sense of fair play. The focus of the Catalyst report is motivating men to support and champion gender equity.

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

Sinclair (1998:155) considers men's involvement in change as critical, and takes men's engagement with change a step further by emphasising the need for profound personal change:

These are predominantly 'inside out' changes through which men are provoked, encouraged or forced to re-think the links between their masculine identity and their way of working – their values and priorities.

This description suggests that for men, like women, there is also a journey to be undertaken to engage in gendered change agency.

Kronsell (2005), in her study of the military, reflects on the different positioning of women and men in knowing about gendering processes. Women as 'outsiders within' institutions of hegemonic masculinity, she argues, have 'epistemic privilege', because of their interaction and struggle with hegemonic masculinity while men, because of their fit and their lack of struggle, are less able to see and know (Kronsell 2005:290). This is not to say women will necessarily develop this knowing, as conscious reflection and engagement is required to do so.

These separate investigations of women and men as change agents highlight the different starting places and processes for women and men in the literature. For women, as Marshall (1984:153) identifies, this journey of increasing feminist consciousness is about developing 'a clear sense of themselves as women'. Marshall's accounts highlight the implications of this for every aspect of women's working and personal lives. For men, as presented by Prime and Moss-Racusin (2009) this is a process of standing alongside women and supporting gender equity, rather than a life changing event. Sinclair, in contrast to this describes the requirement for men to engage in a much more challenging process of 'inside out' change. This is more analogous to women's journey towards feminist consciousness as described by Marshall.

Debra Meyerson and Maureen Scully's (1995) work on 'Tempered Radicals' provides a useful way to think about organizational change agents, both women and men with a variety of change agendas.

"Tempered Radicals" are individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations, and are also committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organization (1995:586).

This lack of alignment with the dominant culture may be because of their social identities, for example race, gender or sexual orientation, or it may be differences in values and

beliefs. Meyerson's (2003) later work, *Tempered Radicals: How everyday leaders inspire change at work*, provides a multitude of examples of strategies ordinary people use to challenge the status quo both through intentional acts and through being true to themselves, different in some way to the norm. Women as the minority group often experience this difference, of being an 'outsider within', however Meyerson (2003:21) argues that not all will experience their difference as a source of exclusion or differential treatment. Those who lack a power analysis and do not link difference 'to systemic patterns' personalize their difference and do not behave as tempered radicals. They experience difference as a 'personal struggle to fit in' (Meyerson 2003:33).

'Tempered Radicalism' becomes a much less heroic, but also 'more inclusive, more realistic and more hopeful' way of thinking about change agency for people who want to make a difference (Meyerson 2003:13). Naming and claiming this capacity to make a difference can act as a powerful reinforcer and, as Meyerson (2003:15) notes, taking action can 'transform people from the stance of passive bystander or victim to that of constructive agent'.

Tempered radicalism dovetails with the idea of 'small wins', the process of incremental and 'doable' organizational change (Meyerson & Fletcher 2000).

### ***Positional leadership for gendered change***

Tempered radicals can operate at any level of the organization, however leadership commitment has also been identified as a critical variable in gender change initiatives (see for example Bell & Neale 2005; Blackmore & Sachs 2007; Charlesworth, Hall & Probert 2005; Mattis 2001; Shapiro & Olgiati 2002).

The CEO toolkit, designed by Chief Executive Women (2006), is aimed at CEOs for exactly that reason. In a punchy *Message to the CEO*, they state, 'The commitment and drive required to implement change are too challenging to proceed without support from – and the leadership of – the top echelons of any given organization' (Chief Executive Women 2006). Catalyst takes a similar approach by placing the responsibility firmly at the feet of the male CEO, proclaiming '[t]he key to women's advancement rests squarely with him' (Wellington, Brumit Kropf & Gerkovich 2003:19).

According to Orser (2000), executive champions play a particular leadership role that requires ongoing participation and visibility and that holds people accountable. Senior management commitment must be demonstrated, 'such that wider workforce views can be influenced' (Liff & Cameron 1997:39). Champion building then is about capturing CEO or

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

executive level attention to the issue of gender, thereby making it a strategic issue (Dutton & Ashford 1993).

To a large extent this literature echoes the more traditional change literature, which argues that CEOs and executives must lead the way. Kotter (2007:97), for example, gets straight to the point. 'Change by definition...always demands leadership...If the renewal target is the entire company, the CEO is key.' Walking the talk is also seen as critical (Senge et al. 1999; Kotter 2007) because employees are quick to pick up on differences between the real and the espoused rules (Shapiro 1995). Pacale and Sternin (2005) query the universally accepted importance of "champions" in the change management literature. They contend that this focus on champions and leaders can generate an unconstructive dependency, which absolves others of the broader ownership necessary for sustainable change. They choose instead to focus on change and change agents operating at a more grass roots level.

The incremental model of change proposed by the CGO moves away from the notion of top down traditional change efforts, but in one respect at least executive level champions remain important. Many gender equity initiatives depend on CEO support for their funding and existence. CEOs play an important gatekeeping role. As Potts' (1998:28) notes, 'the withdrawal of support by top management ended the diversity effort'.

### **Women only programs as a gendered change intervention**

In my review of the literature so far I have concentrated on the necessity for any gender equity intervention to focus on challenging and changing the gendered organization. The majority of organizational interventions adopt women centred approaches that are located within Frames 1, 2 or 3. In doing so, they miss the mark precisely because they focus on women and not the organization. On the other hand, there are few examples to draw on in building transformative gendered change. The work of the CGO in applying their Frame 4 approach highlights that this is relatively new terrain and demonstrates the many difficulties inherent in undertaking a transformative approach. The theory of the gendered organization and its application in practice provide both a sobering reality check and room for hope.

CGO researchers acknowledge that their CIAR approach is time and resource intensive and difficult to replicate (Kolb et al. 1998; Kolb 2003). However, the problem of gender inequitable organizations, as described in the introduction to this chapter, remains. Hence

there is a need to search for new forms of intervention that can meet the challenge of pursuing the long transformative agenda.

The purpose of this thesis is to propose and examine the capacity of WO programs to do just that. Can WO programs build more gender equitable workplaces by challenging and changing the gendered organization? WO programs, categorised by the CGO as the quintessential Frame 1 ‘fix the women’ approach (Meyerson & Kolb 2000:560), seem essentially flawed. Where is the organizational focus? And what about the men?

In Chapter Three I address the apparent contradiction of situating a WO program beyond Frame 1 and incorporating a Frame 4 approach of ‘re-visioning work cultures’. In the remainder of this chapter I review the WO program literature. Is the CGO criticism of WO programs deserved? What do we know about the contribution of WO programs to building more gender equitable workplaces? In answering these questions, I highlight the critical minority voice in the literature that has always questioned the purpose of WO programs and their capacity to address the broader gendered change agenda.

I have also examined the literature with a view to understanding why WO programs have persisted. WO programs are not a thing of the past. The perception that WO programs are ‘so eighties’ is at odds with their current prevalence in a diverse range of formats in many organizational settings. This capacity to endure is important if WO programs are to become a useful platform for a transformative agenda.

### *The scope of women only programs*

WO programs came into popularity in the 1970s. The broad sweep and timing of their introduction, from the US to the UK and Europe broadly follows the timing of Equal Opportunity legislation. This legislative impetus or sanction for WO programs is explored in detail by UK writers, in particular Gluchlich (1985), Chater and Chater (1992), and Gray (1994). Legislation created the possibility of ‘affirmative action’ for women and in some cases racial minorities. Australian legislation followed in the mid 1980s (Smith 1993), which may explain the later advent of WO programs here in the early 1990s. While the legislative frameworks may have provided much of the impetus, early WO programs appear to have their roots in the feminist movement also occurring at that time (Pyner 1994).

WO programs in their broadest sense include any single sex targeted activity designed to address inequities experienced by women in the workplace. These vary in their target groups, design and emphasis. However, in large part, the first wave of WO programs was

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

targeted at senior women and characterised as management training. These programs were designed to fix the problem, made more visible by legislation and the associated reporting requirements for government and large organizations, of a lack of women in senior organizational ranks.

Despite my categorisation of these initial programs broadly as WO management training (WOMT), there are few useful frameworks for differentiating between WO programs in the literature. This failure to differentiate has been accompanied by a proliferation over time of the form WO targeted activities might take. Diverse examples of WO programs in the literature include a visiting professor program (Halliwell & Brown 2001); intensive training in selection skills designed to get women into school principalships (Metzger 1985); women's writing groups in Australian university settings (George et al. 2003; Saunders, Sampson & Lee 1998); a Women's Global Leadership Forum in a multinational corporation (Adler, Brody & Osland 2001); and an Australia wide local government women's network (Pini, Brown & Ryan 2004).

The lack of categorisation in the literature and the associated lack of detail when reporting on various programs result in more assumed homogeneity between WO programs than is the case. However for my purposes, it will be extremely important to distinguish *between* WO programs, which is a point I take up in Chapter Three.

Much of the work of WO programs remains invisible, in some cases undocumented or contained in institutional reports and unpublished papers – the so called 'grey' literature. It is difficult to get a good picture of the prevalence of programs because they come and go in waves of popularity at different times in different sectors and countries. The most comprehensive body of literature comes from the higher education (HE) sector globally, not surprisingly given the emphasis on scholarly work and a network of academic/practitioner conferences internationally<sup>4</sup> and in Australia which leave more of a publication trail (for example Chesterman 2006; Cohen et al. 1998; Fogelberg et al. 1999; Grenz et al. 2008; Maione 2005; Wiedmer 2002). The Association of Commonwealth Universities (Singh 2005) was also active in reviewing programs across the sector. Australian data show 86% (31 of 36 public universities) have staff development programs exclusively for women (Tessens 2008), while the comparable figure for the UK is less than 31% (Bagilhole 2002b).

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the European Gender Equality in Higher Education Conference, from the inaugural Helsinki conference in 1998 through to the 6<sup>th</sup> conference in Stockholm 2009, attracts a broad international following, including representation from Australia and results in the publication of selected papers.

In contrast to the high prevalence of WO programs in Australian HE and the activity of conferences and practitioner networks, there were no prior WO programs in Australasian policing when LDW was introduced. There is now one other state with a WO mentoring program (ACWAP Conference 2009).

Hutchinson and Eveline (2006), in compiling a best practice framework for women's leadership development in the West Australian public sector, provide an appendix of best practice leadership development programs. These include seven Australian public sector examples and a further 43 examples, almost exclusively North American or multinational corporations. The international examples appear heavily skewed towards company networks, forums, and councils; to a lesser degree mentoring and skills/career training; and with a minority focus on leadership development. The Conference Board of Canada data (Brady & McLean 2002) reflects a similar emphasis, where 42% of surveyed organizations had women's councils/networks, while in separate research 30% of senior women reported that their organization provided women only development programs.

### ***Critique and controversy***

The literature on WO programs, patchy, incomplete and dominated by HE, is disappointing in other respects. Breda Gray's (1994:202) article entitled *Women-only management training – a past and present* summarises the literature in the following way:

The 'life history' of women-only management training (WOMT) has not been recorded. We know little about the circumstances that gave it birth, the main influences on its growth and development, its struggles and successes. My exploration of the literature on WOMT finds much activity but little reflection on these activities.

Much of the literature is written by those who could be seen as 'insiders' – people directly involved and invested in WO programs as developers, facilitators, consultants and co-ordinators. The majority of this literature has an enthusiastic, positive, largely descriptive and unreflective tone. Gray (1994:203) notes how uncomfortable she is with this 'decontextualized, unreflective and pragmatic representation of WOMT in most of the literature'. Bhavnani (1997:140), noting the increase in WO programs, concurs stating '...they have developed in an ad hoc pragmatic way. Underlying assumptions have not been examined and theory has not accompanied practice...' Published during the second wave of programs in the UK when WO programs were just beginning in Australian HE, their criticism is equally apt in regard to the body of largely practitioner literature that has continued to develop in the Australian context.

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

Much of the controversy that surrounds WO programs is in response to the 'affirmative action'<sup>5</sup> nature of WO interventions. Workers, management and feminist theorists alike have contested this 'special treatment for women'. Some fail to acknowledge that there is a gender equity issue, others brand any pro-active strategies to address gender inequality as unfair, anti-men, or reverse discrimination (Pini, Brown & Ryan 2004). Women themselves may be sharply divided (Colgan & Ledwith 1996), while feminist scholars such as Bacchi (1996) have explored the ways in which affirmative action has become politicised and co-opted.

Fundamental questioning of the inappropriate focus on the women rather than the organization surfaced early in the history of WO programs. Gluchlich (1985:41), in reflecting on five years of her work in the UK Civil Service, notes that it has a touch of the 'remedial about it...and that we are colluding with the notion that women are the ones who need to assimilate'. Likewise Reavley (1989:55), writing from a Canadian perspective in her paper entitled '*Who Needs Training: Women or Organisations?*', advocates that organizations examine the 'belief system underlying their corporate culture'. She sees WO programs as a 'fill in the gaps' approach designed to assimilate women into existing corporate cultures. Reavley (1989:59) succinctly concludes that 'the remedial focus of existing sex based training programmes is antiquated'.

White, Crino and DeSanctis (1981:237) noted the explosion of programs in the US and critiqued their underlying assumption that:

[W]omen have unique problems which they must deal with when placed in a management position...the presence of such programs creates the appearance that the environment either should not or cannot be changed and the onus is on women to adapt to the organizational climate as it exists.

These accounts of early WO programs in the UK and North America highlight the shortcomings of what is now labelled a 'Frame 1' approach. Perhaps most telling of all is the suggestion by White, Crino and DeSanctis (1981) that the mere presence of programs serves to reinforce the assumption that the organization 'should not' or 'cannot' change. If, as this argument suggests, the WO focus *inevitably* leads to a remedial approach that fails to challenge (and perhaps implicitly endorses) a gendered organizational culture, does that mean that WO programs are fatally flawed?

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<sup>5</sup> Affirmative action is the term most often used in the USA and Australia; whereas the terms 'positive action' or 'positive discrimination' are used in the UK.

Despite their focus on training women, WO programs may have failed to deliver more women into senior organizational ranks and leadership roles. This criticism, voiced by insiders, is most often based on a broadbrush recognition that women continue to be under-represented in the senior ranks (Brown 2000; Devos, McLean & O'Hara 2003; Glucklich 1985; Reavley 1989), rather than on a detailed or careful evaluation of the effectiveness of programs within a particular organization or sector.

Despite early advocacy of the need for monitoring of employment and promotion outcomes (Larwood, Wood & Inderlied 1978), the necessary follow-up studies, with very few exceptions (Gardiner et al. 2007; Limerick, Heywood & Ehrich 1995; Metzger 1985), have not taken place. This is reminiscent of Equal Opportunity initiatives more broadly, where the business case used to secure support is often not backed up with cost benefit analysis or monitoring of outcomes (Charlesworth, Hall & Probert 2005). This lack of 'hard' data to support a business case or to justify funding leaves WO programs vulnerable, unable to substantiate their contribution to improving the status of women.

There have been other critiques of WO programs, informed by developments in the feminist movement. These identified the homogenising of women in WO programs, leading to the disappearance of race, socio-economic class, sexuality, able-ness and other aspects of identity (Gray 1994; Pini, Brown & Ryan 2004). Programs were criticised for catering exclusively to white middle class women (Betters-Reed & Moore 1995; Eveline 2004), and were said to 'merely reinforce the status quo through the perpetuation of a dominant ethnocentric organizational culture' (Betters-Reed & Moore 1995:35-6). These criticisms appear to have largely been ignored.

### ***Pragmatism and the 'feel good' factor***

In analysing the arguments put forward in the literature to support the existence of WO programs, I observe two main clusters. Firstly there is a high degree of pragmatism, which reflects Cockburn's 'short agenda'. Rather than focus on long-term organizational change, the focus is on assisting women to survive and/or thrive in organizations now, with programs designed to assist women to cope with the reality of pro male bias, gender stereotyping, male dominated workplaces and the family/work juggle (Reavley 1989). Early proponents of this argument saw WO programs as part of a transitional process until organizations became better places for women (Hartnett & Novarra 1980; Larwood, Wood & Inderlied 1978), a transition that has failed to occur.

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

Likewise the pragmatism of the 'now' is evident in arguments that mainstream offerings, both in-house training and management education, are inadequate (Gatenby & Humphries 1992; Ruderman & Hughes-James 1998; Tanton 1994; Vinnicombe & Singh 2003) and less accessible to women (Larwood & Wood 1995). Gallos (1995:24-27) argues that women are short-changed by mainstream management education which is based on faulty assumptions regarding women's learning needs, their career paths and organizational experiences.

Moreover, these management programs ignore the way in which male is seen as the norm and female as the exception, and the gendered nature of teaching practices and classroom dynamics.

Mainstream management training is seen as perpetuating women's experience as the 'other', while WO programs assist women to develop their own styles of leadership in a safe and conducive environment (Limerick, Heywood & Ehrich 1995) away from a male dominated presence and discourse (Bartram 2005). A benefit claimed for WO programs is that 'Women are not taught to manage 'like men' but rather are freed from gender based attitudinal constraint for the duration of such courses' (Limerick & Heywood 1993:23).

Ruderman and Hughes-James (1998) from the US based Centre for Creative Leadership consider that the biggest advantage of their single identity (be it race or gender) programs is that they offer participants a validating experience, free of the usual experiences of self as other. Hartnett and Novarra (1980:34), from a participant perspective, express the liberation of no longer carrying the heavy load of being the token woman, 'of forever being responsible for representing our entire sex'. WO programs are presented as compensating for the current shortfall of training conducted within a masculinist management paradigm.

For many, this pragmatic focus on the women is justified because of a belief, often optimistically expressed, that increasing the number of senior women will inevitably change the organizational culture. Organizational culture change, it is assumed, will take place *through* the women (Hackney & Bock 2000:4). This suggests that a Frame 1 approach can ultimately lead to Frame 4 transformation.

WO programs are almost unanimously well received by women who have participated in them. I call this the 'feel good' factor. Women's positive responses, provided through evaluations based on participant self report, provide one of the strongest rationales for WO programs to continue. Evaluation questions usually probe changes in feelings, attitudes and behaviours, and there is a great deal of congruence between evaluations regarding the positive benefits and highlights for participants that typically include,

## Chapter Two

the practical nature of the course, the unique nature of the interaction, the group solidarity, the provision of role models, the opportunity for networking and the affirmation of women as good managers in their own right (Limerick & Heywood 1993:27).

Further examples abound - see Glucklich (1985) Willis and Daisley (1992; 1997) Monks and Barker (1999) Ruderman and Hughes-James (1998) Brown (2000) and Browning (2004; 2007). In addition to the 'feel good' factor, women report substantial changes in their working lives, for example promotions, increased research output and new opportunities that they attribute to their course participation (Browning 2007; Devos, McLean & O'Hara 2003; Gardiner et al. 2007).

The arguments I have canvassed here almost inevitably focus on the women. Furthermore, this focus on the women is a focus on enabling the success of individual women. As Morley, Unterhalter and Gold (2001:14) note in their study of gender equity strategies in Commonwealth countries, '[g]ender equity is frequently reduced to strategies for transforming quantitative representation and participation, rather than an engagement with processes, power and dominant values'.

Working to improve the (senior) 'body count' (Alvesson & Due Billing 2002), the underlying rationale in most WO programs, ignores the need for organizational transformation. As Devos, McLean and O'Hara (2003:144) argue, increased numbers of senior women 'is a necessary but not sufficient condition for bringing about the culture change needed to achieve gender equity in our institutions'.

While some attempts were made to ensure that WO programs contributed towards the 'feminist goal of working towards gender justice' (Moultrie & de la Rey 2003:408), the focus on women remained. Some programs revised their content and methodology to be 'politicised and feminist', pointing to the need for an analysis of power, 'how it is defined and how that excludes women and minority groups' so that women could challenge their own subordination (Bhavnani 1997:145,146). However, this assumes:

...that the individual 'self' can practice power without considering the extent to which external structures of power hamper individual agency...Thus, while the individual woman may gain power, there is no shift in the distribution of power to women as group (Bjork-Billings & Lawrence 2006:8).

Others, moving beyond the limitations of Frame 1, wished to include men in the gender work (Gray 1994; Simmons 1994), pointing out that changing organizational culture is not

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

just the responsibility of women (Glucklich 1985) and if men's attitudes do not change, the glass ceiling remains (Bargh 1986).

CGO researchers, while dismissive of WO programs as Frame 1, advocated bringing Fourth Frame thinking to bear on Frames 1, 2 and 3 in order to strengthen their effectiveness (Kolb et al. 1998). Bringing Frame 4 to bear on WO programs, it was suggested, would lead to executive development programs for women that 'rather than addressing women as deficient' would help women to 'understand the larger *systemic* effects of gender in organizations'. This would entail 'supplementing training in management skills with training in strategies to use when women find themselves in gendered situations that inhibit their ability to be effective' (Kolb et al. 1998:15, original emphasis).

Later, CGO researchers themselves experimented with 'linking leadership education for women to an ongoing process of inquiry and change', hoping it might prove 'less time-and effort-intensive' than their dual agenda CIAR approach (Kolb 2003:1). While Kolb et al. (1998) had argued that leadership education is primarily aimed at individuals, on this occasion they linked the delivery of an in-house women's program to systemic change by including constituency building and organizational dialogue, aimed at small wins. Key to their efforts was a focus on building a community among women participants, creating alliances between participants and their coaches, and developing a small wins strategy.

The increased attention to power in the curriculum of WO programs, the desire to involve men, and the experimental work of the CGO are important contributions to the goal of re-positioning women's programs towards the long agenda. However, what is lacking is an overarching theory to more systematically inform practice.

This review of the WO literature has highlighted many of the shortcomings of WO programs and provided some pointers for overcoming these shortcomings. However the dominant tendency of WO programs, through focussing on the women, but not the organization, is to leave the gendered status quo undisturbed.

It is perhaps fitting to let participants have the last say. Participants themselves sometimes wonder if WO courses are misdirected, as indicated by both the quote from an LDW participant at the beginning of this chapter and the following from another program reported in the literature:

Perhaps providing management development courses for women is not the way to go at all? Participants enjoy the course and need the affirmation it provides, but on the whole, we are not the ones with the real problems, or the ones who create the real problems. Perhaps your resources should be

directed at people with a great deal of power in university x, so that they would be helped to analyse themselves and their management styles. They are in a better position to effect change in the organization than are the women who have attended the course (Monks & Barker 1999:541-2).

### ***Mentoring: different or more of the same?***

WO mentoring (WOM) programs form a large but somewhat separate subset of WO programs. My aim in exploring WO mentoring separately from the WO program literature and locating it within the broader mentoring literature is to draw into the discussion literature with a critical perspective from different contexts. I am once again particularly interested in ways in which mentoring might contribute to organizational or structural change.

The mentoring literature is overwhelming. Mentoring is everywhere – in schools, universities, organizations, welfare programs and youth programs, to name a few. Over several decades, mentoring within organizations has grown enthusiastically and exponentially for everything from socializing new staff, to fast tracking high achievers, to enhancing diversity within management ranks (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland 2007:253).

This plethora of mentoring grew out of an interest in existing relationships in the workplace between ‘an older, more experienced mentor and a younger, less experienced protégé for the purpose of helping and developing the protégé’s career’ (Ragins & Kram 2007:5). This kind of mentoring is now referred to as informal mentoring to differentiate it from formal mentoring, which is developed with organizational assistance or intervention (Ragins 1999:231). Formal mentoring aims to replicate the perceived benefits of informal mentoring and extend it to under-represented groups, such as women and racial minorities, (particularly popular in the US, see Ragins 1996) or towards more explicit organizational purposes such as fast tracking new recruits (Douglas 1997).

The mentoring literature has many of the same shortcomings as the WO program literature reviewed earlier. Colley (2003) quotes Merriam:

The literature on mentoring is biased in favour of the phenomenon...it warrants neither the enthusiasm about its value, nor the exhortation to go out and find one...[M]entoring is not clearly conceptualised...The majority of published articles consist of testimonials or opinions...[T]here are no studies of the negative effects of mentoring, or [of its] absence. (Merriam 1983:169-179 in Colley 2003:34).

Kathy Kram (1985:195), a longstanding researcher in the mentoring field, was also cautionary in the early years, suggesting that mentoring has been ‘oversimplified as a

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

relationship that is easily created and maintained' and as a solution to a multitude of problems. These early cautions have been ignored and the criticisms still ring true (Colley 2001; Douglas 1997). Eby (2007) argues that the mentoring literature is uncritically reported and insufficiently researched (despite a mountain of publications) while others (Devos 2008; McKeen & Bujaki 2007) claim that it is imbued with an assumption that mentoring is always good. According to Ragins (2007), few have focussed on mentors and the reciprocity of the relationship as highlighted in the early work of Kram (1985) therefore became lost (Allen 2007; Greenhaus & Singh 2007). Scandura (1998) cautioned that little attention is paid to the potential detriment for mentees despite, as observed by Eby (2007), the obvious potential for relational difficulties. Most studies ignore outcomes for mentors or the organization (McKeen & Bujaki 2007). Fewer still make any links to organizational change, with exceptions such as Giscombe (2007) and Jarvis and Macinnes (2009). And in common with WO programs more broadly, formal mentoring suffers from a 'dearth of evidence of program effectiveness from an organizational standpoint' (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland 2007:254).

Importantly, within the small critical stream of mentoring literature, there is an echo of the questions I have already posed regarding WO programs. What or whose purpose do mentoring programs serve? As Carden (1990:276) asks,

...have we rediscovered an ancient treasure...Or are we sanctioning an elitist patron system that excludes the socially different, clones managers and administrators and maintains a status quo based on "accumulation of advantage" and replication of exploitative hierarchical systems?

Perhaps this ambivalence towards mentoring is not surprising when one considers its historical roots. Ann Darwin (2000:198) sees the (masculine) history of mentoring as all about power and knowledge:

...handing down knowledge, maintaining culture, supporting talent and securing future leadership...Thus traditionally, the mentoring relationship has been framed in a language of paternalism and dependency and stems from power dependent, hierarchical relationship aimed at maintaining the status quo.

The mentoring that Darwin describes is ill suited to an organizational gendered change agenda. Helen Colley (2001:193) problematises the individual focus of mentoring in her study of mentoring for disadvantaged youth, urging her colleagues to remain open to 'questioning the validity of mentoring as an individualised response to problems that may rightly have more collective or structural solutions'. A focus on mentoring individual

## Chapter Two

disadvantaged youth ('fix the youth', analogous to 'fix the women') might serve as a distraction or alternative to tackling the structural disadvantage young people experience. Colley (2001) argues that the wider power locations within which the mentor-mentee dyad is situated is rarely considered, obscuring the way institutional goals may drive the relationship towards particular (institutional) ends. In effect, the presentation of mentoring as apolitical and almost inevitably positive may obscure a darker side of mentoring. Mentoring, with its masculinist history, lack of a practice of ongoing critique, and lack of an analysis of power, appears better suited to maintaining the status quo than to pursuing a gendered change agenda.

These difficulties have not acted as a deterrent to WO mentoring programs. WO formal mentoring programs have been popularly embraced as a strategy designed to redress the low numbers of senior women. The exclusion of women from informal networks was increasingly seen as a barrier to career advancement. It was hoped that formal mentoring would replicate for women 'the informal systems for career advancement used for so long and to such good advantage by male colleagues' (Ramsay 2001:16). While research specific to formal mentoring is limited (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland 2007), recent research suggests that formal mentoring for women is a 'poor cousin' to informal mentoring for men (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland 2007) with women receiving less coaching, role modelling, friendship and social interaction (Ragins & Cotton 1999).

In addition the criticism of 'women centred' gender equity approaches canvassed earlier also applies to mentoring. Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) situate WO formal mentoring and networks within Frame 3 'Create equal opportunity'. In attempting to address structural disadvantage through formal structures, the organization focuses its efforts on the women. McKeen and Bujaki (2007:218) concluded in their recent review of gender and mentoring that mentoring 'seems intended to assimilate women into the dominant masculine corporate culture'. Meanwhile, informal mentoring and networking, which are shaped by masculinity and reinforce male advantage, remain in place and unscrutinised, as do the usual ways of progressing through organizational hierarchies. Because it does not address entrenched relations of male advantage and female disadvantage, formal mentoring fails to challenge the status quo (Hackney & Bock 2000).

The focus on the women obscures the organizational context. Anita Devos (2008:195), building on the work of Colley and applying a post structural feminist critique to mentoring of Australian academic women, argues that 'these programmes are supported because they speak to institutional concerns with improving performance in a performance culture,

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

while being seen to deal with the problem of gender inequity'. Devos suggests that mentoring suits the purposes of the institution precisely because it 'activates the operation of technologies of self, which the women...take up to manage themselves as women academic workers'. Mentoring therefore produces 'certain sorts of self-regulating subjects' (Devos 2005:194). I would argue this is particularly the case for narrowly targeted mentoring schemes (for examples of this approach see Casson & Devos 2003; Devos, McLean & O'Hara 2003; Gardiner 1999; Gardiner 2005; Gardiner et al. 2007). Devos (2008:195) goes further in critiquing her earlier work, suggesting that 'this reading locates mentoring within a network of institutional power relations, in so doing upsetting the truths we hold about mentoring as always good and unproblematic'.

This criticism, of the instrumentality of current mentoring approaches is not unique to WO mentoring. Mentoring practices in general have been accused of making institutional needs central (Colwell 1998); emphasising a one way process of knowledge transfer (Zachary 2000); exclusively focussing on mentees' career outcomes (Greenhaus & Singh 2007); using male models of success (McKeen & Bujaki 2007); ignoring the learning process (Lankau & Scandura 2007); and emphasising one way relationships (McKeen & Bujaki 2007). The dangers of this instrumental approach include dependency, control and greater power distance (Gay & Stephenson 1998); sponsorship and patronage (Jarvis & Macinnes 2009); social control and conformity (1998); and socialization into the majority culture (Chao 2007).

In contrast to the instrumental approach, developmental mentoring makes mentee needs central to the relationship (Colwell 1998) with an emphasis on exploring, guiding, supporting, risk taking and independence (Gay & Stephenson 1998). With less power distance, the relationship becomes more reciprocal, thus perhaps counter-intuitively linking developmental mentee centred mentoring with a relationship that is more conducive to mentor learning and reciprocal development (Fletcher & Ragins 2007).

There are suggestions that mentoring may be useful in educating majority group members (Fletcher & Ragins 2007; Ragins 2002). Baugh and Fagenson-Eland (2007:253) suggest that mentoring 'provides education for the mentors with respect to challenges faced by women and minorities in organizations'. Ragins (2007:293) describes this as an opportunity 'to gain insight into the everyday experience of being "the other" in organizations'. Kolb (2003:3), who worked more directly with coaches as part of their constituency building efforts, found in follow-up interviews that 'these relationships altered coaches' perceptions of the gender issues in the firm'.

## Chapter Two

Ragins and Verbos (2007) add a gendered dimension to the distinction between instrumental and developmental mentoring. They argue that instrumental mentoring, or what they refer to as the ‘Godfather approach’, values mentoring for

*what it can do* rather than for *what it can be*...this view ignores the reciprocal nature of mentoring relationships, and takes a hierarchical and perhaps stereotypically masculine approach to the relationship (Ragins & Verbos 2007:95, original emphasis).

Ragins and Verbos (2007:92) seek to reclaim what they describe as a more feminine, relational view of mentoring involving ‘mutual growth, learning and development’. ‘Relational mentoring’ overcomes the limitations of one-directional, hierarchical mentoring and calls attention to the ways that traditional perspectives on mentoring are themselves gendered. It is therefore reasonable to assume, as Fletcher and Ragins (2007:390) observe, ‘that traditional perspectives on mentoring may not fit the needs, experiences, or role expectations of women...’

Jarvis and Macinnes (2009) have explored the capacity of mentoring relationships to either challenge or maintain the status quo. They found that a focus on learning and development, reciprocity, critical friendship, values alignment and psychosocial support were associated with mentoring that had the capacity to challenge the status quo. This finding highlights the critical distinction between instrumental and developmental mentoring. Not all mentoring is cut from the same cloth. Developmental mentoring offers a much greater sense of possibility in pursuing the transformative agenda.

There is little explicit linking of mentoring and organizational change. One exception is mentoring in European HE, designed with culture change in mind:

...mentoring should, as we see it, not only be understood as a scheme for offsetting the disadvantages that female academics and scientists have, but should also be seen as a strategy for changing the structure and culture of universities as a whole (Nobauer & Genetti 2008:30).

Nobauer and Genetti (2008:40) conclude that if mentoring programs lack this strategic goal they ‘run the risk of reproducing traditional gender hierarchies’.

Another innovative change oriented mentoring approach is described by Giscombe (2007:556,9) where junior women mentored senior executives on issues facing women in the company, with the specific goal of supporting ‘creation of a culture that facilitated advancement of women’.

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

Mentoring as a developmental process for women presents the same difficulties as WO programs more generally, where a focus on the mentee misses and/or obscures the need for change on the part of mentors and the organization. The reclaiming of mentoring as developmental and relational may provide a way of avoiding the difficulties of instrumental career focussed mentoring that 'fixes the women', and assist a move towards mentoring which engages with gendered change.

### ***Organizational co-option or cop out?***

Devos' (2004a; 2005) critique of mentoring programs for academic women highlights the possible mismatch between organizational and equity agendas. An apparent focus on the women, with no corresponding focus on the need for organizational change, actually becomes an exercise in fitting women to organizational demands.

Implicitly positioning women as the problem may in fact explain why WO programs (and I include WOM here) receive the support they do, despite a lack of evidence of outcomes. Writing from an Australian HE perspective, Devos, McLean and O'Hara (2003:146) suggest that despite controversy, 'such programmes are paradoxically the most palatable [to the organization] forms of positive or affirmative action for women'. According to Gray (1994:206), they meet some of the training and support needs of women but allow the organization to 'contain issues relating to gender and sexuality' and are therefore unthreatening precisely because they do not challenge the status quo.

Perhaps their value also lies, as Bargh (1986) argues, in allowing the organization to believe the issue is being sufficiently addressed or that their obligations have been fulfilled. WO programs become a 'salve to the organization conscience' (Knight & Pritchard 1994:57). Kalev, Dobby and Kelly (2006:610) suggest that anti-discrimination measures are adopted in part because they are accepted as 'good faith efforts' in the courts, acting as 'window dressing, to inoculate themselves against liability, or to improve morale rather than to increase managerial diversity'.

Their popularity with the women suggests that WO programs may be effective in meeting women's immediate needs. But it also opens up the possibility that WO programs act as a panacea for women in the organization who think something is being done, while the gendered organization remains unchanged.

The feel good factor for the women often extends to the facilitators and managers (James 1996), leading Gray (1994:229) to suggest a more widespread collusion:

I think that WOMT has colluded with those who have sought consciously or otherwise to contain its influence and effectiveness. If WOMT is to come alive, then those involved will have to make difficult and risky decisions about how to confront this collusion.

This suggests that for many insiders, the pragmatism and the ‘feel good’ factor of the short agenda – working with the (individual) women – may overwhelm the necessity for strategic engagement with the much more difficult and longer agenda of organizational change. It appears easier for those involved in running WO programs and the organizations where they are located to engage in the short agenda, rather than the transformative agenda so desperately required.

### *A sense of possibility?*

WO programs and WOM, as I have shown, share a predominantly uncritical history of development within organizations, where the broader political agendas and power dynamics are largely ignored. It is as if these programs take place in a contextless bubble, where only the good of individuals is served. In reality WO programs and WOM can be co-opted to serve larger organizational purposes where the obscuring of power relations preserves the status quo.

Critical practitioners who have been able to name the issues and see what is missing, still entertained a sense of broader possibility and hope. In describing WO management training as a ‘lost child’ in the 1990s, Gray (1994:204) saw potential that was not being realised:

In my view the presence of women in management brings an opportunity for change in work patterns and within work organizations. I see women only management training as having the potential to facilitate and support these changes.

This sense of possibility is echoed in the suggestion by CGO scholars that Frame 4 thinking could be usefully applied to Frame 1 programs. Likewise, they saw their ‘model of education and intervention as a promising one’, while acknowledging that ‘[c]learly there is more to learn from these kinds of experiments’ (Kolb 2003:4). However the one-off nature of this model worked against a more vigorous re-theorising of WO programs that might be usefully applied by others. Neither approach appeared to seriously consider the potential of WO programs to carry a Frame 4 intervention.

There is clearly a sizable gap between the intractable gendered disadvantage experienced by women in the workplace, the need for transformative change and the practice of WO

## Women only development programs: Still relevant in today's workplaces?

programs as reviewed here. The dearth of critical scholarly work, with the exceptions noted in this chapter, suggests that WO programs have been overlooked or dismissed as a serious contributor to the transformative agenda. The substantial contribution of feminist scholars to organization theory in the areas of gender, power and the gendered organization occurring over this same time period is almost entirely absent from the WO program literature.

The lack of critical or reflective practice (highlighted by Gray 1994) provides little in the way of useful frameworks for categorising programs, a shared understanding or language for practitioners or researchers to build on, or a theoretical basis for WO program development and refinement. These deficits result in cycles of repetition rather than evolution or development. This has stripped WO programs of their relevance in the gendered organizations of today, leaving WO programs stranded, far removed from their original feminist roots and emancipatory intent.

There is little evidence to suggest that WO programs can provide a platform for building more gender equitable organizations. However, the sense of possibility has endured. Could WO programs be the 'pragmatic means' to 'strive towards radical ends?' (Knight & Pritchard 1994:61).

## Conclusion

This chapter began by situating gender inequalities in the workplace within a wider context, detailing to use Joan Acker's (1990:145) words '...the extraordinary persistence through history and across societies of the subordination of women'. Acker's theory of the 'gendered organization' was pivotal in the discussion of the theory that underpins this research. The 'gendered organization' becomes the keystone, by providing a way of understanding the radical nature of the organizational change required and anticipating the inevitable difficulties for interventions that pursue a transformative agenda. The necessity of turning the spotlight onto the gendering processes of the organization in turn identifies the shortcomings of WO programs that focus on the women, while ignoring the organization.

The work of CGO scholars, building on Acker, provide frameworks and tools for putting this theory into practice. In particular, their model of organizational change based on 'small wins' connects individual agency to systemic change. Organizational interventions, based

## Chapter Two

on the 'small wins' understanding of organizational change, depend on engaging organizational members as constituents for change.

A critical review of the WO programs and WOM program literature, measured against current understanding of the gendered organization and the need for transformative change has highlighted many shortcomings. Yet it is the survival of WO programs and their substantial 'feel good' factor, together with glimpses of WO programs that have been more than 'fix the women', that lead me to conclude that the full potential of WO programs may not yet have been realised.

The challenge of addressing the shortcomings of WO programs is picked up in the next chapter. This is a potentially rehabilitative project, bringing a clear feminist intent to bear on developing a theoretical framework and understanding that will re-position WO programs to contribute to the larger transformative project of organizational change



# Chapter 3

## The LDW program: Developing the 'bifocal approach'

### Introduction

Despite the many shortcomings of WO programs in the previous chapter I finished on an optimistic note, emphasising the unrealised potential noted in the literature. My challenge as a practitioner developing and facilitating the LDW program has been to realise that potential. Following my visit to the CGO in 2000 I began to build my own bridge between theory and practice. This became a process of re-theorising WO programs, using what I term the 'bifocal approach' to address the transformative change required and to re-position WO programs away from the deficit approach of Frame 1.

The research question for this thesis concerning the capacity of WO programs to contribute to the gendered change agenda has emerged out of this development process and is itself a process of spiralling between theory *and* practice over an extended period of time. This chapter details the journey of re-positioning the LDW program as a vehicle for transformative change.

This chapter serves two main purposes, to introduce the LDW program – the program being examined in this study, and to define the 'bifocal approach', its purpose, theory and application. This becomes an account of the LDW journey towards the 'bifocal' that occurred from 2000 onwards. Because the LDW program, already six years in existence by 2000, provided the foundation for this work, I begin by introducing the program from inception until 2000. Using the CGO visit as the pivotal moment, I then retrospectively critique the LDW program and take stock of what I call the 'good bones' of LDW, those attributes which provide a skeletal framework on which to build a 'bifocal approach'. The

journey forward from that point describes the inspiration and integration of materials from the CGO and others in re-positioning the program. This interwoven account blends theory and practice and seeks to crystallise six years of experimentation. While much of this chapter takes place at UWA, as the developmental ‘home’ of LDW, the program as described forms the basis for this study in both institutions by the time the research began in 2006.

Given the lack of theorising, examination of purpose, detail and transparency of the bulk of the WO literature, I place importance on explicating the LDW program in a way that makes it a useful contribution to the literature and current and future practitioners.

Finally, I introduce the three groups of people who became the crux of the bifocal approach in practice – executive level ‘champions’, mentors and participants. The program engaged with each group in different ways, through champion building, mentoring and peer learning.

### **The inception and early years of LDW at UWA: 1994–2000**

UWA is a ‘sandstone’ university (Australia’s equivalent to the ivy league) and as such is an older, comprehensive, research-intensive university and member of the elite ‘Group of Eight’. Unlike other similar universities at the time it had not been party to any amalgamations (e.g. with teachers colleges or nursing schools) and therefore retained an unmitigated gender profile of male dominance. Of most concern to the institution was the lack of progress in building the numbers of academic women, steady at around 23% for a number of years. The University Equal Employment Opportunity Yearly Report showed that the university had seven female professors<sup>1</sup> (7.5 % of professors at that time) and 11 women (16.9%) at level 9 and above in the general staff<sup>2</sup>. Women made up 23% of academic staff and 54.5 % of senior general staff. A women’s program was seen as part of the solution to the lack of women, particularly in senior ranks and as contributors to the decision-making processes of the university (University of Western Australia 1995a).

In 1993, UWA was one of a number of universities which were successful in gaining funds from the Commonwealth Staff Development Fund to establish a women’s program. Established in 1994, the Leadership Development for Women (LDW) program flourished.

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<sup>1</sup> In all cases I have combined ‘research only’ with ‘teaching and research’ academic appointments. ‘Research only’ are now termed ‘research intensive’.

<sup>2</sup> Now commonly termed professional staff.

It enjoyed the support of the Vice-Chancellor (VC) Professor Fay Gale and her male Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) Professor Alan Robson (Gale 1998; Stanton 1996; University of Western Australia 1995a). External funding ceased in 1997; however, unlike many other universities, internal funding was provided at UWA for the program to continue. These two factors, support from the top and program funding, played a critical role in the survival of LDW through to the present. These early years of the LDW program and the Higher Education context are extensively discussed by Joan Eveline (2004) in her book *Ivory Basement Leadership*.

### ***Program elements and design***

The program itself was designed around cohort groups of 30 women, academic and general staff combined. External funding focussed on academic women, so their numbers predominated in the early years and general staff were initially required to be at Higher Education Worker (HEW) classification level 6 or above. Vicki Caulfield (1996:1), program co-ordinator in 1996, described LDW as:

An integrated and comprehensive program of activities, including a Core Program (exploring leadership), Skills Development Workshops, Information Sessions, the Mentor Network, Action Leadership Projects, and Networking Functions and Forums. Distinctive features of the program included its multi-faceted approach—to suit different learning needs, a highly consultative, evolutionary and developmental approach, the use of male and female mentors, facilitators who use a participant-driven and experiential model, and networking.

The time commitment, which varied somewhat from year to year, was substantial (more than 5 workshop days, plus other activities and mentoring) over a period of 6 or more months. The core program and workshops differed from year to year, within broad parameters. The core program focussed on leadership followed by skills workshops with topics identified by the participants. Topics included Power and Politics, Acting Strategically, Managing Up, Visibility, Work/Life Balance, Assertiveness, and Managing Change. Information sessions focussed on aspects of university life such as the budget, committee structure and promotion processes. The Action Learning projects, where a number of individual women were sponsored to take on projects outside their normal role, proved resource and time intensive and were discontinued after three years. However, the program structure and combination of activities proved enduring.

## The LDW program: Developing the bifocal approach

The Mentor Network, often a stand-alone program at other universities<sup>3</sup>, was an integral part of the broader LDW program. Each participant was matched with a more senior male or female mentor. The inclusion of male mentors, commonplace now but somewhat unusual for WO programs of the time (Quinlan 1999; University of Western Australia 1995a), was instigated by VC Fay Gale. Gale wished to ensure that the 'too few senior women' were not further overloaded and to 'involve the senior males in the process so that they would own and support' the program (Gale 1998:294). Mentors, and in particular senior male mentors, were viewed as potential collaborators, who might, and in Gale's view did, influence gender equity matters more broadly (Gale 1999). This intent, to 'convert' the men, became a defining influence in the way LDW developed and evolved. Further to this, Gale and Robson, by becoming mentors themselves, role modelled the importance of mentoring, resulting in broad support and commitment at the most senior levels of the organization. Many senior staff, most notably DVC Alan Robson, mentored on numerous occasions. The support from senior male mentors later proved critical in the budget debate when the one line budget was secured. As one participant noted, 'men acting as mentors will be exposed to gender equity issues and some male mentors have made positive statements about the program at public forums' (Stanton 1996:18).

Mentors were carefully matched with mentees, and were offered half day training in the role of the mentor. Additional mentor networking opportunities were available, often with guest speakers, to mentors and mentees (University of Western Australia 1995a).

### ***Program governance and relationship to the wider community***

The LDW program, located within the Equity Office for the first year, was relocated to the Centre for Staff Development (located within HR) and staffed by a part-time co-ordinator. A Planning Group provided strategic direction, advocacy and oversight. This all female group drew its members from general and academic staff across as wide and diverse a cross section of the university as possible, and included representation from the Equity and Diversity office and the unions. Over time, women who had participated in the program became planning group members, and the role of Chair alternated between senior general and academic staff members. The quarterly meetings, with a formal agenda and minutes, budget documents, activity reports and other documents provide an invaluable record of

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<sup>3</sup> For example Australian National University, Curtin University of Technology, Murdoch University, James Cook University, and the University of South Australia (Appendix 1; Stanton, 1996).

## Chapter Three

the deliberations of the group from 1994 through to the present. Additional meetings, such as strategic planning sessions, were held on an ad hoc basis.

The Planning Group devised the Vision and Mission statement outlined in the LDW Strategic Plan (University of Western Australia 1999):

It is the vision of the program that the university environment be a place where all women aspire to and achieve leadership roles in diverse ways, and at all levels, thereby contributing to the success of the University.

This is further explicated in the Mission statement, which is:

to enable women at the university to develop leadership skills and knowledge in order to increase their participation in positions of leadership and in all the university's decision-making processes; and

to contribute to culture change in the University to encourage and welcome women's involvement in leadership and decision-making positions.

This explicit coupling together of building women's leadership skills and contributions *with* an institutional 'culture change' agenda reflects the feminist underpinnings of the program's instigators. This coupling, which I will return to, ultimately provides the foundation for the bifocal approach.

Planning Group Chairs in the early years had relatively easy access to the one or two members of the University's Executive team with the closest links to the program at the time. This was usually the Vice-Chancellor or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. Compared to the experience of practitioners at other universities, the arrangement at UWA was an unusually active, committed and supportive relationship.

Through the Planning Group, an ever increasing number of mentors and close working relationships with executive level leaders, LDW became well connected with the broader UWA community. This connectedness was further enhanced through activities open to all university staff such as debates, forums and visits by distinguished scholars.

### ***Program evaluation and success***

An important aspect of the LDW program was its concern for public accountability and program refinement, with three evaluation reports between 1995 and 1998 (de Vries 1998; Stanton 1996; University of Western Australia 1995a). External consultant Jo Stanton (1996:15) noted the strong institutional support for the program and documented the positive outcomes for the women exemplified by the following participant quote: 'I have

## The LDW program: Developing the bifocal approach

accepted a position on the Faculty Board and the Academic Board and am preparing a submission for promotion and made a submission for a government grant’.

Increased confidence and a sense of empowerment, greater access to, and preparedness to take up opportunities, increased involvement in UWA decision making processes and stronger networks were recurring themes for LDW participants. A conference paper entitled *‘Four women’s journeys toward leadership and empowerment’* highlighted these and other positives from the women’s point of view (Fetherston et al. 1997). The *Creating Opportunities* report (de Vries 1998), a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the first three years of the program using surveys and institutional data, further confirmed the benefits for women’s working lives. LDW was the first program to track female participants, comparing their progress against women who had not participated and men. LDW improved, in some cases markedly, participants’ promotion and retention rates. These statistics later proved to be highly political and were often discounted by detractors saying that women coming on the program were already ‘promotion ready’. The women themselves saw this differently:

Of those survey respondents who were successful in achieving promotion, 59% felt their decision to apply for promotion was influenced by LDW and 82% felt the quality of their application was influenced by participation in the programme (de Vries 1998:ii).

Research undertaken at the University with a particular focus on promotion confirmed these views. Todd, Bird, Evans and Hammat (1999) explored outcomes by gender in promotion of academic staff at UWA (later published by Todd & Bird 2000). They noted:

The role of the Leadership Development for Women (LDW) program is also worthy of note. It appears from the survey responses that the LDW contributes in a variety of ways to the confidence and motivation of women to seek further promotion (Todd et al. 1999).

Although still under-represented in the applicant pool, more women were applying and were more successful than men when they did apply (Todd & Bird 2000:7). In part, LDW appeared to be offering encouragement that was countering the climate of discouragement that women frequently experienced and commented on in their local environment. For example, one woman said ‘I’d suggested to successive heads of department that I’d like to apply (for promotion) and had been discouraged. LDW galvanised my resolve’ (Todd & Bird 2000:11).

The retention statistics were also improving. Institutional data showed that a higher percentage of academic women were leaving the University than academic men, a quiet exodus from the back door that had so far escaped notice. LDW women were defying this

trend (de Vries 1998). For general staff the retention rates showed no gender difference. However, both academic and general staff participants in LDW showed higher retention rates than men and non-participating women (de Vries 1998).

LDW was being judged a success. The feedback from the women, in conjunction with the promotion and retention statistics, was heart-warming and encouraging. LDW seemed to be meeting both institutional expectations and the expectations of individual women. The research had assisted in establishing internal and external credibility for LDW, which proved important in ensuring future support for the program.

The LDW program had become popular, with strong word of mouth endorsement resulting in many more applicants each year than could be accommodated. By 2000, 175 women (105 academics in teaching and/or research positions and 70 general staff) had participated in the program (de Vries 2002). The foundation of a well designed, well regarded and institutionally well supported WO leadership development program had been laid. But despite these measures of success, LDW had shortcomings as a vehicle for gendered change.

### **CGO insights: Looking backwards and taking stock**

My involvement with LDW at UWA began in 1997 and Maggie's began not long after this. However it was the year 2000 that provided a pivotal moment for Maggie and me in our development of the LDW program. As part of a larger study tour exploring WO programs in Europe and North America, I visited the Centre for Gender in Organizations (CGO) at the Simmons Graduate School in Boston. The work of the CGO provided frameworks, an active and critical approach to gender interventions, role models and inspiration. Visiting the CGO crystallised some of my frustrations with LDW and WO programs more broadly, and provided a more critical gender lens through which to view these interventions. My conviction became that for women only development programs to have any relevance in today's organizations as a gender equality strategy – they must directly tackle issues of organizational culture change.

Prior to my visit to the CGO I could probably have said the same thing, but not with the same degree of clarity and purpose. Now I had frameworks, tools and ideas to put this into practice within the LDW program. The strength of this conviction and the catalyst for change that it represents has served to delineate my work with the LDW program into 'pre CGO' and 'post CGO' phases.

## The LDW program: Developing the bifocal approach

Debra Meyerson and Joyce Fletcher's (2000) *A Modest Manifesto for Shattering the Glass Ceiling* was pivotal. Using the Four Frames discussed in Chapter Two, they drove home the deficits of most gender equity strategies while providing a vision of what these strategies could and should be aiming to achieve. For me the key message from the CGO researchers was the absolute necessity of turning WO programs into vehicles for critiquing and challenging gendered workplaces. This was the start of a more focussed journey toward a bifocal approach to WO programs. It was from that point forward that we began to reframe LDW into the program that eventually became the focus of this research.

### ***Looking backwards: a 'two pronged' approach***

I began by taking a critical look at LDW and how it measured up against the Frame 4 ideal. LDW had a focus on the women and the organization from its beginnings as evidenced in the Mission statement. Contributing to culture change was always part of its mandate. In retrospect I would describe this as a 'two pronged' approach. LDW aimed to be more than a 'fix the women' program, but the intent had not always translated into practice.

The main difficulty was the way in which the two prongs of the mission statement, firstly '*to enable women at the university to develop leadership skills and knowledge...*' and, secondly '*to contribute to culture change in the University...*' remained unintegrated. Each was addressed through different activities, for example the first prong was primarily addressed through the cohort program, while the second was addressed through 'outreach' activities designed to engage and educate the broader university community and highlight issues of gender inequality on campus.

This lack of integration created a number of difficulties. Firstly, there was an ordering or prioritising of one objective or prong over the other. The first objective, of enabling the women, became the primary focus of the program. The focus on participants produced immediate and positive outcomes and spoke most directly to the organizational need that underpinned the program's beginnings. The second objective proved difficult to prioritise and, when either funding or staffing were short, outreach activities were abandoned for considerable periods of time. It is apparent from Planning Group Minutes that the ongoing management of the cohort program was the easier of the two objectives to manage and achieve. The process of engagement with the broader community, and particularly the men, which was considered essential in achieving the 'culture change' objective, was a much larger, fraught and open-ended task. Secondly, because the culture change agenda was located outside the cohort program, there was insufficient recognition of the ways in which

culture change was already part of the cohort program or ways this could be further developed.

In failing to intertwine these two goals or foci, the women and the organization, it seems inevitable that the culture change agenda becomes the poor cousin, more difficult to legitimise and sustain. The prevailing image of LDW as a women's program rather than a broader culture change program reflected this, despite recognition that LDW did play a role in organizational culture change. Professor Bob Wood, Chair of the Review of Academic Women in 1995, recommended ongoing funding for LDW because he saw it as a less controversial way of achieving culture change. Eveline (2004:97) quotes him in *Ivory Basement Leadership*:

...Rather than change the male-dominated culture directly, because that [would] invite reactions, what we decided to do instead was to fund an activity that we saw as being very effective in building a support network and developing female leadership so that they could then exert an influence over culture.

This strategy of resistance minimisation is problematic because it places all of the responsibility for change on the shoulders of the women. The belief that the culture will be changed through the women, as I have already noted, is common in the WO literature. In effect, in relation to LDW, it suggests that if the first prong (women's development) is occurring then the second prong (culture change) will take care of itself. Translating that into the language of the Four Frames suggests that a Frame 1 'fix the women' approach will ultimately lead to a Frame 4 're-visioning of work cultures'.

Despite the difficulties I have outlined in implementing the culture change agenda, the presence of culture change in the two pronged approach proved to be a huge advantage as we set about reframing LDW. It provided the springboard for tackling the 'culture change' agenda in a more intentional, focussed, shared (men and women) and integrated way.

### ***Taking stock***

While viewing LDW from this more critical perspective had highlighted some difficulties, it also drew my attention to those aspects of LDW that provided an excellent foundation for applying the CGO insights. I call this foundation LDW's 'good bones'. The fact that LDW had operated *within* an organization (in-house) and aimed to change that organization as part of its mission forms the backbone of LDW. A great deal of the rest of the skeletal

## The LDW program: Developing the bifocal approach

structure formed around the developmental nature of the program and the focus on leadership.

The distinction between training and development is an important one that is often overlooked in the WO literature. Willis and Daisley (1997:57), creators of the well known UK based *Springboard* program, describe this distinction in the following way. In development courses or modules, they argue:

The woman accepts responsibility for her own development; the woman decides on the issues she wants to address, the trainer is primarily providing a process; there are no right or wrong or “magic” answers; there is a high level of participation; the course addresses participants’ whole lives, not just the work aspects; the woman decides what steps are appropriate for her at the end.

In contrast, in training events:

...someone else has decided the agenda; there are wrong and right answers; there may be defined actions which are required or expected by the individual or the organization; the individual’s full participation is not necessary for an acceptable outcome, subject-matter may be pre-dominant, one aspect or part of an individual’s life is addressed, and the trainer is primarily conveying ideas, information or procedures.

Implied in these definitions is a profound difference in purpose and underlying values and philosophy. While training has a fixed, pre-determined destination, development is a journey that values the participants’ needs, lives, experiences and judgements in a very different way. Training fits the ‘fix the women’ frame, designed to meet the organization’s needs. A developmental, participant-centred approach already sits at odds with the ‘fix the women’ approach. Combining leadership (as opposed to management or other specific skills) and development proved to be a powerful combination in the LDW program. The leadership focus situated LDW differently within the suite of programs offered to staff, challenging men’s numeric domination of leadership programs.

The LDW program design supported the leadership and developmental aims in a number of ways:

The use of a cohort group provides a safe and supportive environment for learning and encourages establishment of supportive and ongoing networks;

An inclusive group open to all categories of staff takes the focus away from (skilling up for) a narrow conception of roles and careers and emphasises leadership development goals;

## Chapter Three

A core program of several consecutive days allows highly participative processes to be used, builds group process and trust, and allows the building of frameworks and foundational concepts that can be revisited throughout the program;

The extended time-frame acknowledges that development takes time. It allows processes to unfold, time for reflection and learning, and enables experimentation to take place in the workplace while group support is ongoing;

A process oriented curriculum emphasises the contributions of the women and the sharing of their collective expertise. It emphasises the provision of frameworks, processes and tools that each person can adapt to their own situation, keeping the women at the centre of the learning process;

Re-defining leadership as broader than positional leadership and as something that can be exercised at every level is an empowering approach that builds participants' capacity to make a difference wherever they are in the organization; and

The provision of ongoing activities for alumni recognises that development is ongoing, with participants continuing to apply frameworks and tools gained from the program with the support of new found colleagues and networks.

The targeting and selection processes for LDW participants were counter to the prevailing culture. By placing emphasis on selecting a diverse and broadly representative cohort group, LDW was undermining aspects of the masculinist culture, such as 'merit' based selection, competition and the dominance of academic over other staff groups.

Further 'good bones' included the connections into the broader UWA community of women and men through mentoring, the establishment and strategic presence of the LDW Planning Group, strong championing by and access to Executive level leadership, a highly visible institutional profile that positioned LDW as important to the organization and public accountability through a strong evaluation, research and publication culture.

### **CGO Insights: Moving forwards**

It was not my aim to follow the pragmatic suggestion from CGO researchers to apply Frame 4 thinking to a Frame 1 WO program. Rather, I wanted to turn a WO program into a Frame 4 intervention. This was uncharted territory. From 2000, using LDW as our vehicle for organizational gendered change, we began a process of experimentation. This involved incorporating various aspects of the CGO's and other scholars' frameworks and

tools and customising them to suit our purposes. A summary of this experimentation, more orderly in retrospect than reality, is presented below.

### ***Peer learning groups (PLGs)***

Introduced in 2002, peer learning groups<sup>4</sup> (PLGs) originated in our desire to deepen participants' engagement with the learning process and their subsequent transfer of learning back into the workplace. Over time we refined PLGs to extend the organizational gendered change agenda. PLGs were loosely based on action learning sets as developed by Reg Revans (1982), where groups used a reflective learning process to work on real life projects with accountability back to the organization for their learning. PLGs adopted the principles of an active and reflective learning process, with the support and accountability of the group but organized around a shared theme, question or issue rather than a project. Topics generated by participants were based on their current workplace issues or development needs, with groups forming around shared themes. Participants were introduced to the idea of 'critical friends', whereby they both supported and challenged each other in the safety of the peer group environment. Groups formed at the core workshop and met between workshops for the duration of the program (6 to 9 months). Accountability for learning (in the absence of a project) was built in through a process of presentations back to their cohort group and a final presentation from the whole group back to the organization.

The final presentation to the organization (including champions and mentors) became a key plank in our change agenda. I saw this as an opportunity to 'hold up the mirror', drawing on the work of Rao et al. (1999:18) who describe this as the practice of 'building knowledge about an organization and then feeding this information back'. The whole group created the public presentation, drawing from the creative presentation from each PLG back to the larger group on the last workshop day. We insisted, often against considerable resistance, that this be a creative presentation. We did so for several reasons - we wanted to avoid boring or lecturing our organizational audience; we wanted to create memorable presentations that preserved or built on the richness of the women's journeys, ones that often involved telling their stories and reflecting the experiential nature of the learning; we wanted to push the boundaries of what was considered ways of knowing,

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<sup>4</sup> PLGs were introduced at Maggie's instigation based on her experience working in another organization. When I say we in this section, the unique blend of structure and curriculum was jointly developed.

learning and being leaders (challenging in both settings for different reasons); and we wanted the women to use the opportunity to be strategic and visible, modelling leadership that challenged the status quo.

PLG public presentations became each group's graduating 'leadership challenge' where a great deal of what they had learnt together could be applied. The participants were often outside their comfort zones but almost always delivered amazingly rich, insightful, moving, authentic and often humorous presentations. We noted that as we strengthened the capacity for organizational members to be challenged and to learn from the presentations, we actually strengthened the learning process for the women.

The women were best placed to tell the organization what needed to change. It was harder to shoot the messenger when it was 30 of your own women telling the story. The PLG presentations offered an important reality check; a powerful strategy for keeping the focus on the organization and one that was repeated year after year – providing the opportunity to build understanding over time. The women became collective change agents in this process, contributing to building constituencies for change.

Over time we recognised that PLGs effectively extended the organizational gendered change agenda *through* the individual women. PLGs became the vehicle for participants to work with and apply the more complex material we were introducing into the curriculum such as developing gendered cultural literacy, exercising leadership and change agency in the workplace, and applying the 'small wins' process.

The women's development, when applied to their workplace and very visibly shared through the public presentation, was the main contribution of the PLGs into the gendered change agenda.

### ***Leaders and change agents***

Incorporating the insights from the CGO and other feminist scholars meant that we had to re-think how we 'taught' leadership within the program. It became more evident that we needed to present leadership as a gendered construct and practice, where masculine traits are more valued and where women and men experience various degrees of fit with the predominant (often heroic) leadership style (Sinclair 1998).

The leadership model we used was based on the work of Sheryl Bond (2000). The three ingredients of the model are 'identity' (including but not limited to gender), 'power' and 'context/organizational culture'. This model emphasised that leadership is not a solitary or

contextless exercise. It worked well with a re-visioning and reclaiming of leadership and building 'gendered cultural literacy'.

A further program development involved the exploration of other forms of identity such as race, class, and sexuality. The women also identified other aspects such as age or educational background (common in universities) that contributed to inclusion and exclusion. Further exploration of identity assisted the women to reflect on multiple aspects of who they were - for example their values, backgrounds, and childhood experiences - in ways that embrace a bringing of their whole self to leadership, rather than attempting to fit a mould.

Exploration of our leadership 'three legged stool' (identity, power and culture) allowed the women to uncover ways in which women's leadership was constrained by gendered workplace cultures. It also encouraged them to 'do' leadership with a growing confidence and sense of self, effectively challenging 'the way things are done around here'.

### ***Teaching the 'gendered organization'***

The gendered organization, as developed by Acker and discussed in Chapter Two, is a theoretical concept that we needed to translate into something teachable. We wanted to help participants answer the question: How did they experience the gendered organization and how did this impact on their capacity to exercise leadership?

The CGO's Four Frames ('Fix the women', 'Women are special', 'Create equal opportunity' and 'Re-visioning work cultures') and 'gender lens' became tools for developing what I term 'gendered cultural literacy' which is 'the capacity to read and understand the gendered workplace culture' (de Vries 2005:32). The 'gender lens' provided a way of looking at organizations, to see how gender 'can be revealed and analysed' through exploring organizational culture (Thomas 1996:143). The gender lens analysis used by the CGO is a working adaptation of the gendering processes put forward by Acker and described in the previous chapter. We used the version of these from the *Modest Manifesto* (Meyerson & Fletcher 2000) to assist participants to bring a critical gender perspective to what was going on in the everyday interactions, rules and norms in their workplaces. Our adaptation of the questions (how is the work done, what gets rewarded, how are competence and commitment demonstrated, what are the interactive styles, and what are the images of a strong leader?) provided an entry point for critically examining gendered work cultures (Meyerson & Fletcher 2000:132).

Gendered cultural literacy was an important tool in keeping the focus on the organization and assisting women to de-personalise their experiences in favour of seeing a larger gender dynamic at work. Improved gendered cultural literacy gave the women the option of playing the ‘organizational game’ more effectively, resisting the ‘game’ and/or working to change the ‘game’.

This examination of the gendered workplace in turn provided a starting place for thinking about small wins as a process of organizational change. As Meyerson and Kolb (2000:564) explain, ‘[o]nce we identify the particular ways in which concrete organizational practices produce gender inequities, these practices become potential targets for experimentation and change’.

### ***Small wins as the change agency process***

In the LDW program, the PLGs became the focus of the small wins process. Applying the gender lens and developing gendered cultural literacy was designed to assist the LDW participants in the naming and dialogue process, and the support of colleagues provided encouragement for doing things differently back in the workplace, itself a kind of experimentation. Using the small wins cycle, PLGs captured some of the liberating intent of women as experimenters in their own right (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983).

Small wins proved to have immediate appeal with the women, becoming a liberating concept in a number of ways. Small wins, as a process of inquiry, created some helpful distance, situating women’s own change process – pushing back against gendered organizational cultures into a broader context. Experimentation freed participants to do something different, without necessarily expecting success the first time. And the idea of small wins creating ripples or snowballing into larger change made it more worthwhile to persist. It became an empowering way to translate learning from the program into action in the workplace, eventually becoming ritualised in the form of small wins ‘check-outs’ and ‘check-ins’. As Meyerson (2003:104) observes in her work on ‘tempered radicals’, ‘small wins are powerful because they are doable. This encourages people to act by doing what they can now’. At the end of core program check-out the women would commit to taking a ‘small wins’ step back in the workplace and at the next workshop’s check-in would report on how they had fared. In this way, everyone became more adept at looking for and identifying ‘small wins’.

The small wins concept was also often re-interpreted to suit the LDW participants' own purposes. The capacity of small wins to 'precipitate a sense of hope, self-efficacy and confidence' (Meyerson 2003:105) became more pervasive. While small wins was taught as a culture change process, it came to encompass all manner of small steps that women were taking. The beauty of the small wins approach was that it created a link between women stepping more strongly into leadership and the capacity of this to impact on the gendered organization. Small wins therefore helped to keep the spotlight on the goal of organizational change.

I want to make some observations regarding differences in terminology between the curriculum of the program, as I have been describing it, and the terminology of this thesis. In Chapter Two I avoided the use of the term organizational 'culture', preferring to refer to the gendered organization. In this chapter the term culture has crept in, for example in the term 'culture change' as used in the LDW Mission statement. Culture and culture change are both commonly used terms (by both Sinclair and CGO scholars for example), however, narrowly defined 'culture' could be understood as only one aspect of the gendered organization. Practically speaking, in the program we often use the term organizational culture loosely, as a way of explaining how the gendered organization is expressed through 'the way we do things around here'.

Because 'organizational culture' has become overloaded with different meanings, in this thesis I have chosen to use more precise terminology wherever possible. Hence I refer to the 'transformative' or 'long agenda' (Cockburn), 'gendered change' (Morley, Unterhalter and Gold), and 'Frame 4' or 're-visioning work cultures' (CGO). I also replace the term 'gendered cultural literacy' as explained here, with the shorthand term, 'gender insight', in later chapters.

### **The 'bifocal approach'**

There is no point at which I can say we 'arrived' at the 'bifocal approach'. It would be more accurate to think of it as a journey towards the 'bifocal' that began when LDW began, gained impetus in 2000 and is ongoing. However, part way through the formal research process I coined the term 'bifocal' in an effort to encapsulate what we had been trying to achieve. The main purpose of the 'bifocal approach' is to make the transformative agenda an integral part of the LDW program. The change agenda is explicit and intentionally designed into the program, in contrast to the majority of WO programs where the gendered change agenda is incidental or non-existent.

## Chapter Three

The *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines bifocal (as an adjective and noun), as ‘having two focuses, especially of lens with a part for distant vision and a part for near vision’.

Those of us (most likely of a particular age!) with bifocal spectacles know that with some practice, switching focal length between close reading and distance vision can be easily and almost seamlessly achieved. A ‘bifocal approach’, as applied to WO programs, requires this same capacity to focus almost simultaneously, switching between a focus on the development of the women and a focus on the organizational transformative change agenda. Because the bifocal approach maintains a strong commitment to the women’s individual development, it does not fit neatly within Frame 4. However its focus on organizational transformation is inspired by and derived from the work of the CGO.

The simultaneity of the two foci overcomes what appears to be an inherent contradiction between WO programs, located in Frame 1 ‘fix the women’, combined with a Frame 4 ‘re-visioning work cultures’ agenda. It is not a case of one or the other, but both together. Bringing together the two foci aims to avoid the more dualistic thinking of the ‘two pronged’ approach previously used in LDW, where culture change became the add-on optional extra which is easily lost. The ‘bifocal approach’ aims to make these foci not only simultaneous but complementary, mutually attainable and mutually supportive goals. This fits with Cockburn’s (1991) idea of the simultaneous short and long agenda of organizational change, a combining of the pragmatic and the radical.

The ‘bifocal approach’ is a radical re-positioning, a re-theorising of WO programs and their capacity to contribute to the long agenda. In combining the two foci, one which has been thought of as Frame 1 and the other as Frame 4, the bifocal approach begins to disrupt the neat categorising of the Frames and to expand the notion of what a Frame 4 intervention could look like.

LDW as the vehicle for a transformative gendered change intervention offers a distinctly different platform for a strategic intervention that may offer advantages in tackling the difficult task of gendered change. In Chapter Two I identified three core issues: organizational access and the way the radical transformative agenda was ‘sold’ to the organization; the process of engagement with organizational partners; and, making the intervention robust and sustainable. WO programs provide a different organizational rationale for a change agenda, have the potential to provide access to a wide range of organizational partners and have the capacity to be ongoing rather than project based.

### *The 'bifocal approach' in practice*

The 'bifocal approach' evolved out of practice and in turn has served to inform the ongoing practice of LDW. The purpose of this research is to examine the bifocal approach, as applied in the LDW program in the two research sites to see if it was working as theorised. I want to pause here to reflect on what had emerged as central features of the bifocal approach by the time the formal research process began. By 2006, the gendered change agenda was being channelled through the cohort program and the relationships with organizational members that were directly connected to the cohort program. The organizational change agenda was therefore directly linked to the women's development.

The idea of small wins guided our understanding of the organizational change process. This in turn placed an increasing emphasis on building constituencies for change. The platform for the LDW program continued to be leadership development – but not just the leadership development of the women. LDW was trying to engage participants, mentors and executive level 'champions' of the program in exercising leadership that would challenge and change the gendered organization.

In bringing together male and female executive staff and senior mentors with female participants from most levels of the organization, we had assembled a *potentially* large, diverse and powerful constituency group that grew with each new program intake. This extended the gendered change focus well beyond the female participants, beyond women, to engage both men and women in the organizational change process. The engagement process was different for each group, offering different opportunities to build the gender insight that we assumed was necessary to underpin each individual's capacity to act as leader and change agent.

By this time, substantial changes to the curriculum and leadership model, and the introduction of PLGs were well established in practice. Mentoring, historically and strategically situated as a partner building exercise by UWA VC Fay Gale, continued largely untouched. There was a continued reliance on the mentoring dyads and repeat mentoring as the main avenues to educate mentors about the organization's gender issues. The engagement of champions with the program was achieved by providing public opportunities for the champion/s to be visible and active in the program and to get to know the women, through program launches, celebratory events and PLG presentations. Champions were also invited to be mentors.

## Chapter Three

The bifocal approach, which took shape at UWA from 2000 onwards, was well established by 2004 when the opportunity to introduce LDW to policing arose. The LDW model, as it was in current practice in 2004 at UWA, was transferred almost in its entirety to policing. This included a core program, skills workshops, mentoring (with mentors referred to as ‘corporate coaches’ to distinguish it from the other mentoring program in policing), peer learning groups and peer learning presentations. Participants’ time commitment was nine days in total, plus PLG and mentoring commitments.

The approach of involving senior men as coaches was also replicated, by targeting the Commissioner, Deputy and Assistant Commissioners, Superintendents and senior public service officers. Mentoring, as introduced at policing, carried with it the same expectation that was so culturally embedded at UWA, to:

Provide the male coaches of the women participants with enhanced knowledge and understanding of the gendered workplace culture of policing and their role in redressing issues arising for women in that culture (Harwood 2004:35).

Senior women were not excluded as coaches; however, they existed in very small numbers in the senior ranks. Coaches were provided with longer training (one day in the first year and a half day in subsequent years) than at UWA and issues of gender and leadership were explicitly addressed.

Police relied heavily on program materials and processes from UWA in implementing the program, including advertising and selection processes, mentor matching, and the formation of a Planning Group. Significant differences included the addition of men in the composition of the Planning Group and a more tightly targeted participant group (Sergeant level and above and public service officers level 3 and above).

By the time this research began in 2006, the ‘bifocal’ LDW program was well established in policing (in its third year) and at UWA. The implementation of the LDW program in two very different organizational sites provides an opportunity to examine how the organizational history and context shaped the intervention and the effectiveness of the intervention. It also provides rich avenues for learning about how the gendered organization is mobilised and maintained.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have traced the evolution of the LDW program at UWA from ‘two pronged’ to the ongoing application of the bifocal approach. Together with Chapter Two,

this chapter completes the introduction of theory and practice that underpins the formal research question. It is now time to explore whether practice works as theorised.

In essence, the bifocal approach in practice locates the program participants as an integral part of the culture change process and engages women and men in the broader organizational community, in particular through the roles of mentors and champions, in the gendered change agenda. It is these potential constituents for change that are the focus of this research.

A great deal of the introduction to UWA as a research site has taken place through the summary of the evolution of LDW in this chapter. In the next chapter I expand my discussion of the research sites from a methodological perspective. I outline how I tailored my research approach based on a feminist qualitative methodology to answer the research question: Is LDW successful in engaging participants, mentors and executive level champions in exercising leadership that challenges and changes the gendered organization?

# Chapter 4

## Researching the ‘bifocal approach’

### Introduction

Using the bifocal approach, the LDW program seeks to engage as many organizational players as possible in a ‘small wins’ strategy of gendered change. In Chapter Three I described how the bifocal approach re-focussed or re-aligned the LDW program in order to make a greater contribution to achieving the primary goal of more gender equitable workplaces. This research is a critical examination of the application of the bifocal approach to the LDW program in two organizations, UWA and policing.

My question is how effective has the bifocal approach been? To answer that question I decided to look at the three groups that have evolved to form the nucleus of the bifocal approach – executive champions, mentors and LDW participants – and the key processes of champion building, the mentoring program and peer learning groups.

The traditions of feminist qualitative research provide the methodology used in this study. A feminist approach does not aspire to an objectivity that is clearly far removed from my practitioner embeddedness within the work investigated here. Rather, it allows me to embrace this positioning while providing tools for ensuring the integrity of the research process. As the researcher, I am investigating a transformative change intervention, with the research taking place against the backdrop of the ongoing intervention.

My data comes from three main sources – individual and group interviews, participant observation, and organizational documents and publications. In this chapter I use the analogy of the research interviews as being like a photograph, with my researcher self as the

photographer capturing a moment in time. As practitioner/participant observer, I am caught up in a larger ongoing project, much like making a movie, with all the complexity and dynamism that brings. While the 'moviemaking' bears many of the hallmarks of participant action research, the study itself does not claim to be and was never designed to be a change intervention.

In addition there are two organizations with two sets of photographs and two different movies. This therefore introduces some elements of a comparative case study to my research approach.

In this chapter I outline how the research was conducted, introduce the research sites, those involved, the issues and challenges I faced as a researcher, and the approach I adopted to data analysis.

## **Doing feminist research**

### *Feminist positioning*

There is no single feminist methodology, a reality highlighted in various social research texts (Neuman 2003; Punch 2005; Sarantakos 1993) and named by Shulamit Reinharz (1992) as a plurality of research approaches. While one of Reinharz's working definitions of feminist research is research conducted by feminists, there is more to it than that. As Lather (1991:71) puts it:

To do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry...feminist researchers see gender as a basic organising principle which profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives...through the questions that feminism poses and the absence it locates, feminism argues the centrality of gender in shaping our consciousness, skills and institutions as well as the distribution of power and privilege.

This LDW study, built on the understanding of gender as socially constructed and the organization as inherently gendered, is, by its very focus of inquiry feminist research. Linked to the centrality of gender is the understanding that feminists work towards social change (Reinharz 1992), in my case the goal of developing women leaders and creating more gender equitable workplaces. Moreover, 'research should contribute to women's liberation through producing knowledge that can be used by women themselves' (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983:423). While this knowledge production can be more easily claimed

for the LDW program itself, the research seeks to extend this process through the research interviews, which provide an opportunity for further reflection and inquiry.

Much of the feminist literature has an exclusive focus on researching women's lives and, as expressed in the quote above, a commitment to empowering women. In the LDW study, this goal is extended to encompass men as well as women, for two connected reasons. I believe women *and* men need to be emancipated from the gendering processes that constrain them in the roles they can play in the workplace, the home and society. I also believe that men, as the more powerful organizational actors, are critical partners in building more gender equitable workplaces.

### ***Researching gender and the gendered organization***

As discussed in Chapter Two, gender and gendering are dynamic and situated practices that are intertwined with power and enacted by individuals within organizational contexts. In organizations, gendered (asymmetrical) power relations are rarely discussed, often practiced unreflexively, and most often normalised and unquestioned. As Acker (1990; 1992) argues, gender(ing) is made irrelevant and invisible within organizational settings. Hence the task of researching gender and the gendered organization is best served by qualitative methods that can uncover individual practices and aspects of organizational life that are covert, hidden, or silenced.

Researching the gendered organization requires an awareness of gender as structural but it also means paying attention to how systemic processes shape and are shaped by the individual experience of gender in organizational life. This is what Morley (1999:5) refers to as micropolitics or 'the ways in which power is relayed in everyday practices'.

In much the same way that the bifocal approach demands a facility in moving between the women and the organization, this research must skip backwards and forwards between the gendering practices of individuals and the broader gendered organizational culture of which they are a part. It is through the practices, individually and collectively, of doing gender that we come to see the gendered organization in action. This is akin to peering through the individual accounts to glimpse the gendered organization beyond.

Qualitative methods provide tools for exploring individual experience and thereby revealing the larger organizational picture. As Punch (1998:243) observes, qualitative methods are 'sensitive to context, and process, to lived experience and to local

## Researching the 'bifocal approach'

groundedness, and the researcher tries to get closer to what is being studied' allowing for a more 'in-depth' and 'holistic understanding'.

Importantly, the use of rich interview data within a case study approach facilitates the exploration of individual agency within the gendered organization. As Colley (2003:4, original emphasis) expresses it, 'I wanted to keep both social structures and individual agency in view, because what interests me most is the *interplay* of the two – their dialectical relationship...'

Researching the specificity of gendering within the organization will contribute to understanding gendering processes and organizational change, while the comparison across organizations will further develop the bifocal approach and its generalisability to other organizational settings. Rather than limiting generalisability, Colley (2003:4) in her mentoring case study noted that:

When they [case studies] are clearly contextualized and integrated into a theoretical framework...their evidence becomes transferable to other instances, and this in turn allows advances in theoretical understanding.

Also canvassed in Chapter Two were some of the inherent difficulties in gender interventions, where resistance and backlash are expected and gains, if any, may be small. In addition to being well suited to capturing small changes, a qualitative approach allows the unexpected to emerge. Being attentive to unexpected gendering processes, to what is not said, to failure, may be as important as capturing positive change (Acker 2006).

## Research Approach

My dual positioning, on the one hand as the researcher examining the effectiveness of the bifocal approach and on the other hand immersed as a practitioner in the delivery of the LDW program and development of the bifocal approach, together define the approach to this research. As the researcher I interviewed champions, mentors and participants. As the practitioner/facilitator I am a participant observer, drawing on my experiences and observations. A further important source of data was found in institutional documents, program records, notes, media reports and publications specific to the two organizations. Together these three sources of data informed each other, becoming invaluable for cross referencing or triangulating the accounts I developed.

I will refer to the interview data collected in my researcher role as the 'formal research'. In using the term 'formal research' to denote the data gathered through interviews, I am not

wishing to ascribe more legitimacy to this as a research process per se, but rather am acknowledging that this research project and ethics approval were designed around the interviews and this is what the two participating organizations agreed to. This therefore is the data I wish to foreground. The interview data in turn has always been informed and added to by my involvement in the LDW project, evolving and changing over time.

### *Foregrounding the photographs against the movie backdrop*

I searched for an analogy<sup>1</sup> that might describe my experience of the two roles I occupy within the research, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Perhaps it is like the difference between being a stills photographer and a movie camera operator on a film set. As a stills photographer I have some control, briefly. I can breeze onto the (interview) set at a pre-arranged time, take my photos/record my data and return to the studio to develop/analyse what I have captured during that moment in time. I can choose my subjects and I have their time and attention and agreement to participate. They may have even given some thought to the image or identity they want me to capture. I can control the camera and lighting, perhaps arrange a pleasing composition in the photographs/data. I can zoom in on the detail that interests me and change angles to better capture the 'right' images. Once the interview is over, I have my photographic data, and I can examine them in different ways, 'photoshop' them perhaps to create the best 'look' or 'fit' for my (research) purpose. I might notice different things each time I return to them, depending on my current level of involvement and relationships with other key players in the (moviemaking) production. This is my experience as researcher. It is bounded, producing a finite set of data that sits as the foreground against a dynamic backdrop.

As the practitioner, I feel more like one of several movie camera operators in the thick of the filmmaking/research production but with much less control than I had in the previous scenario. I am not the Producer, the Director or even the Director of Photography. I cannot control the cast, the script, the lighting – I am just one of many contributors to the overall organizational LDW production, a process which goes on whether I am present or not. It is dynamic and chaotic, the script undergoes frequent changes and actors/participants come and go. There is a lot going on and I can only capture so much imagery and dialogue. I therefore have to make choices about what I focus on and what gets left out of the picture. So, I do exercise some power but it is constrained, and sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> I credit Jennifer Binns with the photograph versus movie idea, which I develop here.

contested, by the way others on set deploy power, especially those with positional authority. I am not usually involved in the final editing or crafting of the organizational LDW story that is being told. While I take my own version of events away with me, seen through the lens of my movie camera, it is only one possible version from amongst many possibilities.

The formal research that I have described as the stills photographs takes place against the backdrop of my ongoing practice, the movie making.

This combination of roles brings with it the significant advantages of 'working at the intersection of scholarship and practice' (Rapoport et al. 2002:196). The research question has evolved out of practice and gets to the core of the dilemma for WO programs and their capacity to contribute to current gender equity issues in the workplace. There is a close relationship between theory and practice, and the research is grounded in both. This makes the research more applicable and pre-existing links with practitioners make it easy to disseminate the research back to practitioners.

I bring a much longer view of the organizations and the programs to the research than would ordinarily be possible, with my role as practitioner at UWA spanning ten years and my role at police spanning five years. As practitioner/participant observer I bring pre-knowledge of organizational culture and practices, history, and organizational players, as well as established credibility and working relationships that made access to the organizations and participants relatively unproblematic. Organizational documents collected in this role covered the entire timeframe of the program in each organization. My practitioner role facilitated the research process while contributing length, breadth and depth to the organizational and LDW accounts. This added insight, richness and context would otherwise be absent.

### ***The 'practitioner story' behind the research***

Every researcher brings what Joyce Fletcher (2001) refers to as the story behind the story. Making this story visible, in my case making my practitioner story in particular visible to the reader, is an important cornerstone in feminist research. For Fletcher (2001:7-8), knowing the story or standpoint of the researcher is important for three reasons. Firstly, 'because all research...is value-laden and cannot escape being influenced by the history, life situation, and particular worldview of the researcher'; secondly, because the 'standpoint of the

## Chapter Four

researcher can be a significant source of new knowledge'; and, thirdly, because 'it invites readers to join the interpretive process as partners'.

My practitioner role was not the same in each organization, neither was it static. For most of the duration of this research I retained my role as developer and facilitator of LDW programs: as an organizational staff member 'insider' at UWA and a consultant 'outsider' at police. However, by the end of 2009 I was no longer involved in either organization. At the start of the research in 2006 we were beginning the third year of LDW at Police. However at the end of 2008, after five LDW programs, our contract was not renewed and the program was discontinued. At UWA when I began my PhD in 2006 I continued to lead the LDW program, on a fractional basis. In 2007 I was partially replaced and began educating my successor, and in 2008 I resigned. My final involvement was delivering the core program as a consultant in 2009.

I am not attempting to claim objectivity as a researcher. As Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983:425) emphasise '[a] feminist methodology must, therefore, deal with the issues of objectivity in social science'. As the researcher, I am located within the research as embodied, and therefore gendered (Pullen 2006), rather than as an objective outsider (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983; Fine 1994). My identity becomes an asset within the research, repairing the 'pseudo-objectivity' found in mainstream research (Reinharz 1992:258). Reinharz (1992) considers this blurring of the boundaries between the research project and the researcher's life as an important characteristic of feminist research. It means I do not need to (try to) draw lines in the sand between my practitioner and researcher selves. I am not required to put my feminist activist project of building more gender equitable workplaces on hold to become the 'objective researcher'.

More important than striving for an unachievable objectivity is making my positioning visible and explicit, recognising this research as situated and partial knowledge (Haraway 1988). Making myself visible is necessary to avoid what Haraway (1988) describes as the 'God trick' where the disembodied researcher presents the view from nowhere. In contrast, this research must present the view from somewhere.

For me, this is an empowering and enabling position that reflects the reality of my life, which is that my practitioner and researcher selves are inextricably woven, part of the same cloth. They are both part of me, informing, critiquing and moderating each other. Earlier, using the filmmaking and photographer analogy, I tried to make a clear distinction between my researcher and practitioner selves. While it is important to distinguish between them to

understand the research approach I have taken, I now wish to blur the boundaries of these selves.

### *Intertwining research and practice*

As a practitioner I was frequently involved in research projects such as evaluations and I also engaged in practice as research. My intention was always to theoretically enliven my own practice and the practice of others. I used 'some of the principles of action research as a method for developing effective professional practice' (Eden & Huxham 1996:528). This includes a focus on generating theory with implications beyond the specific project or situation and an explicit valuing of theory with a focus on theory elaboration and development 'to inform a more reliable and robust development of practice' (Eden & Huxham 1996:531). My experience concurred with Punch's (2005) description of the iterations of theory and practice as constantly spiralling and unfolding. Eden and Huxham (1996:531) highlight 'the notion of drawing out theory', emphasising that 'the researcher needs to be committed to opening up the frame within which the research situation and the data related to it are explored', recognising that the researcher appropriately brings some pre-understanding, a starting theoretical position to the theory development process. This iterative process of theory development or 'emergent theory' is demonstrated in how I developed the 'bifocal approach'.

It would be possible to claim the larger LDW intervention and my practitioner role with LDW as Participatory Action Research. However, this research study does not claim to be and was not designed as this. It does not include the central tenet of action research because the formal study was not designed as a change intervention. The LDW intervention was already well underway and to a large extent continued undisturbed by the formal research. The formal research was designed to collect data, through interviews, that were not normally available as part of the ongoing LDW intervention. Importantly, organizational access was granted for the interview data collection, not for intervening in the LDW program. One advantage of this design was that in making the formal study distinct and removed from the ongoing program it could remain separate from the organizational politics surrounding LDW. I was free to follow my intellectual curiosity rather than be constrained by any organizational agendas. Neither organization had input into the research focus or design and neither imposed reporting requirements.

### ***Reflexivity in research***

My embeddedness in the research, the blurring of boundaries between research and practice, my genderedness while studying gender, all of these characteristics of the research and many more demand a capacity for reflexivity. There is no illusion of separateness:

We work to create and achieve new structures and processes, but as gendered (and sexed) beings we are a reflection and a product of the very structures – personal political and professional – that we seek to change (Rao, Stuart & Kelleher 1999:224).

But if researchers are enmeshed in the phenomenon they seek to study, how then do they gain the critical insights that are necessary for change to occur? Rather than seeing this as a problem, it can be reframed as an asset. As Virginia Olesen (2000:229) argues, the researcher's cultural embeddedness:

...leads to strong arguments for 'strongly reflexive' accounts about the researcher's own part in the research... 'the cultural self' that every researcher takes into her or his work is no longer a troublesome element to be eradicated or controlled, but rather a set of resources.

This raises the question of what it means to practice reflexive research. According to Louise Morley (1999:19), reflexivity

demands emotional and theoretical literacy on the part of the researcher, who can engage sensitively with the research study while/because s/he is aware of her/his own responses, values, beliefs.

Judi Marshall (1984; 1995) role models for me someone who scrupulously examines her own role in the research, returning to this again and again at different stages in the research process, as exemplified in her books, *Women managers: Travellers in a male world* and *Women Managers Moving On*. I have tried to emulate her example, cultivating reflexivity or aware subjectivity in this research. I think of this as applying the process of mindfulness, 'paying attention without judgement' (Sinclair 2007:15) to the research, a practice I was coincidentally exploring and endeavouring to develop during this time. This requires practice and is helpful in cultivating a preparedness to stay open and look again and again at the interactions, the transcripts, my analyses, my assumptions, the accounts I developed and the conclusions I reached.

In particular I was aware of my multiple identities and how they play out in the research process. As a staff member at UWA, an important part of my LDW role was strategically positioning the program to succeed, not only to be a good program but to be seen as a good program by important others, ensuring funding and support. As consultants at police

we were 'selling' the virtues of the program (and ourselves as designers and facilitators), making it worthy of funding year after year. In both cases my professional reputation was linked to the success of the program. This might incline me towards an uncritical and positive account, something that, perhaps not coincidentally, the WO (practitioner) literature is swamped with. Anita Devos (2004b:610), an Australian colleague finding herself in a similar position, describes these conflicting identity positions:

As a strategic political act, I will seek out performance measures that place the participants and the programme in the best possible light. As an academic...I acknowledge my investment in the success of the Programme and in my being seen in turn as successful. As a feminist researcher and activist, however I do not subscribe to liberal discourse...

It was important to carry this awareness of my 'role conflict' with me. It certainly eased over time, particularly when I was no longer employed by either organization. Immersion in the literature and the research and writing process further developed the critical stance I had always brought to my practitioner role.

While my aim was to utilise my own knowledges and practices developed over more than a decade of LDW practice in this research, this was more difficult than I imagined. My challenge in 'going native' (Punch 2005:183) or more accurately 'being native' (at UWA) has been to be able to make visible these knowledges and to incorporate them explicitly in this research as they have become progressively less remarkable and notable to me over time. Others, for example my supervisor, knew what I knew and could make it more visible to me. In addition, the discipline of writing and rewriting proved enormously helpful. This is just one example of where my assumptions needed to be surfaced, and it illustrates that reflexivity is not always a solitary pursuit.

### **Research sites**

This research contains elements of a comparative case study in that it examines the bifocal approach as applied in two different organizational contexts. The two organizations were chosen because they both had LDW programs that had been in place for a number of years. The university was the developmental 'home' of the program. By way of contrast, introducing the program into policing meant a steep learning curve with rich insights for program development and refinement. The contrast between the two organizations helped to surface assumptions while policing, as the more overtly masculine and less familiar site, provided the 'in your face' expressions of gender and the gendered organization that stretched our thinking. As Kronsell (2005) observes, institutions such as policing are

valuable sites for researching gender because hegemonic masculinity is so normalised that it provides stark examples of gendering practices, often undisguised because of their normality. Because organizational gendering processes are highly contextual and nuanced, finding different expression in the two organizational types and two specific organizations represented here, the capacity to contrast the research findings adds to the robustness of the study. Both organizational types have attracted significant research attention, providing a body of comparative literature within which to locate the research.

### ***Male professors and policemen***

A university and a policing organization may seem worlds apart. Each has a specific gendered structure and form, a product of history and current practices, with particular horizontal and vertical gender segregation. However, they share some common features relevant to this study. Both institutions have historically been male domains where women's roles were to support the men. Each has a dominant group or 'privileged class', academics and police officers (referred to as sworn) respectively, which have historically been male preserves.

Women who dared to enter as academics or police officers have often failed to thrive in these male dominated organizations. As Joan Eveline (1996:67) points out, 'women who desire to enter, penetrate, get into or occupy jobs in which men predominate are going to face retaliation when acting out that desire'. Jane Roland Martin (1999) characterises women in higher education as 'Immigrants to the Promised Land', where women are brutally filtered out, with few entering unscathed. Frances Heidensohn (1992:42) provides a different analogy for policing:

...women's entry into policing is a version of The Secret Garden in which some uppity women laid siege to a male preserve and gained admittance, only to find themselves regularly being excluded from most of the garden's primary activities for more than fifty years.

Women were not admitted easily, in large numbers, or without personal cost, to the institutions that were studied here.

In both organizations highly feminised, low status and low pay support roles were identified by what they were not, being referred to as *non* academic and *unsworn* staff respectively. This gender segregation of roles echoed the public/private domain, with men in command in the public arena and with women doing domestic support in the private world.

The particular university and police service studied had one other thing in common. Both had the worst statistics for academic women and policewomen respectively in Australia at the time of the inception of the LDW program. In each case this poor showing relative to their Australian counterparts provided a great deal of the impetus that contributed to the implementation of the LDW programs.

Neither organization type is seen as responsive to organizational change. Policing, a 'command and control' hierarchically based organization, seems far removed in organizational culture from a university, traditionally more decentralised with more collegial decision making (although this is rapidly changing due to New Public Management reforms, see Blackmore & Sachs 2007; Currie, Thiele & Harris 2002). The command and control nature of policing might suggest that, with a supportive CEO, gender equity reforms could easily be pushed through the organization. However, Karl Weick's (1976) work on loosely coupled systems emphasises that much is overlooked in assuming that organizations behave in rational, tidy, efficient and co-ordinated ways. In contrast, thinking of organizations as loosely coupled, where the centre and the periphery may be loosely linked but not changed by the other, serves to explain why business as usual can operate in apparently tightly controlled organizations, despite policy reforms and pressures to change (Hallett & Ventresca 2006). Studies of both universities (Lutz 1982; Modell 2003) and police organizations (Jermier et al. 1991) have concluded that they are loosely coupled systems which are resistant to centrally driven top down change.

### ***A 'sandstone' University: The University of Western Australia***

The introduction of LDW in Chapter Three provided a significant amount of information regarding UWA and the historical context for the program. This has already served to highlight UWA's sustained commitment (from 1990 to the present) to building a more gender equitable university. This is in large part due to an unusual degree of championing of gender equity from the top, through successive Vice-Chancellors and Deputy Vice-Chancellors, beginning with the second ever appointment of a female Vice-Chancellor in Australia, Professor Fay Gale in 1990 (Eveline 2004; Eveline 2005). The other defining aspect to UWA's culture is its elitism. Both characteristics – elitism and gender equity - are extremely highly valued by the VC. However the ways in which these key characteristics may be antithetical or in tension with each other remains apparently unnoticed and undiscussed.

## Chapter Four

UWA is a member of the Group of Eight Australian research intensive universities and the original sandstone university in Western Australia. According to Eveline (2004:21), '[t]he prestige of tradition envelops those sandstones, but they can be viewed as elitist with entrenched hierarchies'. The current goal of the university, to be ranked in the top 50 universities of the world by 2050, seeks to build on this elitism, benchmarking UWA against the world's best (UWA News 1 December 2008:4). The recent Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) audit commended UWA for this 'bold vision' and the 'degree of ownership staff have of the UWA vision' (UWA News 27 July 2009:4).

UWA's gender equity journey is well documented, with a strong contrast evident between the university Gale inherited and the UWA of today. A poignantly written account of women staff at UWA by Patricia Crawford and Myrna Tonkinson (1988), *The Missing Chapters*, detailed the years from 1963 to 1987. With issues such as women's compulsory resignations upon marriage and equal pay for equal work for administrative staff both unresolved until the 1970s, it painted a picture of entrenched historical male privilege. The Status of Women's Group (SWG) was active through the 1980s and 1990s in fighting for women's rights and was instrumental in the appointment of the first Equity Officer and in establishing childcare on campus. However, the legacy of the not-so-distant past was certainly strongly evident in the already noted 'bottom of the pile' statistics of the early 1990s.

Fay Gale, with the assistance of her Deputy Alan Robson, began a process of gender reform. This included overhauling the recruitment, selection, promotion and tenure processes (Eveline 2004; Todd & Bird 2000) and the instigation of a number of internal reviews of the position of women academic staff (University of Western Australia 1995b; University of Western Australia 1997) and general staff (University of Western Australia 1997) (see Eveline 2004; Stuart 1999 for further commentary). The implementation of LDW took place in the midst of this reform process.

UWA now prides itself on its progressive and innovative gender equity (and equity more broadly) policies and practices, and has been acknowledged through various awards and accolades, including National Employer of Choice for Women for eight consecutive years (UWA News 25 March 2008). At the VC's Christmas drinks in 2008, when wrapping up the year, Robson began the list of university achievements with the national Diversity@Work Large Business Champion Award before going on to note UWA's clean sweep of the WA Premier's Science awards. Relative to other Australian HE institutions, UWA would be seen as, and claims to be, a mature institution in terms of its commitment,

policies and practical initiatives in addressing staff gender equity issues ([www.equity.uwa.edu.au/welcome/about\\_equity\\_and\\_diversity\\_at\\_uwa](http://www.equity.uwa.edu.au/welcome/about_equity_and_diversity_at_uwa)).

Statistical gains are significant in comparison to the 1990s data, but remain modest when compared against sector benchmarking statistics. In 2008 women comprised 39% of academic staff at UWA (up from 22% in 1994) and 14.8% of professors (up from 2.7% in 1994). Women make up 65.7% of professional staff and represent 48.6% of senior levels HEW 9 and above. Cross sector comparisons in 2008 (QUT Equity Section 2009) show UWA remains below sector averages on women's representation in senior professional staff, academic staff, and senior academic staff. However, the rate of improvement (2003 – 2008) in all cases has been above the sector average. Female professors are well below the sector average of 20.95, placing UWA 8<sup>th</sup> lowest relative to all other universities.

Gender pay gap findings based on average salaries show a gender pay gap favouring men of 15.0% for academic staff and 11.9% for professional staff in 2008, compared with an industry average of 16.8%. Staff allowances paid on top of salaries for close to a quarter of academic and professional staff further exacerbate this gap. Allowances for academic staff show a gender gap of 28.4%, and for professional staff this gender gap is 55.2% (University of Western Australia 2009).

### ***The policing research site***

The policing jurisdiction is anonymous in this thesis. To preserve anonymity, the geographical location and other readily identifying information was removed from references. The reasons for and difficulties in preserving anonymity are returned to later in this chapter. The following account presents the history and context that resulted in the implementation of the LDW program in 2004. This also paints a picture of the situation for women within this police jurisdiction.

The policing jurisdiction was experiencing intense internal and external scrutiny of the place of women within policing in the early 2000s. The lowest participation rate of policewomen in any state in Australia, at 13.1% in 2000, was one factor among several providing impetus for change. The absence of senior women was stark at this time, with only one recently commissioned<sup>2</sup> officer at the relatively junior level of Inspector.

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<sup>2</sup> In the policing rank structure, all staff at Inspector level and above are referred to as Commissioned Officers.

## Chapter Four

The policing jurisdiction had an active Women's Advisory Network (WAN), established in 1999, however it was the last of all the states to do so. WAN fitted what Colgan and Ledwith (1996:28, based on Tomlinson (1987) ) described as a 'conservative' women's organization that 'wished to act moderately, present a 'safe image' by avoiding the label 'feminist' and involve men'.

The Department of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment (Saunders 2002) had recently completed research on examining the barriers for sworn (police officer) women in this policing jurisdiction. Saunders (2002:23) noted that women 'are judged against male expectations of appropriate behaviour, work styles, professional standards, attitudes and leadership styles.' One of Saunders' (2002:24) respondents noted:

The challenge for us is to ensure our female officers are allowed to carry out the business of policing in their own style, and to stick to their own standards.

Saunders (2002:75) herself stressed

...the urgency of addressing the gender bias, negative practices and unacceptable harassing behaviours outlined in this report...the systematic elimination of these biased systems, practices and behaviours is the minimum required to achieve a 'level playing field'.

The *Royal Commission into Corrupt or Criminal Conduct* focussed on the entrenched culture within policing as the underlying impediment to progress on gender equity:

Underlying the capacity of many of the plans for the improvement of the position of women in the Police Service is the need to change the culture of the organisation. The attitudes of indifference to issues facing female officers, of intolerance to female officers and a degree of disrespect for their ability have been very much entrenched in the culture of the Police Service. Similar negative aspects of police culture have been identified as a fundamental cause of both corrupt conduct and its ability to continue undisclosed (Royal Commission 2004:93).

Of interest in this excerpt is the direct link made between negative aspects of police culture, disrespect for women and corruption. Two other interstate Royal Commissions have concluded that there was a direct relationship between increasing the number of women police officers and reducing levels of corruption, despite little evidence to support this (Fleming & Lafferty 2003:39,47).

Pru Goward, the Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner at the time of the Royal Commission, endorsed the need for 'women only' opportunities. She described police agencies 'as sexually hostile environments', emphasising the need for 'women in such male-

dominated environments communicating and networking with one another on a range of issues such as work and family and promotional opportunities' (Royal Commission 2004:95).

Internal scrutiny came in the shape of an extensive research project, strongly supported by the Commissioner of the time, conducted in partnership with a university to examine the gendered workplace culture of policing (Harwood 2007) (referred to in this thesis as the *Gender research project*). The action research process engaged police officers and public service officers in multiple project teams to investigate a range of gender equity issues. An Equality Implementation Group was established to oversee the resulting comprehensive raft of recommendations.

Implementing the LDW program was one of those recommendations. Other 'quick win' recommendations, designed to get the implementation phase off to a good start, included WO public service officer scholarships for development opportunities and a WO mentoring scheme. The introduction of these WO initiatives prompted significant internal backlash with threats of complaints to the Equal Opportunity Commission. The newly incumbent Commissioner of Police (a participant in this study) stepped in to defend and endorse the initiatives. LDW was launched with great fanfare by the new Commissioner with many of the top echelon in attendance. The LDW program, specifically chosen because of its emphasis on culture change, was the first WO program in Australasian policing.

The proportion of women police officers in this jurisdiction has been improving slowly from the very low base of 13.1% in 2000 to 15.4% in 2002/3 and 19.7% by 2008 (still the lowest in Australia according to the 2007 HR Benchmarking report). In 2004 when LDW began, there was one female Superintendent and two Inspectors. Not long after the LDW program was launched, a more senior woman arrived from an interstate jurisdiction. By 2008 there were 16 senior women at Inspector level and above, representing just 9% of senior officers. In 2007<sup>3</sup> women were 27% of new recruits, 22% of Constables but only 7% at the next level of Sergeants, showing overwhelming compression into junior ranks<sup>4</sup>.

Women comprised 61% of public service officers in this police jurisdiction in 2000, with 90% clustered at the lowest levels of 1-3, and were 59% by 2006 (Australian Institute of

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<sup>3</sup> Police Officer rank headcount as at April 30, 2007 (internal document).

<sup>4</sup> Police ranking (from lowest to highest) Constable, Senior Constable, Sergeant, Senior Sergeant, Inspector, Superintendent, Assistant Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Commissioner of Police.

Criminology 2006). Data by level for public service officers was not available on this website or in documents I had access to from HR, reflecting considerably less concern and scrutiny of the status of women in this less visible group.

### ***When the research began***

In 2006 when the research project began, the LDW program's bifocal approach, as described in Chapter Three, was essentially the same in both institutions. However the story of the program in those two institutions was very different. In particular UWA and police were at very different stages in their gender reform journeys and the program itself was much more deeply embedded within the institution at UWA.

It was the twelfth year of LDW at UWA and the program was still going strong, always oversubscribed and institutionally well regarded. The 14<sup>th</sup> cohort program (two years had double intakes) commenced in 2006 bringing the total of women who had participated to more than 400. Fifteen percent of female staff had participated in LDW (11% of professional staff and 24% of academic staff) at that time. By 2006, 219 mentors had been involved. Strong support from the top continued with 76 senior mentors (Heads of School, Deans, Executive, and Directors), most of these male (Webb 2008). Almost half of the 219 mentors had repeat mentored, with 35% mentoring two or three times, 10% mentoring four or more times and the VC having mentored nine times (Webb 2008:491).

The LDW program celebrated its tenth anniversary with a series of events in 2004/2005, culminating in a Tenth Anniversary Dinner in the newly opened University Club, attended by the then retired former VC Fay Gale and with a keynote address by Professor Joanne Martin of Stanford University. An edited volume, *More than the sum of its parts: 10 years of the LDW programme at UWA*, was launched by VC Alan Robson. The publication celebrated, documented, evaluated and researched various aspects of the program.

The Executive landscape had changed, with Alan Robson now VC. The Executive group for a short time (parts of 2004 and 2005) was gender balanced with three men and three women (UWA News 19 April 2004:7). The recruitment of several new staff to the Executive and the restructuring of Executive roles resulted in greater adherence to reporting lines and less direct access by LDW to Executive members, something to be explored in greater detail in Chapter Five. LDW began to experience funding difficulties, with a non-indexed recurrent one-line budget that had not kept pace with increased costs,

in particular salaries. The program was not successful in its requests for top-up funding from this time onwards.

Police, in contrast, was beginning its third LDW cohort program in 2006. Sixty women, police officers and public service officers<sup>5</sup>, had completed the program and 51 mentors, predominantly male police officers, were involved in the first two years. Already much of the momentum generated by the *Gender research project* and the external scrutiny had been lost. The Equality Implementation Group had ceased to exist. It was to have been replaced by a Diversity Implementation Group that never materialised. The WO mentoring scheme was opened up to men and the scholarships lapsed, apparently due to a lack of interest.

The LDW program survived, protected by a three year contract, but the visibility of the program was much reduced. LDW was losing some of the 'frills' enjoyed in the first two years (exemplified by the downgrading of the room and the catering) and we were onto our third in-house co-ordinator. The Planning Group composition constantly changed, and the group seemed unable to gel and mature sufficiently to take leadership of the program.

Lines of responsibility between line management at the Police Academy (where the program and co-ordinator were located) and the Planning Group remained unresolved.

During the third LDW program, as we were shunted from room to room, it became harder and harder to imagine that LDW in policing would ever attain the institutional stature achieved at UWA. However, the women attending the program appreciated the opportunity and from this perspective the program was going well.

## **Ethics, access and participation**

Gaining access to organizational sites and research participants was unproblematic in both institutions. Following UWA ethics approval, consent was sought from the two organizations for the research to proceed. In the case of UWA, this approval was granted by the LDW Planning Group and at policing, directly from the Commissioner. Both organizations were proud of their LDW programs and saw them as 'good news' stories.

LDW was a flagship program for UWA and there was no need for the institution's identity to be kept confidential. The ability to identify the institution allowed a great deal of additional material, specific to UWA, to be used in the research. The Police Commissioner was also unperturbed by issues of institutional anonymity; however, I offered a degree of

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<sup>5</sup> Public service officers previously referred to as 'unsworn'.

## Chapter Four

anonymity, achieved through not revealing geographical jurisdiction, while revealing the nature of the organization's business. This was based on protecting potentially identifiable individuals rather than the organization itself. Identifying the policing context allows me to draw on research work previously conducted in policing environments.

There are practical difficulties in maintaining anonymity for policing. Readers of this thesis who are familiar with policing in the Australian context and who wish to work out the identity of the policing jurisdiction involved could easily do so. I have proceeded on the basis of not revealing information in this thesis that directly identifies the policing department, and have taken care to check back with the most identifiable individuals regarding what I have written.

At UWA I have identified by name, with their permission, the three members of the Executive who took part in the research. Once the institution was named, their identity was immediately obvious. All other UWA research participants have pseudonyms. At policing all research participants are referred to by pseudonym. The pseudonyms used were chosen by the LDW participants, while the remainder were assigned.

Following organizational approval, I contacted individuals by email requesting their participation. The ethics form was attached to provide the necessary information to inform their consent, and I followed up by phone call. All champions and mentors approached agreed to participate and were gracious in making time for the interview. Peer learning group (PLG) members saw the invitation to participate as a compliment to their group's success and an opportunity or excuse to organize a reunion. However several PLG meetings were difficult to organize, eventually requiring two further groups to be approached. Times and places were organized that suited the circumstances of the individual or the group. Some negotiation about the place of interview occurred if their suggested environment (a busy coffee shop) would be detrimental to the audio recording and eventual accuracy of the transcription.

Participants differed markedly in their concerns regarding the confidentiality of their interview data. The majority of research participants were very relaxed concerning issues of confidentiality, showing little interest in checking transcripts or knowing how the data would be used. No UWA participants expressed concern. Female police officers were the exception, understandably given that they were so few and therefore more readily identifiable. I am intensely aware that these women experience enormous scrutiny because

of their presence in such small numbers and do not want to add to this. Several made comments that they indicated were off the record and this has been respected.

## Research participants

Three categories of participants took part in this research across two organizations, as summarised in the table below. At UWA, participants totalled 24, six men and 18 women; and in policing a total of 19 participants, six men and 13 women took part. Across both organizations there were six executive champions, 14 mentors, and 23 participants from six peer learning groups, taking the total number of interviewees to 43.

**Table 1 Summary of Research Participants**

	UWA		Policing		Total Research participants
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
<b>Champions</b>	1	2	1	2	6
<b>Mentors</b>	4	4	2	4	14
<b>PLG participants</b>	13 (3 groups)		10 (3 groups)		23
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>43</b>

### *Champions*

Executive level champions were chosen at each organization, according to their level (CEO level, direct reports to CEO and/or part of Executive team) and their degree of involvement in the program. This included people who were organizationally endorsed or nominated as LDW champions as well as those who undertook the role voluntarily. Due to my involvement in both organizations it was clear who these people were. They played a public role in activities such as launching, endorsing, protecting, funding, and supporting the LDW program.

At UWA the three champions were the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alan Robson; the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Margaret Seares; and the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Education, Professor Belinda Probert. Professor Probert was interviewed by phone as she had recently left the university. All three were members of the Executive team of six. At Policing I interviewed the Commissioner, a man; and two Assistant Commissioners, one man, one woman. I have given them pseudonyms – Mark, Geoff and Cecilia respectively.

All six champions come from the higher status, dominant and privileged staff groups of academics and police officers respectively.

### ***Mentors***

Only mentors who had mentored twice or more were considered for inclusion in the research, as I expected some depth of experience in the role would be helpful for their contribution to the research. This restricted my sample at policing, which in turn influenced my sampling at UWA.

At policing, where three LDW cohort groups had completed the program (2004 to 2006), this resulted in a possible pool of 20. Two were interviewed as champions and therefore excluded from the mentor group. The remaining 18 comprised 12 male and one female police officer, plus five male public service officers. The mentor group reflected the dominant staff group and dominant gender, making it impossible to get a balanced sample of women and men across staff groups. I decided to focus on police officers, as the dominant group, believing them to be the most influential players, and therefore those we would most like to engage in the change agenda. I eliminated two men with whom I did not have a cordial relationship on the grounds that they would be less likely to be open with me about their mentoring experience, another who was suspended, and used a random number generator to select four out of the remaining nine, plus the one female. A year later I located and interviewed one more female mentor, who had by then mentored twice, to provide more gender balance. The six mentors included three male and one female Superintendent and one male and one female Inspector.

At UWA, applying the same criteria of those who had mentored on two or more occasions and who were still employed at UWA yielded a list of 69. Thirteen of these were excluded due to their involvement in previous research on mentoring reported elsewhere (de Vries 2005; de Vries, Webb & Eveline 2006). The research area was similar and prior reflection may have biased the results. Two champions were excluded, with 54 remaining: nine academic men, 26 academic women, four professional male staff and 15 professional female staff. The profile of repeat mentors at UWA is skewed towards academic staff (44 out of 69), the dominant group and therefore similar to Policing but dominated by women (49 out of 69). In part this predominance of women mentors at UWA is due to the heavy involvement of previous LDW participants in subsequent mentoring of more junior program participants. Also, as the program progresses over time we naturally search deeper into the organization (thus accessing more women) to find mentors and to avoid overburdening senior staff.

## Researching the 'bifocal approach'

To provide some comparability to the police sample, I decided to select senior (Associate Professor or above) academics only. This resulted in a list of nine women and seven men. I chose the four men with the most recent experience (post 2000), deleted one woman with dated experience and then used random numbers to select the four women. All four of the women selected were previous LDW participants, (three between 1994 to 1997, the other in 2002). This is not surprising given the number of senior women who have participated in the program over the years. This means they had a greater degree of familiarity and connection with the LDW program. All eight mentors were professors, two in central senior management positions and six in Faculties. Six had mentored twice, one had mentored three times and one four times.

Once I began interviewing, I realised that there was a surprising over-representation of mentors from the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry (4 out of 8). Medicine and Dentistry staff are the most likely of all UWA staff to be located off the main campus, in hospitals and medical research institutes. They often have a more tenuous sense of connection with the university due to their location and their multiple roles, which may include hospital appointments. Two of the four women were from non-traditional areas, and two were in what one of the interviewees referred to as 'Cinderella' areas, that are female dominated areas within a more broadly masculinised area.

### ***Peer learning groups***

Peer learning groups for the research were identified by the in-house LDW co-ordinators, who were asked to provide lists of groups each knew had continued to meet or stay in touch following the completion of the LDW program year. At UWA I added the proviso of more recent groups in order to loosely match the policing time-frame. From these lists I approached groups, by emailing the entire group and asking for their involvement as a group. I tried to maximise diversity through group composition, topics and different group years. One group, primarily junior professional staff at UWA, declined as it was a busy time of year and two groups proved too difficult to organize sufficient members to attend (one group was in the middle of a baby boom, the other cancelling twice due to accidents and ill health). I later approached two further groups from the 2007 program (one UWA, one police). All groups were at least one year post program at the time of the interviews.

The following table outlines group topics, group year, group membership and attendance at the group interview. In all 23 women in six groups took part, 13 at UWA and 10 in police.

**Table 2 Peer learning group research participants**

Group title	Year	Original composition	Attendees
UWA peer learning groups			
Stand your ground	2007	4 academic 3 professional staff	3 academic 4* professional staff
How do we define ourselves as leaders?	2006	4 academic 1 professional staff	3 academic
Managing change	2006	5 professional staff	4 professional staff
Police peer learning groups			
Putting ourselves first without fear or guilt	2006	3 police officers	3 police officers
Situational leadership	2007	3 police officers, 1 public service officer	3 police officers
Are flexible staff, committed staff?	2004	4 public service officers 1 police officer	3 public service officers 1 police officer

*\* One staff member changed position from academic to professional staff during the program*

## The interviews

Every research participant in both organizations had met me in my program facilitator role prior to participating in this research. However, there was considerable variation in how well I was known and, no doubt, how I was perceived. According to Reinharz (1992:26), ‘every aspect of a researcher’s identity can impede or enhance empathy’ and this is particularly significant in research that requires interviewing. It can be difficult to know which aspects of identity were coming into play and how my role and (lack of) status in the organizations influenced the interaction.

Broadly speaking my status was very different in the two organizations. In Police I was an outsider. The process of screening and entry to Police Headquarters marked one as an outsider and the reduced familiarity with the surroundings and the individuals made for less comfortable or chatty interviews. Symbols of rank such as stripes and stars on shoulders for example, with the majority of senior police (champions and mentors) in uniform, increased the status differential and emphasised difference. At UWA as an insider, I had established credibility, particularly with senior and executive level staff, through the longevity and success of the LDW program.

Both organizations considered themselves special and unique which placed a premium on insider knowledge and understanding of the organization. Loyalty to each other was strong in policing which in turn influenced levels of disclosure and honesty. Insiders did not wish to be judged by outsiders. The insider/outsider difference in my positioning between the two organizations was most keenly felt in my relationships with executive level champions

and mentors and less keenly felt with LDW participants. Participants got to know me over an extended period of time and there was a degree of friendliness and familiarity with all of the women. My potentially higher status as one of the facilitators was somewhat diminished by the experiential nature of the program and our approach where we did not present ourselves as the experts. However, my role as program facilitator might still have been an issue in terms of disclosure.

My primary means of gathering data from the three different participant groups outlined in Chapter Three was through individual or group interviews (more commonly referred to as focus groups). I chose semi-structured interviews to strike a balance between my desire to cover certain topics while retaining sufficient flexibility to allow new concepts or strands of conversation to emerge (Eden & Huxham 1996). I knew that talking about issues such as gender, the championing role, and the situation for women would be unfamiliar and perhaps uncomfortable territory for some. Aaltio (2002:201) observed that 'gender issues sometimes disappear when a researcher tries to capture them by means of interviews' and that men may be polite, defensive or embarrassed. In most cases I already had some rapport with the interviewee/s and I worked to enhance this and to make the interviews as reciprocal, open and informal as possible. I wanted to create a conversation, an exploration with the interviewee/s that would become an extension of their engagement with LDW. I hoped that the guided conversation would enable a reflexive account from participants, where allowing a conversation to develop would minimise the imposition of my language and concepts.

Separate interview guides for champions, mentors and peer learning groups were developed as part of the ethics requirements, reviewed prior to first interviews and continually refined during the research process, so that each interview was informed by prior experience. My aim was to provide easy entry to the interview, with increasing depth of inquiry as the interview progressed. As I relaxed, the guides came to resemble more of a series of dot points to act as memory joggers for the territory I hoped to cover. The group interviews proved the most challenging and I continued to re-order my prompts seeking a better conversational flow.

Despite my best efforts, some interviews were just that – interviews. Police mentors, in particular, were the least conversational. Executive champion conversations were the most varied in material covered, with champions perhaps best equipped to take the conversation in the direction they wanted to go. I was aware of my status as the junior person in the

## Chapter Four

champion and mentor interviews and in policing I was more aware of my gender than in the university setting.

I chose to use the term 'group interviews', partly to disassociate them from ways in which focus groups have become tainted through use in marketing research, or as a shortcut method of gaining multiple views quickly (Kidd & Parshall 2000). I was interviewing a pre-existing group, not one that was assembled for the purposes of the research. Frances Montell (1999:47) advocates group interviews as an under-utilised feminist research method that combines the 'advantages of participant observation with those of in-depth individual interviewing'. This suited my desire to encourage and observe interactions among group members so as to elicit a fuller account of their experiences and perceptions. Previous experience told me that women were often too modest in claiming successes and that their colleagues may be able to more fully describe changes and breakthroughs. This capacity for individuals to augment each others' accounts seems to be particularly evident where groups have been able to establish trust and a high level of self-disclosure. Montell (1999) found that group members not only told their own story but also questioned and challenged other participants and that this group interaction can lead to richer and more complex information. I was also interested in the group learning process, designed as part of the bifocal approach, so their 'collective experience' was of interest to the research (Rose 2001).

I was very aware of the extended scope and breadth of material I wished to gather from the group interviews and the limited time available, in most cases one and a half hours. I knew that the women would inevitably spend some of the time catching up with each other – a valuable opportunity for me to observe but eating into the interview time. Group interviews also have the potential to be derailed by strong individuals or the group's own agenda (Montell 1999). To round out the interview data should this occur, I compiled a brief data sheet/questionnaire for individuals to fill out, in order to corroborate and extend the interview. As it turned out the individual data sheets mostly served to reinforce what was said during the group interview rather than add new material.

I had notes that were taken during their LDW program and I used these to remind PLGs of salient points regarding their group presentations. In reminding the groups when appropriate of some of these details, I was continuing to model the importance of tracking, naming and celebrating small wins they had along the way, a process which I hoped would also occur during the interview.

All interviewees agreed to be recorded. Following each individual and group interview, I made my own reflective notes, recording my feelings about the interview, thoughts about the content of the interviews, questions or things I was puzzled about, relevant comments made after the recording device had been switched off, incidents that occurred pre or post interview as I was being escorted to and from the office, ways to improve my interviewing, and changes to be made to the interview guide.

All audio recordings were professionally transcribed. I checked each transcript for accuracy against the audio recording, making corrections to the document. This was an opportunity to add to notes taken post interview, as I listened for tone and reflected once more on the interview. Where possible this process occurred before the next interview, allowing the research process to be further refined.

### **Institutional documents and participant observation**

As practitioner I had access to, collected and generated a wide array of documents and records. These included publicity materials and stories from internal staff magazines, Planning Group Agendas and Minutes, published and unpublished evaluation material, program files for each year including workbooks, powerpoint slides, presentation notes, speech notes from launches and PLG final presentations, notes made by my colleague Maggie Leavitt and me during PLG presentations, conference papers, published materials and media reports. At UWA there was a significantly larger body of published materials over a much longer historical timeframe. In policing the media provide an ongoing source of data.

My different positioning at UWA, as an insider for over a decade and in policing as an external consultant for five years, provide a different quality to my participant observer role and data across the two institutions. At policing I always felt like the outsider, and that information presented to us was filtered through layers of loyalty and discretion. At UWA I was an insider, with good networks where I was privileged to hear both formal and perhaps more importantly informal information. But it is not only the information I have access to, it is my own experience of the organizations and the individuals that is incorporated into these accounts.

## Data analysis

In my earlier use of the photographer/researcher analogy, I alluded to the powerful position of the photographer in composing the photographs and choosing the representation of the photo/interview data. Once again my two roles are at play, with my moviemaking/practitioner self contributing a great deal to the 'taking' of the photographs and their subsequent interpretation and presentation. Paying attention to these roles and their interplay and developing reflexivity in this thesis is not designed to remove my subjectivity. I mention it here to emphasise and make visible how I bring myself to the process of sensemaking and to recognise the power of the author in this account.

Each set of interview data (champions, mentors, PLGs) was analysed separately, beginning with a process of goading (Richards 2005), memo writing and manual coding. Goading, according to Richards (2005), involves prodding the data to see what it has to say, using memo writing to follow trains of thought and to see what might emerge. Coding, searching for categories across interviews provides 'ways of interacting with and thinking about the data' (Coffey & Atkinson 1996:30) in order to open the data up. According to Coffey and Atkinson, coding is about '...conceptualising the data, raising questions, providing provisional answers about the relationships among and within the data, and discovering the data' (Coffey & Atkinson 1996:31).

Each analysis became a somewhat different process. I discovered that the champion interviews (after initial thematic coding) and the PLG interviews, due to their limited number, lent themselves more easily to a story-based approach where accounts of each person or group were written separately in order to preserve their particularities and uniqueness. My emphasis became telling a story that captured the most important elements of that person or group interview and letting the story of the multiple interviews unfold over the course of the chapter. In this, I was guided by the process described by Judi Marshall (1995), who emphasises a rigorously reflexive and iterative process to capture the essence of the person.

In contrast, the 14 mentoring interviews were coded more extensively to reveal themes and sub themes (developed into a tree) across all interviews. In all cases I found myself returning to the audio recordings and transcripts repeatedly, listening and re-reading. This occurred not only for the goading and coding processes but also as the chapters took shape. My returning to the data intensified when there were other (on occasion disappointing or distressing) phases unfolding in my own relationships to the LDW

moviemaking and when I thought I was being too influenced by other information I knew about the particular interviewee. I worked to retain the interview data as my primary source, without discounting what I brought to the process as a participant observer.

The documents proved invaluable as a way of checking my participant observer recall and analysis. Wherever possible I relied on documented sources to corroborate or to challenge my own impressions and understanding. In the same way that the analysis and presentation of the interview data varies between chapters, there is a different mix of data sources in each chapter and this is explored in the relevant chapter.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have drawn on the tools and traditions of feminist and qualitative researchers to design a research approach suitable to my undertaking. It has been important for me to clarify my role within the research and I have used the analogy of filmmaking versus stills photography to do so. This has had the added advantage of directing attention to the power of the researcher in the research and sense-making processes, underlining once again the necessity of understanding all knowledges as situated and partial (Haraway 1988).

The chapter introduced the research sites, providing important historical and contextual material that will be important to understanding how each organization is positioned to engage with a transformative intervention.

Chapters One to Four have set the scene for the remainder of this thesis. The following three chapters are devoted to exploring the carefully assembled photographs/data against the movie backdrop. Chapter Five explores Executive level champions of LDW, Chapter Six focuses on mentors and mentoring and Chapter Seven is the account of participants and peer learning groups.

# Chapter 5

## Championing a gender equity cause

### Introduction

This chapter is an examination of executive leadership for transformative gendered change. I will argue that executive level leadership (or championing) is critical to enable LDW to pursue the long agenda of transformative change. Sinclair (1994:11) builds the importance of the leader into her transformative ‘Stage 4’ of Executive Cultures (see Chapter Two), describing it as ‘leadership into a new culture’ that is marked by the tandem features of ‘strong commitment to change driven from the top, accompanied by an understanding that this requires dramatic personal change for executives’. Sinclair paints a picture of a personal journey on the part of the CEO, often prompted by insights gained from female family members, for example, the experiences of their daughter/s or wife. As Sinclair (1998) observes, this transformation of self and culture requires leadership that moves well beyond the heroic style prevalent in Australian corporate culture. This chapter asks, can and do the executive leaders at UWA and in policing exercise the kind of leadership required for ‘transformative change’? What constitutes effective leadership and are women and men equally able to perform this role? Can the LDW program strengthen champions’ commitment and behaviour? And, what are the implications of the effectiveness of their leadership, or what I will term championing behaviours, for the LDW program and its bifocal goals? I anticipate that without effective championing, the LDW bifocal approach is likely to be reduced to a focus on training women or it might cease to exist at all.

I have chosen to use the word ‘champion’ as descriptive of a subset of leadership behaviours that focus particularly on the role of executives in relation to change agendas. It

## Championing a gender equity cause

is a term coming into popular usage in relation to equity and diversity initiatives<sup>1</sup>. While never defined in the literature, the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* lists champion as a noun, adjective and verb. As a noun – someone who has been a winner in a contest; as an adjective – denoting approval, something very positive; and as a verb – to champion (usually of a cause), to promote, advocate or act as a champion for. All three add aspects to a working definition. A champion is someone who has won the contest (in this case the seniority), therefore presumably has enhanced credibility and positional power to confer approval and behaves in ways to actively promote the cause.

The chapter begins by introducing each of the six champions. I have then chosen to analyse the following pairings of interviewees in order to explore the issues and questions outlined below:

### **Mark and Alan**

Comparing these two male CEOs of very different but strongly masculinist cultures allows me to examine the perspectives and practices around being a champion, the meaning of ‘gender’, and the level of engagement with the LDW program. Drawing out the similarities and differences between the two environments highlights the ways in which organizational forces help to shape the champions’ perceptions and practices, and in many respects influence how effective they can be in driving change.

### **Geoff and Cecilia**

The strongly contrasting accounts of two Assistant Commissioners, one male and one female, focus on how gendered norms and expectations feed into their perception and enactment of the champion role. The question is: does gender ‘set them up’ to be a particular kind of champion?

### **Margaret and Belinda**

Both female Executive members at UWA, their accounts provide a counterpoint in examining how they are viewed by others and by the organization, their self perception, and the ‘choices’ they make about how they will perform as champions. The critical issue here is the degree of choice they have, given that gender equality is often construed as ‘women’s work’.

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<sup>1</sup> For example in the Diversity@Work awards and EOWA submissions for Employer of Choice for Women. Also evident in the U.S literature, for example Catalyst reports.

Where possible I have woven into the pairs' analysis the accounts of other 'informants' in this research, such as their executive level colleagues and mentors. Many of these comments refer to Alan and Mark thus allowing me to look for congruity and incongruity between their accounts of self and the perceptions of others. In the case of Geoff and Cecilia, their references to each other provide further depth to their reflections on gendered experience. In both cases the additional information, provided incidentally and not in response to any particular question, serves as a way of checking my own analysis.

Finally I discuss the implications of these interviews for understanding the nature of the championing role, the impact of the gendered organization on the performance of that role, and the contributions of these executive level champions to the bifocal approach.

In the previous chapter I introduced the champions, as listed below:

**Table 3 Executive level champions\***

UWA	
Tier 1 <sup>2</sup> Vice-Chancellor (VC)	Alan
Tier 2 <sup>3</sup> Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (SDVC)	Margaret
Tier 2 Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC)	Belinda
Policing	
Tier 1 Commissioner of Police (COP)	Mark
Tier 2 Assistant Commissioner (AC)	Cecilia
Tier 2 Assistant Commissioner (AC)	Geoff

\* Real names are used here for UWA champions and pseudonyms are used in the policing organization, as previously indicated.

Champions were chosen on the basis of their executive position and their engagement in championing behaviours. This selection process has resulted, by default, in a semblance of gender balance despite their homogeneity in other respects. All are members of their organization's dominant group. All are white, heterosexual and able bodied, five are currently partnered, four have children, four have doctorates. All are baby boomers, with at least three approaching retirement age.

The interview's broad scope included: How did the champions define and understand championing; did they see themselves as champions; in what ways did they demonstrate this; how did their position and gender impact on this role; what contributed to their

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<sup>2</sup> Classification system used by the Director Equal Opportunity in Public Employment to allow comparisons across public agencies. Typical titles for Tier 1 include CEO, Commissioner, Vice-Chancellor, Director General.

<sup>3</sup> Directly below Tier 1, usually reporting to the CEO or part of the Senior Executive group.

## Championing a gender equity cause

becoming champions; and what difficulties and supports did they experience in this role? While the LDW program was the focus point for our conversations, participants ranged more broadly in their discussions about gender equity in their organizations.

I have already referred to the fact that interviewees were pleased, almost flattered, to be included in the research. This positive recognition of them as champions, coupled with my own level of interest and curiosity, got the interviews off to a good start. Since I was not a naive interviewer and was well aware of each champion's history and degree of involvement with the program, this allowed me to prompt those who underplayed their role and provided a different perspective about how others saw them. This resulted in what often felt like a mutual exploration of their championing leadership that incorporated my growing understanding as the interviews progressed. For most interviewees, talking about championing was a novel task – a term and a role they had not necessarily articulated or defined. It became clear that it is a label more commonly attributed to leaders by their followers than a descriptor used by leaders for themselves. It was, however, a word that the interviewees understood, a positive term bringing together a cluster of activities that could not be so succinctly evoked using any other word.

This chapter draws on a wide range of data in addition to the interviews. The 'movie' backdrop is enriched by my relationships with these leaders over substantial periods of time and the opportunities to observe them afforded by their public profile. Speeches, conference papers, newspaper articles, radio broadcasts, internal publications and published research all provided material that has been incorporated into my analysis. In the case of policing, referencing is incomplete to maintain confidentiality. I have endeavoured to give primacy to the interview accounts while using the rich backdrop available to enhance understanding.

### **Champion introductions**

#### *The University of Western Australia*

##### *Alan: The doer*

In 2005 LDW celebrated, slightly belatedly, its tenth anniversary year with a gala dinner at the newly open University Club. The VC arrived late, slightly breathless having hurried from another engagement, and on entering the banquet hall, was greeted by a spontaneous standing ovation. The University community was left in no doubt that Alan supported and

## Chapter Five

championed the LDW program and had done so from day one. In turn, Alan was left in no doubt that the women appreciated his championing.

Alan, a soil scientist by training, rose through the ranks of the University, from doing his PhD at UWA in the 1960s through to occupying the most senior position. This more than 40 year association with one university is in itself unusual, as most academics move between universities to obtain promotions. Alan is enormously loyal to the University and is known for his amazing capacity to remember people across campus. Prior to speaking at each program launch when he was DVC, he would glance through the list of 30 participants and ask me about the one or two that he did not know.

As deputy to Fay Gale in the 1990s, Alan played a very active role in the gender reform processes that she initiated. As Chair of the Staff Development Committee, Alan supported and prioritised the external funding application that marked the beginning of the LDW program in 1994. When I began co-ordinating the LDW program in 1997, Alan was clearly the program champion. Alan opened each program with a presentation addressing the question: why does UWA need a program for women? He often dispensed with his prepared notes, and spoke informally and passionately about the latest gender equity concerns on campus. Alan attended all our events: dinners, networking events, informal drinks for participants with executive members and so on. Once the peer learning group (PLG) presentations started he attended those as well and continued to do so. He once remarked that while the PLG presentations often made him feel uncomfortable (as a result of the stories he would hear), it was important for him to find out what was going on in the University. Alan became VC in 2004. While more externally focussed and no longer so involved in staffing issues, he continued to support the program through his attendance.

Alan's interview reflected his longstanding engagement with LDW, ranging across the entire life of the program. Of all the interviewees, he was the one who had given the most thought to his role as champion. This had in part been prompted by his participation in earlier research exploring his leadership role in relation to the Ally program, an awareness raising network supporting gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex staff and students, and the first such initiative in Australian universities. In the resulting thesis (Stewart 2006), Alan was repeatedly referred to by interviewees as 'the program champion'.

Alan's sense of comfort and quiet pride in seeing himself as champion of the Ally and LDW programs was evident in the interview. He had a strong track record of consistent, active and visible support. As a champion, he has been both a doer and a talker. This was

## Championing a gender equity cause

externally recognised when in 2009, Alan personally won the Diversity@Work Large Organisation Champion Award. The citation for the award described Alan's championing as 'legendary, tangible and undisputed'.

My interview with Alan was cut short rather abruptly by the appearance of a disgruntled senior male academic, early for his allocated appointment time with the VC but requesting to be seen immediately. I was instantly reminded of the power of maleness and seniority in contrast with my own femaleness and junior status within the context of the gendered university.

### *Margaret: The matter of fact*

My first regular contact with Margaret occurred when, as the most senior woman in the University after Professor Fay Gale retired, she became the logical choice to convene the newly established Senior Women's Network (SWN), which I then organized. Fay Gale appointed Margaret to the Executive team as the Executive Director Community Relations. Originally an academic from the School of Music, Margaret had spent a number of years seconded to senior Arts administration in the public sector, later becoming Chair of the Australia Council. Alan, on becoming VC, appointed Margaret as DVC in 2004, and following restructuring in 2006, into the newly created role of Senior DVC (SDVC).

Margaret, like Alan, had a long association with the University and could tell stories from the early days. Margaret joined UWA in 1974 and like many women at the time, was employed year after year in a tutoring capacity. After a childbearing break (well before maternity leave existed), Margaret returned in the 1980s. While her own career and that of many other women on campus attest to how far the position of women has improved over time, Margaret retained a strong sense of that history and struggle. Her own experiences as a woman with young children and her lack of understanding about how an academic career worked had left her with a soft spot for women and early career academics. Others, in her view, should not need to tread that same path.

Margaret used the Senior Women's Network (SWN) to hear what the issues for women on campus were and then quietly went about addressing them. For example, when the University was going through a restructuring process in the early 2000s the SWN, which included senior professional and academic staff women, became the consultative forum for identifying the real impact of this on women in all areas of the University. It was clear to me that Margaret did a lot of behind the scenes work and although the results were often

not dramatic, progress was made on many issues. Margaret also mentored women year after year through the LDW program.

When he became VC in 2004, Alan stepped back from the more visible championing roles and Margaret stepped forward, 'inheriting' the championing duties of the LDW program. These duties were Margaret's only briefly, until Belinda arrived, resuming when Belinda left.

Margaret had been matter of fact and unassuming in her championing role. These qualities were also in evidence on the occasion of her retirement farewell speech at the 2008 VC's Christmas drinks, where she made no mention of gender equity. Her speech was devoid of reference to her achievements, merely giving an at times humorous overview of historical changes she had been a part of, and some highlights afforded her through the opportunities her work had granted her over the years. She finished by giving a ringing endorsement of the VC.

### *Belinda: The blow in*

Belinda arrived from interstate into the newly created Pro Vice-Chancellor, Academic position in 2004. Her arrival was greeted enthusiastically on a number of fronts. For the first time in UWA history the Executive group achieved gender balance, with three women (Belinda was joining Margaret and a female Executive Director, Finance and Resources) and three men. Women on campus saw this as well worth celebrating and LDW hosted a special event to mark the occasion, in conjunction with the beginning of LDW's tenth anniversary celebrations. Belinda's reputation as an academic preceded her. An economist by discipline, she had been part of the *Gender Pay Equity in Australian Higher Education* study sponsored by the National Tertiary Education Union (Probert, Ewer & Whiting 1998).

Belinda had built her academic career in a more typical fashion, moving between universities and working her way up through the academic ranks. Her appointment at UWA was her first at Executive level. As the outsider, Belinda was in stark contrast to Alan and Margaret, both unusual in their UWA home-grown careers. Belinda proved herself to be both forthright and charming, speaking her mind and, as is usual in a new senior position, wishing to put her mark on her new role.

While hers was a new portfolio and roles were somewhat fluid, she was immediately assumed to be the gender expert on the Executive and responsibility for both the LDW program and the SWN became hers. Belinda arrived in time to see a well-honed LDW

## Championing a gender equity cause

program, already well supported at Executive level, in full tenth anniversary celebratory mode. Alan, as VC, continued to endorse the program at every possible forum. While Belinda took on the designated 'spokesperson' duties, she apparently saw no need to champion a program that was already so well feted.

By the time I undertook these interviews Belinda had left the University, after less than two years, to take up a role in Melbourne. However, I was keen to include her in this study because my interest in championing of gender equity fell within her area of academic expertise evident in *Drivers and Contexts of Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity Action in Australian Organizations* (Charlesworth, Hall & Probert 2005).

### **Policing**

#### *Mark: The commander*

The Commissioner launched the first LDW program with great fanfare in 2004, a high profile event attended by most of the top 'brass'. Mark's presence at the launch was critical to getting the program off to a good start. He promptly and ably dealt with the associated internal backlash, including threats to take a complaint of discrimination against men to the Equal Opportunity Commission. From that point on however, Mark's championing became less and less visible, and his lack of attendance at LDW events attracted comments. He had not attended any LDW event for more than a year at the time of the interview.

Mark became Commissioner just prior to the start of the first LDW program in 2004. He was an internal applicant, promoted from the rank of Assistant Commissioner. Mark joined policing some 35 years ago, immediately following high school. On several public occasions (outside police) I heard him portray himself as an 'accidental Commissioner', someone who did not fit the customary police profile. Mark spent considerable time studying at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, had a strong community policing rather than operational policing background and had been criticised on both counts. He presented himself as approachable and emphasised his diverse interests and life as a family man outside of his work role.

As Assistant Commissioner, Mark was heavily involved in the earlier *Gender research project into the culture of policing* and initially took a prominent role as Chair of the Implementation Committee charged with following through on the project's recommendations. He was particularly keen to recruit senior women from outside the agency, as a 'quick win' response to the research findings of a highly masculinist culture which disadvantaged and

## Chapter Five

excluded women. On becoming Commissioner, he initially chose to maintain this oversight of the committee, however quickly handballed responsibility for this to Cecilia, a senior lateral entrant he recruited a few months later. The Implementation Committee was disbanded within a year and the new Diversity Committee that was designed to replace it never eventuated.

Mark presented himself as an advocate for cultural change, placing less value on status and position, relaxing strict hierarchical protocols, and acknowledging the need to depart from long held traditions, structures and rites of passage. Within a week of taking office as Commissioner, he removed two sets of doors and the police guard barring access to his office as a sign of increased openness and accessibility. His allocated driver was returned to normal duties and he caught the bus or drove himself.

The Commissioner's role is highly politicised, often reactive to media reports and ministerial demands. Mark was highly visible, persuasive and polished, handling the media with aplomb. On popular radio for example he is straightforward, personable and clear, able to turn the interview to his advantage, and calming any 'beat ups' of police in the media. Coincidentally the same day I wrote this, there was a photo of Mark in the paper in his operational police gear at the site of an arson attack on a police station.

Despite Mark's relaxed and informal manner and his eschewing of police formalities and protocol, I was still somewhat overawed by my interview with the 'COP' (Commissioner of Police). While Mark himself may underplay this, the mystique of the 'COP' role is still alive and well in the organization and this had not escaped my attention. I went into the interview knowing that funding for the fourth LDW program had just been approved and planning was underway. As a consultant, I felt somewhat constrained to be on my best behaviour.

In my interview with Mark I found it hard to push past his articulate performance to find what was underneath the words. On reviewing my transcript I found that he had side-stepped some questions, even when I had repeated them, and my promptings for examples of championing behaviour were non-productive. I felt like he dealt with me the same way he dealt with radio talkback hosts, positioning himself and his own message.

Mark took the opportunity the interview afforded him to reflect on his visibility with LDW and subsequently launched the fourth LDW program. Many senior policemen, absent when Mark was not there, attended the launch. We have not seen him since, with the fifth

## Championing a gender equity cause

program now concluded. Mark has not attended any of the five PLG presentations, often sending last minute apologies due to intervening events.

### *Geoff: One of the boys*

At first glance Geoff seemed an unlikely person to be championing gender equity within policing. Twenty of his 30 plus years in Policing had been spent as a detective, an elite and even more male dominated bastion within policing. As Assistant Commissioner, he was part of the senior 'command group'. Geoff lacked some of the corporate polish that was evident in many of the other senior men. While dress standards had relaxed under the current Commissioner, he was out of step with the majority in continuing to wear a tie. There was no 'corporate speak', no dominating physical presence, no loud voice. There was however a dry sense of humour, an abundance of Australian colloquialisms and a sense of old fashioned 'fair go blokiess'<sup>4</sup>. This contrasted sharply with the apparent intent to charm displayed by a number of the senior men.

Geoff was the first Chair of the LDW Planning Group, a role immediately bestowed on Cecilia on her arrival. He had previously been involved in the *Gender research project*, where he was supportive and enabling from the first. Geoff later became the first male member of the Women's Advisory Network (WAN), a position that was not welcomed by a number of the women. However later when he resigned from this role, he was warmly thanked with a special morning tea. Geoff's championing was visible through these formal roles. He was also visible at events such as LDW launches and PLG presentations and was a popular mentor with the women in both the Mentor<sup>5</sup> and LDW programs.

Women and men in policing, it seemed, almost universally liked Geoff. At the time of our interview, however, Geoff's career was under a cloud. I was still keen to interview him as he had provided unfailing support to the *Gender research project* and to the LDW program over a period of some five years. And there was still a strong groundswell of loyalty and support for him within the police service.

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<sup>4</sup> Giving people a 'fair go' is considered to be part of the Australian culture. Bloke is a term for men.

<sup>5</sup> A separate mentoring program instigated in response to the Gender Research project was initially for women and later opened out to others.

*Cecilia: Definitely not 'one of the boys'*

The first thing I noticed in Cecilia's office was a photo of her first day at work in this policing jurisdiction. Her uniform was not ready. She was extremely prominent, dressed in a cream coloured business skirt suit amongst a group of uniformed men in blue. Cecilia's appointment was notable. She was the first woman ever to be appointed at that level, with the next most senior 'home-grown' woman being still one rank below her. Her lateral entry was also extremely unusual in that movement into policing at a senior level from another state jurisdiction was rare. With the addition of Cecilia, the number of female commissioned officers rose to four, with some 180 male commissioned officers. Cecilia became part of the Corporate Executive team on arrival, the only woman on this group. Later this group was contracted to a smaller number of people, reverting to an all male group, a strategy others have observed as serving to exclude women (Secker 2005).

Cecilia's extreme visibility as the only woman anywhere near the top of this policing organization was inevitable. Where many other women will act to minimise that visibility, Cecilia, as evidenced by her photo, appeared to accentuate it. Maintaining her femininity, perhaps even proclaiming her femininity was central to how Cecilia saw herself as a policewoman. The title I gave to Cecilia picks up on this visible difference and defined Cecilia by who she was not. Cecilia was definitely 'other' in this context.

Cecilia was accustomed to being noticed. For most of her extremely well qualified career, which spanned a number of professions and policing jurisdictions, she had stood out from the crowd. Highly accomplished, competitive and driven, she told stories of goals she had set for herself and single mindedly achieved. Cecilia appeared well accepted by the women in policing but most considered her an unrealistic role model. On one occasion, speaking to the women on the program, she related a typical day that left most of us feeling exhausted. It was noted by many of the women that Cecilia did not have children. Cecilia was not typical of policewomen and had not had a typical police career.

As the most senior woman, Cecilia was unquestionably expected to take on the mantle of championing gender equity issues. Before she even arrived, Mark announced that Cecilia would be taking over his role as Chair of the Implementation Committee. This was despite her lack of involvement in the project, and the presence of a number of senior men who had been actively involved in all stages. Chairing the LDW steering group was also added to her portfolio. Cecilia undertook the LDW role with diligence, visiting each LDW group

## Championing a gender equity cause

on several occasions to demonstrate her support and speaking at public events such as LDW Program launches.

Over the last few years Cecilia divested herself of some of the more formal and visible championing roles, actively seeking to involve other senior women and to spread the load. Unfortunately this resulted in a process of downward delegation, continuing the trend Mark set in delegating to Cecilia. Given the hierarchical nature of the organization, this symbolically diminished the importance of gender equity.

### **CEOs Alan and Mark: Doer and Commander**

Alan and Mark, as respective CEOs of their organizations, had a number of things in common. They both believed champions were essential and that championing was most powerfully done by men, and they both ‘inherited’ the championing of gender equity from their predecessors. But Alan and Mark were also dissimilar. Their style of ‘being a champion’ was very different as was their understanding of gender and their positioning of the LDW program.

#### ***Male champions: a powerful combination***

As male CEOs, Mark and Alan’s gender and position coincide in powerful ways. Because this is the organizational norm it is often considered unremarkable, however for my purposes the intersection of gender and positional power is noteworthy. It was the combined strength of their maleness and positional power that provided the opportunity for Mark and Alan to be effective champions.

Alan and Mark both saw their championing support as essential for programs such as LDW. Mark noted:

I think, particularly in an organization like this where the LDW tends to be a little bit controversial because it is directed at one gender...And so we have a male dominated organization like this. It is not possible to get those sorts of strategies off the ground without very strong support from the CEO. So I think you have to be a champion for those things.

Mark then went on to describe the champion role:

[O]f course a champion clears the way; a champion makes it clear that this is important - it is important for the organization, it is important to the life of the organization, it is important to the values that we hold. So part of the challenge is articulating exactly why this is so important. And I think, in that role, I mean, you could call it a leadership role, but I think champion is a good description of that.

## Chapter Five

While at interview Alan firmly identified with being seen as LDW champion, he claimed not to have thought about it a great deal at the time. '[You] don't think about it a lot, but if you don't have someone at the top to set the direction you don't get very far', he said. He saw his championing role as 'showing the support of the institution' through attending events, doing the 'behind the scenes work to secure funding' and 'putting pressure on key decision makers'. Alan emphasised how important it was to 'walk the walk not just talk the talk'. Talking the talk he stressed meant 'not just talking about the issues to the women, but in all sorts of forums'. Alan went on to discuss how he now champions gender issues as a Board member, recently promoting LDW as a strategy CSIRO might like to consider.

Alan and Mark both said that men are better placed to champion gender equity, primarily because women can be accused of self-interest, a commonly expressed view that is reflected in the literature (Ashford 1998; Blackmore & Sachs 2007). Mark's view was that:

It is really important for the males to champion diversity programs, particularly gender diversity programs, because if it is a senior woman doing it all the time, I guess the male perspective could be it is a little bit self-serving. But if the males are getting up saying we need to champion this, then it has a different level of impact.

Alan reflected at length on how extraordinarily costly it was for Fay Gale as VC to champion gender equity. However he sees this partly as a product of time and place. The institution, in Alan's view, has 'vastly changed' since then. Nevertheless, in scanning the HE sector he concluded: 'The sector has a very masculine culture, there is a shortfall of senior women, and it is very competitive and still tough'. In his view female VC's could still:

...get criticised on the basis of looking after the sisterhood – women looking after women, rather than someone looking after the health of the organization by using all the talent available.

He observed that some female VCs did not choose to take on a gender equity championing role.

The 'choice' to champion will be explored through all the accounts in this chapter. The inverted commas signify that choice or agency is exercised within a complex interplay of factors. In the case of Alan and Mark, these factors include historical precedent and external pressures. Mark and Alan 'inherited' gender equity because their predecessors provided the initial impetus for the gender equity reform process to occur.

Alan's elevation to the Executive as Fay's deputy, combined with her passionate commitment to gender equity, clearly set the scene for his continuing development as a

## Championing a gender equity cause

gender champion. Alan described his close working relationship with Fay, and how he fronted many of the gender equity initiatives, for example speaking at Academic Board to present the Review of Academic Women. His comment that 'It was much easier for me than it was for Fay' reflects the gender dynamics of power.

Mark's induction to championing also came via his boss. The previous Commissioner, recruited from outside the State, had been extremely critical of the poor gender representation. He was strongly supportive of the *Gender research project* and this combined with the pressure from the Royal Commission findings and the public sector report made gender equity an urgent priority. Mark, then an Assistant Commissioner, was active in the *Gender research project*, perhaps pragmatically following the then COP's footsteps.

For both men their test as champions came once their predecessors had left. For Alan, as Deputy Vice-Chancellor, following Fay's departure in 1997 it was business as usual, continuing his strong gender championing role under a new VC. This role as he describes it did not change until 2004 when on becoming VC he relinquished the spokesperson role, while maintaining public support for LDW through his continued attendance at events. Mark on the other hand, on attaining the COP position, appeared over time to soften in his support, handing over much of the 'gender' responsibility to Cecilia once she arrived.

### ***Performing the role, positioning the program***

If male CEOs (or male deputies to female CEOs) are best situated to champion, as Mark and Alan suggest, then what is their role and how are they performing it?

Alan had no hesitation during interview in claiming himself as LDW champion, reminding me of the standing ovation he received at the tenth anniversary. This view of himself, as an effective and genuine LDW/gender equity/diversity champion is strongly corroborated by Margaret and Belinda and by a number of the female mentors interviewed. There was no criticism of Alan in any of the interviews. Alan is according to Margaret 'a really great champion', while Belinda commented:

You see it [being a champion] in other people because you see them doing things which you don't think they have to do...it is only going to give him [Alan] aggravation...that's why you think of him as a champion, because he did these things which were unnecessary...that might even be unpopular. He was doing the right thing, just doing the right thing again...I think that's where you see real leadership...

As Beverley (mentor), who had been informally mentored by Alan noted, 'I think it has been fantastic for the institution that you have someone like Alan Robson who has

## Chapter Five

supported women and been pro-active.’ David (mentor) summed up Alan’s champion role and importance of it to LDW:

I see Alan as a champion because he is in a *position that allows him to define the value of the program to the institution*. I am sure that’s been a fundamental part of why the programme has got such a level of institutional acceptance and is so embedded in the institution. (emphasis added)

This capacity and willingness ‘to define the value of the program to the institution’ was key to Alan’s contribution as champion. Alan re-iterated during the interview what he has said on numerous public occasions, describing LDW as a *transformational* program. For example, in his column in UWA News (17 May 2004) he wrote that ‘Very few things happen in an institution that could be said to transform that institution, but LDW has transformed UWA’. This was a bold claim and one that, according to Alan, others have challenged him to substantiate. While noting that it was hard to prove, he nonetheless believes it to be true, thus endorsing LDW as a program engaged in a gendered culture change process.

Alan ‘didn’t feel he was alone doing it’ but instead saw himself as championing *with* others. Championing in his view took place at different levels and he acknowledged many others by name, all women, both academic and administrative, who over the years had been key people in ‘supporting and carrying the agenda’. Alan described how:

There are two things that have made championing LDW easy for me. Firstly, the program was efficient, well run and works well; this made it easier to defend. I don’t want to defend something that is not well done. Secondly, the calibre and credibility of the people who supported the program contributed to the credibility of the program itself.

Gaining the support of others was important because it was these mid to high level champions who in Alan’s view did the ‘hard job of drilling down and down’ into the organization.

Making it ‘easy’ for Alan to champion became a mutually reinforcing process for the LDW program and the LDW champion. As Alan’s strategic endorsement of the program through his leadership enabled it to flourish, his reputation as champion was supported and strengthened. This reciprocity sets up a positive cycle of engagement where the program was supported and Alan remained connected and open to learning more about gender equity, which in turn affirmed the importance of the program. Over time, championing LDW became part of Alan’s public identity, resulting in a tight coupling between Alan and the LDW program. While extraordinarily beneficial, this coupling also presents its own difficulties, as became evident in other interviews.

## Championing a gender equity cause

Mark saw the program and his role in relation to the program in a very different way. Mark was passionate about ‘breaking down the pseudo-military structure of his organization so it becomes a lot more egalitarian’. Diversity, as he explained, would help him achieve this goal:

I think we have come under a lot of criticism as an organization – it came out of the Royal Commission about having a very singular view of the world - and you know, adding diversity whether it is gender equity or other types of diversity, helps you to be much broader about the way you view the world. And for me that’s the only way you can get confidence that what happens from the inside in, what happens in here is a balanced view not a male dominated view or a pseudo-military view of the world.

LDW was in his view ‘not necessarily a strategy *just* to improve the place of women in the organization, but it is a strategy to improve the organization and its values’ (emphasis in interview). This ‘adding’ of women (and other minority groups) is sometimes referred to as an ‘add women and stir’ approach. It acknowledges the need for cultural change but relies on the women (and others) to bring about that change:

So the more you get women into senior management, the more egalitarian the whole thing becomes, in my view, and I think that’s where we want to go, so they [women] are helping with my strategy as well.

Improving gender diversity appeared to be complementary to Mark’s agenda without being central to his agenda. His move away from a distinct focus on gender equity to subsuming gender under the broader diversity umbrella was not unique. Rather, it reflected the larger movement away from gender equity and towards diversity that has been well documented and critiqued (Bacchi 2001; Blackmore & Sachs 2003; Thornton 2008).

Mark explained that in terms of gender balance:

The number one problem for us is really about credibility [of the women] and the way I think to champion the importance of this is not to focus all the time on the actual program itself.

Mark went on to discuss the strategic placement of LDW graduates, focussing on policewomen:

...you need to have them at the sharp end doing the same things as the guys do – not doing what you might call the soft support stuff. And so we think a lot about how we can provide more profile and more opportunities for women to do things that gain credibility in an organization like this... find out what the organization values...So, for women it is actually making sure they are at the sharp end of the business and they are standing alongside the men, or they are leading the men into, you can call it battle if you like, but, you know, it is doing the job.

## Chapter Five

Here Mark's comment was reinforcing the common criticism of women in policing as doing the 'soft stuff'. By placing importance on 'what the organization values' he is effectively reinforcing the cultural status quo which defines contribution (and career) in terms of narrow operational (military) terms. Despite seeing the organizational culture as problematic, Mark was still veering towards fixes that focussed on the women, not the organization.

Mark was a low visibility champion rarely attending LDW events. When I commented on the difference between the first launch and what had taken place since, he responded:

Yeah, I think it was a good statement to make up front. I am not sure that the people in the programme itself are the people I need to convince though. So, while the launches may be more low key, remember in those launches you are already talking to people who believe in the importance of the programme. I think the importance for me is the dialogue *out* to the rest of the organization. (emphasis in interview)

By emphasising his 'dialogue out to the rest of the organization', Mark, in direct contrast to Alan, was relying on his words rather than his presence to signal his support for the LDW program. However, several other police interviewees were critical of his low visibility *and* his lack of dialogue. Geoff is one of those critical of the absence of the COP at LDW events:

If you think something is important then you have to push it and give it your time... And the Commissioner is god. So, if he fobs something off, unless he is overseas or something like that or there is a good reason, people actually become offended when he is not there to open or close something. And, particularly if he is championing the cause... [The previous Commissioner] was very big on women's issues and unless he was hooked up to a life support system, he would be there. So, I do see it as a bit of a watering down and that's what worries me.

Geoff is underlining the importance of the Commissioner's presence and how his absence may signal a 'watering down' of support. Karen (mentor) commented on the lack of 'audience' LDW had with the three top positions. When I mentioned the importance Mark placed on dialogue out to the organization, she responded: 'But does he? I don't know if he does. When does he do that?'

Mark's absence meant there was no opportunity for the women or the program to engage with him. His lack of engagement with the program, specifically the PLG presentations, and mentoring (he had mentored once), removed the capacity of the program to inform him regarding the required organizational change. His absence signalled a lack of support,

## Championing a gender equity cause

making it difficult for the program to be strategically aligned and making it more likely that it would be seen as a training program.

Mark's reluctance to be a visible champion is reflected in several references during his interview to the downside of championing. For example:

Sometimes in an organization like this where you are speaking about things which are slightly controversial like gender issues, the term [champion] can be used in a derogatory way as well, in a way that suggests you are overly focussed on this.

Mark was also keen to ensure that no one person in the Executive team be seen to carry the championing mantle, allowing the others to bow out:

It is very hard when you start championing something, one of the executive behaviours that you often see is that they give you the mantle completely and say, well you're championing that, so we don't need to, *we don't need to take the risk*. And part of the challenge for me has been encouraging the other members of the executive to be saying the same thing, so that their rhetoric has got to match my rhetoric...otherwise you have got one person doing that sort of work. (emphasis added)

The matching rhetoric was not difficult to achieve because as Mark laughingly observes 'they are all on contracts'. He described his team in the following way:

The executives are on board, some of them are passionate, some of them are on board because they know they have to be. Right, that's part of corporacy. Whether you agree with or not, you go out and you champion it. If you don't want to do that, well then leave the corporate scene.

This raises interesting questions regarding the possibility of championing gender equity when you do not believe in it. While minimising risk to himself or others, the danger of rhetoric not matching any genuine commitment are strong, and indeed evident. Mark's Executive team turned out in full force on the two occasions when Mark launched the program but were otherwise mostly absent. Mark's absence and the perceived lack of support from his team were noted by the women.

Geoff, Cecilia and Karen (mentor) were all concerned by this gap between words and action, not only of the Commissioner but of those on his team. As Geoff said:

But a lot of the men are speaking the words but they are not doing the action. So, publicly they come out and they are all for this and they are all for that, but when you speak to them privately, that's when they lapse back into who they really are.

Corporate toeing the line was clearly not working and is certainly insufficient to drive transformative change. As Karen noted, 'I don't think that's how you change the culture'.

## Chapter Five

My first 'reading' of Mark's account and our observations of his championing was of Mark as an ineffective (and possibly uncommitted) champion, over relying on his word to carry his message in a command and control policing environment (Jones 2008) and underestimating the symbolic importance of visibility and presence. However this would be inconsistent with Mark's very pro-active re/presentation of self and his demonstrated appreciation of the symbolic value of his presence in other contexts such as his frequent visits to the rank and file and his out in the field 'at the pointy end' photo opportunities. I now see Mark as more actively engaged in resisting being perceived as LDW champion or gender equity champion more broadly. I am not suggesting that Mark does not support gender equity but rather that he does not want to be actively and visibly associated with it, as a marker of who he is and what his leadership stands for. Mark had enabled the program to occur and, while policing budget processes were not transparent to us as outsiders, he appeared to have supported ongoing funds. He had laterally recruited senior women and the number of senior women had increased from three to 16 under his watch. While it was difficult for me to probe past the words to gauge the genuineness of his support, others too were questioning his commitment.

While Mark and Alan appeared to have much in common, they in fact engage with and view gender equity and the LDW program in entirely different ways. Superficially the difference could be attributed to the style of championing required to match differences in organizational style, however further examination reveals that Alan had wholeheartedly embraced the championing 'mantle' while Mark had actively resisted this role.

The very different levels of engagement demonstrated by Mark and Alan highlight the two-way nature of championing leadership, as one part of a complex interplay of factors. The LDW program provided multiple opportunities to engage and to deepen understanding of gender issues but these rely on a sustained, visible and active engagement with the program. Alan took the opportunities afforded by the program to endorse LDW and be identified as LDW champion. By all accounts, Alan was an effective champion who enabled LDW to pursue a transformative agenda, consistent with the Frame Four approach. He legitimated gender equity as an organizational issue and this helped to form 'a particular organizational identity for insiders and an organizational reputation for outsiders' (Dutton & Ashford 1993:401).

Mark was seen as LDW champion because of his early support in enabling the program to occur and his presence at the inaugural launch. But by the time of interview Mark preferred to champion LDW from a distance or not at all and was wary of possible detriment from

## Championing a gender equity cause

being too involved or singled out in his support of gender equity. Subsuming gender under a diversity umbrella also served to dilute its importance. He treated LDW as a development (or perhaps more accurately training) opportunity where the women then had to prove themselves in the usual way. His approach included aspects of Frame 1 'fix the women' and Frame 2 'celebrate difference' (otherwise known as 'women are special') where the diversity women bring is seen to benefit the organization. His Frame 1 and 2 understanding of LDW served to limit the program to those frames and therefore deny its transformative potential.

The LDW program design, through pro-actively providing champion building and champion showcasing opportunities, may have the unintended consequence of highlighting the absence of champion support. In Mark's case, his absence prompted people to question his support, leaving the program at risk.

Both the accounts of Alan and Mark strongly endorse the powerful combination of maleness and positional power and the importance of the CEO for championing gender. This can be to the benefit of the program when it is present or the detriment of the program when it is absent.

### **Cecilia and Geoff: Same rank, different story**

The stories of Cecilia and Geoff allow an exploration of how gender operates within the highly male dominated culture of policing. Cecilia and Geoff, situated as female and male at the same senior rank within policing, are representative of what Kanter (1977a) calls the 'token' and the 'dominant' group in what is a highly gender skewed environment where only 7% of commissioned officers are women. The interview data shows that this difference in group membership, for Cecilia as 'token woman' or Geoff as 'one of the boys', has a profound influence on their respective understanding of the champion role, their choices in regard to the champion role and their ultimate effectiveness as champions.

#### ***Gendered group membership and gendered 'choices'***

Cecilia's photo of her first day pictorially demonstrates some of the effects noted by Kanter in her study of majority/minority group dynamics within the workplace. Group member characteristics, in this case the maleness of the men and the femaleness of Cecilia, are both accentuated by the presence of the 'other'. The similarities within the group, their shared senior status, fades into the background as the foreground is filled with the imagery of the

## Chapter Five

male/female binary. Cecilia's visible difference from the male norm translates into what Kanter (1977a) describes as tokenism, where the individual comes to represent the group and differences between groups are accentuated. While normative masculinity means that the visibility of each individual man is downplayed within the group, female 'otherness' renders the lone woman highly visible and highly vulnerable (Kram & McCollom Hampton 2003).

Cecilia is the outsider in another respect, as the lateral entrant with the less traditional policing career. Her recruitment exemplifies Sinclair's (1998:19) Stage Three, where 'one or two targeted appointments are made of women who already have a track record and are not seen as "high risk"'. While used as symbols of great progress, senior women like Cecilia provide little threat to organizational ways of operating which remain largely unchanged. Geoff, on the other hand, belongs to the dominant group in every way, through his local and traditional career background as well as his gender.

Pivotal to Geoff's understanding of the championing role is that the dominant group needs to drive the change. Male power is needed to undermine male power. He explains his position using a range of colourful metaphors. Geoff believes that championing gender equity is basically a male activity that needs to start at the top with the male leader. 'It is critical that the CEO of the organization has to stand for it and champion it', he said.

Geoff went on to explain that:

...this organization has got a reputation of launching something with great fanfare and the Commissioner being behind it and all that sort of thing. And because it is the flavour of the day...But then something else comes up...and of course, then when the CEO or a male champion takes their eye off the ball...then it starts to die a natural death. And *it needs those male champions to breathe life into it* and watch it, like a watchdog, just keep watching it. (emphasis added)

In this view, male vigilance and protection is required to maintain a focus on gender equity. Men could not afford to 'take their eye off the ball' for fear it would 'start to die a natural death'. Geoff saw a great deal of potential for backsliding, 'otherwise it will just go back to the way it was and you won't notice it 'til it is too late'. Championing in Geoff's view required active sustained attention:

And it doesn't take care of itself. It is like a plant in the garden, once you plant it, you can't neglect it. You have to water it, fertilise it, trim it, talk to it, whatever.

Despite using the nurturing metaphor of the garden, Geoff's language reflects hierarchical male power. But his emphasis on action contrasts strongly with Mark's reliance on rhetoric.

## Championing a gender equity cause

This highlights the existence of multiple masculinities (Collinson & Hearn 1996b) where powerful men can occupy different positions in relation to gender equity and in this case different attitudes to LDW.

Like Mark, Cecilia referred to the backlash that championing can provoke:

...means that I am a strong supporter, advocate and one who is prepared to take on some of the challenges and issues that may arise. When there is opposition, and you need to get in there and get dirty, upset people because you are challenging them.

Unlike Mark, whose response was to downplay his championing of LDW, Cecilia spoke of actively taking on challenges as they arose.

Cecilia's understanding of championing arises out of the injustices she has observed and her own experiences as a woman.

I think they are very real issues, and I think women have been discriminated against quite seriously over the years. I have been a victim of sexual harassment, so I am very empathetic to women who get harassed in the workplace because I know how devastating it can be...I don't think women have been treated as they deserve to be or there hasn't been a level playing field...I feel pretty confident, if I had been a man, [in previous policing jurisdiction] I would have been promoted earlier.

I have already observed that there was little choice for Cecilia in taking on the formal and visible championing roles. Reflecting on her visibility on arrival, I noted the sense of proclamation:

JdV      Definitely, "here's our woman".

Cecilia    (Laughter) Some might say, here's our token woman.

At interview Cecilia spoke about her singularity as the only senior woman and how that defined her role in several ways. She accepted this showcasing and the additional duties as part of the territory, having experienced it in her previous organization. She observed:

I was always thrust forward as the person, which is a bit of a trap, a bit of a danger. To some extent you get dropped in it, because you get promoted and you are it and everyone is looking to you, or even people from outside look to you as well. *So there is probably not much choice in it.* It is a good thing I don't mind doing that sort of thing. (emphasis added)

This quote highlights the complexity of choice for Cecilia. In some ways she has no choice, 'being thrust forward' with all the resultant visibility. However, she sees herself as 'not minding', a point she returns to later in the interview.

## Chapter Five

The 'trap' that Cecilia describes is the 'shadow job' (Meyerson 2003:53) of gender equity which requires substantial time and energy but does not 'count' as work that matters. Hence being visible as a woman means invisibility as a legitimate police officer. Cecilia's story, with all the extra expectations and duties associated with her 'token status', is not unusual for policewomen. Silvestri (2003:150), in her study of UK policewomen, concluded that many senior police women get drawn into what she calls 'inserting' women into policing and what I would call the 'short agenda' because of organizational imperatives driven by equal opportunity policy. Silvestri (2003:153) describes this as 'activism by default'.

These extra duties, within and external to police, provide opportunities and profile that would not exist for a man in the same position (1994:147), but as a highly visible woman in a man's world Cecilia is also subjected to much more scrutiny than her male colleagues:

Well, you are visible and people do tend to watch you more closely than the blokes. The blokes can stuff up and they are a good bloke and all the rest of it, but if I make a mistake I am sure they rub their hands and go, oh, ho, ho, ho, did you hear this, yeah, she got that wrong, ha, ha, ha. Oh well, you just have to be tough and resilient and bounce back... but I still think you are not really part of the club.

Cecilia recognises that she does not belong. Mateship, 'the glue that binds' (Piterman 2008:10), is not extended to her. Men, as Cecilia saw it, could champion the LDW program in different ways because they belonged:

I don't think it did Geoff any harm for instance or Fred because they were people who were highly regarded and credible and liked and I suppose people accepted it.

Geoff's own account corroborates Cecilia's impressions. While for Cecilia championing involved some personal cost, there is no sense of cost for Geoff. Geoff commented on the contrast between them saying:

Oh, yeah. I mean I can tell another Assistant Commissioner or Superintendent they are a boofhead and this is what they are doing wrong and they should be doing this. Cecilia could probably tell them the same thing but whether they took her seriously or not is another thing. Also too, the predicament for Cecilia is that she hasn't been in the job that long, so probably doesn't want to trample on relationships she has built. Whereas my networking and relationships with the guys is such that I could trample on them today and they are fine in five minutes time.

Geoff's account highlights the difference in belonging between himself and Cecilia and his secure position as one of 'the guys' that gave him the capacity to influence others. This

## Championing a gender equity cause

robustness in his relationships means there is no cost for him. In contrast, Cecilia may not be taken seriously and her relationships are seen as more fragile, able to be ‘trampled’ on, and therefore requiring some protection. Geoff began this account commenting on Cecilia’s gender which is complicated by the fact she ‘hasn’t been in the job that long’. Taken together these become a double disadvantage for Cecilia. Geoff and Cecilia, by both their accounts, have a very different launching pad for their champion behaviour.

In sharp contrast to Cecilia’s lack of choice, Geoff had actively chosen to step into the championing role. Geoff expressed frustration at men who couldn’t see that it ‘was all lopsided for them’, a colourful expression of systemic male advantage. His understanding of this ‘lopsidedness’ seemed to have evolved over time and his interview was interspersed with examples:

Well I just think that I have been lucky because I have worked with a lot of great women, you know. As a detective I worked with some great women who are very intelligent and worked as hard, or probably harder than the blokes, because they have to do that to prove themselves. And I was really spoilt. And then, I guess, also I had a bit to do socially with some policewomen who were struggling with child issues, family issues and things like that.

For Geoff gender equity was simple, it was about equality of outcomes, ‘it is not about treating them the same. You have actually got to treat them different’. He described how he ‘always leaned towards the individual’, working to find solutions:

But, more often than not, I will say yes to the individual or, if it has never been tried before, then let’s try it and see what happens. What is the worst that can happen? We undo it.

As Geoff gained more positional power he put it to use wherever he could to make life easier for women in the organization. For example, he had allowed a graduate from the academy to go part-time immediately upon graduation, had allowed another to complete detective training when she accompanied her husband on a country transfer, changing the policy for future occasions, and enabled another woman, who became pregnant during recruit training, to return later to complete her training.

He continued to observe ‘lopsidedness’:

What used to really bring it home to me is when I would go in and open a course, perhaps a Detective Training Course or something, there would be 25 people sitting there – one or two women. And that used to annoy me. And then, conversely, when I used to go and open a Sexual Assault Interviewers’ Course there would be 25 women sitting there and no blokes. So *we were just putting them in pigeon-holes* and yeah, you can do this course, but

## Chapter Five

you are really going to have to struggle to do that one – that sort of thing. And in the way we were structuring it was to get on a course, you had to meet prerequisites...And women weren't getting the secondment opportunities and all that, and if they did get a secondment opportunity, they were always, you know, you can do the running sheet or you can do this or you can do that. They were never at the pointy-end for whatever reason. (emphasis added)

Geoff was comfortable with his own positional power and working within the masculine power structures around him. In his view gender equity required powerful male champions because, as he put it, 'with a powerful male champion, you know, there is no argument'. The downside he acknowledged is that powerful messages from the top can result in 'a lot of men are speaking the words but they are not doing the action'. Hence male champions must be ever vigilant.

Geoff is the only champion in this study who appears to have exercised choice in becoming and remaining a champion. He did not inherit the role as Mark did. Geoff, operating in the same political environment as Mark as an AC under the previous Commissioner, could have pragmatically positioned himself in the same way I suggested Mark did. However, he had chosen to remain committed despite a waning interest on the part of the present COP. He does not appear to have paid a price for his ongoing commitment and clearly remained one of the boys. He was however highly visible and known as a champion. He experienced some of the reciprocal reinforcement I noted with Alan, where his choice to champion was reinforced by the gratitude of women, making championing a rewarding addition to his duties. In contrast, Cecilia had neither the freedom to choose to be a champion nor was she well placed to be a champion.

Despite her prominence and visibility within and outside the organization, Cecilia did not find it easy being an effective champion. As a woman representing women, she often found that gender issues were discounted:

Yeah, I think there is always – oh, another one of those women's issues, you know what it's like, women with their women's things sometimes. And they don't see it so much as just an equity issue and fairness and good HR practice.

Cecilia's view, that being a woman undermined her capacity to position gender equity as a strategic issue, was consistent with the views of Alan and Mark, discussed earlier. Reflecting again on how different it was for men, Cecilia said 'I think it is really good to have male champions and it has probably got a bit more credibility if it is supported by some of the men.'

## Championing a gender equity cause

Their maleness, in effect, was having exactly the opposite effect to her femaleness. While her femaleness undermined her credibility as champion and left her unprotected and excluded, she saw their maleness as adding credibility, and bringing protection because they belonged. ‘Tokens’, as Kanter (1977b:978) points out, are not trusted by the dominant group to be loyal and therefore may be subject to quarantining and distancing, thus further undermining their access to informal networks and power.

Geoff’s viewpoint concurs with Cecilia’s analysis. Not only do men have more power to challenge or change the highly masculinist culture of the organization, in his view responsibility also rested squarely with the men. Geoff’s view was a refreshing re-framing of the problem as being the men’s problem, not the women’s problem.

I mean if we could change men’s attitudes, we don’t really have to change the women’s attitude, because they know what the problem is...So, I think a lot of the problem is men are just still set in their ways.

### ***Championing for a different audience?***

Geoff and Cecilia coincidentally spoke at length in their interviews about role modelling. Role modelling could be seen as drawing on more informal, personal power rather than, or perhaps in addition to, the positional power so important in the policing hierarchy. As Geoff put it, power ‘is being able to influence other men as well to do things or not do things’ by being a role model.

I mean, a lot of people think champion, you are a role model for women, which is true, but I saw it as being, perhaps even more importantly, *as a role model for men to support women in the workplace* and what their endeavours were and all those sorts of things. Because in a male-dominated organization, it goes without saying that the women are at a disadvantage...So, I saw it as being a champion as a role model for men – if he is supporting women in the workplace, then that’s what I should be doing, so that’s what I saw it as. (emphasis added)

In contrast Geoff described Cecilia as ‘kicking against the wind’ when it comes to being a role model for men. ‘I am not saying the guys don’t take her seriously, but it is a lot harder for her to start to change the mindset of men in the organization’.

Cecilia also described role modelling as integral to championing:

...the idea of a champion to me is broader too, it is also being a role model. You are championing that women can succeed at that level I suppose. And they see that you, hopefully in my case, that you can retain your femininity and your feminine management style and still succeed and be effective...she did it, or she’s up there and I don’t have to swear like the blokes and drink with the blokes and be tough and thump the table to get things done.

Cecilia presented herself as a role model for women, a way of successfully being a woman and a leader in a very masculine environment. However, Cecilia also needed to prove that ‘women can succeed’. The very femininity she was trying to preserve for herself and in order to be a role model for the women increased her visibility and vulnerability.

Geoff made a connection between being a role model and ensuring that gender equity became embedded in the organizational culture:

So, yeah, it is just about telling my male colleagues about what I am doing and hopefully they will follow suit. And that was also part of my scheme because I didn’t want it just to be, oh, well it is flavour of the month, or it is what you have to have on your CV now. No, I want it to become part of the furniture.

The stark contrast in the platform Cecilia and Geoff have for championing gendered change raises the possibility of two different and distinct roles for male and female champions. Their emphasis on role modelling orients them towards their same gender group. In the case of Cecilia this may be in response to her diminished capacity for influencing men, which is compromised by her female gender.

### ***The hard work of being a champion***

Cecilia was championing women and the LDW program in an extremely difficult environment where she was always highly visible as a woman. Being a female leader poses many challenges for her: her positioning as a ‘token’ woman, maintaining a sense of her feminine identity in such a macho environment, a lack of real choice about representing women, the need to (as a highly visible representative of the group) prove that women are capable, the marginalising of women’s issues when they are brought up by her, and the reduced sense of belonging she experienced which constrained her capacity to act and increased the personal cost of acting. She was visible and vulnerable (Kram & McCollom Hampton 2003) without the group protection men experience.

It is not just championing that is difficult for Cecilia – other aspects of her leadership role are hard work for all the same reasons. A mentor to Cecilia once advised her to ‘just keep ducking and weaving’. Cecilia herself notes that it requires a degree of personal agility to negotiate senior police ranks. Managing her gender in this environment is hard work (Maddock & Parkin 1993; Catalyst 2007). Men, on the other hand, do not need to engage in this ‘gender work’, their gender is the gender of policing, quite ordinary and unquestioned. As Silvestri (2003:132) notes in regard to senior female police: “getting to

## Championing a gender equity cause

the top” in policing does not necessarily equate with “getting in”; similarly “being there” does not necessarily equate with “being heard”.

Cecilia, by her own account, struggled to position gender as a strategic issue. The focus remained on women as the problem and Cecilia was constrained in her influence, unable to move beyond advocacy for women and being a role model for women. Perhaps it is expecting too much of Cecilia, given her singular status as the only woman at the executive level, to champion at all. Silvestri (2003:147) in fact argues that senior policewomen develop a ‘greater sense of individualism’ because they occupy a ‘pioneering space’ and that this together with their visibility which contributes to a ‘heightened perception of surveillance’ explains their lack of activism. Cecilia is perhaps doing more than most.

As Kanter (1977b:976) noted, the boundary heightening that occurs in strongly skewed groups accentuates hegemonic masculinity: ‘Ironically tokens (unlike people of their type represented in greater proportion) are thus instruments for *underlining* rather than *undermining* majority culture’ (original emphasis).

Geoff’s male body and sense of belonging combined with his positional power provided him with a sense of agency that is in stark contrast to Cecilia’s disempowered status. While both have the same formal power, Cecilia’s story replicated those of high flying corporate women in a study by Martin and Meyerson (1998) which found a disconnect between formal and informal power for senior women. Martin and Meyerson (1998:313) conclude that despite formal power, women ‘are disempowered, in some ways by their gender’.

The commonly held expectation that ‘as more women gain high ranking positions, the more change will occur to benefit all women’ (Martin & Meyerson 1998:312) making it easier for others to follow, did not hold true in Cecilia’s case. This account supports the conclusion of Martin and Meyerson (1998) that the capacity of high ranking women in masculine organizations to address systemic gender inequalities may be more limited than we realise.

Geoff was the only one of the three police champions with a clear focus on both women *and* men but despite his privileged masculine position Geoff’s individual actions were insufficient to push LDW and gender equity into the organizational limelight. In effect, replacing Geoff as Chair of the LDW Planning Group with Cecilia when she arrived, removed a platform that Geoff may have been able to put to good effect as a male champion.

Geoff and Cecilia's interviews provided closely matching accounts of their perceptions of their opposite gender counterpart. Geoff's views on the difficulties of championing gender for Cecilia as a woman were reflected in Cecilia's own account of the difficulties she experienced. Likewise her perceptions of how much easier it was for Geoff as one of the boys were echoed in Geoff's own account. Their corroborating accounts endorse the huge gulf between women and men in exercising formal and informal power, in this case to champion a gender equity cause in the policing context.

Geoff and Cecilia's interview accounts raise critical questions. Do gendered bodies dictate what kind of championing behaviours can be undertaken? Does this preclude women from championing the way men do and/or from being effective champions? Does this mean male positional power is essential to the championing process?

### **Margaret and Belinda: Gendered expectations and choices**

Exploring the stories of Margaret and Belinda, both female members of the executive group at UWA, highlights their differences, for example, the insider and the new arrival, the non-feminist musician and the feminist economist. However, their stories also seem coloured by their shared gender identity and the expectations others had of them as senior women within the institution. While these expectations apparently constrained their choices, each downplayed her championing role, albeit in different ways.

Championing of gender equity was beginning to seem like a hot potato – tossed to newcomers on arrival. Neither Belinda nor Cecilia had much say in the matter, or so it appeared. Margaret had already shouldered the additional duties expected of senior women, the 'shadow job' (Meyerson 2003:53), since Fay's departure in 1997, stepping up to the mark even further when Alan became VC. Now it was Belinda's turn.

#### ***Am I a champion?***

At UWA there were some longstanding and non-negotiable duties associated with championing the LDW program, established in large part by the precedent of Alan doing them year after year until he became VC and maintained perhaps by executive members understanding (from Alan's lead) that LDW was a valued part of the fabric of the university. While at UWA this was seen as unremarkable and no doubt will remain so while Alan remains VC, I am aware of how extraordinary it actually is when compared to the levels of Executive support in other organizations. In effect, strong championing over a

## Championing a gender equity cause

decade had created more than a mainstreamed budget. It also included a mainstreamed executive presence and support. This meant that an Executive member was expected to launch the program each year, convene the Senior Women's Network and attend the Peer Learning Group presentations at the end of the program. An Executive member will speak at LDW Graduation dinners and so on. Only one of these roles, convening the Senior Women's Network, is specifically gendered in the sense that it must be done by a woman.

Based on precedent, there were two parts to this championing of the program. One part of the role is what Alan in his interview referred to as the 'spokesperson'. It is these duties, as described above, that he divested to Margaret on becoming VC while he remained as champion. Alan was able to continue to be a champion without doing the bulk of the 'spokesperson' duties because of his strong support in the past and his continuing advocacy. He often showed up even if he wasn't the one doing the speech. And sometimes he insisted on doing a speech as well.

While Alan was able to be champion without necessarily doing the duties, Belinda responded by taking on the duties as was expected of her, without seeing herself as a champion. Belinda was therefore the exception amongst the six interviewees. As she explained:

I don't think I call myself that because – it is a very interesting question – it [LDW] clearly has such a history and visibility and status within the university, that I came in perhaps on the tail of the first wave...it had been very effectively championed, so it seemed to me...so, it was not a moment of championing, if I can put it that way...it was taking stock of the ten year review.

Belinda did however, on the basis of the *Drivers and Contexts* research I referred to previously (Charlesworth, Hall & Probert 2005), have some very clear ideas about what being a champion entailed:

People obviously *take something to heart* and decide, or maybe not even consciously decide, but they do *ensure that it stays visible* and they are *looking for ways in which the issue can be taken further*. (emphasis added)

Belinda echoed the research finding that champions are more motivated by doing the 'right thing' than by the business case. As she put it:

The most salient thing seemed to be, *it was the 'right thing' to do*. And that is clearly about people being prepared to say they believe in something without having to justify it in terms of the organization's normal goals... just something you *should* do...sort of non-negotiable. It is not something you trade-off. (emphasis in interview)

## Chapter Five

And importantly, from Belinda's point of view, this could or almost by definition had to be outside your portfolio:

It is not for yourself...championing to me suggests that you take up something that you believe is important for the organization or the area *because it is*, not because it is your responsibility. (emphasis in interview)

Belinda's perception of what championing entails is consistent with her lack of championing of LDW. Gender equity was not something she felt she needed to be proactive about given that UWA had a strong record in this regard. LDW was being 'championed very successfully', she said and because the spokesperson duties were part of her staffing portfolio, by her definition this almost precluded championing. Belinda saw it more as a time to review and re-think priorities:

It has been, you know, a very significant part of the university and now there is a bit of a re-think going on. So, again I wouldn't say – I just knew it was very strongly supported. *I felt it had almost been taken for granted in the good sense way.* (emphasis added)

There was a downside to this history of effective championing. My response to Belinda in the interview was 'I don't know if there is a taken for granted in a good sense way?.'

Certainly as the LDW co-ordinator at the time we (the Planning Group and I) spent some time floundering 'between champions'. Executive roles were being renegotiated and Alan was assuming a much more externally oriented role as VC. LDW began to experience funding problems. Neither Belinda nor Margaret had ultimate line management responsibility for LDW and our repeated requests for modest top up funding kept disappearing between Executive members into an apparent black hole. While the talk continued to be very positive and the spokesperson duties were all taken care of, the more basic issues such as funding where champions are vitally important, were being missed.

Belinda's perception that there was no need for her to champion LDW and that she was just performing her duties contrasted with our own perception that she had been given the role because she was a senior woman with gender equity expertise. We certainly expected her to champion LDW in the fullest sense of the word and endeavoured to engage with her on this basis. While there seemed to be little choice as a senior woman, Belinda in effect exercised choice through her framing of the role and which aspects she chose to perform and to not perform.

Margaret, in my view clearly a champion of women and LDW on campus, did not initially identify with that label during our interview discussion. At first she used the term 'supporter', which included 'seeing its value' and 'supporting the funding of it'. However

## Championing a gender equity cause

Margaret then revised this, saying that 'I suppose supporter is passive and champion does mean you take some sort of active role, particularly in advocating it to others', which she does both inside and outside the University.

Downplaying her role throughout the interview, Margaret's responses appeared pragmatic, perhaps even dutiful in tone. When asked about examples of championing behaviour, Margaret did not mention her attendance at various LDW events, until prompted. She then tentatively acknowledged that this was a form of championing:

Yeah, well you see that I probably wouldn't see that I am championing any more than I (pause). No, I am actually aware when I think about it when I tick yes I will go, it is because *I feel I should be seen to be there, which is the same motivation I have for other things*, you know, going to some things on campus and not others really. (emphasis added)

In this excerpt, Margaret makes little distinction between her responsibilities in regard to LDW and other tasks or roles she carries as SDVC. She also views LDW as part of her responsibility as the most senior woman:

*I am aware of being the senior woman in the Executive so I think it is a responsibility, so that if I have to choose between two events...I would go to the LDW one...because I felt I needed to be there. So it is that and because I also feel because of where I sit with the staffing areas that I am very aware of the needs of women on campus...(emphasis added)*

Margaret made the link between LDW and her portfolio responsibilities a number of times during the interview. I asked her if championing gender is different to any other causes:

Probably for me it is not, I mean I wouldn't proclaim to have come out of a strongly feminist sort of background, it has never been part of my academic training or anything of that sort.

Instead Margaret ascribed her championing to her tendency to:

...inherently veer more to the left than to the right in politics and that I think it is all part of the same thing...So I will support LDW just like I have joined the Student Guild and you know, I'll send a cheque off to the refugees group, you know...it is just that it is about being aware of socially oriented programmes I suppose.

In identifying herself as left leaning rather than feminist, as just doing her job, as unremarkable because it was part of the staffing portfolio and by including gender equity initiatives alongside many other aspects of her role and her values, Margaret effectively resisted being positioned as a woman defending women's rights. While her championing arises from who she is and what she values, it is not confined to gender. Margaret was

## Chapter Five

motivated to work with a number of groups and causes and by doing so in a low-key, matter of fact fashion, she seemingly escaped scrutiny or criticism.

Margaret described the champion building process which had occurred for her in relation to several causes, noting:

...you can only be a champion if someone perceives you as such...So I think it is actually very much a reinforcing thing from the field...learning how to become a champion has been organic...You get more and more involved...and so it becomes a snow-balling effect'.

This champion building process with LDW began for Margaret when she became a mentor and continued to grow and evolve with increasing seniority:

Oh, yeah, I think certainly since I got into the Vice Chancellery, even into this role, and not surprising, because this role is much more intersected with the staffing portfolio. Yeah, I have been more aware of the value, the institutional value of it. I suppose before when I was a mentor and I had some of my mentees go through the program and I came over to the debriefs and I thought, you know, isn't this great, I wish I had had it, sort of thing. So that was more of sort of a personal reaction to it, but certainly my appreciation of it from an institutional perspective has really grown.

As a result of her portfolio responsibilities, Margaret moved from seeing LDW as having individual value to validating LDW as having 'institutional value', endorsing a strategic place for the program:

I am quite concerned about the support that they [women] get to pursue their careers whether it be in the academic or professional staff. I read all the exit interviews so I get to see some of the high points and low points...I can see the benefits that the program has given and I can see some of the gaps in ourselves as an institution where the program will be really helpful.

Margaret's response incorporates both aspects of the bifocal approach – the needs of the women *and* the gaps in the institution that need to be addressed. As she described it, LDW was contributing to some of the highs while having something to offer in helping the institution address the lows.

### ***Gender duty***

Both Margaret and Belinda spoke of the need for male champions, highlighting the gender differential in power and influence. Belinda commented that:

I personally react, without any evidence to support this, when I see a senior man take up an issue to do with women or family. I tend to think, well, we are going to get somewhere. It will not be seen as a women's issue if he does. But I have no evidence to suggest that's really the case.

## Championing a gender equity cause

While Belinda seems almost reluctant to believe that this was more than her own personal impression, her view was consistent with all the champions interviewed. Margaret also saw men as more powerfully placed:

Exactly, on a campus like this it could often be more powerful having a male driving it and championing it – that it's acceptable to think that way sort of thing.

Margaret argued that being a woman can be an advantage in understanding the issues, explaining that '[y]ou are constantly checking it with your own experience whereas for obvious reasons a man won't be'. However Margaret also identified a down side for female champions, commenting that 'people probably read more into anything you say or do if you are a female championing something like this'.

Despite Margaret noting advantages and disadvantages for women in taking on the championing role, both Belinda and Margaret agree that men make better champions. How then do they reconcile this, as women undertaking championing? Margaret and Belinda both claimed championing LDW was part of their portfolio and downplayed any link to their gender. Margaret, for example, denied that she had inherited LDW because she was the senior woman:

Margaret No, I would say it is handed over to me because the staffing portfolio was handed over to me. So here, if the staffing portfolio had been transferred to [male colleague], it would have gone to him.

JdV You really think that that would have been the expectation?

Margaret Yes, I think so. Yeah, for the same reason that I am now chairing the Equity and Diversity Committee and the reason that Belinda took these things on was because she was given the staffing portfolio. So this will go wherever the staffing portfolio goes.

JdV What if that person doesn't have that same kind of ... because the championing is more than just the role on paper isn't it?

Margaret My sense is that if you offered it to someone or said to someone who really wasn't very empathetic, well there are two things, ...he would either suggest that he wasn't the appropriate person or he would grow into it. So I actually think in some ways it is a very good thing for men to take these portfolios on because it does force them to change their mindset and get a different mental space around some of them.

However, this link between championing LDW and the staffing portfolio starts to unravel when Margaret introduces the idea of choice for men. While both Margaret and Belinda

made choices about how they executed the role, the critical question is how much choice Margaret or Belinda had in taking it on?

On her retirement in 2008, Margaret chose to hand the role of championing LDW to the sole remaining female member of the Executive. While her concern for succession planning was admirable, her choice belied what she said in her interview a year previously regarding the role going with the portfolio. The SDVC position was filled by an internal male applicant and conceivably he could have been allocated, and been groomed or grown into, this task. Despite downplaying the significance of gender, Margaret's choice is congruent with gendered expectations around gender equity as women's work, making the gender equity championing roles 'gender marked' or 'gender duty'.

Margaret and Belinda both championed under Alan's shadow and the protection that his stance on gender equity provided. Margaret undertook the role dutifully, bringing genuine commitment to this and a range of other responsibilities without it seems any sense of risk or cost. Belinda's commitment to championing was also influenced by Alan's shadow, leading her to conclude that championing was not required. Neither experienced the difficulties or cost that characterised Fay Gale's championing of gender equity a decade earlier.

### **Engaged as gender change agents?**

Championing of the LDW program and gender equity more broadly, as revealed in these accounts, is an intensely gendered leadership role which unfolds within the complex relationship between self presentation, others' perceptions and expectations, individual choice and organizational forces. This constantly shifting interplay has an impact on the effectiveness of the championing role and the ultimate position and mandate of the LDW program. In this final section I bring together material from across the pairs in order to explore the engagement of champions with the gendered change agenda.

#### ***Positioned by gender***

Executive level champions are part of the organizational gendering processes they seek to change. The negotiating of gendered selves has particular implications for leaders. The work of Sinclair (1998) has been important in highlighting how leadership has been associated with masculinity in ways which are reinforcing for men and which complicate and diminish women as leaders. This gender dynamic is reflected in the views of the six

## Championing a gender equity cause

interviewees, who all considered men to be better positioned to champion gender equity. Men, by virtue of their gender are advantaged, while women, by virtue of their gender, are disadvantaged in effectively carrying out this leadership role.

Men's power to challenge the status quo derives from their membership of, and acceptance within, the male establishment. They appear more likely on the basis of the personal power of homosociability to be able to influence men. Alan and Geoff, home-grown and well respected within their institutions, appear able to take on the championing mantle effectively and without personal or professional cost. Mark's hesitance to identify himself as a champion in a wholehearted way appears to be related to his assessment of risk, in itself related to not being 'one of the boys' to the same degree as Geoff.

Unlike women, men engaging in gender equity initiatives cannot be criticised on the basis of self-interest. They are less vulnerable as leaders, do not have to manage their gender or their minority status as women do, and they do not carry the additional 'shadow job'. These are some of the factors that disadvantage women and advantage men. Championing a gender equity cause highlights women's embodied gender based on the male/female distinction. For women, there is little capacity to camouflage or minimise their membership of a disempowered 'outsider' group.

It is difficult to compare the stories of Margaret and Belinda with Cecilia's in policing. Cecilia's account demonstrates how women, when they are present in very low numbers, are compromised by their status as 'other'. Cecilia's 'otherness' unrelentingly undermined her effectiveness and carried a personal cost. While this was also the case for Fay Gale at UWA, this was not evident in Belinda and Margaret's accounts a decade later. Their low-key approaches to championing LDW may have diminished any risk or cost but the 'choice' to champion in this way was probably enhanced by the trailblazing of Fay Gale, the increasing number of senior women in the university (beyond 'token' representation), and Alan's solid support over such an extended period of time. It does suggest that the highly gendered nature of championing observed in the story of Geoff and Cecilia may be moderated over time or in a different setting. In other words, context is critical and, even amongst male dominated organizations, there is considerable variation in the degree to which it is safe (or risky) for senior women to be associated with gender equity causes.

Mark and Alan, male CEOs powerfully combining gender and status, see their role as crucial and their executive colleagues corroborate this perception. Clearly the combination of gender and position is critical for effective championing. While all interviewees carry

positional power, their capacity to drive change and exercise choice is shaped by gender. To be a senior male executive is to possess a level of informal power that women usually do not enjoy. As Cecilia's story illustrates, gender (femaleness) can actually operate to undermine positional authority. These deeply embedded gender forces mean that women and men have a different foundation or platform from which to champion.

### ***Gender marked roles: expectations and choices***

There is a contradiction in both organizational accounts between what is said and what is done in regard to gender and championing. All interviewees agreed that men made better champions, however at the time the research was conducted women in both institutions were carrying the bulk of the championing duties. Mark, while noting the difficulties for women in championing gender equity and also noting the risks of any one person on his Executive team taking on the mantle of equity, nevertheless passed various formal roles, including that of LDW Chair, to Cecilia and his visible presence and championing seem to have been in decline ever since. Alan passed on the championing duties and responsibilities to Margaret who in turn passed them on to Belinda.

There was a strong presumption in both organizations that senior women, regardless of interest, inclination or choice will champion. Women were assumed, because of their group membership, to be on board with gender equity. The reality is far more complex. While there may be some resonance because of personal experience with at least some of the issues women in the organization face, we cannot assume this is sufficient. Moreover as we have seen, women have a far less powerful platform from which to advocate and champion gender equity. Equally, the disproportionate difficulty and risk for women compared to men of taking on this role should not be discounted.

There was a correspondingly low expectation that men will be inclined to champion. Margaret passed the LDW role to another woman rather than expecting the incoming male SDVC to take it on. Mark did not expect any of his deputies to be gender champions. Men, unlike women, are assumed *not* to be on board with gender equity until proven otherwise. While Fay expected it of Alan, this was based on his prior gender equity track record as Head of School. Mark's decision to align himself with gender equity can be seen as a strategic choice influenced by the stance of the previous COP.

Women are conscripts to gender equity causes while men are volunteers. Women's choices are reduced by gender based assumptions and expectations while men's remain open.

## Championing a gender equity cause

Because of this difference in the power to make choices, the duties of gender champion become 'gender marked' as women's work. This urge to make it women's work seems to be so strong that Geoff, who was willing and able to champion as Chair of the LDW Steering Group when Cecilia arrived, was sidelined by Mark in favour of Cecilia. It appears that the easy or default option, and coincidentally the least likely to disrupt the status quo, is going to be a woman.

When championing is defined as 'women's work', becoming part of senior women's 'gender duty', the bifocal aims of the program are undermined. The absence of men removes men and the organizational gendering processes from view, implicitly sending the message that 'it's not our problem'. This encourages, or at least does nothing to deter, the ever present push towards positioning LDW as a 'fix the women' initiative that leaves the status quo intact.

Significantly increasing our expectations of male leaders to champion gender equity and correspondingly challenging the 'default to women' position could go some way to making the LDW champion less 'gender marked' as a woman's role. Men could take responsibility, as Geoff suggests, for the organization being 'all lopsided for them'. Grooming men as champions or giving them the chance to grow into the role becomes critical and should be seen as part of the current champion's role. Champion succession planning is key but this mantle whenever possible should be passed to men not to women.

### ***Champion building***

If this were to be an allocated role, it places even greater emphasis on the champion building process. In order to champion, men, and I would add some women, need to be convinced that there is a gender equity problem (Prime & Moss-Racusin 2009). This research raises questions about how much passion and personal conviction is required of a 'true' champion. Duties can be passed on but this can fall short of the genuine 'non negotiable', 'doing the right thing' that Belinda defined as championing. Delegating the role may result in a splitting of the role where the tasks are dutifully done while the original notion of championing, requiring passionate and committed advocacy, is lost.

Margaret provided some insight into her own development as an LDW champion, linking her portfolio duties to an increased capacity to see the contribution of LDW and position LDW strategically. Alan's championing as DVC too was grounded in the hands on knowledge of gender equity issues he acquired through the staffing portfolio, chairing the

Promotion and Tenure Committee and the Equity and Diversity Committee. I would argue that some linking between the executive member's portfolio and LDW championing would facilitate the champion building process and provide more immediacy to the role. The reverse may also be true, where the loss of the linkage between portfolio responsibilities and championing, as has occurred for Alan, may be detrimental. This raises interesting questions about the ideal positioning of a champion. While someone at CEO level is symbolically important, their external focus and competing priorities may diminish some of the advantages that a champion who is more directly engaged may bring.

Margaret's initial suggestion that the LDW spokesperson role go with the staffing portfolio may have merit. This reinforces the need for LDW to educate and involve champions while providing visible opportunities to build champion profile. But this process, as Mark has demonstrated, can also be resisted.

This discussion has put an enormous emphasis on individuals as champions or potential champions. This to a degree reflects the fragility and reliance of LDW on individuals, where one individual can make all the difference. It also highlights the positioning of equity as a personal value, where as one of Blackmore and Sachs (2007:238) respondents noted 'people can go with it [equity] or not as a personal preference'. Unlike other organizational imperatives, gender equity is still seen as an added optional extra, 'not part of the managerial self' (Blackmore & Sachs 2007). Bagilhole's (2002b:30) study in a UK university found the 'power and personal autonomy of some senior academics' allowed them to respond to EO 'in the way they see fit'. This choice for men, to opt in or out, is also demonstrated here. The LDW champion building process proceeds on the basis of, and is to a degree captive to, this assumption of male choice. However, we need to find a way to shift from the individualistic concept and practice of championing to gender equity being part and parcel of an organization's mandate. While UWA is much closer to this 'mainstreamed' ideal, it is still far from a reality.

### **Measuring up to the bifocal approach?**

In the opening to this chapter I noted the importance of executive leadership support to the very existence of WO programs *and* to their capacity to adopt a broader transformative mandate. How robust then was the LDW program and how was the transformative agenda faring in the two organizations?

## Championing a gender equity cause

At UWA, Alan's behaviour as champion appeared ideal. It was active, sustained and highly visible to women and men in the institution. He sent a clear message to his executive level colleagues and other senior staff (mentors) and was judged to be sincere, even exceptional by them. He was highly visible in championing other equity causes, had taken up gender equity issues in his role on external boards and had a sector wide reputation for supporting gender equity. He positioned and supported the LDW program as a transformational program.

There was, however, a down side to Alan's exceptional and sustained commitment. His association with the LDW program had remained so strong that there appeared to be a perception that there was no need or room for others in the Executive to do more than pick up (some of) the spokesperson duties. In addition, there appeared to be no men in the succession pipeline. At the LDW 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary event (in 2009) the female executive member who Margaret had asked to champion LDW was not present. Alan once again delivered a speech, handed out the graduation certificates, and was honoured for his commitment to mentoring (a total of 10 mentees over the years).

Meanwhile the budget difficulties that began when Alan became VC and LDW experienced somewhat of a championing vacuum have continued to worsen. This lack of valuing and prioritising of the program through the budgetary process may leave the program at risk. In previous years, as I noted in Chapter Three, reductions in staffing or budget served to place the emphasis on what may be regarded as 'core' activity, in this case the development of the women. The lesson here is that over time the transformative mandate of the program can easily be lost.

In policing Mark, on the other hand, began strongly as a champion but did not sustain his attention and presence. Mark viewed LDW as a training program designed to get more women into senior ranks, which in turn contributed to his vision of building a more modern policing organization. Meanwhile his absence spoke much louder than his words. With Geoff earlier effectively removed from formal championing and no expectation that any of the other men on the executive team should or could take on the role, Cecilia was effectively left carrying the full 'championing' load of building a more gender equitable workplace with little visible support. It was no surprise that over time she chose to delegate and downgrade this role, which after all she never chose. Geoff is no longer with policing; however, his uneasiness at the way things were going proved well founded.

LDW no longer exists in policing. The end of our contract and discussions regarding contract renewal ultimately provided the opportunity for the program to be placed on hold for a year while the leadership offerings at the Academy were under review. This, we were told, would assist greater integration of women's development in the following year and funds meanwhile would be used for focus groups to explore women's difficulties in applying for promotion. This was despite an evaluation of LDW just completed by the coordinator that was a strong endorsement of the program and what the women had achieved. While the Assistant Commissioner who made the decision felt the need to advise the Commissioner that the program was on hold for a year, there was no expectation this would be problematic. More than a year later, we have heard nothing more.

Piterman (2008) notes how diversity strategies lack resilience. As they are vulnerable to shifts in the organizational landscape, they can be easily undermined or wound back. Passive enactment is not sufficient. Clare Burton (quoted in Piterman 2008:26) argued that organizations need to be 'fiercely committed' and without that it becomes easy to justify phasing programs out or downgrading them. To that I would add vigilant. It is not clear if Alan can remain fiercely committed (and vigilant) given the demands of his role. And there is no-one else at Executive level protecting the LDW program at UWA. Mark's lack of tangible support for and engagement with the program resulted in it being afforded a low organizational priority. This low level of championing proved insufficient to maintain the program over time. Using Geoff's words quoted earlier, if the 'CEO or a male champion takes their eye off the ball...then it starts to die a natural death... it needs those male champions to breathe life into it'.

### **Conclusion**

This exploration of the championing role across two organizations has provided some fascinating insights into the champion role, revealing the gendered nature of the role and the gendered advantage men have when they choose to take on this role. The UWA account demonstrates how the LDW program can be seen and supported as a transformative program, thus endorsing the bifocal approach. On the other hand policing demonstrates how easily LDW can be confined to a training program by a lack of endorsement and support.

My concern with investigating executive level champions and their contribution to the robustness and longevity of LDW has proved well founded. The demise of LDW in policing and the identified risk for the LDW program at UWA clearly undermine the case

## Championing a gender equity cause

for WO programs as a sustainable vehicle for a transformative intervention. However, five years in policing and fifteen years at UWA could be seen as exceptionally long time-frames, given the current pace of organizational turmoil and change.

It would be premature to judge the bifocal approach on this alone. Championing for LDW and for gender equity is not exclusive or limited to the top of organizations. The fundamental premise of this thesis is that change occurs through building constituencies for change at all levels and across the organizations. Top down change on its own is of limited value (Liff & Cameron 1997). The following two chapters explore the involvement of mentors and participants and their engagement with the gendered change agenda.

# Chapter 6

## Mentors: Engaging in gendered change or validating the status quo?

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on mentors and their engagement with the transformative agenda of the bifocal approach. It is an examination of the effectiveness of mentoring as a means of recruiting constituents for change. The capacity of the LDW program to work with such a wide range of potential organizational partners was proposed earlier as a potential strength of WO programs as a gendered change intervention. Mentoring is the vehicle whereby mentors have the opportunity to develop gender insight, by which I mean the capacity to 'see' systemic gendering processes, which in turn underpins any gendered change agency.

This focus on the mentor is an unusual departure from the majority of mentoring research and practice that has a primary interest in the mentee and mentee outcomes. In addition to my focus on the mentor and outcomes for the mentor, I have a particular interest in the nature of the relationship between mentor and mentee. If mentors are to learn from their mentees this presupposes a two-way relationship, more characteristic of developmental, than instrumental mentoring, a distinction I explored in Chapter Two. The mentor's approach to their mentoring role and the nature of the relationship they develop will have important ramifications for their capacity to develop gender insight.

The development of gender insight is such a critical outcome for mentors within the bifocal approach that I begin the chapter by examining mentors' understanding of gender in some detail. My argument is that without gender insight there can be no engagement

with the transformative agenda and no capacity to engage in transformative mentoring. As experienced mentors, this examination of their current understanding becomes one way of determining if the bifocal approach has been working as intended. Incorporating this material with an exploration of their mentoring relationships, using the instrumental – developmental continuum as a guide, reveals their interconnectedness, providing clues as to what enables or constrains the development of gender insight within the mentoring relationship. The chapter concludes with an exploration of transformative mentoring, where the mentor uses their developing gender insight to engage with the organizational change agenda and mentor in a way that assists their mentee to do likewise.

Mentors were randomly chosen from lists of those who had mentored twice or more and the UWA sample was restricted to academics in order to enable a better ‘match’ with the police sample pool which was almost entirely male police officers. In all, at UWA I interviewed four women and four men, all professors: Raelene, Claudia, Beverley and Christine, and David, James, Clive and Leonard. In policing I conducted interviews with the two women who met the criteria: Karen and Samantha, and four men; Simon, Howard, George, and Trevor. Four were Superintendents, with Trevor and Samantha one rank below as Inspectors.

The interview covered two broad areas. Firstly, gender insight, explored through questions regarding the situation for women in their organization, their own attitudes and understanding and how this may have been influenced by their mentoring role, and their relationship to LDW as a women only program. And secondly, their mentoring role and practice, explored through questions such as how they approached the role, what they brought to the mentoring relationship, describing typical meetings and areas canvassed, outcomes for the mentee and their reflections on being a mentor.

## **Gender insight**

In the opening paragraph to this chapter I have defined gender insight as the capacity to ‘see’ systemic gendering processes. However delving into the ways people understand or ‘see’ the world based on what they articulate during interview, capturing them in that one photographic ‘snapshot’ moment, is necessarily fraught. In the case of gender insight, there are often difficulties with language and the temptation exists to equate gender insight with the use of gender language and to conclude a lack of gender insight due to a lack of articulation rather than necessarily any lack of understanding. Equally it is not a black and

white case of having or not having ‘gender insight’ but rather shades of grey. Gender insight, much as its presence or absence can be glimpsed through these accounts, will be fluid, contradictory and partial.

*‘And gender, if it has relevance...’*

This title, using the words of Clive (UWA), is symbolically representative of a great deal of what I will discuss in this chapter, where gender relevance was often contested. This was despite the primary assumption embedded in the mentoring program at UWA, and subsequently police, and voiced by some mentors, that (male) mentors learnt about gender from their mentees. As David (UWA) noted:

The mentors learn from the dilemmas that are faced by the people they are providing their mentoring to and they become institutionally aware in ways that I suspect, if you never did it, as a bloke, you could probably go along blissfully being unaware...

Samantha makes the same point about male mentors in policing:

‘I have had a number of them say to me, “My God, I didn’t realise that that was going on”... the mentors learn as much as the mentees about actually what the reality is [for women] in the workplace’

Despite this and anecdotal stories that I had heard particularly at UWA, little data emerged from these interviews to support the view that mentors developed gender insight as a result of their mentoring relationships. Only a minority of mentors described a two-way relationship where they acknowledged learning from their mentees and this was only infrequently related to gender. In fact, Simon actively resisted the idea that (gendered) patterns would emerge over time with repeat mentoring (police) when I queried this possibility:

No, they were quite different in their approaches to things. Their circumstances, while there are some parallels, they were individual people. I think one or two of them might have had a couple of stories which they thought were bad. And you go, “Well, everyone has those. Yeah, that might have been a bad experience, but let’s move on and let’s focus on the positive stuff. This is where you are now and this is where you can go”.

Simon’s response suggested that the attitudes of mentors towards gender issues may influence their capacity to hear the stories of the women and to learn from them.

Clive’s (UWA) words dismissing gender’s relevance and Simon’s (police) resistance to the idea of gendered patterns provided clues to the difficulties in developing gender insight

within mentoring. Only one mentor provided an emphatically positive response to my question regarding what had been learnt. Trevor's (police) story epitomised what I had hoped to find, development of gender insight for the mentor and the mentee and an engagement with the transformative agenda. Putting Trevor's account of mentoring to one side to be returned to later, I turned my attention to the remaining mentors in this research. If, unlike Trevor, they had not learnt from their mentees, did that mean they could already 'see' gender in the workplace and were ready-made constituents for gendered change?

Unfortunately this was not the case. The majority of mentors had more in common with Clive and Simon than they did with Trevor. Nevertheless there were many different ways of thinking and talking about gender and more particularly issues for women that emerged during the interviews. I have begun by exploring those perspectives presented by male and female mentors that deny or minimise the relevance of gender as an organizational issue, highlighting similarities and differences between UWA and policing where these existed. There were also perspectives that were specific to men or women. Men put forward ways of seeing or stereotyping women, while women's perspectives regarding gender were filtered through their own experiences. Finally in this section I explore examples of gender insight from the interviews.

This chapter is as much an account of how gender is rendered irrelevant by mentors (and their organizations) and the subsequent impact of this on the mentoring relationships as it is an account of the development of gender insight through mentoring. Both the 'failure' and 'success' of bifocal mentoring provide opportunities for deepening our understanding of the gendered organization (Acker 2006).

### ***Gender progress: 'we have gone ahead in leaps and bounds'***

Mentors in both institutions painted a picture of substantial progress towards gender equity. UWA mentors, both male and female, were unanimous in casting the institution in a very favourable light in respect of gender equity issues. Police mentors were more varied in their perceptions.

Leonard and James (at UWA), mentors with careers spanning 30 to 40 years, related stories of how bad it was in the past in order to highlight how much the institution had changed for the better. James described the dearth of female undergraduate students and staff:

## Chapter Six

who had very few opportunities, they were usually junior tutors...very few of them really went beyond that...when they got married they were given the sack...it was very male dominated...I think it is not the case now.

As Leonard reflected:

I think it is a lot better than it was...30 years ago when I started I would say at least for the first fifteen, it was open talk – we shouldn't have women on this...I think people generally are very accepting of women now, but I think there are just these differences in styles and lifestyles that impact still.

Simon, Howard and George voiced this positive assessment at policing, however over a much shorter timescale. Simon gave the most enthusiastic assessment of progress:

I think *we have gone ahead in leaps and bounds*...I grew up in what was probably a fairly racist, misogynist sort of organization, probably not a very nice organization, and it is not that long ago...I think we have come a long way...It is not a homogenous white Anglo-Saxon male boys' club where you go out drinking a lot. (emphasis added)

Howard echoed this sense of a profound shift:

...women have been around the organization virtually since inception ...But I really think it has only been in the last three or four years that women have actually become legitimate...as police officers...we have managed to move forward I think quite quickly.

These mentors were highlighting the macro changes in the workplace, something Connell (2006) observed in her NSW public sector study. Focussing on the macro view served several purposes. In the case of James and Leonard (UWA) this macro progress dominated their assessment of present day issues for women. For Simon, Howard and George (police) macro progress could be used as a sign to move on.

Simon wiped the organizational slate clean, saying: 'I like to focus on the positives about where we are going, not looking backwards about how bad it was'. He believed that the playing field was now level, offering opportunity for all:

I don't think there has ever been greater opportunity for people whether you are male or female or you are gay or straight or different culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds...

For Simon, individual success in this more progressive policing organization was there for individuals to grasp if they wished to do so. He had shifted gender from being an organizational systemic issue firmly located in the past, to placing the onus on the individual in the present.

## Mentors: Engaging in gendered change or validating the status quo?

At UWA male and female mentors considered the university, using Clive's words, 'a good place for women to work because there is a genuine effort to try and reduce some of these problems'. Women, who may have themselves experienced gendered disadvantage within the gendered organization, could be expected to present a less positive view than men. While this was the case in policing this was not true at UWA. Positive comments from Beverley and Raelene (UWA) ranged across areas such as committed leadership ('great having a VC and SDVC who are really committed'), policies, the availability of childcare on campus, promotion processes ('it promotes women equally, even though women may delay in applying'), the presence of female role models ('fantastic women leaders'), and access to opportunities for women ('does provide opportunities for women'). UWA was seen as a level playing field for women:

Beverley I have seen no sign that women who are working hard don't do as well, and the opportunities are there for women as much as the men.

Claudia I generally don't think the university is an anti-female organization in any way...I don't think there is necessarily any discrimination against women.

Christine, located away from the main campus and in an atypically female dominated area, had a very positive view:

... we [women] are in the majority and we do have a female leader so I think that makes the institute very easy to be a woman in. Our voice is heard, the work environment is very suitable to women with family commitments and so on, and very flexible, and it really is a very warm and caring environment by and large.

At UWA male and female mentors perceived the number and presence of senior women as evidence of progress. Indeed, substantial progress had been made since Fay Gale's arrival in 1990 when she could count senior women on one hand. As James put it:

I can certainly see a much more balanced and harmonious relationship with the women at UWA. Now they are on the Vice Chancellory, I think it is great, it is really good.

Senior academic women, now present in more than token numbers, were highly visible to these mentors. Mentors noted the growing numbers, importance, quality, and contribution of senior women, particularly as role models. James emphasised the importance of realistic senior role models for women, unlike when he started:

...there was one professor...very famous and totally eccentric...She used to smoke all the time and work like a maniac. Now there is a whole range of

people in different roles in the university, particularly senior roles and I think that has improved the perspective of other women building their careers...people who are regular women with families and doing the sorts of things like blokes do in the normal run of life, building their career as academics, that role model I think has improved enormously.

This perception of a level playing field and the positive assessment of numbers and contribution of senior academic women would suggest somewhat better data than is actually the case. Men still comprised 85% of Professors, the position coincidentally occupied by those interviewed. UWA remained below the national average of 20.9% female professors (QUT Equity Section 2009).

In policing, where women were still represented in 'token' numbers (meaning below 15% (Kanter 1977b)), the increased number of senior women nonetheless carried enormous weight as a symbolic marker of progress and was often the only evidence put forward to justify judgements of substantial organizational progress. As Howard noted 'I think we now have a lot more women in a lot more senior positions'. The presence of senior women was always expressed in numbers, rather than percentages, sometimes even by naming individuals and counting them off on their fingers. Howard, for example, claimed that, '[n]ow there are about 15 commissioned officers: three superintendents that come to mind, some inspectors and a whole host of senior sergeants'.

While Howard was reasonably accurate regarding the number of female commissioned officers (14 or 7.6%), a 'host of senior sergeants' suggests rather more than the 11 women (5.2%) that was actually the case (2007 HR data). This highlights the extreme visibility of female commissioned officers (inspector and above) and even below this rank (senior sergeant), and the way in which the organization uses senior women as signs of progress. Through focussing on numbers the few can become many, with no reality check concerning the actual percentages of men and women.

These positive organizational accounts did not sit well with the data or with many of the stories and experiences shared with us by the LDW participants. A focus on macro change when both organizations started from such a low base can, perhaps conveniently, mask large and continuing gender inequities (Connell 2006). Kanter (1977b:42) also noted the tendency to relax at any sign of progress, where 'great signs of progress' could be an improvement from 4% to 8% in senior women. In addition, the presence of these 'emblematic' senior women can be used as evidence that the glass ceiling no longer exists (Connell 2005:13).

## Mentors: Engaging in gendered change or validating the status quo?

Markers of progress such as increasing numbers of women, genuinely committed leadership (at UWA), and the presence of programs such as LDW, bolstered mentors' assessment of gender equity. What was missing for most was a broader critical awareness of the current inequitable situation. The strength of these mentors' positive assessments of their respective organizations and the almost unanimity of UWA mentors surprised and worried me. Without having a sense of gender inequity there could be little impetus to engage in the gendered change agenda as part of the LDW bifocal approach.

While these unrealistic assessments of gender equity progress were one form of gender denial, there was evidence of other gender denial and minimisation strategies in mentors' accounts.

### ***'I don't see them as being men or women'***

A common argument Maggie and I faced as facilitators of the police mentor training also emerged in the interviews. Men claimed that not seeing gender contributed to being gender fair. As Howard expressed it 'I try and treat everybody the same and therefore I don't see the difference'. Simon outlined this 'gender fair' approach in more detail:

There are still pockets of resistance where people may perceive a person to be a woman. *I don't see them as being men or women, I see them as being police officers* who may have particular needs, so I want to address them on that basis that they are police officers...The more we can get our head around the fact that it is not about men or women but it is about police officers or police staff who may or may not have particular needs. And I think that's really important, particularly for women in progressing, not to be seen as a woman but as a police officer...(emphasis added)

In choosing to deny the relevance of sex category, at least for women, Simon was able to ignore the construction of gender and the ways in which the organization was gendered. Simon and others, who argued this 'not seeing' gender approach, positioned it as part of a 'we've moved beyond gender' discourse.

### ***Greedy academia: A single issue approach to gender?***

UWA mentors unanimously raised issues of workload, the unrelenting demands of academic life and the difficulties of maintaining some kind of work/life balance. This (gender) issue dominated their assessment of the situation for women at UWA and to a degree their approach to mentoring. Their focus on the 'greedy institution' (Cosser 1974), a difficulty they themselves experienced and understood, became a way, and for some the

only way, of understanding women's difficulties within academia. For one mentor it also became a way of linking men's and women's experiences, thus serving to diminish gender differences.

Leonard described academia as well beyond a '9 to 5 job':

...it is very cut throat, well not necessarily cut throat, very competitive, very hard work. You have got to do good work, you have to write grants, two-thirds of which will be rejected at least. You have got to write papers that will be sent back to you – your life's work and there are all these criticisms, and it is hard. It is hard for anybody, *but maybe it is a bit harder for women than men.* (emphasis added)

Beverley, a research only appointment felt the pull of the greedy institution/sector keenly. A newly appointed female Professor had commented to her, "Oh, I tell women they don't need to be a super hero, they just need to keep publishing and be successful". Beverley strongly disagreed with this sentiment:

I think to become a Professor and to do really well in the university you do need to be a super hero...I don't know that it is a university issue but a broader sector issue that what we are confronted with now as academics is to be successful...It is a really harsh sector for men and for women really, but I don't know if there is any difference and I think it is getting worse.

Beverley and Leonard had between them described a demanding, harsh, competitive, and cut throat environment where you need to be an 'unencumbered' and devoted worker to succeed. Despite saying it was harsh for both men and women, Beverley acknowledged the difficulties for women, unlike herself, who had childrearing responsibilities.

So I think that women have opportunities but I think there is enormous cost because women who still have primary responsibility for their children, ...there must be this incredible tension for people who have got kids...to take those opportunities, one still needs to work at quite an incredible pace.

Caring for children became the key impediment in meeting the demands of the greedy institution (Connell 2006:442). Clive, in contrast to Beverley and others, did not see work/life balance as a gender issue, instead stressing the commonalities between men and women:

...as someone struggling to balance a range of different commitments and I have found, from my perspective, that the problems and challenges that the two women I have worked with as a mentor have described, I have been familiar with – I haven't gone, "Oh jeez, these are women's problems that I am not familiar with". They had a *variance* of things that I recognise well... (emphasis added)

Clive's approach serves to obscure gender effects. Several times during the interview he stressed that if men experienced it too, in his view it was no longer a gender issue. By collapsing men and women's experiences into a 'variance' of each other's he was in danger of denying important gender differences. His own experience as a senior academic with a supportive wife who retains primary care of the children and the domestic duties would not be comparable to the junior woman in a dual career couple who was the primary carer of her children, a common scenario (Probert, Ewer & Whiting 1998:53).

While all UWA mentors dwelt on issues of workload and the nature of academic work as problematic, David was the only mentor to question this institutional greediness, as I will discuss below. There appeared to be implicit acceptance by both women and men that these were the rules of engagement in a competitive research-intensive university and that the sector rather than the institution was to blame. Regardless of whether mentors saw work/life balance as more applicable to women (with children), their approach remained the same. Their individual success, *despite* the demands of the greedy sector, led them to individualise this issue rather than framing it as a systemic gender issue that continued to shape academic success.

Simon and Howard's (police) approach of 'I don't see gender' has much in common with Clive's view. Each in their own way profess a form of 'gender blindness' that denies reality and difference (Maddock & Parkin 1993:6). Simon represents police officers as disembodied and therefore sexless but Acker has argued this universal ideal worker actually represents one gender – men. Clive, on the other hand, blurs the boundaries between men and women, also effectively disappearing gender. Pretending 'that women live the same lives and have the same experiences as men...allows people to ignore the significance of gender at work' (Maddock & Parkin 1993:6). The particular needs and experiences of women become invisible, being seen as individual rather than systemic.

### ***Gender hesitancy***

There was a marked hesitancy on the part of some female mentors to see their gender (sex) as a relevant or an explanatory factor in their experience. This was matched by a hesitancy on the part of male mentors to see gender as relevant to differences they observed. In each case gender relevance was diminished by the search for alternative, often individualistic ways of seeing the world.

Claudia (UWA) described a difficult experience:

‘...and I think being a woman actually made that harder, and being a newcomer and being non-WA, I didn’t go to Christchurch [private boy’s school]. It is honestly a big thing here and I don’t think I was necessarily taken that seriously always’.

She finished off somewhat apologetically saying: ‘[m]aybe that’s just my perception but that’s what I felt’.

Karen (police), who I quoted in the previous chapter as critical of the lack of ‘audience’ LDW had with the three top executive positions, made few references to her own experiences as a woman and focussed instead on her experiences as a recent lateral entrant to this policing jurisdiction.

Karen: I guess if I stuff up...that gets emphasised because ‘she’s from outside’.  
JdV Is it the ‘she’ or the ‘outside’?  
Karen ‘Outside’ I think. But I guess women are subject to: if I make errors in a particular area, then women are quickly labelled, as opposed to men.

Karen’s comments echoed those made by Cecilia (police champion), where women and men are quick to criticise women. However at interview Karen was hesitant to talk at length about gender and following this excerpt returned to the theme of her lack of a shared ‘social history’.

Beverley described how ‘I have come completely from the wrong side of the tracks and so there is a lot of barriers I think’. She expressed surprise and ‘shock’ at her academic success. ‘I just sort of laugh everyday, how did I get here? It is just not where I was going’. More aware of her working class origins than gender, she appeared not to see how the two forms of identity interact. Beverley described the faculty as ‘very clubby’. When I asked if it was ‘a boys’ club’, she hesitated before acknowledging that it ‘is probably a boys’ club’, later qualifying this ‘I am not sure it is entirely gender or it is partly to do with the nature of the club’. Later when she described her own growing management role and how difficult that role was, she commented:

I just wonder whether they are gender issues or are they workplace issues in a way because men were in power and women weren’t?...a lot of discussion about gender issues at those [LDW] meetings may not have been gender issues actually, they are management issues. I think it just happened that most of the bosses were men because it is just really hard.

In Beverley’s analysis the fact that bosses were male was incidental. She was prepared to ascribe any difficulties LDW women had described with their male boss to the fact that it

was hard being a boss, rather than the gender of the boss. Beverley seemed unaware of the contribution of gendering processes to gender segregation in the workplace (Acker 1990). Individualising her own difficulties as the boss meant losing a systemic and power based analysis. Beverley, despite describing not fitting in, her feelings of isolation and the lack of support she experienced, was able to say ‘So I don’t think that I could say personally that there are institutional problems with being a woman’. In part, the perception of UWA as a gender fair institution, discussed earlier, seemed to encourage the view that the explanation must lie elsewhere.

Men too were hesitant to ascribe gendered meanings. Leonard and James both coincidentally mused on women’s contribution to, and interest in, teaching. Leonard noted women’s contribution to curriculum change, describing it as ‘striking how it was the women who were prepared to come in and drive and put in the input’. Men meanwhile ‘were focussing on what leads to promotion, which is the research related activities’. He finished off his thoughts rather abruptly, concluding ‘I suspect it was more of a personality thing’. James observed how many more women than men attended the annual Teaching and Learning Forum. He concluded that women ‘probably use resources that are available more so than the men’.

Neither Leonard nor James were able to move beyond noticing a gender difference in behaviour to explore a deeper systemic understanding of gender that may explain this observed difference, appearing hesitant to read too much into it. This reluctance on the part of both male and female mentors suggested that gender remains somewhat of a taboo. For women to ascribe gender as relevant to their personal circumstance was to claim discrimination was occurring. For (some) men ‘gender fairness’ relies on seeing and treating women and men as the same, leaving little room for observing systemic gendering. In both cases deeper exploration does not occur and an opportunity to see and understand systemic gendering is lost.

### ***No need for women only programs***

The lack of gender relevance for these mentors – due to over enthusiastic assessments of progress, gender blindness or a lack of a systemic analysis – not only jeopardises the bifocal agenda of the mentoring aspect of the program but also jeopardises the LDW program itself.

Howard, George and Simon (police) used their views of substantial progress to justify a movement away from organizational support for gender initiatives. As Howard argues:

I suppose the thing there is OK, at what point do you say this has now gone far enough. It is strong enough to not need a 'women only' set of drivers and deliverables, we can now start to bring men I suppose into that. My gut feeling is, and don't ask me to prove it, that we are there. I think that today we could relax this out a bit and we don't need a 'women only' programme.

Howard, in describing the work of the WAN [Women's Advisory Network], went on to suggest that 'at times it is *difficult to determine the relevance*, for me anyway...What does it actually do that's not yet been accomplished?' (emphasis added). While describing himself as a supporter of LDW he was: '[s]upportive of it now morphing to be something a bit more inclusive rather than exclusive'.

In all three men's accounts, which were uncannily similar to each other, I heard echoes of the Commissioner's optimistic assessment of progress and his desire for the organization to move on, away from gender and women only initiatives and towards diversity.

In contrast, at UWA, female mentors' assessment of gender fairness did not extend to a softening of support for LDW. All four, themselves former participants of the program, endorsed the ongoing value of LDW, in particular noting the benefits of women only space. As Beverley noted:

It was good to be women only because we were able to share a lot of things that were common problems and we may not have discussed these things had there been men there.

Both women and men at UWA raised men's needs, for example for networking, for skills, or for mentoring, as an issue. For most mentors, acknowledging men's needs did not include dismantling women only programs. However Clive's perceptions of good progress and his minimisation of gender differences resulting from increasing overlap between women and men led to him questioning the ongoing relevance of women only programs:

...there are younger guys having the same problems that have been traditionally been women's problems, that we need to think of how the same support mechanisms that might have been channelled towards women can be made available.

Clive was clear about gender-segregated programs stating that: 'I certainly wouldn't say I was a champion of that'. His argument is a version of the 'what about the men?' that is so often directed at women's programs.

### *Women's place*

In addition to the gender blind and gender minimisation approaches evident in the interviews, women were also positioned as 'other', particularly within policing.

The notion of the genderless disembodied 'police officer' that underpinned Simon's 'gender blind, gender fair' argument was difficult to hold onto and began to unravel when Simon raised 'the biological issue':

Women will make particular choices and that may mean that they will choose to go and have a family. Now that can, not necessarily, but it can be an impediment to their progression because *they have basically put their life and their career on hold* and that is a difficult thing. Men need to understand that. (emphasis added)

Ultimately Simon and Howard fell back into the position that policing was not a good fit for women raising families:

Simon ...because it is perhaps not a job that's conducive to women trying to raise a family all the time...Raising children is a pretty hard thing, so my wife tells me all the time.

Howard We ought to respect that person is trying to do a terribly difficult thing or two jobs virtually – policing perhaps really should be secondary employment for mothers that are trying to make a home, if they come from the same sort of family that I came from...

This is a version of 'women do not belong here', an attitude still (covertly) prevalent in policing. Simon described his own circumstances:

She [my wife] keeps telling me that she basically takes me out of the equation except for those odd occasions when it is mandated that I have to do things. I have been very lucky, I have had a very supportive wife who is not in the police and I have been able to progress my career.

Simon was not unusual amongst senior male police in having domestic duties almost entirely taken care of by his wife. Writ large between the lines was the understanding that his wife was behaving as women should, that is 'at home with their children' (Sinclair 1998:23). Further to this, he was behaving in the way he believed men should behave.

Simon and Howard's accounts of gender were complex and full of contradictions that they seemed oblivious to. When, despite their attempts to ignore or minimise gender, they acknowledged women's reality, Simon and Howard fell back on stereotypical understandings of women's roles and questioned women's 'fit' rather than institutional

structures. Women remained impostors after all when they could not meet the demands of the unencumbered employee.

There is another way that women are positioned that is particularly evident within policing. I have already noted the visibility of senior women in both organizations. However while UWA women were noted as great contributors to the organization, women in policing were apparently expected to carry more of the burden of organizational change. This notion of 'women are special' (CGO Frame 2), for example policewomen's capacity to contribute to more ethical and less corrupt policing was noted in the Royal Commission. Senior women, despite being thinly spread were expected to value add to the work of the agency. In reality this became another way of stereotyping and containing women. George, a superintendent in charge of a District office, had what he referred to as a 'male bastion' with five male inspectors.

George Now, I have already had a conversation with my boss about, well when one of those moves, *can I get a female in, because I want to get that perspective into this level*. So, the issues for me are that we don't have enough female officers at the levels that count...we only got our first female sergeant a few weeks ago as an officer in charge of a police station...So those numbers are right down for me and I think until you get more of a critical mass at that level, we don't utilise the value. (emphasis added)

JdV What difference would it make having a female inspector do you think?

George I am going to generalize here...I think it would keep us honest...We would be forced I think to think more about flexible work options and how to accommodate that in our business of policing...

I challenged George to consider how this would work if in fact the female inspector did not have family responsibilities herself. He suggested that he could speak privately to her to take that issue on. As the conversation proceeded, it became clear that he and at least two other senior men in his district office had school age children themselves and that in fact they were making some progress on this issue. However this was a potent example of how issues such as work/life balance were gendered as women's issues and became women's work to solve. This is reminiscent of the way that the Commissioner delegated all responsibility regarding gender equality to Cecilia as soon as she arrived.

***Female mentors: Drawing on their own experience***

There has always been a gendered assumption embedded in the LDW mentoring program. The intent to recruit male supporters presupposed that it was the male mentors who needed to develop gender insight, not the female mentors. Women, it was assumed, would have gender insight because they were women. With hindsight I can see this assumption embedded in my own questions. Although each interview followed a semi-structured format, developing its own trajectory, I consistently and more directly asked male mentors to reflect on any changes in attitude, understanding or behaviour attributable to their mentoring experience, searching for the development of gender insight. With women I was happily diverted, if they were forthcoming, by their experiences of the gendered organization.

Most, in fact, were not forthcoming. Christine (UWA) reflected on her experience in passing, while Raelene and Beverley (UWA) and Karen (police) shared nothing of their own experience. This was interesting of itself, signalling perhaps the lack of relevance these successful women placed on their own histories when reflecting on gender issues within the organization, a capacity to distance themselves, or a need to position themselves in a particular way as senior women. However Claudia (UWA) and Samantha's (police) stories suggest that the strategies women have used to cope within highly masculinist professions provide important filters or lenses to their development of gender insight.

Samantha's interview was dominated by her long and engrossing tale of her years within policing. I was shocked, fascinated, indignant and enthralled by her story as it unfolded. It was a story of the excesses of a masculinised workplace with multiple examples of discriminatory, sexist, misogynist and exclusionary behaviour together with constant criticism and scrutiny. This was a private performance. The public performance of senior policewomen was in my experience quite different. After 5 years working with policewomen I had heard many stories but Samantha's was by far the most frank. Senior policewomen were very circumspect in discussing their difficulties publicly, even in 'frank' accounts with women on the LDW program. Rank, as Silvestri (2003:177) notes, keeps women apart.

Far from being surprising, Samantha's story is rather typical of women police officers' stories in the literature, also told anonymously and in private (Rabe-Hemp 2008:254,257; Silvestri 2003). Samantha detailed how she had learned to survive and succeed. Some of the earlier stories set the scene for her survival mantra – 'well I'll show them' - and indeed she

did show them. Chosen as one of four women cadets in a group of about 60, even the security guard apparently felt free to voice his opinion. “My God, I would never have picked you. You are not going to last 12 months”, Samantha recollected him saying.

In order to ‘show them’ and to survive, Samantha focussed on ‘working really hard – head down and bum up and just getting on with it’. This became her major defence against seemingly inevitable criticism:

I know I have worked my butt off to get to this position and I deserve it as much as any one else, I am as good as any of the others...it has got to be 110 per cent...I needed to be really clear in my mind that I deserved that because I am going to cop it anyway...

Samantha’s story veered between her experiences and her stoical, non complaining approach. For example, following the story of how she was clearly discriminated against in promotion in favour of men with families to support, she laughed and said:

Well, what do I do, do I go and have a dummy spit?...Oh dear, so I know what it is like to miss out, but that’s good too, it is part of the journey.

When she described being excluded from social events, she was quick to add, ‘[d]on’t think it is sour grapes, it is just reality.’ When men were promoted who are well known for being misogynist, she despaired:

...and to think that people like that even get promoted is just beyond me. That really frustrates me immensely. *But anyway, that’s life isn’t it.* But whilst you have got leaders like that, people being promoted to commissioned office rank who have got those sorts of attitudes and those sorts of behaviours, we are never going to change the culture in this job. *Luckily they are not all like that.* (emphasis added)

Remaining philosophical became part of her capacity to cope.

Like Cecilia (champion, policing), Samantha believed she had to work harder and be better than the men to succeed. Her credibility had been fought for and bought at a personal price - 30 years of working hard to prove herself. Samantha was extremely critical of women who had not done the ‘hard yards’, who had not meticulously secured their credibility, reputation and wide ranging experience as she had. In this sense, she participated in the excessive scrutiny of successful women, one of the gendered processes that undermine women’s credibility and legitimacy in the workplace.

Claudia (UWA), like Samantha, had been through a strong enculturation process as one of a very small number of women during her professional training. Claudia recalled that when her baby son was critically ill in intensive care, she continued, on the instructions of her

boss to carry a full load in the clinic and operating theatre, sleeping with her son in the Intensive Care Unit at night. She accepted it:

I never thought to say, “Well, actually I have got to go and see my child who I may never see again”, because that’s just the way it was...Years later I thought it probably wasn’t normal, but [at the time] I thought it was.

Claudia’s recollection offered a view into the very gendered world in which she had learned to survive and later thrive. She had been immersed in the cultural rules, unable to see them as not ‘normal’ and something she could challenge until much later. She exemplified the way in which successful women, in pursuing career success, may lose sight of gender, in this case in the form of ‘heroic’ norms in their workplaces.

In common with Cecilia and Samantha, Claudia’s visibility and vulnerability in a male dominated environment (Kram & McCollom Hampton 2003) had resulted in a fair bit of criticism. For example she remembered ‘making bloody sure that what you do do well, you do well’, in an attempt to be above criticism. In turn she believed her visibility had resulted in considerable advantages:

You always had to offer to go the extra mile, but you were certainly always remembered...I was one of the only women...but I always got the job I wanted and I always got where I wanted to be.

Claudia echoed Samantha in her criticism of other women:

...who are a bit lazy and scoot around things as there are men who do the same. I suppose I probably have less tolerance in some ways for women who don’t do things well.

Claudia appeared to be aware that she was applying a double standard to exclude women who don’t measure up. As one of so few women, her competency, like Samantha’s, remained linked to the competency of other women. Because senior women, unlike senior men, have a minority status in organizations, their hard earned reputation is always precarious. As Kanter (1977b) argued, individual women became representative of all women and any perceived ‘slip’ can readily be used to undermine all women. The criticisms of other women voiced by Samantha and Claudia therefore need to be read as survival techniques.

There was little in these accounts to suggest that Claudia or Samantha were well placed to challenge the status quo. Unlike the men, women’s minority/token group gender status (1977b; 1998) and the ways in which they have ‘managed’ their gender (Maddock & Parkin 1994) plays a part in, while not totally determining, their approach. While sharing common

experiences, women also deploy individualised strategies for coping within the same highly masculinised workplace (Martin & Meyerson 1998).

Both Claudia and Samantha exemplify what Powell, Bagilhole and Dainty (2009:419) found amongst women in engineering, where women strove to be accepted through ‘achieving a [professional] reputation’, so that they were seen as engineers first and women second. As Kelan (2009) notes, this negation of gender becomes another way of doing gender. And Claudia, in common with some women engineers in Powell et al’s (2009) study claimed the advantages of her gender status outweighed the disadvantages. Both accounts contain elements of conflicting narratives, similar to those Hunter (2002) found in her study of women barristers. She called them the ‘no-yes-but’ group, where women ‘simultaneously deny, admit, minimise, and excuse discrimination against women’ (Hunter 2002:123).

Claudia claimed to be impervious to criticism, saying that ‘I am far too old and long in the tooth to give a damn about that any more’ but Samantha was still focussing on (her own) survival. Samantha had a lot of energy tied up in the overworking she considered necessary to secure her professional reputation. Neither appeared to have the depth of gender insight required for transformative mentoring.

Kronsell (2005:290), in her study of military and defence organizations, argues that ‘women as “outsiders within”...are situated in ways that enable them to perceive gendered practices’, while men because of their organizational fit are situated ‘in ways [that] disable their “seeing and knowing”...because they do not struggle with them’. However, in my research there is little support, either in the interviews where the women did not discuss their experiences as women, or in Claudia and Samantha’s accounts, for the notion that women draw on their own experiences as women within the organization to develop gender insight.

### ***A more complex systemic view?***

So far in these accounts there has been no evidence of an emerging gender insight. The positive view of gender progress in both organizations removed a sense of urgency and gender was no longer positioned as organizationally relevant. Various forms of minimising or denying gender have been explored. At UWA the widespread acceptance of the demands of the greedy institution reinforced the notion of the unencumbered (male) worker and disappeared systemic gender issues. In policing women were assumed to be special and were thus stereotyped in terms of their contribution. Visible signs of progress

## Mentors: Engaging in gendered change or validating the status quo?

appear to be amplified in order to get gender off the agenda. The existence of LDW, if it depended on mentors' support for its existence, appeared particularly vulnerable in policing.

In addition the mentors' accounts were often narrow in scope and lacking depth. Perceptions were often based on very limited data and observations and in relation to a limited range of topics or behaviours. David and Raelene (UWA), both holding leadership roles within the central administration, presented a more comprehensive understanding of gender issues. Raelene balanced out her list of benefits and progress for women at UWA, quoted earlier, with a list of difficulties ranging from the salary gap between women and men to the complexities of career mobility. However, her list focussed on symptoms and was not accompanied by any gender analysis.

David appeared to have a more encompassing view of the institution as gendered, acknowledging that the gender work was not yet done. 'The kind of gender ratio in the place still requires a lot more attention and work'. He also admitted to being puzzled sometimes:

...there are elements that are related to that [gender ratio] which I don't understand, but I can see what they look like...I know that simple solutions are not likely to work, but how to actually make the changes that would make it work are much harder.

David was the most enthusiastic of all male mentors in endorsing LDW, describing it as 'absolutely essential, precisely because the fit between the expectation and *how you build careers and live inside the institutions is actually gendered*' (emphasis added). Later in the interview, when I asked David to expand on how he saw the organization as gendered, based on this remark, he corrected me saying; '*the experience* of the organization is gendered' (emphasis added). In making this distinction David is stopping short of acknowledging the gendered organization, as we understand it from Acker; that is where the institution itself through its policies, practices and culture is 'doing' the gendering. Instead, he is acknowledging that the experiences and outcomes for women and men differ, advantaging men within the institution.

Despite David's reticence when I used the term 'gendered organization', he does see gender issues as being both personal and systemic, moving between these two positions in the interview covering some of the same ground as other mentors, for example research funding and work life balance with children, while holding onto a more systemic analysis.

Those things to me are still unresolved issues in terms of institutional design, institutional culture and institutional assumptions and they are not ones that are resolvable simply by women who are experiencing those problems (emphasis added).

David has effectively described how the gender problem then is 'designed' into the way work is done, as Acker suggests in defining the gendered organization. If the issues are not individually resolvable as David asserted, then perhaps institutional change is required? I was keen to explore if David's gender insight translated into change agency. When I asked, 'is there anything you do differently?' David described his thinking:

...how do you actually live in this institution and how can we make it such that you can achieve what you want to achieve and be the kind of person that you are?...And for the institution to achieve its goals?

David went on to acknowledge that men 'find it easier to live in the institution', achieving their own and the institution's goals. But he said 'It can't be that you all have to be blokes' in order to do this.

It was not surprising that David, while articulating the difficulty of 'fit' for academic women within the institution and the academic role, remained 'puzzled', 'knowing simple solutions won't work'. David had come up against the gendered construction of the ideal academic, deeply embedded in the ways people 'live within the organization' and contribute to organizational goals. He knew the answer was not that they all 'have to be blokes' but had not progressed beyond asking the questions. He appeared to have no idea of potential solutions, mentioning no actions planned or taken to address what he observed. In David's case a more systemic understanding of gendering had not translated into action.

This detailed exploration of mentors' understanding of gender issues within their respective institutions paints a sobering picture, highlighting the many ways in which gender was situated below the horizon of what matters (Eveline & Bacchi 2009), removing any responsibility for these mentors, as leaders within their respective institutions, to address it.

Rather than mentoring acting as a catalyst for mentors to develop gender insight, the organizational normalising of gender irrelevance (Eveline & Bacchi 2009) reflected in these accounts may be blocking the development of gender insight. Even David, who was more questioning of the gender inequities he observed, was unable to translate this into action. It appears that neither female nor male mentors had become constituents for gendered change as intended within the bifocal approach.

## **Mentoring approaches**

The development of gender insight, more particularly a systemic understanding of gender, should be both a product of mentoring and a foundation for future mentoring within the bifocal approach. My focus so far in this chapter has been on the (non)development of this gender insight in the mentor. The following exploration of mentoring practices, the way mentors understand their role and how they describe their mentoring relationships moves the focus to the mentoring relationship. In the following section I explore where these mentors are located on the 'instrumental' through to 'developmental' mentoring continuum. My aim is to make explicit linkages between mentors' understanding of gender, their approach to their role as mentor and to the mentoring relationship, and their resultant capacity to engage in mentoring which suits our bifocal ends.

### ***Mentoring for 'organizational fit'***

Mentoring at the instrumental end of the continuum is characterised by a senior colleague mentoring a junior colleague with the intent of assisting the career of the junior colleague in her current role and context. The mentor uses their knowledge and experience to teach and/or advise the mentee how to succeed. In the case of WO mentoring, where the organization wishes to progress women through the ranks to address the shortfall of senior women, there can be a strong focus on promotion. Based on unequal power relationships, an instrumental mentor relationship is one-way and lacks reflection or learning on the part of the mentor. Mentors may demonstrate a lack of capacity or desire to empathise, listen or offer other types of psychosocial support needed to make mentoring a safe place to learn and take risks.

Instrumental mentoring, while apparently focussing on the women, can also be seen as a way of assisting women to navigate and thrive within existing organizational parameters, thus meeting organizational needs without disrupting the gendered status quo. From the perspective of the goals of the bifocal approach, instrumental mentoring becomes a way of 'fixing the women'. This organizational imperative often remains hidden from view and for this reason I have renamed instrumental mentoring as mentoring for 'organizational fit'.

Simon (police), who promoted the idea of the genderless police officer, was the most striking example of this approach. Simon was clear about his role and the type of mentees he could and couldn't help. He described his mentoring role as providing 'some guidance

and some parameters as to where I think you should go'. He described his mentoring approach as being very task focussed around career and promotion:

“Well OK, let's have a look at where you are at. What is it you need to do to get promoted? What are the things you are looking for? Let's have a look at your skills. What sort of job are you after? Then we worked from there and then I said, “Well OK, show me your CV and your application, how would you word it?” I gave her some hints and some structure as to how I would do it...So I worked through that with her. She applied for a job. She was successful first time around. I then thought my job here is done and I can now move on.

Once promotion was achieved, Simon considered his job done. Simon's suggestion to me that we allocate him a group of mentees who he could then simultaneously guide through the promotion process was indicative of his strongly instrumental approach.

Simon did not want mentees who did not know what they wanted. In his view:

They should have some idea of their goals or objectives and their ambitions...I don't know that some people are actually ready...It is no good them coming if they are not prepared...the person needs to have a clear understanding of where they are going or what they want to do...To be quite honest, I wouldn't want to waste their time or my time in providing them with some guidance if six months down the track they are still haven't worked out what they wanted.... they are sitting there waiting for me to wave a magic wand.

Simon's narrow view of mentoring meant that mentees needed to fit what he was prepared to offer. Those who in his words might require 'confidence boosting' or said 'I am not really sure what I want to do' were in his view not suitable for mentoring. Simon referred to these women as 'high maintenance' adding 'I think maybe they need to go on a confidence boosting course or something'. Simon's understanding of mentoring does not embrace the more developmental approach that may be appropriate for the mentees he describes as unsuitable for mentoring.

Simon was not alone in his instrumental approach to mentoring. While his policing colleagues (three men, two women) took a more developmental approach, six of the UWA mentors, male and female, shared to a lesser degree his career focussed instrumental approach. These UWA mentors were relying heavily on their expert knowledge, networks, problem solving skills and experience to assist their mentees' career development.

Raelene and Clive (both UWA) shared a very similar problem solving approach. Clive described his mentoring role as:

## Mentors: Engaging in gendered change or validating the status quo?

Sharing experience and endeavouring at least to translate my own experience into candidate solutions to my mentees' problems. So, my standpoint is what is it this person wants to achieve where there is an obstacle? Then I would be saying, given what I know from my background, what would be the way this person should go about that? That would be how I would explain it.

Raelene took a similarly pragmatic approach:

'My role as a mentor is really to open eyes, to provide ways of getting around obstacles to move ahead in your career I think...What I usually try and do...is identify an issue that I might be able to help with...around networks, who to talk to ... a particular career issue...an imminent birth or how to deal with being overloaded with teaching or doing too much admin, or whatever the issue might be...And usually to try and suggest approaches that are likely to keep everything rational and data driven in order to try and solve the problem.

Raelene and Clive were endeavouring to value add for their mentees by drawing on their own resources, as Raelene said, to find something 'I might be able to help with' or, for Clive, 'some capacity to come up with novel solutions'. Advice giving and knowledge transfer from themselves to their mentee are both characteristics of a more instrumental approach. However, their focus on career was broader than Simon's in that both explicitly discuss work/life balance issues as they relate to career progression.

These examples of mentoring for 'organizational fit' provide a feel for the mentors' approach and simultaneously in the case of Simon began to highlight difficulties with this approach such as issues of fit or match between mentor and mentee. There were further difficulties when mentors used this approach without gender insight.

Beverley (UWA) also used an instrumental approach, with varying success. With her LDW mentees she noted that 'I felt disappointed in my performance as mentor' whereas:

The people who I mentor [informally] around here...I feel like I have done quite a good job at doing that in a really positive way in mentoring people to solve problems for their careers and internally...there are different people in the university, some people want to be an academic and have a really good work/life balance and all that sort of thing and we all aspire to that, but some of us don't achieve it. Maybe that was it, that the people I mentor here are more people who want to be the academic like I am, which is not for everyone...So it is a matter of matching the style. I am quite goal directed, task oriented and that's not for everyone let's face it, but I don't know how to be any other way.

Beverley's reflection highlighted the way in which instrumental mentoring did not suit all mentees. Her conclusion that 'it is a matter of matching style' highlighted her inability to

modify her approach when the mentee's goals did not match her driven approach. Seeing herself as a 'high flyer' but without 'work/life balance', Beverley's description of her instrumental mentoring approach may be enculturating more junior colleagues into 'being superheroes' within the 'harsh sector' she described earlier.

Simon (police), who advocated 'the gender blind, gender fair' approach, denied women's reality in order to do so. This resulted in him advising women who were working part-time that '[y]ou should apply for a job as if you were going to be full-time, then you can negotiate the circumstances as to your employment'. This suggestion, that women should conceal the ways in which they deviated from the ideal worker, was in our experience commonly offered advice that left many women on the LDW program feeling uncomfortable. It implied that gender camouflage (Sinclair 1998) was necessary in order to progress and at the same time denied the life situations of many mentees..

Clive (UWA), who described women's experience as a 'variance' of his own in terms of work/life balance, was also unable to see gender as relevant in other scenarios:

And there is a huge difference in the challenges that men and women face, but there is also I think a great deal of overlap and two kinds of overlap I've got in mind, one is just that *most of the challenges that I would be talking to women about are exactly the same challenges that I would be talking to men about*, you know, difficult promotion issues, an external job; and *gender, if it has relevance, it is not relevant* to that discussion. (emphasis added)

Positioning gender as irrelevant to career discussions puts Clive at risk of offering 'candidate solutions' based on his own experience to the mentee's problems that are inappropriate to her life experience. Mentors also act as role models to mentees particularly when they offer advice based on their own experience. As Claudia (UWA) describes mentoring:

So it is acting as a role model for what women see as a potential career and life choice for them. So it is that, and then giving them practical advice on how to go about achieving it.

Clive, Raelene and Claudia (UWA) in particular chose to share their experience (as role models) of juggling work/life and still being successful with their mentees. There were several difficulties with this. Cross gender mentoring poses particular problems for role modelling, with research suggesting that women will be seen as more legitimate (Blake-Beard 2003) and more effective role models by the female mentees because they can model 'behaviours needed to overcome barriers and career challenges faced by women' (Young, Cady & Foxon 2006:158). But what were these mentors role modelling? All three

professed, using Raelene's words, a 'family comes first' principle and this was central to their advice to others. As Clive said 'the bottom line is your kids are what are most important' while Raelene described herself as 'pretty driven at work, but family comes first'.

Without any systemic or critical analysis that might be of assistance to mentees in grappling with the greedy institution as a fundamental expression of the gendered organization, the advice offered by mentors served to reinforce rather than question the masculine approach to career success (Knights & Richards 2003) and assumed that 'individual women can improve their situation if they choose to' (Park 1996:74). What is required to be successful becomes a problem to be individually managed rather than an expectation, individually or collectively, to be resisted. As Pocock, Skinner and Reina (2009) stress, this places far too much emphasis on the individual while obscuring the need for structural change. In addition, Park (1996:59) observes that individual solutions, such as prioritising research over teaching and service effectively prioritises 'women's individual efforts to advance within the system over women's collective efforts to transform prevailing norms and practices.' The issue is never sheeted home to the greedy institution or the greedy sector.

David (UWA), who was more questioning of institutional practices, nevertheless took an instrumental approach in his role as mentor. David recognised that both of his mentees were striving to fit norms and expectations that did not sit easily with who they were. One of his mentees was pregnant. She was, according to David, in need of some structured advice to work out 'what's doable now and what is doable over the longer term and how to do incremental steps to get there'. David saw there was no advantage in thinking:

...if I was more like somebody that didn't have babies, then I would achieve my goals, or that I should pretend or should try and mitigate the impact of having a child will have on how I actually do my job, and that somehow is virtuous...there isn't a utopia that says everything can be done harmoniously together, you do have to trade things off...Making those kinds of fairly pragmatic choices about how you do that, being realistic about it is the hardest, getting a sense of realism that isn't depressing...

While David acknowledged her lack of fit with more stereotypical (male) academic careers and understood the need for the institution to change, the onus was still on the mentee to accommodate herself to the organization. His advice about what is 'doable' can be seen as a reassuring reality check which may have reduced the pressure she felt. However the reality according to David is that the mentee will need to 'postpone that kind of glowing ambition that says I want to be at this point by then'. The mentee, experiencing the conflicting discourse of the 'successful academic' and the 'good mother' (Raddon 2002) and advised by

her mentor to be pragmatic and realistic, may indeed have found it depressing. Women, dividing their time and attention between career and caring, fall far short of the ideal academic.

David's advice and his focus on an individual solution reinforced rather than challenged the gendered nature of academic career paths. The mentee was not assisted to bring a gendered analysis to her situation in order to develop the 'critical distance' (Morley 1994) or gendered cultural literacy necessary to survive or to challenge this. And importantly from a bifocal point of view, there was no sense of action on David's part to challenge or change the institution.

This cluster of UWA mentors taking a broadly instrumental approach contrasted with the greater number of police mentors (all except Simon) who described a more developmentally oriented approach.

### ***Mentoring for development***

As outlined in Chapter Two, mentoring relationships towards the developmental end of the continuum would be characterised by a more open-ended journeying approach facilitated by the mentor who works hard to provide a safe, supportive yet challenging learning environment, marked by critical reflection on both the part of the mentor and the mentee. This mentoring exhibits mutuality and collaborative partnership working on a broader range of issues identified by the mentee. Both partners focus on the learning and engage in active monitoring of the learning process to ensure goals are being met. The mentor refrains from giving advice and knowing the answers, instead seeing themselves as a guide.

Christine was the exception among UWA mentors, describing a much more open-ended approach to mentoring that is in direct contrast to Raelene and Clive:

...and they could talk about anything. Its [mentoring's] isolation – it just sort of sat there and you could come into this space, that whatever happened in there wasn't going to mean anything to anything if you didn't want it to, and it wasn't going anywhere if you didn't want it to. If you got something good out of it that was great, but that didn't really matter either. So that gave it that freedom and flexibility and was a really good environment...To listen I think and to be available and to take on whatever and go with them wherever they wanted to go. It is hard to put your finger on it really. I think sometimes they would come with quite specific questions...but in some ways it was more valuable probably to just explore

## Mentors: Engaging in gendered change or validating the status quo?

things together - it's not coming to get an answer. I think the things you bring are the flexibility and trying not to solve the problems.

Christine brought a sense of detachment from the outcomes and a deliberate intent 'not to solve the problems' that she found liberating. She said that this worked well with her first mentee and not so well with the second, who she described as 'more confident and knew where she was going and probably needed to do it a different way'. It is easy to imagine that such an open-ended approach may not suit a mentee wanting or expecting a more instrumental career focussed approach.

Gender issues for Christine seemed to have largely disappeared. She described 'being a woman in this [feminised] environment is no big deal' and she had been dismissive of gender believing her mentee's experience was related to being 'small fry and insecure' rather than being female. While aware that her mentee was having problems with male professors, Christine was not recognising the ways gender intersects with status and seniority.

George, Howard, Karen and Samantha (police) described their mentoring role and their mentoring relationships in ways that were consistent with moving towards the developmental end of the continuum. Howard described mentoring as 'being on a journey with someone at their invitation'. Clear that it was not a counselling relationship, Howard nevertheless drew heavily on counselling skills he had learnt outside the work context and emphasised qualities such as 'honesty' and being 'non-judgemental'. Unlike Simon, who had no patience for under-confident mentees, Howard appeared to have sufficient skills and considered it part of his mentoring role to help his mentee build confidence:

...And she's come up with some strategies...and is starting to implement them and I think that sounds pretty good what she is doing. She has vastly come out of her shell in her self-belief and is willing to try new things that perhaps were frightening for her 12 months ago. I think we have gone well over [the mentoring time period], and it is good because every time we meet I pick up something as well.

Howard here is acknowledging mentoring as a two-way exchange where he learnt from the mentee. Karen focussed on the relationship saying:

I think the value is in the relationship itself, there wasn't any technical or operational or that sort of knowledge imparted. It was more sounding board and giving them the opportunity to see what I am dealing with and letting me see what they are dealing with. That's where the value is I think.

This broader focus was also reflected in Samantha's understanding of the mentoring role:

## Chapter Six

It is not always about promotion – a lot of people have this view that mentoring is about getting people promoted. Often it is about, I suppose, sorting out what's important for them as well, helping them to work through what it is that they really want...So, it is some of that, it is helping them with making some decisions I suppose in their personal lives as well... that's part of the mentor's role, to provide them with that advice, support, confidence to go forward so that when they do make decisions, they are strong on those and they know they are at that point where they can make a difference in their own lives. It empowers them.

George drew on his own extremely positive experience of being mentored for his approach to the role of mentor. George described his role as 'to help the person find their pathway forward and encourage them on that journey. It is not for me to give answers'. George paid attention to reducing rank and status differences considering it the 'proper mentor thing' to metaphorically 'leave the hat outside the door when you sit with them'. In reducing the power differential he was enhancing the development of a two-way relationship.

George found the mentoring relationships encouraged his own change efforts:

...there would be conversations about where policing is heading and I would be talking about stuff that's on my heart about where policing should be going and they mightn't have realised it, but in a way they were probably encouraging me to have a go, to shake things up and keep pushing, that sort of stuff.

While this challenging of the status quo did not have a gendered dimension, George was also learning more about women:

I think I have got a greater respect for the women we have and just their life experiences and the depth of the experience they bring to the table that most of us don't know...I am probably more open now to trying to tease out what that is so that they can be given a chance to contribute.

George had begun to notice a pattern in the difficulties the public service officers in particular had in being visible and acknowledged for their work. This may in time move him from an individual to a more systemic analysis.

All four mentors mentioned learning from their mentees. As Samantha said 'I got absolutely as much back from her', while Howard spoke for them all when he said 'it is nice to think that maybe in some way you have made a bit of difference'.

I had some difficulties reconciling George and Howard's preparedness to spend time developing individual women with their overly positive macro view of progress within policing. Neither apparently brought a gender analysis to the mentoring relationship yet they were open and empathetic to the experiences of the mentees, suggesting a disconnect

between their macro view (perhaps espousing the accepted view) and their individual behaviour. George and Howard may benefit from further repeat mentoring, where each woman's story provides a new opportunity to reflect on the organizational culture and another opportunity to develop a systemic rather than individual analysis. Equally Samantha and Karen showed little systemic gender insight. However the difficulties I highlighted earlier resulting from combining an instrumental approach with a lack of gender insight, such as denying women's experiences, proffering potentially inappropriate advice or reinforcing the gendered status quo, were not obvious here. Mentoring based on a developmental approach is less dependent on role modelling and advice giving and more responsive to a broader range of mentee needs. The developmental approach may act to buffer mentees from some of the disadvantages of a lack of gender insight on the part of the mentor. And despite a lack of gender insight, as we can see with George, developmental mentoring opens up possibilities for developing gender insight.

There is still something missing in these accounts of mentoring. While mentoring for 'organizational fit' did not support our bifocal goals, neither did developmental mentoring when it lacked gender insight. The following account of Trevor combines a developmental approach and gender insight with a capacity to act to challenge the gendered status quo.

### **'Transformative mentoring'**

The continuum I had described as ranging from mentoring for 'organizational fit' to developmental mentoring was not adequate for the purposes of the bifocal approach. While developmental mentoring enabled two-way learning to occur, Trevor's narrative took this one step further and demonstrated that the desired mentoring approach, 'transformative mentoring', was possible although apparently not very probable.

Trevor was in a middle management role, at the rank of Inspector. While I didn't remember Trevor, he remembered me. Trevor had attended the first training session we had run with mentors in policing, which he said was a memorable affair for him, and I remembered as a watershed for us. It had provided Maggie and me with valuable and unforgettable lessons about the rank structure and the deep antipathy that existed towards women (including us) among some senior men. The presence of three vocal Assistant Commissioners had completely stifled participation and our attempts at exploring gender and leadership degenerated into an oppositional exchange. Trevor, having not spoken out at the time, now commented:

You learn to pick your battles and my philosophy on that one day is, I am actually learning more about this by shutting up...I just sat there and shook my head. I still talk about that one...

Trevor had formally mentored two women on the program and another LDW participant informally.

The first thing that really piqued my interest in the interview with Trevor was his answer to the following question:

JdV: What are the most important things you think you have to contribute as a coach<sup>1</sup> in terms of your experience, your beliefs, your attitudes, and your skills?

Trevor: I think analytical and conceptual industry knowledge and I would actually say *a huge degree of cynicism* because I do not believe everything that's pushed out from the top. You do not accept unquestioningly every decision that's made. That doesn't mean you sit there and kick and whinge and moan about it, but you need to be able to challenge the status quo otherwise nothing changes. So, I believe that by seeing them [mentees], or having them observe how I worked through that process, enabled and gave them the courage to be able to say "No, I can challenge a bad decision. I can challenge something and this is how I go about doing it without cutting my own throat and basically being treated like a leper and left out on the side" (emphasis added).

Trevor was describing himself, using Meyerson and Scully's (1995) term, as a 'tempered radical'. In a policing environment where most people followed rank structure, expressed loyalty to the organization and it seemed to me parroted some version of the gender 'party line' to outsiders, Trevor was doing just the opposite. He saw the need to challenge and change the status quo. This was not expressed from a disaffected position; Trevor remained positive about his capacity and the capacity of his mentees to make a contribution and make a difference. Not only was he approaching his own work as a tempered radical, he was role modelling it and teaching it to his mentees, giving them the 'courage' to 'challenge bad decisions' without being ostracised. This was an astoundingly different approach to what I was hearing in my other interviews. Trevor was in fact articulating the approach we took with the women in working towards leadership that could challenge and change the status quo. It was a standout moment.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'corporate coach' was used within the LDW program at policing, in order to distinguish this program from another mentoring program. This different terminology did not reflect any difference in role or focus and the two terms mentor or coach were used interchangeably.

## Mentors: Engaging in gendered change or validating the status quo?

Trevor was what Meyerson and Scully (1995:589) refer to as an ‘outsider within’, combining the ‘knowledge and insight of the insider’ with the ‘critical attitude of the outsider’. But in what sense was Trevor, as a white heterosexual man, an outsider?

Trevor explained how he acquired and developed his healthy cynicism: ‘I think I have always brought a healthy cynicism to the job’. The manner in which he joined policing and his subsequent career path had both contributed to this: ‘I was a school teacher before I joined...I didn’t come through the Cadet system’. Trevor had worked on two Royal Commissions (one interstate) and been on secondment to two regulatory bodies. In his view:

There is nothing better than stepping outside your own organization and having a look inside and going “And this is the reason you have to challenge” because you get this group think and you get this sheepish compliance with every instruction, with every policy, without actually going “Do you realise the downstream implications of what you are now asking?”

I was curious, given the intense focus on loyalty within policing, about Trevor’s experience following his extensive periods of working outside the organization. Coming back, he said, was difficult but:

They forget...It was important at the time because I got ostracised, very much so at the time, because you seem to be going out into this anti-corruption view point, but OK, we have moved on, come back in the organization.

These experiences of being outside his organization looking in, totalling eight or so years in a 28 year career, had convinced him of the need to change. Questioning and challenging was key in his view to progress for women:

Unless we get that questioning we don’t get that cultural change and what we do is we get the same product turnout as managers because that’s the stereotypical manager, that’s the stereotypical inspector, superintendent and guess what, no one is prepared to challenge, nothing changes, we continue to get poor participation rates by women because “Mate, no, you don’t meet the stereotype”.

Trevor had not only survived the ostracism that came from breaking ranks, he had been able to position himself differently within the organization, taking a more critical stance towards the status quo.

Trevor provided what I would consider a realistic assessment of the situation for women in policing, one that concurred with the stories we heard directly from the women. He described policing as ‘patchy’, in some areas there was ‘genuine good intent’ while in other

areas women ‘were still suffering’. He recalled moments, similar to the one we had shared in the mentor training, when he wondered if any progress had been made at all: ‘When you see some of those decisions [at deployment panel] and entrenched attitudes when you think you are making great gains, it looks like nothing has changed’.

Trevor, perhaps because of his critical stance towards the organization, had been open to learning from his mentees: ‘It has certainly attuned me to the environment which is a sensitivity I probably didn’t have before. It is personally a really good outcome’. Mentoring is a two-way learning process for Trevor, that had changed his understanding about the situation for women:

Oh yeah, no doubt about that. It forced you to the table to spell it out clearly what the frustrations were, what their concerns were...and talk about some more strategic impediments to the participation and the opportunities for women.

### ***It's all about opportunity***

Trevor, unlike other mentors, could articulate a systemic understanding of how gender was operating in police, which in turn provided him with a framework for action. He focussed on the gendered distribution of opportunities. Trevor observed that all three of his mentees were being passed over or actively blocked for opportunities that he considered they were capable of. He recognised that ‘some people get opportunities, some people don’t, depending on the political layout’. When women failed to advocate on their own behalf in the same way as men, Trevor believed people perceived them as ‘not interested’, with ‘no get up and go, when they have got heaps of it, they just don’t...bang the table’.

Opportunity, in Trevor’s view, was clearly linked to career progression in the sense that ‘[y]ou need to have the opportunities to put yourself in a position where you can win the race and where you can get promoted’. Otherwise he said, women don’t have ‘an equal run of the race. That’s where you build your CV, that’s where you build your confidence’.

An important part of the mentoring role for Trevor was the ability to facilitate opportunities. Trevor had been able to put the name of his mentee forward for consideration for a particular role. He described his behaviour in the following way:

I am actually able to intervene and go “No, I am going to suggest Pamela”. So you actually cause people like Superintendents to stop dead in their tracks and go “This is not a fait accompli any more”...So you actually are able, at the management table, to say, you need to stop, have a think about this. “Oh, look, it is the male again”.

This developed into a whole new awareness for him:

...I was able to sit and actually actively look for opportunities to intervene whereas I would have been unconscious of it before. I would have been “Oh, yeah, RJ’s a great operator. I understand why he has got that project”. But I wouldn’t have sat there prior to that going “Hang on, what’s going on here?”

Trevor also looked out for his own staff, explaining that ‘I now actively go out and champion opportunities for them. I can sit at a senior managers’ meeting and then look for the gender imbalances’. By advocating on behalf of women more broadly, Trevor was challenging the gendering of opportunity.

Trevor said that he had changed his mind about the LDW program, from being initially ambivalent and unconvinced of any organizational benefits to now seeing the benefits for the women. The program, he argued, was justified on the basis that it began to undo some of the organizational processes that were impeding women’s progress:

It may be a case that we shouldn’t measure the success of this on what benefits has the organization got out of it, as long as the individuals got a benefit out of it in terms of their personal development...because you may find that it was the organization itself that put barriers in the way of those people, either directly or overtly, or covertly...

Here Trevor was framing the problems as organizational rather than to do with the women. He was emphasizing women’s development in preference to organizational benefit (‘organizational fit’). In placing responsibility on the organization he was moving in the opposite direction to the majority of mentors (in policing and at UWA) who placed responsibility onto the mentees rather than the organization to solve their own problems.

### ***An ideal mentor?***

Trevor is the only mentor in my sample who captures to a degree all aspects of what I will now term ‘bifocal mentoring’. Trevor, through multiple mentoring opportunities, has developed an understanding of the gendered organization which he was previously unaware of. While his analysis focussed almost exclusively on one particular gendering practice, the gendering of opportunity, it is a gendering practice with substantial impact and leverage for change. As feminist scholars have noted, the ‘dominance of cultural masculinity, and its role in reproducing gendered task allocation within police work accounts for female officers’ limited career progression and social status’ (Metcalf & Dick 2002:395). Importantly, Trevor had a systemic analysis that allowed him to locate the

responsibility for the problem with the organization. Even more importantly his analysis translated into action. He behaved differently, advocating not just on behalf of his mentees but his own staff and within the broader management team.

Trevor, as a self described cynic, had been a 'tempered radical' for some time but his experience as a mentor allowed him to broaden his challenging of the status quo. His critical stance towards the organization allowed him, it seemed, not only to learn from the women but to move naturally towards a pro-active position of challenging the gendered status quo. Trevor then brought his capacity to question gendered organizational practices to the mentoring relationship. He encouraged his mentees to challenge established practices, role modelling positive ways to do this. Together they discussed incidents such as the mentor training, sharpening their analysis of the gendered organization. As he put it, 'we can sit here behind a closed door and talk through the issues. Healthy cynicism, but in a good sense, in that challenging constructive way'.

Trevor was not just intent on assisting his mentees to become tempered radicals, able to challenge the status quo, he wanted to assist them to do well in policing now, to grasp opportunities wherever possible and make the positive contribution he believed they were capable of. Trevor, true to the bifocal approach, had his focus on both the women and the organization. He wanted women to navigate, survive and thrive. At the same time he and they would be challenging the gendered order. Trevor can be described as a transformative mentor, where he is mentoring for individual development and organizational change.

### **Measuring up to the bifocal approach?**

Should I be disappointed that Trevor was the only one who measures up to my ideal of the transformative mentor or should I be exhilarated to find even one? Transformative mentoring, which requires a two-way mentoring relationship in order to develop significant insights into systemic gendering processes, was no easy ask for the mentor. It required a range of skills, insights and positioning of self in relation to the organization that certainly could not be assumed of all mentors in such a broadly encompassing mentoring program.

Moreover, were my 'bifocal goals' for mentoring ever going to be realistic? Bifocal mentoring was far removed from the instrumental mentoring that most people think of when they become involved in mentoring programs. Mentors did not sign up to become gendered change agents, rather they volunteered to be mentors, adopting the more commonly expected approach, where they as benevolent colleagues were prepared to assist

junior colleagues to succeed. Indeed the prevalence of instrumental mentoring is not surprising, given it is strongly grounded in the historical roots of informal mentoring. The accounts of these mentors highlight just how radical a shift in the role of mentor, mentoring practices and outcomes would be required to meet the demands of the bifocal approach.

This chapter sheds light on the not unexpected difficulties of measuring up to my seemingly far-fetched ideal. Despite these difficulties, Trevor presents a challenge by creating a sense of possibility and providing clues about how to narrow the gap between theory and practice.

So what exactly was the slippage between the bifocal aims and what was occurring in practice? And how can this gap be understood?

**For mentors:** The assumption that over time (and with repeated opportunities to mentor) the mentor would build a systemic understanding of gendering and engage in working towards a more gender equitable organization has not stood up to scrutiny. The framing of mentoring as a two-way process was the essential building block that would enable mentoring to engage constituents for change, thus contributing to the bifocal approach. In reality most mentoring, particularly at UWA, was not a two-way relationship and mentors only rarely attributed any learning about gender to their mentoring experiences. Few mentors possessed or subsequently developed sufficient gender insight to position gender equity as an organizational problem and only one, Trevor, saw it as something that he as a leader could tackle. Without gender insight, mentors cannot contribute to the gendered change focus of the bifocal approach.

The assumption, embedded in the program, that senior women had developed gender insight as a result of their gendered experiences and that it was men who needed to develop gender insight, was not supported. At UWA, the enculturation process towards the ideal academic based on the message 'you too can succeed, the way we have succeeded' is offered equally by male and female mentors, themselves successful academics. Women as much as men appear caught up in and constrained by these discourses. It is important to remember that mentors in both organizations belong to the 'privileged class' of academics and police officers. Mentors who belonged to the 'second class' groups of professional staff and public service officers may bring a very different and less enculturated perspective to the mentoring role.

In addition, there was some support for the idea that the gender coping strategies employed by women, particularly where they were an extremely small minority (as was the case for Claudia and Samantha), may in fact hinder the development of gender insight. Survival may leave little time for the reflexivity required to transform difficult experiences into a more critical perspective (Kronsell 2005).

Gender differences were more evident in police mentoring. Karen and Samantha were aware of ongoing difficulties for women in the workplace and in Samantha's case her own experiences of marginalisation were ongoing. Yet neither of the women could offer a clear-sighted view of gender, falling into Hunter's (2002:123) 'no-yes-but group', where women offer conflicted accounts of their gendered experiences. Karen, as the more senior woman, seemed less inclined to acknowledge gendered difficulties while Samantha remained overburdened by the energy required for overachieving and 'gender coping'. Karen and Samantha, while open to hearing about the difficulties of being women in policing from their mentees, may filter their stories through the lens of their own gender coping strategies. This includes a degree of acceptance that this is how it is for women in policing.

The six female mentors provided no evidence that women have a more systemic understanding of gender or a greater capacity or interest in challenging the status quo. Assumptions made about senior women being more engaged with a gendered change initiative (Hackney & Bock 2000) appear misplaced. Female mentors who lacked a framework for understanding gender appeared to approach mentoring in very similar ways to their male counterparts.

Rather than focussing on what mentors can learn from mentoring, these accounts suggest it is useful to explore what mentors bring to the mentoring relationship. The particular mentoring approach and gender perspective mentors bring will influence what they themselves learn. An instrumental approach to mentoring and/or seeing gender as lacking relevance to the mentee's experience, limit the capacity to learn from mentees. Both also increase the capacity to do harm in the mentoring relationship.

The seniority of the mentors may also be operating to limit learning. LDW mentoring focuses on senior mentors because of their sphere of influence, however their seniority may create a substantial power differential between mentor and mentee making it more difficult to develop a two-way exchange. There is also a suggestion in the literature that the more senior the mentor, the more instrumental the mentoring approach (O'Neill, Horton & Crosby 1999).

## Mentors: Engaging in gendered change or validating the status quo?

While seniority may to a degree increase protection when questioning the status quo, there may also be more to lose. Rapoport et al. (2002:160) observe that ‘individuals who have risen to the top in the existing system can, understandably, have difficulty seeing the need to challenge it in fundamental ways’. Unlike senior executives, there may also be comparatively more to lose for those, like these mentors, who are not quite at the top (2000:460). In addition, seniority, success and perhaps belonging to the privileged class may contribute to what Meyerson and Tompkins (2007:308) describe as ‘embeddedness’ where those who are most embedded have the greatest difficulty in ‘imagining alternatives’. Senior mentors may be more likely to bring an unquestioning acceptance of the status quo to the mentoring relationship.

There were signs of potential enablers for the development of gender insight. There was support for linking developmental mentoring to developing gender insight in the stories of Trevor (police) and George (police). Furthermore a critical stance towards the organization, once again evident in the stories of Trevor and George, appears to open mentors to learning from their mentees. Trevor’s capacity to develop and act on his developing gender insight in particular appeared linked to his pre-existing tempered radicalism.

David’s account underlined the importance of the capacity to act on gender insight. While for Trevor there appeared to be an almost seamless transition from insight to action, this cannot be assumed. The instrumental approach David brought to mentoring may have stifled the potential for additional learning for himself and his mentee. While further exploration of the gap between insight and action would be useful, by far the biggest barrier to transformative mentoring appears to be the lack of relevance attributed to gender by the majority of mentors.

With the exception of Trevor, being a mentor has not substantially contributed to developing the gender insight so critical in underpinning any capacity to become constituents for change. Trevor’s position seems at once fragile and robust. Thomas and Davies (2002) in their UK policing study highlight the expectations within policing of ‘docile obedient subjects’, where criticism or questioning can be seen as lack of commitment that in turn can result in being marginalised. Being a tempered radical is a balancing act between self preservation and working for institutional change (Meyerson 2003:32). While Trevor appears well practised, as one of so few taking on this role within the institution he is out of step with the norm and this may well limit his promotional opportunities in the future. However, as someone who offers a more critical perspective on

the organization, he 'can act as [a] vital source[s] of resistance, alternative ideas, and transformation within [his] organization[s] (Meyerson & Scully 1995:586).

**For mentees:** This chapter has not focussed on outcomes for mentees, however it is possible to make several comments. Transformative mentoring would support the leadership development of the women and their capacity to engage in gendered change, and indeed Trevor exemplifies this approach. Trevor is the only mentor who mentioned discussing gender with mentees, an action that would assist in supporting gender change agency on the part of the mentee. Mentors who do not themselves question the gendered status quo or bring a critical stance to their organization will be unable to support this aspect of the bifocal approach.

**For organizations:** The bifocal approach aims to build a network of change agents comprising mentors and mentees who individually and collectively challenge and change the gendered organization. Mentors, in practice, were more often engaged in unquestioningly supporting, rather than challenging the status quo.

At UWA, mentors, with the exception of Christine, were clustered at the midpoint or towards the instrumental career focussed end of the continuum. While focussing on assisting their mentees in navigating the requirements of being a successful academic, they were implicitly endorsing the demands of the greedy institution. The prevalence of the instrumental approach among male and female mentors validates Devos's (2008:195) reading of mentoring programs for women in higher education as oriented towards 'improving performance in a performative culture', thus emphasizing organizational goals of 'fit' rather than equity goals.

There was a much greater variance in policing between the mentors and their approaches to mentoring, with Simon and Trevor at opposite ends of the continuum. The remaining mentors, George, Howard, Karen and Samantha, were situated towards the developmental end of the continuum. While fewer mentors than at UWA were engaged in mentoring for organizational fit, there was little challenge either to the gendered status quo.

This lack of challenge to the status quo, because gender is seen as organizationally irrelevant, not only undermines the bifocal approach but may in fact endanger the existence of LDW. Paradoxically, gender denial may in fact be strengthened by the existence of LDW. Buswell and Jenkins (1994) note that the presence of equal opportunities policies, or in this case the opportunities women were afforded through the LDW program, reinforced the perception that the gender 'problem' had been solved. In this discourse women now

had more opportunities (than men). This was a predictable outcome when men's advantage remains invisible and uncontested and the focus turns to women's 'advantage'. In policing, the support for LDW had softened as mentors saw little need to continue with women only offerings given the substantial progress that, in their view, had been made. At UWA the attitudes to LDW were more varied but not necessarily supportive, as we saw in the example of Clive.

However, one manager like Trevor can make a big difference, something Catalyst (Mattis 2001) emphasises in listing leadership behaviours similar to those Trevor mentioned. The fact that Trevor was making a difference was attested to by the enthusiastic reports I heard about him from women in the area he worked. Trevor had gained satisfaction from working with his mentees and they and other women who worked with him were grateful. This may in turn strengthen his commitment to working for gendered change.

### ***Success by a different measure***

This critique of mentoring from the bifocal perspective does not suggest that mentoring is seen as unsuccessful from the point of view of mentees, mentors or the organization. Each may use quite separate and different criteria to evaluate the success of the mentoring relationship. Jarvis and MacInnes (2009), for example, based their research on successful mentoring experiences as judged by the mentee, and this included instrumental relationships with short term and immediate benefits to the mentee in terms of getting on in the organization. At UWA participants reported high levels of satisfaction regarding the mentoring experience (70%) and its usefulness to their development as a leader (over 70%) (de Vries 2005:92). An unpublished evaluation report after four years of LDW at policing showed that 52% of respondents rated mentoring as valuable to their professional development, ranking it at seven or more out of ten (Morris 2008). Mentors in this research indicated they gained substantial satisfaction from being a mentor and their willingness to mentor repeatedly supported this. The Executive and senior support for mentoring at UWA would indicate that the organization judges mentoring as successful. This is less evident in policing. However, satisfaction on the part of mentors, mentees or the organization does not mean that mentoring achieved, or had the potential to achieve, the bifocal goals.

The mentoring continuum is not intended to imply that instrumental mentoring be entirely abandoned in favour of developmental mentoring or in the search for transformative

mentoring. There will always be a place for the knowledge of the mentor to be accessed by the mentee. Rather it is a shift in the balance of these activities, where some aspects of instrumental 'know how' are incorporated into developmental or transformative mentoring.

### **Conclusion: A shaky platform**

This chapter has documented the way in which the bifocal aims have proven elusive and difficult to implement in practice within the mentoring component of the LDW program. Mentors neither brought to, or developed within, the mentoring relationship sufficient gender insight to underpin a commitment to change agency. The mentoring relationships varied enormously along a continuum from 'mentoring for organization fit' to 'mentoring for development'. Neither was sufficient for the bifocal approach although mentoring for development appeared to provide more possibility for developing gender insight.

There was some optimism found in the story of Trevor, a minority voice who helped me to put some flesh and bones around my notion of an ideal mentor within a bifocal approach. Trevor is a 'tempered radical' and his mentoring approach is what I now term transformative mentoring. His approach is summed up as: nurture the women, challenge the organization and teach/support the women to challenge the organization. His story offers some hope for mentoring as an organizational change strategy.

Despite institutional differences, there was one over-arching story. Making gender relevant to mentors when the organizational framing, discourse and enculturation processes serve to make gender irrelevant was a difficult task. Despite strong contrasts in the championing of gender, the gender histories of the organizations and the different history of LDW within the institutions, disconcertingly what UWA and policing had in common was a failure on the part of mentors to adopt a transformative agenda. In both organizations mentors for this research were selected from the dominant 'privileged class' group, which was police officers and academics. Interviewing mentors from the non-dominant 'second class' group may have provided a different story.

Both organizations remain ultimately driven by the construction of the ideal worker, be that the ideal academic or the ideal police(man), which ultimately denied women's experience and disenfranchised or excluded (most) women. Much of the 'work' of mentoring centred around assisting women to more closely fit the ideal in order to succeed within the defined 'masculine' parameters of the role. Mentoring, while showing some

## Mentors: Engaging in gendered change or validating the status quo?

promise, has not translated into a firm foundation for recruiting constituents for change and building the gendered change agenda.

Viewed through the perspective of a 'small wins' approach however, it is possible to see that change is occurring and to predict that unseen ripples radiated out from a number of these mentoring relationships. Despite my pessimism regarding Trevor's future within policing, while doing final corrections prior to submission of this thesis I noticed in the newspaper that Trevor has been promoted.

# Chapter 7

## Developing leaders and gender change agents?

### Introduction

Peer learning groups (PLGs) provide the vehicle in this chapter to examine both aspects of LDW participants' role in the bifocal agenda: their leadership development and their contribution to the broader gendered change agenda. While the previous two chapters have dwelt on recruiting executive champions and mentors as constituents for change, this chapter asks: Have we recruited LDW participants as change agents? Equally important is the exploration of the women's leadership development. I use the six group interviews, supplemented by significant amounts of documentation (documents and powerpoint slides produced by PLGs as part of their presentations as well as notes that Maggie and I took during presentations) to unravel the complexities of participants' understandings of gender and the gendered organization and how they viewed themselves as women leaders and as change agents. While in previous chapters I argued that developing gender insight is a critical pre-condition for contributing to gendered change, in this chapter I explore whether gender insight also underpins the women's own development as leaders.

This is the first time we hear the voices of the LDW participants. Their voices have not been given primacy so far in this thesis because I conceptualise the program as being broader than its participant base. But of course the program is also very much about the participants. Holding onto the bifocal aims of LDW can be likened to a tightrope walk: balancing women's development and the gendered change agenda. Maintaining a focus on both yet neglecting neither, is difficult precisely because they are often seen as contradictory. Using the CGO terminology, Frame 1 and Frame 4 do not sit easily

alongside each other. The goal of LDW, in contrast to this, is to make the two aims complementary, transforming Frame 1 by coupling it with Frame 4.

This chapter, with its focus on the women, therefore brings us face to face with the apparent contradiction in proposing a women only program as an organizational gendered change intervention. The pull of a 'women only' initiative towards being *only* about the women is strong. The bifocal approach must be robust enough to maintain some balance between the two foci. Women and their development are at the heart of the WO program mandate, however, the participants must not be the sole focus of the change agenda. This becomes a fix the women approach. Neither should the women be relied upon or expected to take responsibility for the gendered change agenda. This makes the organizational change required to address gender inequities women's business, quickly sidelining its importance, reinforcing the notion that only women have gender, and once again situating women as the problem. For this reason the LDW program is designed to spread the change agency load among many women and men at all levels of the organization. While LDW participants must never be the only change agents, their involvement in the transformative agenda is nonetheless critical. Participants form the largest group numerically and the majority of program time is spent with them. They appear ideally placed to benefit from a more inclusive re-visioned work culture.

In Chapter Two I emphasised the importance of WO programs taking a developmental approach to steer them away from a skills 'top up' focus that situates the women as deficit. LDW has taken this a step further by pursuing a critical leadership development approach. The program aimed to develop leaders who were capable of not only critically 'seeing' the gendered culture of their organization but were also equipped as leaders and change agents. The development of leadership and change agency became intertwined, thus enhancing each participant's capacity to be actively engaged in the gendered change process.

In this chapter, for the first time, there is diversity amongst participants. Champion and mentor participants in this research have all come from the dominant organizational group, academics and police officers respectively. In contrast, the peer learning groups contain all staff groups and a cross section of levels thus introducing issues of class or status, where the non-dominant group are often seen as 'second class' citizens. There is also racial and cultural diversity amongst participants that is not evident in either organization amongst senior and executive staff. This in itself says a great deal about the intersection of gender, race and class in the two organizations.

## **The women's stories**

I have chosen to frame the majority of this chapter around an analysis of each peer learning group (three at UWA and three at police) rather than developing a thematic account of the group interviews. My aim was to allow for a more cohesive group voice to emerge, thus communicating more fully the spirit and experience of each group and the richness and diversity of their accounts. As part of my research, groups were invited to reminisce about their PLG experience during and following the LDW program, with prompts regarding different aspects such as group formation and process, developing gender insight, small wins, their own leadership, changes in their working lives, and what they learned regarding their topic. Each interview developed a trajectory and life of its own, no doubt in some ways reflecting their developed group process. The group interview was augmented by their individual 'data sheets' filled out at the time of interview, which summarised individual key points.

Rather than attempt to standardise the group accounts, I have chosen to pick up on a small number of quite different examples from each of the group interviews. In some cases this may be the only discussion of that topic across the six groups (for example only one group discussed husbands and domestic roles), in others it may be the most striking (all groups discussed their public presentation and I have selected three of these for analysis). It is not my intention that each group account stand alone, but that this account is woven through the combined and cumulative stories of the six groups.

I have chosen to present the three UWA groups first, followed by the three police groups, choosing the order where possible to build on examples already mentioned. While there are many commonalities in the PLG experience across organizations, the language and context is sufficiently different that it is easier to group them organizationally. Each group title reflects the group's theme, question or issue, developed at the time of their group formation.

### ***'Stand your ground'***

Wilma, Georgia, Siti, Rhonda, Jenny & Larissa (UWA)

One of the larger peer learning groups with seven members (six in attendance), this group was the most diverse in terms of roles and backgrounds, with two academics, two researchers and three professional staff, two European immigrants for whom English was not their first language and an Asian woman. Their topic *Stand your ground* was a variation

on a common theme across all groups. Defining what *Stand your ground* meant for them individually, and as a group, resulted in a clear focus for their discussions right from the start. Recognising that they were not alone provided an excellent starting point. As Jenny remarked, ‘the fact there were so many people who had the same goal made you feel like “Oh, I am not the only one here”’. Siti echoed this:

...someone asked me early in the first few weeks, “How’s it going?”, and I said, “I thought I was the only one with this problem, but when I got there, everyone has the same problem” (laughter). I was amazed, that was my first reaction.

While they found the commonality of this lack of confidence reassuring, it did not prompt a moving away from individual explanations to a more systemic understanding of gendering. The group instead offered a diverse range of explanations as to why this might be so. For example, Rhonda, a junior academic, attributed lack of confidence to the ‘culture of the organization’, where ‘power broking’ by academics made others without this power reluctant to speak out. Wilma, a researcher located in a feminised research centre, attributed it to needing to ‘do time in the place’ and ‘more a personal thing’. Jenny, in a central administration area, saw it as ‘more of a human thing’, ‘I know plenty of guys having similar issues...I think a lot of people just cope with insecurities in a way’.

Georgia, formerly a researcher and now working in an administrative role, noticed the competitiveness, with ‘people making sure that you stay down where you are because once you get up you will be a threat to them and that kind of thing’. Siti and Larissa added personality to the mix, leading Siti to conclude that ‘there is a bit of everything you know. I couldn’t pin point it on one thing’.

This potpourri of explanations and experiences includes several observations regarding power, the most powerful group (academics) and the organizational culture (hierarchical, competitive), alongside personal factors (personality) and the argument that if men experience it too, it must not be gendered. The discussion nonetheless served to obscure rather than clarify any systemic gender analysis. This process of providing multiple observations without a gendered storyline to make sense of it recurred when they were asked to reflect on their observations regarding gender in the workplace. Their responses bounced in a ping pong fashion between examples of blatant individual and systemic gender discrimination to ‘not a problem in my area’.

Georgia described how confronting it had been for her moving into a heavily male dominated area where she might be the only female in a meeting of ten or fifteen men:

## Chapter Seven

It does get a bit (sigh)...you know, most of the guys that we work with are pretty good, but there is always the odd one that doesn't look you in the eye because he is busy looking somewhere else, all that kind of stuff.

Georgia, who as a researcher had been dependent on research grants<sup>1</sup> for her position, had made a calculated decision in moving to a professional staff position:

I made a conscious decision two years ago to move out of research because I didn't think I would be able to keep the performance up and to have kids at the same time. And I have seen most of the group that I was in before go through having kids and struggling to get grants and maintain their performance outcomes...people make a decision that they will either be the parent or they will be the researcher and it is really, really difficult to be both.

Sentiment against pregnant women had been running high in her previous workplace because research grants did not pay maternity leave. Georgia said that she had heard comments from colleagues like 'God, I can't believe she's pregnant again'. Rather than juggle motherhood and research in an unsupportive culture, Georgia saw that in administration 'there was a likelihood of regular work and longer contracts and potentially more pay for less work'.

While Wilma described these difficulties as 'gender *biased*', Rhonda labelled them as 'gender *based* decisions. I want to have kids, I need to do something to steer this so that I can'. In Jenny's view, this focus on women's choices explained the lack of senior women. Jenny described how after the LDW session exploring gender, which she 'didn't agree with at all', she 'started looking around'.

I looked more for it but like in my area I don't believe it is an issue at all but when you look at it, the director and his whole management team are male, but I don't have the feeling that if there was a good female, that she wouldn't get the job. I don't think that for a minute. I think it is more a matter of just males happen to apply for the jobs that [the men] were better at the time. The level underneath that is a lot female so you could see that coming through in a way, but I think if you speak to most of them they wouldn't want to go a level up because that would take them away from the families too much and they choose not to.

Despite this awareness of male domination within her own work area, Jenny was reaffirmed in her opinion that while there were gender differences, it was not a problem, but merely a reflection of women's choices. In her view, 'if you want a career, you can get it'.

This view seems to fit with what Colgan and Ledwith (1996:24) describe as 'traditional

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<sup>1</sup> So called 'soft' money or funding because dependent on gaining research monies to continue from contract to contract, providing very insecure employment.

## Developing leaders and change agents?

women', those who are broadly accepting of 'women's gendered place in society, the family, the labour market and work organizations.'

Larissa's response to Jenny's analysis was to recount her own example of sexist behaviour on the part of a male school manager who was overheard saying:

"We won't listen to that, it is just typical female erratic behaviour"...the fact it came out of his mouth to me was just...I was gob smacked by that...I now have to collaborate with him and I just find that absolutely impossible because he just looks at me as an erratic female.

Siti followed this with her overall assessment of UWA as gender fair in appointments, in part based on the presence of women at Executive level, but then related her own anecdote of a sexist comment made by an executive member at a Vice-Chancellory function.

The range of views in this group appeared to be easily accommodated without dissent. Jenny's comment 'that I have noticed throughout the whole year that all areas are very separate, very different in their mini cultures' goes some way towards explaining why a more shared understanding had not developed. Each view was accepted as that person's reality with differences in work contexts considered so great that connections could not be made between these gendered realities.

However the focus of their group, *Stand your ground*, transcended their different locations and roles and created a cohesive learning group. Each woman reflected on her own development during their group presentation on the review day. For Georgia, it was learning in a difficult situation not to yield to others based purely on their position, for Siti it was exploring the fine line between assertiveness and arrogance, for Wilma, having the confidence to respectfully disagree, for Rhonda it was working to quietly uphold her own interests, and for Jenny, staying true to her core values.

This group developed their peer learning presentation using the symbol of the cairn. The group defined a cairn as:

an artificial pile of stones, often built to mark a site; placed at regular intervals, to indicate a path across barren terrain; used as a lighthouse like holder for fires, to guide boats; or to commemorate an event.

Linking the cairn back to their topic, they said that 'LDW has provided us with a "Cairn" of new "stones" that we can draw from in situations where we need to stand our ground'. In building a 'cairn of leadership' during their presentation, the cairn came to symbolise where they were, their path forward and a celebration of their program year. The cairn was built from rocks of different sizes, starting with large rocks at the base. As each group

member told her story of standing her ground, she added her own rock. This became the foundation, followed by stones representing the LDW workshops, the mentoring, the other LDW participants, and the university support for LDW. Finally each participant was invited to add her own stones of learning to the cairn. This very grounded and grounding presentation was unusual in appreciating and representing the many elements of the LDW experience, while at the same time providing a very rich representation of their experience as individuals and a group. The cairn embodied their 'stand your ground' small wins, visually demonstrating the power of the collective and the capacity of small wins to make a difference.

More than a year later, during the group interview, it was obvious their learning continued to translate into the workplace in the ways they exercised leadership. Georgia was setting boundaries with co-workers, speaking up about problems or issues, and becoming a role model for her colleagues in doing so; Siti was learning to 'exercise leadership in lots of little things everyday'; Jenny now saw herself as a leader and was developing her own style where she could lead without being 'hard' or 'unkind'; and Wilma now understood that she could lead and offer guidance from within the group, without a 'strong fist on the table'. Group members actively re-defined leadership, saw themselves as leaders and worked out ways to lead that suited them, in each instance challenging gendered leadership norms. This was matched with extensive changes in their working lives, including multiple secondments, a new job, confirmation in a position where previously acting, and a re-classification. Increased seniority gave them larger arenas for exercising leadership and/or more recognition for what they were contributing.

This group provided a fascinating contrast between their holistic view of LDW based on bringing many different parts together and their incapacity to bring together their many disparate views of gender to develop a systemic view of gender. They lacked a shared gender story or narrative to make sense of their contrasting experiences of the gendered organization. While the cairn represented a shared story of empowerment and growth, the learning remained individually focussed. Despite this 'lack' of gendered cultural literacy, which I hoped groups would develop, the group had provided a successful platform for members to 'stand their ground' with a clear impact on their leadership development and capacity to act in the workplace. They could claim many small wins.

***'How do we define ourselves as leaders?'***

Vera, Juliana & Lesley (UWA)

Vera, Juliana and Lesley, all academic women (at Senior Lecturer or Associate Professor level), were not surprised by who was present and who was absent for the group interview. The two absent members were a professional staff member and a researcher, who had not shared the same concerns as their academic team mates despite their shared topic. As Juliana noted '[t]heir problems were very operational. We were probably thinking in more abstract terms with regard to leadership'. The three present shared a feminist background and had found enormous collegial richness and commonality, coming from diverse disciplines within the same faculty. While shocked by the stories they heard from their PLG colleagues and questioning the reality of the current 'one staff, one university' slogan designed to bridge the historical gap between academic and professional staff, as a group they remained largely unable to bridge that gap. This illustrates one of the difficulties for women's groups where it is often assumed that what women have in common overrides their differences, which is not necessarily the case. This can serve to disappear issues of race or in this example class, and the relative privilege of academic women.

As the title suggests, much of the work of the group focussed on re-defining leadership, which ultimately allowed them to define themselves as leaders:

Vera      Between the three of us we seemed to want to talk about the same sort of things, so I guess that was quite a fruitful combination because as it went along we sort of realised we *were* doing leadership activities, so it was a process of identifying and articulating what we were doing and how that fitted into the model that we wanted to pursue.

Lesley    Yeah, that's how it was for me, I hadn't seen the activities that I was doing as leadership before, but I definitely do now. It is in my latest ARC [Australian Research Council] application. (Laughter.) Because I had this model – I must be head of a unit and have the grey suit and all those budgets and stuff like that – and it was not what I saw as my strength at all. It was the three of us, we worked for each other.

Academic leadership, as they came to understand it, grew out of their disenchantment with current male dominated leadership theories and models and a dearth of alternative role models. Together the women created a garden metaphor (which I will elaborate) for leadership that brought about 'a shift of paradigm which was quite fruitful' (Vera). As the

interview unfolded, the women described what I would call a small wins process and engaged in this process within the structure of the interview.

As Vera described it, this was very much a joint and interactive project of *identifying and articulating* (naming and dialogue) what they were doing. For Juliana it was a process of 'seeing' and 'labelling' leadership for each other:

...very easily identifying the other's activities as clearly being expressions of leadership when they didn't. We looked at one another's CVs and also got inspiration – "Oh, you are organising a conference and hosting this and oh..." Yeah, we could see things that we could ourselves aspire to and also applaud the others for and recognising they were rather unique or inspirational and had shown initiative and they were leading by example at least. Very often it was the lack of recognition from the top level that had caused this non-recognition of leadership.

Commonly undertaken activities were also re-defined as leadership. As Lesley reflected:

I just never thought of being a supervisor of a post graduate as being a leadership position, but the metaphor of the garden helps me to think of leadership in a much broader spectrum of possibilities so that I can now think of being a supervisor as a position of leadership and a really important one.

Group members were claiming aspects of their leadership that had been 'disappeared' by the male model of leadership (Fletcher 2001). This jointly undertaken naming of their leadership acted as an antidote to the old models they wished to discard and the lack of recognition of their leadership they experienced in their workplace. Next came experimentation, with group support. For Lesley, claiming herself as a leader in her latest ARC grant application was a big (experimental) step and one she wasn't sure would be successful. It was however applauded by the group:

Juliana But even making those claims is a real jump isn't it in how you articulate yourself? And you need to be able to see yourself in those terms before you can write in that way.

Vera Trying to define them for ourselves out of our own values.

The following exchange demonstrated the 'critical friend' process as part of the small wins cycle, where Juliana and Vera offered an alternative way of viewing what Lesley described as opting out, challenging her to name it as leadership. Lesley responded to a question about challenging the status quo:

Lesley I think I'm just opting out by saying 'no' to offers. Would you like to do this job? No. Would you like to do this job? No. That's not changing the organization, it is just being me realising I don't

## Developing leaders and change agents?

want to go down some paths because I would rather do other paths, but that's not going to change the organization.

Juliana It does, because you're a leader and your actions will have an impact and you are a role model to others who say, she didn't have to do it, I won't do this either. Why? I think it is very much a leadership initiative.

Lesley It tends to happen behind closed doors that sort of stuff.

Vera But there is a modelling in refusing things, like I learnt a lot when my head of school told me he doesn't answer emails. I said, "Can you do that?" It is really liberating to realise, especially on long service leave that you don't have to check your emails every day.

The garden metaphor was used to good effect by the group in their final presentation, as an inclusive and organic demonstration of new ways of thinking about themselves as leaders. Using visuals of their own gardens we were invited to peep over the fence and enjoy playing with the metaphors of the various activities, spaces and elements of the garden. Primary values that emerged included the notion of generosity in academic leadership and the need for 'heimat', a German word meaning sense of belonging, a negotiation of self in relation to place. Leadership as represented by their gardens involved bringing a whole self to the tasks and values of leadership. They presented their gardens as full of flavour and colour; mulberry and almond trees represented sharing of produce, of opportunities; mulching and composting signalled the need for feeding the soil (and soul) to use fewer resources and encourage sustainability and social change; the garden seat next to the sun basking cat represented the need for reflection and renewal; exotic plants signalled looking far and wide for ideas while natives emphasised the need for local connections and collaboration; the laburnum tree demonstrated pride in 'showing off' its good qualities; and the spaces in the garden offered opportunities for new growth.

The metaphors were endless, creative and personal, and an invitation for the audience to consider their own leadership gardens. The fruitfulness of the work they had done was its inclusiveness and endless possibilities for negotiation of the self as leader. The way this challenged the more heroic, masculine, competitive and less generous leadership styles common in the university was apparent but not stated. This group had wholeheartedly embraced and generously shared their deconstruction and reconstruction of leadership, an important goal of the LDW program.

This profound shift in themselves as leaders was reflected in their individual 'data sheets'. All three recorded changes, for Juliana 'feeling like a leader', Lesley 'realising I am an

academic leader' and Vera 'seeing myself as a leader'. These new definitions, shared in the PLG presentation, also rippled out in other ways, with Juliana intent on 'highlighting leadership when it is happening all around', in itself an act of challenging the status quo.

The group support, trust and friendship that had developed was practically 'fruitful' as described by Vera, with very tangible outcomes such as participating together in a writing retreat, sharing promotion applications and supporting each other through that process, guest editing a journal, and co-supervision of PhD students.

This group used the small wins and critical friend process to do the work together of re-defining leadership, ultimately using the metaphor of the garden to free themselves from old paradigms. In this case their PLG experience, rather than building gendered cultural literacy, provided the opportunity for these women to work with their pre-existing feminist consciousness, together achieving what they had not been able to achieve alone. The PLG provided a connection and process for re-examining leadership and transforming the experience of themselves as leaders. Living out this new leadership was a form of change agency which challenged the academic leadership status quo.

### ***'Managing Change'***

Katherine, Missy, Shakti, & Mary (UWA)

The *Managing Change* group membership was entirely senior professional staff, the majority located in specialist areas within central administration and student services, and one person, Shakti, located within a School. Four of the five group members attended the interview. Competent and well respected women, they were well placed to influence university policy and practice. While initially disappointed at the lack of academic women interested in joining them, they acknowledged the group composition was a natural consequence of the relevance of their chosen topic, *Managing Change*, to their work roles. In contrast to the majority of academic women on the program, most members of this group had formal managerial responsibility. Their group experience as they describe it was uncomplicated and productive:

Katherine We immediately formed as a group before the end of that first session, we were quite cemented as a group and in as far as we were committed to work together on something...[Returning to this later in the interview]...we have a title and we have a meeting time and we have got all that framework that says now we can get together and work as a team, and so whether or not that's an artificial framework, that structure all of a sudden gave it

## Developing leaders and change agents?

legitimacy to work as a team on that topic. I think that for a topic it was very good for us because of where we are within our career.

Shakti I think for us, that chemistry worked as well. So whenever we met I never got the sense that there was any sort of rivalry or competition or anything like that. It was always that we were very comfortable with each other. We could discuss and raise issues and they would be resolved. There was that kind of confidence. I think that's really been very nice. For me that's the biggest plus of LDW is this group. Yes!

Their appreciation of each other and the expertise and diversity of views they brought to the table was obvious in the interview. Their group met regularly over breakfast during the program and these breakfast meetings have continued, albeit less regularly, alongside social events such as attending the football, going dancing, and coming together for celebratory birthday lunches.

Despite very different roles the group found a cohesiveness in their topic:

Katherine ...because the topic was Change Management, that was easily recognisable in our own work areas, so we shared a lot of ideas amongst the group about how we were tackling that, what it meant to us and we actually explored how we might deal with things in our own areas amongst the group. So it was a bit like a debriefing group wasn't it? I think that support was very important amongst us too.

Mary Bouncing ideas off as well. There was a lot of "I have got this issue, what do you think?"

Their topic was well catered for in the course curriculum, not from the usual management angle but through the introduction of small wins as a culture change process, the emphasis on change agency, 'tempered radicals' and challenging the status quo. I was interested to see if or how they had taken these ideas on board, given they seemed ideally situated to contribute to the bifocal agenda. Seeing themselves as protagonists for change in the workplace was not a new experience but they gained strength and perhaps a strategic edge, they said, by working it through with others:

Shakti I think for me it was sort of that you are not alone. For me change is not exactly that ogre, I have thought about it and I have had to do it, it is not that...That there is something which we want to influence, change and we are not just rushed into it or whingeing about it. It is thinking about it carefully and planning in a positive manner, working to it. It is more of a positive outlook towards change rather than just "Oh, I was going to do that and this is the block here, that's the block there". So for me

## Chapter Seven

it was a good learning experience to see that the majority of us are in that boat, we want to influence change, we see problems and we see solutions along with the problems.

Mary Just because a few people resist you can't just forget it, you have to try and do what you want to do and see who comes along. And sure enough people do. Until you use your voice and say, "How about we do this?"...but that encouragement from the group to get on with it and start doing something, otherwise you do nothing and just get really annoyed and that's not useful for any one.

When I asked the group if LDW had had an impact on their challenging the status quo, Missy responded:

For me, yes. One of the things I always wanted to do was be more involved with University Managers Group and I actually did a presentation and I wrote the presentation, sent it to Shakti and also had Katherine give me some feedback because for me I was saying something different to everyone else in the organization and I was actually challenging, and I only found out by coincidence, some of the quite male dominated views on use of leave in the university and I didn't even realise that that's what I was doing. But it was good to have that background support from other people external to my area, whether or not they agreed totally with what I was saying didn't matter but just to say "Yeah, go ahead and do it". That was really appreciated at the time...I just wanted some backup from some people who I could trust...I think that's what I seek mostly from my female friendships is honest critique. Tell me if it is crap.

In Missy's account group members were critical friends, who were both honest and supportive. She went on to describe several instances of pushing for change, which while not successful had been satisfying to her in progressing the debate. She seemed philosophical about the outcomes, saying that:

...previously I guess I would have just got really frustrated and angry, but now I don't go it alone...you know that gradually it will all fall into place whether it be in another couple of years or whatever...it didn't get where we wanted it to, but I know that in a few year's time it is going to have to...

In the meantime, she was both more pro-active and more robust:

I don't know that I was a victim before, but it is much more, well if you don't ask, you don't get. If you don't try a different approach, don't just sit back and present people with problems, present them with a solution.

And for women who presented themselves as confident in their roles, their group members gave them a supportive push to do more:

Katherine I think that we are very fortunate that we are four strong women who would succeed regardless of whether we had this group, but

## Developing leaders and change agents?

what this group has been able to do is add that additional step improvement. I think it gives that impetus to being able to tackle those things and it sits in the back of your mind that you have got that support behind you.

Mary That's right. When we meet and say, "I am thinking of doing this", and that kind of encouragement for that. It is like, "stop talking about it and do it". That's what you need at times...that's an improvement that it pushes you to do things.

Group support and accountability enabled these women to tackle more difficult issues, to challenge the status quo and to persist where otherwise they may not have. It helped Katherine to be self-reflexive, asking herself, 'Are you really stretching yourself or are you just treading water?' What also became apparent was how their network had become an integral part of their leadership and contribution in their own arenas. They exhibited a networked leadership where they used each other's expertise, influence and access to information, as well as seeking alternative views and reference points. For example, Shakti took the opportunity during the interview to lobby Katherine regarding access to first aid training for staff in her School.

The following interview excerpt illustrates the importance the women placed on networking:

JdV When you were talking about your project that you have tried to position for more funding, it sounds like you thought that through quite strategically?

Missy Yeah, definitely and being networked a lot more and having the confidence to go out to different areas and being much more collaborative with different things. That's not just with that project, it is with some policies and a few things. It is great, I will be talking to Shakti about something that I have discovered and I will find out that her perspective as a school manager adds to my thinking of what needs to happen to get change happening in the organization. Then she finds out something that's happening in my area, so we feed off each other a lot.

JdV It is almost like having your own little reference group, tapping into other bits of the organization.

Several Yes.

Shakti If I look at it from a school perspective, we have got a miniscule of everything that is happening in the university, all policies apply to all, all procedures apply to us, everything is happening there and these people are working in specialised areas...so we are all very different and I think that we are realising that ultimately

## Chapter Seven

within the same university and at the end of the day, anything that you think of will finally flow through to us.

Katherine Exactly.

Shakti So it is that kind of a networking with the thought process and cross change and bouncing ideas which is quite useful.

The group demonstrated a collective change agency which, while not deliberately sought or labelled as such by the group, was consistent with the small wins approach. As they described it, their approach to change was a natural consequence of their capacity to work together and support each other, their individual and collective interest in working for change, and their strategic positioning within the University. However, their collective capacity was opportunistic rather than focussed or co-ordinated. Examples they discussed included responses to a recent student suicide, first aid training, improved document management and projects regarding staff well being.

Gender was sometimes present in the women's narrative, for example, Missy's challenging of the established (male) view on leave. However, by and large, gender and the need for gendered change remained incidental or unremarked upon in the interview. In response to more direct questioning, a range of positions emerged. Mary felt that the LDW program more broadly, rather than the PLG in particular had opened her eyes to gender issues; for Shakti, LDW had operated as a refresher regarding the situation of academic women with children; and, Katherine felt that she was already very aware of gender issues. Gender was apparently not something they had dwelt on as a group.

Individuals in this group said that they had been supported to be more effective leaders and change agents in their workplaces, more confidently and strategically stepping forward to be leaders influencing change. This was powerfully augmented by their capacity to share and use each other's influence/networks/expertise as appropriate in a form of networked leadership. This networked leadership hints at the potential power of women acting collectively on a shared issue (Eveline & Goldflam 2002).

The effectiveness of the PLGs in developing each participant's confidence and enactment of leadership emerged across the three UWA groups. What was absent in the group interviews was any clearly articulated or shared understanding of gender either as it impacted on women individually or as it operated systemically. This is not to suggest that individual women did not have gender insight, however the development of gendered cultural literacy or a shared gender narrative did not form an important part of their work

together. While PLGs enhanced women's capacity to be tempered radicals in their workplace, this was not necessarily coupled with a focus on gendered change.

***'Putting ourselves first without fear or guilt'***

Pamela, Cherry & Susan (police)

Three police officers, Pamela, Cherry and Susan made up this group with the topic title *Putting ourselves first without fear or guilt* and all three attended the group interview. The women spoke as one as they described the group's formation. All women of approximately the same 'vintage within the agency', they also saw themselves as 'similar as far as lifestyle, responsibilities [and] work ethic'. Building rapport 'just happened, we didn't have to work at that'. As Cherry said '[it] was quite easy between the three of us just to be open and honest and say it'.

Their topic was primarily concerned with work life balance issues. The inclusion of 'fear' and 'guilt' in their title indicated the deeply felt nature of the difficulties they had faced. Negotiating the demands of the greedy institution and the greedy family, their stories highlight the divide between the public and private spheres that underpins the gendered organization.

Susan had endeavoured to be the ideal worker, meeting the demands of the greedy institution and sacrificing family in order to do so. Cherry and Pamela through working part-time to meet family needs, had sacrificed career. Susan was trying to correct her balance in favour of the home environment. The cost of her work life juggle had been borne by her children:

I think for me it was more of a learning to be a bit more flexible in terms of my children. Georgia would go, "Oh, mum I have got an assembly today and we are doing a presentation". I would say, "Oh, I can't come because I am working", whereas now we have a calendar and I go, "OK, you girls pick out the really important things that you want me to come to. I can't come to all of them, but I can come to this one and this one"...The kids, before LDW, copped an absolute hammering...So I guess for me that was what I got out of LDW, I learnt to relax a little bit and not be so rigid.

Cherry, on the other hand, wanted to change the balance more towards work, making the transition back to full-time work following the LDW program. Cherry attributes her decision to LDW:

I think the courage to go back to work full-time and balance it, because I wouldn't have thought that I could, and I have. I have had to call on things

## Chapter Seven

and I have had to give up on some other things. Even with the kids, I don't know whether it is good or bad...whereas before I was at everything, every sandcastle competition...I was there. But now it is like, "I am sorry, but I really can't come to that, but for that, I'll definitely be there and that will be great"...there are benefits for them as well, the financial benefit for a start. But maybe I have lost a little bit of the guilt.

Losing a 'little bit of the guilt' was a big deal for Cherry and one she nominated as a key learning on her data sheet. She described in some detail the re-negotiating of domestic tasks and parenting responsibilities, including how LDW had prompted her to change her stance. Previously, 'if he was unhappy, I would say "It's alright, don't worry I'll sort something out"'. Whereas now I would say "Sort it. You agreed for me to go back to work"".

Cherry rather gleefully described a recent shopping trip:

The girl said to me, "Duck over here and I'll give you a demonstration of how it works". I said, "Don't tell me, I don't want to know how that vacuum cleaner works, because I ain't using it". (Laughter.) And we have got a 'you beaut' vacuum cleaner at home that cost us a million dollars...I am happy with that because I have no intention of doing the vacuuming. I am not vacuuming, not my job.

Cherry and her husband, also a police officer, agreed that he would work part-time to give her space to settle back into full-time work:

We made a decision, my husband and I, that he would work part-time till I got myself sorted, so that I would then be able to come into my new position and give it everything I wanted to give it...he would have one or two days off each week to take the kids to school, be there and do all that sort of stuff. And he was quite happy with that. A month he lasted. (Laughter.) He comes home and says, "[t]hey are always asking me whether I did any baking on my day off". He came home one Monday seething, "[t]hey all got recalled on the weekend and got buckets of overtime". And he said "[w]hy didn't anybody ring me". And they said "[o]h, we weren't quite sure what your family responsibilities were". He goes "I am getting these shit jobs". I said "I have been doing this for ten years and I have told you over and over again that if you work part-time you are a second rate citizen, you don't get included and you told me to either go and say something or shut up, because it is all in my head".

This exchange demonstrates the way in which the notion of the ideal worker, based on the masculine norm, excludes men who stray from the stereotype in the same way that it excludes women when they contravene the established norms.

Despite this example, which involved a substantial disruption of the women-private and men-public domain linkages, the women all expressed the view that they had learnt nothing new about gender:

Cherry I don't think the gender thing or the culture was any great surprise to any of us. We knew that's how it was and that's how they look at us and that's how we look at them and that's the way it has always been.

Susan I don't think we spoke about that much.

JdV Was it taken for granted that you had a similar understanding?

Cherry Well, we knew what it was like, we knew what they thought and the way they look at us and that sort of stuff, but on the flip side, for each of us, because of our personalities, it's not something that had ever bothered us. It was like, "Whatever! Yes, yes, I am a woman and you are a man and you are so much stronger than me." I think we were from the generation that just humour them.

Susan And take the piss<sup>2</sup>. I don't think we made a big deal of it because, as Cherry says, that's just who we are.

Cherry I don't think it ever stopped us from doing anything...

As noted in Chapter Two, policing is a highly sexualised environment (Itzin 1995) where women are still present in token numbers and the male /female differences are much more overt than at UWA. Women cannot fail to be aware of their femaleness in relation to the dominant maleness and the continued occurrence of sexist, misogynist and discriminatory behaviour in the workplace. Gender, as the members of this group understood it, was about how women and men relate in the workplace and how gendered roles play out. In the exchange cited above, Cherry and Susan detailed some common coping strategies, a sense of resignation, humouring men's egos or 'taking the piss'.

Despite presenting themselves as 'strong characters', and an assertion that 'I don't think it has ever stopped us', it was their shared insecurities that had contributed to the group experience. As Cherry said:

It was good to hear though that we all had the same issues, fears, whatever, we were all facing the same type of thing, and I think we have all boosted each other along a bit to get out there and do something a little bit more that maybe we were afraid to do.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Take the piss' is a colloquial Australian term denoting a tongue-in-cheek mockery that is not intended to harm.

## Chapter Seven

One example of boosting each other was the support and encouragement Cherry and Susan provided to Pamela to apply for promotion:

I ummed and ahhed and in the end I thought, no, no I can do this. The same old reason, have I got the confidence? And I must admit I did cast my mind back and had to remember at LDW talking about how we can do this and don't sit there till we are 100 percent sure. The guys go in at 60 percent, all that sort of stuff. That all came flooding back, so that did have an impact on me deciding then and there that I would do it.

Pamela had what she described as 'a fear of failure' and a failed attempt in the past had held her back from trying again:

...by the time I had finished my application, it was kind of, "Well, OK, it doesn't matter if I fail. It doesn't mean I am a failure". And that's not something I would have thought before. So, that's a big shift. I still have niggles and I think, "Oh, god, if I fail...no, no, it doesn't matter. It doesn't mean I am any less good at what I do or whatever".

As the interview unfolded Pamela offered a gender analysis of the issue of women's lack of confidence:

Pamela I would have to agree with Cherry, [Susan interjects, 'yeah I'm the same'] as forthright and confident as we are, I think every woman, and I do say women because men don't seem to bother too much, every woman worries about what people think. I would have to agree with Cherry that I am a little less worried about what other people think now too. That's something that's come about perhaps around about the time of LDW actually, probably in the last year or so that I worry a lot less.

Cherry My being less concerned with what people think definitely correlates with the period of the last 12-18 months.

For Cherry the biggest breakthrough in her learning was the realisation 'that while it has always been like that it doesn't have to be like that just because it always has been. There is nothing wrong with actually changing'. While in the first instance Cherry was referring to herself changing, she went on to talk about how this might involve challenging others:

I know that's what the police service is like and the gender and all that sort of stuff, but it doesn't mean that I have to humour them, I can actually say something about this. Or the guilt, or putting yourself first, or your own self development, to me is like, "Yes, well put it down there and if there is ever time, any time left in the week, well I can have that bit". Well hang on, it doesn't have to be like that...maybe because we have been in it for so long...maybe we do accept too much, but we work with what we have. Mine was more, "OK, yes, I can see that. Yep, I know that, OK that's my lot". But now it is like, "OK, well, but I can do something about it".

## Developing leaders and change agents?

Cherry could choose not to ‘humour them’, thereby challenging the status quo. Her account also speaks of learning to put herself first without guilt and giving herself permission to change. Cherry relayed her own internal conversation. Where previously she was immobilised by the thought of people saying “[w]hat are you doing? You have never done that before”. Now I go, “So what? So I have never done that before. I’m doing it now!” This increased confidence had also translated into Cherry stepping forward as a leader:

I guess I probably I do feel more like a leader and I think that’s because I have always known that I probably should be one, but I was never really sure whether I could be one. Now I think, well, I am just going to do it. So I probably have stepped into it more if you like. It is a confidence thing.

For Cherry, her program involvement had increased her range of choices and provided a greater sense of agency and leadership.

All three women were in positive working environments at the time of the interview with supportive bosses who believed in them. As Susan noted:

I think what helps as well is other people have confidence in you...They (our bosses) have given us the opportunity to fulfil those roles to the point where they believe in us. We may be a little bit apprehensive and they will go “No, you are doing it and you can do it”. They have given us permission...the opportunity to believe in ourselves and pushed us that little bit over the edge where we are out of our comfort zone.

The importance of opportunities in building women’s confidence and leadership underscores the position taken by Trevor (police mentor) that opportunity is a key gendering process that can be changed.

For the final presentation Cherry, Pamela and Susan developed a handout called the *Ten Commandments*, summarising in a light hearted fashion what they had learnt from a survey about work/life balance they conducted and their own peer learning group journey.

Commandments included, for example, ‘Thou Shall Share the Load’, ‘Thou Shall Overcome Fear and Guilt’ and ‘Thou Shall Make Time for Oneself’. At the bottom of the picture of Moses holding the Commandments is the following:

We have discovered that we can remain passionate about our work and be committed to making a difference as long as we don’t lose sight of the fact that what really counts is life itself.

The commandments and their statement effectively and simultaneously challenged the ideal worker norms, which favour prioritising work above life, and the validity of the often held

assumption that women are unable to fully contribute to paid work because of their family commitments.

The *Ten Commandments*, distributed at the final presentation day subsequently rippled out into the agency:

Pamela That was a big achievement I think for all of us because that was picked up by a lot of people after.

Susan And still is.

Cherry It was far reaching as opposed to the one-day presentation...even the men are going "Let me have a look at that. I want one of those and I am going to try and adapt myself to follow them". And at the time it didn't appear to be that big a thing, more like it was going to have much more of an impact on us, or some of the girls at the course might pick it up, but it has gone throughout the Agency.

The *Ten Commandments* have since turned up on coffee tables in waiting rooms, on walls, framed on a boss's desk and taken to school for news. Such effective (unplanned) dissemination demonstrates the capacity for small wins where local change can ripple out to create more systemic change.

Despite 'knowing it all' in relation to gender, the women made substantial changes in their working life that stretched and challenged gendered norms and practices. They had developed a more grounded confidence based on group support, the opportunities and belief provided by supportive bosses, and their own capacity to challenge more and doubt themselves less. The issues of part-time work and the exclusion that applied equally to women and men who break the 'rules' of the ideal worker were recurring themes which were picked up again in the next group.

### ***'Situational Leadership'***

Cameron, Drew & Lucy (police)

This group comprised three police officers and one public service officer exploring the topic *Situational Leadership*. Our meeting was attended by the three police officers, Cameron (a Senior Constable), Drew and Lucy (both Sergeants), with the fourth member unable to attend due to her country location. Building confidence was a strong theme and once again the group, through providing support and a chance to talk things through, had helped the women to step forward into leadership.

In the words of Drew, exploring their topic assisted them to 'become more aware of how we operate and how that's perceived by others and whether it works and gets the desired outcomes and all of that'. The topic and PLG structure gave the women permission to be reflective, increasingly strategic and experimental in their approach. Drew explained that from the very first meeting they had 'turns talking about if we had any issues at work and how we individually dealt with that situation, that's why it was situational leadership as our group title'. Drew, for example, said she intended to vary her approach with a new staff member: 'I am going to try a few things out because he doesn't know what I was like before'. Cameron began asking herself questions like 'OK. What would the girls [PLG members] do?' Cameron, currently in the sergeants' pool<sup>3</sup>, referred to herself as a 'sergeant in waiting' and described challenging herself to step up to 'think more like a sergeant'. Lucy described moving from the self doubting view that 'I'm obviously not right for this role because I don't have the answer for this question' to a point where 'it is OK not to have all the answers'. As Drew stressed '[y]ou have got to have a good network, you just bloody find out from someone else.'

Agreeing that LDW had provided a big confidence boost, the conversation turned to how this issue of confidence was related to being a woman:

Cameron It's hard being a woman in our job and it is really hard I think to explain. We have all been in the job well over a decade and it is a hard slog and it is constant I find.

JdV Try and describe that a bit, what words do you use for that?

Drew Brick wall (laughter). We are going to be labelled as well, by your style - and it might be misinterpreted too - because I know with me I try and be tactful and try and get a message through, but it might have been taken as being sarcastic or I don't know what, but it wasn't, because I try to do the job and do it nicely because I don't want to be a prick<sup>4</sup> (laughter).

Lucy Whereas a bloke can walk in...and they don't take offence...Whereas for a chick, she must be...(all talking on top of each other)

JdV Extreme scrutiny all the time.

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<sup>3</sup> Promotional rounds for certain ranks take place once a year. Successful applicants are then placed into a 'pool', waiting for a suitable position to arise.

<sup>4</sup> 'Prick' is a colloquial Australian term denoting someone who is troublesome, uncooperative or annoying. Because 'prick' is also a slang term for penis, it generally refers to a man exhibiting these behaviours.

## Chapter Seven

- Drew Yes, because they will just label you because you have got a skirt, you are a hard bitch if you make decisions. Because if I see something that needs to be done I will do it and make the decisions and be quite OK with that because having a sense of direction on where you want something to go, not a problem, but how you get the others on board to go with you on that is the hard bit.
- Lucy If they don't agree with you, you are a hard-nosed bitch and you must be menstruating (laughter).
- Drew Or you are just trying to be an overachiever because you want to improve something.
- Lucy ...Every section you go to, even if you have got a good reputation, even if your reputation goes before you, reputation in this job is a huge thing...everybody is...Do you know Joe Bloggs, what's he like? Oh yeah, he's a white man, he is a good bloke, you'll be right with him, no dramas. That's OK, instantly he walks in that office he is accepted. For a girl: Do you know Cameron Ford? Yes, she is good, she is a white man, you'll have no troubles with her. Alright, so we don't have to ostracise her on the first day, but she still needs to prove herself.
- Cameron Sometimes it is like re-proving yourself, starting again, everywhere you go and time and time again going through the process of head against a brick wall.

In this animated exchange the women described the everyday gendering (and race) practices of the workplace that they experienced as repeatedly hitting their 'head against a brick wall'. There is also a sense of 'damned if you do, damned if you don't', the constant 'double binds' of leadership for women (Catalyst 2007; Martin & Meyerson 1998) where being a leader is at odds with being a woman. Constantly scrutinised, always proving and re-proving themselves, being a woman became a 'hard slog'. Rabe-Hemp (2008:257) found the process of acceptance for policewomen 'was nurtured, negotiated and maintained on a daily basis, rather than achieved'. This was the extra load of being a woman in such a densely masculine workplace, a load which often undermined confidence and pushed women at all levels to adopt coping strategies. In common with the previous group, there was a clear recognition of themselves as *women* in policing and the stark impact this had on their working lives.

Times however were changing and younger women they agreed were finding more acceptance based on capability, not gender. Referring to Drew, the longest serving member

of the trio, as ‘you’d be ice-cream to lost kids<sup>5</sup>’, they decided policing had come a long way yet still has a long way to go. Despite seeing themselves as survivors, they remained determined and optimistic:

Cameron Yet we are still here over a decade later, we are still here.

Lucy We have left a thousand times but we are still here, in our heads we have left.

Cameron I think we have finally come to the decision that *we can make a difference* in this job in this community, in this State or whatever and that we want to make the world a better place, that’s what we want to do, that’s why we joined in the first place and we are still here. (emphasis added)

Cameron’s assertion that ‘we can make a difference’ is one of the desired outcomes of LDW, indicating a view of herself as a leader and change agent. The group connection according to Cameron, played a major role in this:

I can see these girls charging forward. I think we are doing it together and I can see that we are going to make changes in this job because we are supporting each other and I probably didn’t quite feel that before the program and I have got a great network of people in the job anyway but to have the three of us where we are right now has been fantastic and you get excited about the future and thinking that we are going to make a change. I mean, we are going to be commissioned officers before we know it (laughter).

Together they had found what Lucy described as ‘unconditional, non-judgmental’ support, with Drew describing the peer group as having that ‘extra little twist of trust to it...like someone has got your back’.

Cameron had, with the support of the group, stood her ground in refusing an unsuitable posting that was too far from home to be practicable with children. However she felt on shaky ground as the numbers in the pool shrank and the pressure to accept the next offer, regardless of where it was located, intensified. The allocation of promotions and placements was an area where they all agreed the mentality needed to change, as previously highlighted in this thesis by the police mentor Trevor. As Lucy put it, ‘[i]t’s that mentality that drives me to move up in this job, to change that mentality’. The gendering processes of placements were still driven by a notion of the unencumbered ‘ideal worker’ and women like Cameron were being forced to fit this ideal, leaving her feeling ‘as if I am being

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<sup>5</sup> This expression, not one I’d heard before, humorously captures the historically sex segregated roles in policing, where policewomen were restricted in the range of duties they undertook and anything to do with children for example, was dealt with by a female police officer.

shafted'. In spite of her suitability for promotion as judged by the promotion process, she had contemplated dropping out of the pool, rather than be forced to take a family unfriendly posting. This was in itself an act of tempered radicalism, highlighting barriers to women's progression into senior ranks.

Drew, Cameron and Lucy were clear about the day-to-day difficulties of being a woman in the job. Their group offered unconditional support that countered to a degree the effects of the brickwall they were all so familiar with. They were buoyed by the successes of each other, daring to dream about being commissioned officers together.

### ***'Are flexible staff committed staff?'***

Tracey, Anne, Natasha & Deltora (police)

The topic of this group, *Are flexible staff committed staff?*, went straight to the heart of the dilemma for workers requiring flexibility, primarily women, within the policing context (Charlesworth & Whittenbury 2007; Charlesworth, Keen & Whittenbury 2009). In common with the *Ten Commandments* group, the topic challenged long held and deeply embedded assumptions regarding the ideal worker. Originally a group of five, with four public service officers and one police officer, the interview was attended by four women, Tracey (since moved to a different public sector department), Anne (Sergeant), Natasha and Deltora. Three years had elapsed between the program and this interview (for all other groups it was one to one and a half years). While the group no longer maintained regular contact and had lost touch with the fifth member (who had also left policing), it became obvious as the interview progressed that this group had provided a strong platform for development.

Tracey described the group beginnings: 'I think it was very easy, we all got together because we all had this common issue. The minute we got together we got talking and we didn't stop'. Members spoke about how developing 'total trust' (Tracey), 'confidentiality' (Deltora) and knowing 'that it is not just me' (Anne), 'gets that isolation factor out of the way... (Deltora). Tracey added, 'I would just talk about anything and everything...so you know you have found friendship on a different level'.

Group members brought a diverse range of issues to the table under their focus question. Their flexibility issues included working from home following the birth of a baby; limited promotional opportunities for long-term part-time staff; accessing purchased leave for school holidays; negotiating flexible hours to enable some school pick-ups; and, part-time

## Developing leaders and change agents?

staff feeling marginalised through not being able to attend staff meetings and other communication and team building activities.

They didn't just talk about these issues. Anne described the way the group process translated into action:

From the beginning I have really enjoyed the process although it shook me up a bit to say we are doing research through this peer learning process, but I found it fascinating the fact that we could actually move forward and make things happen in a group in terms of research and adopting strategies to address particular issues and that we made things happen. It wasn't just a network; it was a way of making things happen by collaborating and moving things forward.

In describing the group's small wins process, Anne showed how active learning achieved results. They pooled knowledge, resources and their own experiences concerning policies and strategies to support each other and to push the boundaries. At the time of the group interview, all group members were happy with their working arrangements, which had all gone through several iterations over the years since the program began as circumstances and employment changed. For some, success in negotiating greater flexibility brought great relief, for example reducing the stress experienced previously in sending sick kids to school and avoiding the partner negotiations of who should stay home. In one case a savvy child was taking advantage of this flexibility when he was sick, asking "but can't you just work from home today?".

Their topic was timely and resonated widely. Group members learned to position their needs in relation to flexible work as a strategic issue. As Anne emphasized in their group presentation, 'It's not enough to think about it as part-time work for mothers'. In their public presentation this group used the game of *Snakes and Ladders*, which aptly illustrated the difficulties they experienced. They painted a *Snakes and Ladders* game on a groundsheet where they played out various scenarios using themselves as the pieces. The game was a visually striking and accessible way of communicating that while the policies were there to support them, their success in negotiating flexible work practices, such as part-time work or the capacity to work occasionally from home, were erratic (subject to the symbolic throw of a dice) and dependent on local factors such as a change in boss. While progress was occasionally made (ladders), this progress could quickly become eroded (snakes) and often resulted in a return to square one. Their morale too ebbed and flowed as hard won flexibility was gained or lost. Their issue was not just accessing flexible work options but, as Anne highlighted, how that was interpreted as far as commitment in the workplace, the

fact we were marginalised...’ The PLG was calling attention to the way part-time (or flexible working) is interpreted as part-committed (Charlesworth & Whittenbury 2007), once again harking back to the construction of the ideal worker.

Policing, due to severe recruitment and retention difficulties during the economic boom years, had made appreciable changes in flexible working options in the three years since this group’s presentation. As Anne said ‘[i]t is mainstream, but how much we contributed to that I don’t know’. However, with the boom times over, this may prove to be a fragile gain that could easily be lost.

Members of this PLG described substantial changes to how they saw themselves and behaved as leaders, with Anne’s story in particular showing how LDW was pivotal in redefining and claiming herself as leader.

Anne I would just have the confidence to go away and change things gradually, or operate differently to how other people operate. Go, “OK, that might be the way that you do things but as the manager of my area I wouldn’t do things like that”, and feel confident in doing that...And the confidence that *I can do it my way* and that’s very much about what the whole of the LDW was for me, *that confidence that I don’t need to be like anybody else, I can set my own style, I can be the kind of manager that I want to be...*that was the really big thing that came out of it for me. (emphasis added)

One of the stumbling blocks for Anne prior to LDW was the heroic leadership norms:

Anne ...We don’t have too many role models for policewomen in our organization. Throughout my whole career all of my managers have been men and I have always known I can’t behave like that. It is not part of my character and, apart from one or two exceptions, there are male managers that are not the heroic style, so the LDW principally for me was “I can be myself and still be a leader in my area”.

JdV So it was permission giving in that sense.

Anne Yes, and just the confidence to say “OK, this is how men operate and women operate differently and they feel more comfortable operating differently”. For me it just all fell into place and I went, “*Ahaa...Right, well I can be a leader like this.* There is no one there that I can see, but the characteristics are there for me, yes, tick, tick, tick, that’s me”, and off I went. (emphasis added)

While Anne provided a wonderful example of stepping forward into leadership, other members of the group were also getting on with it. Tracey, for example, had moved to a different Agency where:

## Developing leaders and change agents?

They couldn't get their head around the need to do job share and flexibility or give people access to work from home. I have just gone ahead and done it and it has raised a few eyebrows...

As leaders, Anne and Tracey were both changing practices in their own areas, establishing what Charlesworth et al. (2009) refer to as 'islands of positive practice' that can become more widespread over time.

Natasha is also making ripples, through advocating for colleagues: 'I now have the confidence to campaign for my own flexible work practices and am able to approach senior management on flexible practices for others'. She described her own transformation:

Pre LDW I used to just take a lot of what was said, know it was wrong in my own mind, but not I suppose push the boundaries, whereas now...if someone says something to me now and I don't think it is right, then I will say it...I think it is a combination of LDW and the peer learning group that has given me that confidence to go, "No, hang on. Let's stop and think about this. No, yes OK this is the way it is supposed to be, but how can we make that better? Yeah, I suppose I was like this little mouse before and now I am sort of like the troublemaker. (Laughter)

Her new behaviour was being well received '...usually the Director comes up and goes..."If you have got a better suggestion, then give it to me and tell me how it would work"'.

Deltora's experience was similar:

What you normally end up doing is just going with the flow rather than challenge it. But I have and I am finding I am doing that a lot more...at one time I probably would not have said anything that might have rocked the boat...And you might upset them but you have got to get things done. It is just interesting watching the politics...but I feel comfortable in myself that I am staying true to myself rather than saying 'yes' to something because it is the way somebody else wants it done.

Where previously Deltora would not have 'rocked the boat', now she is able to challenge, step back and watch the politics unfold and 'feel comfortable in myself'. The balancing act required of tempered radicals relies on being able to read the politics. For this group, the concept of small wins was useful in terms of thinking about change and their part in it:

Tracey Chipping away at the block. You know there is a big issue and you know you can't go in boots and all, but just go in and chipping away, and I suppose getting the confidence of those that are putting that wall there.

Anne Not needing to confront a big problem head on and have that clash with it, looking at other ways around the problem, eliciting support for a move later to have things changed, look at other ways of generating acceptance of change.

Natasha Yeah, it is more of a gradual change rather than one intensive change. As everyone said, chip away, chip away...Plan your attack. But it shows you how to do that.

Anne And a recognition that these things do happen gradually and that's just the way it is. You look at our topic, flexible work options, and over the last five years how far have we come? That's a series of small wins.

This group presented themselves as confident and empowered during the group interview. Together they had developed a group process which had provided a platform for ongoing growth in the intervening three years. Early issues included negotiating better work/life balance and assisting one member to deal with bullying in her workplace. What is evident now is an ongoing strengthening of their capacity to challenge, be it workplace procedures or unfair practices, to suggest and make changes, to see themselves as leaders and to do it their way. The small wins approach has provided a way to see themselves as change agents, rather than 'going with the flow' and 'not rocking the boat'. As with members of the UWA garden group, Anne in particular had re-defined leadership for herself, despite a lack of role models, and was putting this into practice. After three years, the leadership 'work' they had done during LDW and in their PLG was still alive and current in their working lives.

### **'Holding up the mirror' for the organization**

The PLG presentations aimed to serve two functions, the development of the women and the development of those who attended, primarily mentors and executives. The presentations required courage and leadership from the women and, to a degree, from the audience. For the women, presenting their experiential learning and journey in a creative fashion, as we insisted they do, challenged organizational norms. At the university, LDW groups felt that they needed to have intellectual gravitas, and at policing, the women were fearful of being seen as unprofessional. Pulling the presentation together became the final leadership challenge for each group and presenting to their audience became an experience of being change agents, challenging cultural norms and expectations. Maggie and I were always very careful to provide as safe a 'container' as possible for the women, carefully introducing the presentations, detailing why the presentation was not a powerpoint, the need for the audience to look for the organizational messages and setting the expectation that the audience would respond and engage with the women at the end of the presentation so the women weren't left wondering about their response. There was invariably enormous

## Developing leaders and change agents?

relief once the presentation was over followed by enormous pride in what they had achieved as a group.

Presentations themselves varied in their challenging of the status quo and this was something that each group had to grapple with: how honest, how challenging were they prepared to be? It was, using the words of Ewick and Silbey (1995:220), their opportunity to tell ‘subversive stories...that break the silence...that are capable of countering the hegemonic...which bear witness to what is unimagined and unexpressed’. The PLG presentation provided each participant with the opportunity to be a tempered radical, which in turn could be reinforcing of further action.

Some topics, including those highlighted above, were more inherently challenging of the gendered nature of the organization. *Snakes and Ladders*, the *Ten Commandments*, the garden metaphor for leadership, all contained within them a challenge to the masculine norms as they operated to define work and leadership. Other topics, such as *Stand Your Ground*, *Situational Leadership* and *Managing Change* were also represented in final presentations, often through stories demonstrating how the women had developed increased confidence, management skills and a preparedness to step forward into leadership. These topics and presentations contained a less overt organizational message regarding aspects of the organizational culture that made it difficult for women to build confidence, stand their ground or see themselves as leaders.

The organizational responses to the PLG presentations differed widely, beginning with who attended. At UWA, the Vice-Chancellor attended, accompanied by several of his Executive. Presentations were seen as a ‘reality check’ by the VC and others, and the VC would often participate in the audience response to the women and on occasion would follow up on remarks by individual women over morning tea. On one occasion he was bailed up by a female Professor (a previous LDW participant) and several women from that year’s program in a discussion about the funding of maternity leave. Despite the VC saying ‘we’ve fixed it now’, the Professor was insistent that, despite policy, real difficulties were occurring in the faculty that needed to be addressed. The VC promised to look into it.

Question/response time became a good test of the audience’s engagement which ranged from congratulatory and appreciative to defensive or critical. Sometimes responses filtered through to us later. One Executive member at UWA suggested that the focus should be more on what the women learnt and involve less complaining about the organization. When relayed down the hierarchy and through my boss to me, this kind of pushback

demonstrated that the process of challenging the organization was working. This was apparently not understood by the Executive member in question or my boss despite every PLG presentation beginning with an introduction that involved detailing the bifocal approach. It exemplified the desire to contain the LDW program to a Frame 1 approach that focussed on the women and left the organization unexamined and unchanged.

Police Commissioner Mark, although not in attendance at any of the presentations, on one occasion requested a meeting with one participant, Helena, following her harrowing account of her treatment following a serious injury on the job. This follow-up by the Commissioner was a huge win for Helena in terms of being 'heard' by the organization and was a great boost to the LDW group who had provided support and encouragement, allocating significant space in the final presentation for Helena to tell her story. Not only had the program helped Helena get back on track, the organization had offered her some belated acknowledgement, restitution, and promised changes in procedures.

Mentors are another critical group in terms of the bifocal agenda and many did attend presentations to support their mentee. Several of the mentors in this study made appreciative remarks about the PLG presentations. For example, Howard (mentor, policing) was unusually positive in understanding and appreciating what we were doing:

Yeah, at the first one I went to it was really great because the women presenting adopted a totally different way of presenting than the staid, conservative police way of standing up and saying something – I think they actually sang at the first one. I thought that was absolutely amazing, so I gathered from that, because I had a friend in the program who I wasn't associated with as a coach/mentor, but who had invited me along. I thought this is actually different, this is worth becoming more closely involved with simply because it has the opportunity to make a difference.

Other comments like 'why didn't they learn their lines off by heart?' were also relayed to us. This individual, while completely missing the point, was also demonstrating the highly critical (of others) culture of policing. When our contract came up for renewal at police, the nature of the PLG presentation was contentious. The Assistant Commissioner suggested that the women should be providing solutions, not raising problems, and that the format needed to be substantially changed.

The PLG presentations had provided a forum for 'holding up the mirror'. Taken on face value these presentations, showing enormous and heartening progress on the part of the women, may in fact be seen as the program delivering what the organization requires, that is, better-equipped, or to use Frame 1 terminology 'fixed', women leaders. This easy

slippage towards the individual in preference to acknowledging organizational deficiencies highlights the ever present difficulty in holding on to the bifocal approach. In addition, at both organizations there was evidence of discomfort regarding the organizational message and attempts to refocus on what the women could/should be doing. In each case this side-steps the question of responsibility on the part of the leaders of the organization to address the issues raised in the PLG presentations. Despite this, in both organizations ripples were being felt in the CEO's office and some messages were being heard.

What is evident is that the success of the PLG presentations as a learning strategy for the organization is dependent on several variables: enabling the women to be courageous and strategic in their delivery of the messages, both palatable and less palatable; getting the right people in the room; an openness on the part of the audience to hear the message and not be defensive; and, a capacity to frame the message as being about both the organization *and* the women. The desired outcome of highlighting organizational issues, thereby building constituencies for change and making it harder for the organization to fall back into a 'fix the women' approach, was only partially achieved. However, without this element of the program, a valuable opportunity to maintain a high organizational profile, an opportunity to exercise leadership and change agency for the women, and an opportunity to educate the organization would be lost. It is also difficult to measure or even know about ripples of change that may emanate from these memorable occasions.

## **Measuring up to the bifocal approach?**

It was obvious to us as facilitators that many of the women found the PLGs a very positive and important part of the program. They enjoyed the group meetings and the networking and formed lasting friendships. What had been less clear was how the groups worked with the concepts and tools provided in the program and their level of engagement with a reflexive learning cycle based around experimentation in the workplace. Our intention was that this material and the PLG process would together support LDW participants' role in the bifocal agenda, that is their leadership development and their contribution to the broader gendered change agenda.

The stories of the six peer learning groups in this research provide strong affirmation of the effectiveness of the peer learning group process in supporting participants' leadership development. What is much less clear or obvious is their engagement with the transformative agenda. I wish to reflect on this aspect of the bifocal approach more closely by examining three questions. First, was the PLG process adequate to support the kind of

gender ‘politicisation’ that we hoped would occur? Second, how did the women use the concepts and tools designed to aid the development of gendered cultural literacy? Third, what is the relationship between changes in the women’s own leadership practices and broader gender transformation of the organization.

### ***The peer learning group process***

Without exception all groups spoke about the special qualities of the connections they had formed with each other. As Georgia (*Stand your ground*, UWA) expressed it:

It is quite hard to put into words exactly what the experience was...because part of it was talking and tangible kind of stuff, but a lot of it was intangible and just how well everybody got on and we just had a really nice environment...it exceeded my expectations...a bit of magic.

The successful development of trust and confidentiality was important and noted in all groups but particularly stressed in police. Each group had succeeded in building a safe learning environment, a necessary underpinning for the development work we envisaged for PLGs.

The group formation process, where groups formed around shared issues, had worked well, providing cohesion and a sense of purpose, and as Katherine (*Managing Change*, UWA) said ‘giving them permission to work as a team’. The fact that it was part of the LDW program bestowed legitimacy on their meetings even after the program finished.

Groups talked about anything and everything, blurring personal and professional boundaries, and this was assisted by the nature of their topics. Anne (*Flexible workers*, police), for example said that ‘...we’ve talked about the issues in the workplace that really are quite fundamental and emotional to us’. The depth and enjoyment of the relationships was often obvious in the group interviews with several groups commenting on how, despite infrequent contact, they re-connected instantly in a way that was more reminiscent of old established friendships than workplace relationships. All of the PLGs appear to have formed what McManus and Russell (2007:277) call ‘special peer’ relationships ‘characterised by strong bonding and support for family and work issues’.

If PLGs are thought of as peer mentoring, all groups were located towards the development end of the mentoring continuum. The women had drawn on each other’s experience, knowledge, networks and expertise, replicating the knowledge transfer of instrumental mentoring but without unequal power dynamics. In addition to this, there was the use of each other as a sounding board or as a critical friend, the presence of

psychosocial support and the ‘unconditional acceptance’ of each other that had supported experimentation, taking risks and making changes. This development, where the women were changed by their shared learning, translated across roles and jobs or even organizations (as we saw with Tracey). Importantly, this development process had been sustained beyond the term of the LDW program. It can therefore be concluded that the PLG process supported leadership development and gendered change agency for the women.

### ***Small wins and gendered cultural literacy***

Women in the PLGs did use concepts from the program, in particular the notion of small wins. The small wins process of naming, dialogue and experimentation used by CGO researchers to uncover systemic gendering processes within the workplace had been provided as the framework for the PLG process. However, as I have indicated previously, the women had adopted and broadened the concept to encompass any personal progress. Small wins became a personal change strategy rather than an organizational change strategy. It gave the women permission to engage in step-by-step incremental change, to keep chipping away and to notice and congratulate ‘small’ progress. It was a personally empowering concept. As Mary (*Managing change*, UWA) noted:

It definitely does help...you start doing things slowly and incrementally, but until you realise that that’s what you have done, you just discount it as just getting on with it, but it is good for yourself to know that you are moving along the path to getting somewhere. You need patience though, don’t you?

The notion of experimentation – of trying things out which may or may not succeed – contributed to this permission giving. Together with the understanding that organizational change is slow and incremental, the concept of small wins had encouraged a sense of self as a change agent.

The groups engaged in a small wins learning process, whereby issues linked to their topic were discussed (naming and dialogue) and people were supported and held accountable to do things differently in their workplaces (experimentation). With this more encompassing definition of small wins, the overt link to systemic change appeared to go unnoticed or unremarked. This raises interesting questions however, about whether it is possible to treat individual and systemic change as separate and disconnected. Drawing on the feminist maxim, the ‘personal is political’, would suggest that any distinction would be artificial. Indeed, the linking of the local to the systemic is obvious in examples such as the *Ten*

*Commandments* (*Putting ourselves first*, police), which have been disseminated far and wide, and the garden metaphor (*Ourselves as leaders*, UWA) for leadership, which captured the imagination of a wider audience.

In the interviews there was little articulation of the gender insight it was hoped that women would develop within PLGs. One of the key noted benefits of WO programs is the realisation for women, through the sharing of their stories, that 'I am not alone' (Devos, McLean & O'Hara 2003). This de-privatising of experience is often cited as critical to building 'feminist consciousness' (Morley & Walsh 1995; Silvestri 2003; Sheridan, Kjeldal & Rindfleish 2005) because it draws attention away from the individual towards the structural or systemic. In the PLG interviews this realisation of 'it's not just me' through shared stories did occur, for example in noting the widespread nature of women's lack of confidence. However, the PLG experience did not appear to assist the women to develop an overt 'feminist consciousness'. This is not to say that all the women lacked feminist consciousness, for this was not the case. Rather it appears that the PLG did not assist women who did not already have a degree of feminist consciousness. Jenny (*Stand your ground*, UWA), for example, did not develop greater gender insight, despite being in a group with the more gender savvy Georgia. Further to this, it did not appear that groups considered developing gender insight to be an important element of the work they were doing together.

However the women had embraced change agency as part of who they were as leaders. What appeared to be lacking was, using the CGO term, a 'gender lens'. The small wins process without a gender lens proved to be a firm basis for leadership development, but not for developing the gender insight that underpins the bifocal approach.

I was curious as to how gender had disappeared, not from my sight, but apparently from theirs. I noted that I talked about gender in the transcripts but the women did not. Some interviewees barely mentioned the words men, women, male, female, although some used the word 'girls' a lot – which is the way policewomen (but not public service officers) routinely address each other. Only two of the transcripts have any extended discussion about women and men in the workplace.

Despite this apparent lack of a gender lens, there was a lot of what I would call 'gender work' being done. Many of the topics and stories were gendered, making little sense if, for example, those telling the stories were men. Many of the examples of leadership and

change agency pushed back against gendered norms and disrupted gender stereotypes and expectations linked to the notion of the ideal worker.

I cannot assume that a lack of articulation of gender equates with a lack of awareness or understanding of gender. However the use of language is important in providing and building a narrative that assists in making sense of our gendered experience and as part of the politicisation process. The small wins cycle for example emphasises the importance of naming as a first step. Groups shared a common topic but they did not share and construct a gender narrative to help them make sense of their varied experiences. However, while the overt development of gender insight had been elusive, has gender been completely lost if women's development in and of itself challenged the status quo?

### ***Leadership and change agency***

Women in these groups were, through re-defining leadership and claiming themselves as leaders, challenging the gendered status quo. The *Ourselves as leaders* group (UWA) demonstrated how through re-defining leadership away from the masculine norm they could see themselves as leaders, feel like leaders, and do leadership in their own way. Anne (*Flexible staff*, police) worked out that she could do it her own way despite a lack of role models. In the *Stand your ground* group (UWA), Jenny felt differently about leading, Wilma could lead from within the group and Siti began seeing herself as exercising leadership through everyday acts. The *Managing change* group (UWA) practised networked leadership, while the *Situational leadership* group (police) began to glimpse a future for themselves as leaders within policing

The leadership of these women does not conform to the masculine styles of leadership evident in their workplaces. Importantly too, the leadership enacted by the women was not within the rules of the game. Elements of change agency were clearly visible. Juliana (*Ourselves as leaders*, UWA) actively labelled leadership behaviours in colleagues around her, Missy (*Managing change*, UWA) challenged masculine norms about leave, and Cherry (*Putting ourselves first*, police) realised that she could challenge rather than accept the behaviour of men around her.

Group members were more strategic, thinking about how best to create change, in the case of Anne and Tracey (*Flexible workers*, police) just going away and doing it, for Shakti (*Managing change*, UWA), lobbying other group members; for Cherry (*Putting ourselves first*, police), sometimes sizing up people, and for Missy (*Managing change*, UWA), knowing when

to back off for now, to try again later. These women were making a difference in their workplaces and were achieving their own small wins. They challenged the status quo in ways the majority of them had not done previously.

The women were emboldened by the affirmation of their colleagues and the support they provided, giving numerous examples of increased confidence and self-belief. Pamela (*Putting ourselves first*, police) had applied for promotion, Mary (*Managing change*, UWA) was just getting on and doing it, the *Situational leadership* group (police) doubted and second guessed themselves less, growing in their belief they could make a difference. Together they had become stronger, more confident, more empowered, more courageous, less doubting, more reflective, and more sure of their leadership and contribution in the workplace. Our desired aims for the PLGs, to deepen the learning and assist transfer into the workplace, were being achieved. Moreover, the work of the PLGs continued to be done more than a year and up to three years after the formal program concluded.

It is interesting to reflect on these accounts in relation to the 'three legged stool' leadership model of identity, power and organizational culture (described in Chapter Three). Gender infuses each leg, their own gendered identity, the power dimension of gender and the gendered organizational practices embedded in the culture. The strongest leg in these accounts appears to be doing what Sinclair (2007) refers to as the 'identity work' of leadership, with the two more systemic aspects of power and organizational culture less prominent. The women were achieving what Debebe (2009:1) describes as transformative leadership development, which can 'loosen the grip of the internalised gender narrative and generate new mindsets and alternative practices among women leaders'. They were claiming themselves not only as leaders but as women leaders, who did not have to lead in stereotypically masculine ways.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has focussed on the participants and their PLG experience. The group interviews provide a strong endorsement of the PLG process in supporting the women's development as leaders and change agents. As a facilitator of LDW I was extraordinarily heartened by these accounts of the women's development. But it is not my intention to make a case for LDW based on the women's development as leaders and/or the difference LDW has made in their working lives. This would be the terrain of more traditional program evaluations and is insufficient to make a case for a WO program with a bifocal agenda.

## Developing leaders and change agents?

What is much less clear is the capacity of the program, and more particularly the PLGs, to enhance the development of gendered cultural literacy, providing the kind of systemic understanding which could then underpin women's leadership and change agency with a clear gender agenda. The implications of this for holding onto the bifocal approach will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Eight will bring together the three elements that have provided the focus of this research and been examined in separate chapters: executive champions, mentors, and the peer learning group experience of program participants. Each chapter has highlighted some of the inevitable ups and downs of putting the bifocal approach into practice. It is now time to consider the implications of this collectively for the bifocal approach in theory and practice. Furthermore, the critical issues raised by the work of the CGO detailed in Chapter Two can now be returned to, as we consider what can be learnt about the capacity of LDW specifically and WO programs more generally to operate as strategic gender interventions.

## Chapter 8

### A different kind of women's program: Women's development as strategic intervention

#### Introduction

This thesis was about a different kind of women's program. It explored women's development as a strategic intervention to build more gender equitable workplaces. This concluding chapter summarises the main findings of this research into two interventions, at a university and a policing organization. It explores the movement towards and away from the transformative, before concluding that a bifocal approach can be partially successful as a strategic intervention for building gender equitable workplaces.

There is a positive story here of individual champions and mentors exercising leadership and change agency underpinned by gender insight. There are LDW participants who see themselves and claim themselves as leaders in new ways, who show promise as tempered radicals and use the small wins approach to achieve change. However this chapter also draws attention to the ways in which the gendered change focus has been lost, not only by individuals, but also in the intervention and in the research process itself.

I suggested in Chapter Two that WO programs might be considered an unusual vehicle for the far-reaching project of re-visioning workplaces outlined by the CGO as their Frame 4 approach. This is because WO programs had strayed from their feminist origins and become co-opted to suit organizational purposes. By assisting women to better fit the gendered status quo, I argued that they had become irrelevant as a gender equity strategy. The 'bifocal approach' was my best attempt at re-marrying scholarship and practice, to

## A different kind of women's program: Women's development as strategic intervention

reinvigorate and rehabilitate WO programs. By maintaining a simultaneous focus on the women and the gendered change agenda for the organization, I hoped to overcome this co-option, returning WO programs to relevance as organizational gender equity strategies. By claiming partial success, I am positioning WO programs as able to do more than just 'fix the women'.

Slippage between the theory and practice of the bifocal approach was anticipated. In fact this research has replicated many of the 'general problems' that Joan Acker (2000) identified as inevitable with such an ambitious gendered change project. CGO researchers (Ely & Meyerson 2000a) referred to slippage that occurred in their project as 'losing gender', a term picked up in the subsequent literature. 'Losing gender' has occurred in other gendered change interventions (Benschop & Verloo 2006; Charlesworth & Baird 2007; Eveline & Bacchi 2009; Rao, Stuart & Kelleher 1999) and this research is no exception. Despite the ways in which 'losing gender' undermines the bifocal approach, I will argue that the bifocal approach as applied through the LDW program has nonetheless enabled a number of individuals to develop greater gender insight and contribute to gendered change within their organizations.

I begin the chapter by addressing the three issues I identified in Chapter Two as core to any gendered change intervention: organizational access and the way the radical transformative agenda was 'sold' to the organization; the process of engagement with organizational partners; and, making the intervention robust and sustainable. I also posited that WO programs offered advantages in addressing these core issues: they provide a different organizational rationale for a gendered change agenda; have the potential to provide access to a wide range of organizational partners; and have the capacity to be ongoing rather than research project based. This chapter provides the opportunity to examine those anticipated advantages, along with any difficulties specific to using WO programs as the vehicle for the gendered change agenda. Each of these core issues is in turn implicated when considering the issue of 'losing gender'. This detailed examination of the bifocal allows me to reach some conclusions regarding the bifocal approach relative to other intervention approaches.

Given the difficulties of holding onto the organizational change element of the bifocal approach I revisit the question of whether the leadership development of the women is sufficient in itself to bring about transformative change. My conclusion is that both the bifocal approach and a sole focus on developing women leaders can be transformative, if

they are pursued within the frameworks provided by the critical feminist theory on leadership, gender and the gendered organization.

### **Re-visiting the 'bifocal approach'**

The 'bifocal approach' built upon a pre-existing women only program, the LDW program, using this as the vehicle for the transformative intervention. The bifocal approach became a way of operationalising a transformative agenda specific to WO programs. The focus on the women and their development became one of the foci, paired with the focus on gendered change for the organization. The bifocal approach, drawing on the analogy of bifocal lenses, was intended to guide all elements of program design and implementation to keep both foci, clearly and almost simultaneously in view. This pairing of 'short' and 'long' agendas is customary, for example the CGO (Meyerson & Kolb 2000) paired gendered change with organizational effectiveness in their 'dual agenda' while Charlesworth and Baird (2007) paired gendered change with work/life balance. Pairing something that is organizationally palatable or desirable *with* the much less palatable radical intent becomes a way of gaining and maintaining organizational commitment. However as Rao et al.(1999:21) conclude, this creates a 'fundamental dilemma' for interventions that undermine the gendered change agenda. By pairing WO development with the transformative agenda, the bifocal approach is opportunistically trying to build on an existing (palatable) intervention. In one sense it bypasses some of the difficulties in gaining organizational access but difficulties in 'selling' the longer agenda remain. Pairing, by including a short agenda, has the capacity to create the achilles heel of the intervention.

While the pairing of two foci may serve to disguise or minimise the transformative agenda, it can also be seen as a way of linking something that fits within the current and limited ways of understanding gender equity (the short agenda, often a focus on women) with something that requires a radical shift in understanding and is therefore beyond the current capacity of the individual or the organization (the long agenda, organizational transformation). Hence, linking something that is known, safe and acceptable with something that is unknown and risky has the advantage of moving a radical change agenda forward. As Foldy and Creed (1999) conclude in their investigation of organizational change for gay and lesbian employees, '[t]o foster frame-breaking change, one must begin within the frame'.

I have begun to think of Frame 1 and Frame 4 (or the short and long agenda) as being at opposite ends of a continuum, rather than as discrete approaches. This better represents

A different kind of women's program: Women's development as strategic intervention

my experience, which is that I am constantly endeavouring to move people along the continuum towards the transformative end. Building gender insight or gendered cultural literacy facilitates movement in that direction. In examining the bifocal approach within this chapter, it is important to acknowledge any movement along the continuum away from Frame 1 thinking. While much of this movement may fall far short of the transformative Frame 4 ideal, it is nonetheless movement *towards* that goal.

Not surprisingly, however, developing the women (the short agenda) is the less problematic of the two foci. Keeping to the 'shortest possible agenda', as Cockburn (1991) describes it, has all the advantages of maintaining the status quo, while the longer agenda has all the disadvantages of disrupting the status quo. The short agenda, in this case the focus on the women, provides a comfortable position for all involved in the LDW program. There is therefore a risk that people will not want to leave their 'comfort zone' to engage with the hard part of the bifocal approach, organizational change.

'Losing the bifocal' means losing a focus on the organization and the capacity to engage in transformative change. The challenge for the bifocal approach therefore is to maintain a balance between the two foci and to be encouraging and empowering organizational members to journey towards the transformative.

## **Gender change agents**

The aim of the bifocal approach was to build a large and diverse group of women and men within each organization who would work for gendered change. This included executive level leaders, senior male and female mentors and the female participants. The LDW program provided opportunities for these groups to become constituents for change. Gender insight or gendered cultural literacy was considered necessary to underpin this work for transforming the gendered organization.

What occurred in practice was complex and instructive. The difficulty of this endeavour became increasingly obvious as each new group was examined. Yet with each group there were individuals, always only a small minority of the potentially large group, who engaged with the gendered change agenda.

Championing, an executive leadership role, was confirmed as being enormously important to the program positioning and mandate. It enabled gender equity to be seen as an organizational priority. Not all executive leaders claimed to be champions and they engaged to varying degrees with the gendered change agenda. The champion building opportunities

offered by the program appeared to be effective but were dependent on the willingness of the champion to be fully involved, highlighting the two-way nature of the relationship. There was evidence, for example in the story of Margaret, that active involvement with the program over time led to increased understanding and a capacity to position the program more strategically. The championing role itself emerged as highly gendered, enabling men's but constraining women's capacity to promote gendered change and to be effective champions of the LDW program.

In contrast to championing, the relevance of the mentor's gender was less marked, particularly at UWA where women and men apparently sang off the same organizational songsheet. While gendered differences between mentors were more apparent in policing, male and female mentors in both organizations largely lacked a critical lens to examine their own organization. This largely impeded the development of gender insight, with the one notable exception in Trevor. What emerged were many ways of diminishing and denying the importance of gender as an organizational issue, reducing systemic gendering processes to problems that individual women could address. The seniority and success of these mentors within the current gendered order may have contributed to this. As Acker (2000:630) explains:

The belief in gender-neutral organizing is comfortable to those with privilege. Indeed, one of the privileges enjoyed by those with power is to not see the systemic sources of privilege. The view of organizations as gender neutral facilitates an individualistic view of relative success, influence, and power – the view that people succeed because of superior abilities, dedication, and performance.

The instrumental approach taken by many mentors reinforced this message of individual success and reflected the mentors' embeddedness within their organizations.

The mentoring process was intended to develop change agency on the part of the mentor. However, the beliefs and attitudes of the mentors and their mentoring approach often served to minimise this possibility. In fact the mentoring process, through a too heavy reliance on instrumental mentoring paired with gender denial or minimisation, may have become an enculturation process that undermined the change agency of the mentee.

However there was evidence that the mentoring process could, over time, engage people with the gendered change agenda. Trevor (police) illustrated this process, which enabled him to operate as a tempered radical with a gender focus. There were also signs of movement in the story of George (police), indicating that developmental mentoring may facilitate the process of learning about gender.

## A different kind of women's program: Women's development as strategic intervention

Participants appear to have embraced the idea of change agency as part of their leadership development and were particularly enthusiastic about using the 'small wins' strategy (Meyerson & Fletcher 2000). In developing a capacity to challenge the status quo, they nevertheless did not appear to be guided by an overt or articulated gender insight. However, they provided examples that clearly demonstrated they were challenging the gendered status quo. I characterised this as a 'small wins' approach without a 'gender lens' but this may unfairly diminish the gendered leadership identity work that was visible in the peer learning group accounts. I will consider this when I return to the women's leadership development.

The PLG process was clearly beneficial in assisting individual women's development. PLGs (which can be thought of as peer mentoring) offer an interesting comparison to the formal dyad mentoring relationships. While formal mentoring tended to be hierarchical and instrumental, the lack of a power differential in peer groups meant they offered strong support for development to occur.

This research supports the argument that individual transformation is required for organizational transformation to occur (Foldy & Creed 1999; Rapoport et al. 2002; Sinclair 1998). There are clear examples of this transformation process for individuals taking place and being linked to change agency. 'Tempered Radicals' (Meyerson & Scully 1995; Meyerson 2003) coupled with 'small wins' (Meyerson & Fletcher 2000) has proved theoretically and practically useful to think about, build and recognise change agency.

In the following sections I will examine women and men separately as change agents, describing women as co-journeymen and men as supporters. I do so to highlight the fundamental differences resulting from gender group membership that have emerged during this research.

### ***Women – as co-journeymen***

I call women co-journeymen because women were, regardless of their own strategies for dealing with the gendered organization, defined by their group membership. Women were inescapably implicated in any gendered change initiative. This was reflected in the deeply embedded assumptions, within the organizations, within the program, by women, between women and men, that women understood gender, because they were women. By using the term co-journeymen I wish to highlight that it is not possible for women to stand on the sidelines in the way that men can and do. An invitation to women to become change agents

is an invitation to undertake a journey that is intimately connected to their identity as women (Colgan & Ledwith 1996; Marshall 1984).

Female champions, regardless of seniority, were unable in these accounts to disentangle themselves from belonging to the disadvantaged group, the group in the spotlight, women. Gendered expectations powerfully shaped women's championing in these accounts, reducing their choices and in effect demanding that they align and associate themselves with the gender equity agenda. While all three women made choices about how they undertook the tasks of championing, they did so while both they and their male counterparts believed that men were better placed to undertake this role. Hence being women disempowered them as agents of gendered change. Championing, because of the way in which it was delegated to women, at times became reduced to 'women's work'. This re-defined gendered change as change for women and made it women's responsibility.

The story of Cecilia (police) amply demonstrates the difficulties that senior women experience, particularly when they are present in 'token' numbers. I argue that we should expect much less of senior women in contributing to gendered change and instead work to diminish the burden of the shadow job. Wherever possible, these duties should be undertaken by men, while more formal recognition should be given to women's importance as role models. In addition, supporting senior women to lead in ways that are comfortable for them and not defined by the heroic masculine norm will, I contend, contribute more to transformative change than expecting them to champion every gender initiative.

This research highlights the diversity of approaches women develop in response to the gendered organization. Gender insight and even the perception of gender as relevant cannot be assumed. For example, while a number of the female mentors reflected on their own experiences during the interview, many did not. For some it became apparent that their gender coping style became a filter or lens that they brought to the mentoring relationship, potentially inhibiting their capacity to be open to mentee experiences, or to assist them to develop gender insight. Despite the diversity among women, there was an organizational (and LDW program) expectation, as we have observed with female champions, that women will be more gender insightful. Women, as a result of their experiences as women in the workplace, may develop a feminist consciousness (Ledwith & Colgan 1996; Marshall 1984). However this feminist consciousness proved elusive to find within the research process.

## A different kind of women's program: Women's development as strategic intervention

The difference in the representation of women between the two organizations, where senior policewomen are present in token numbers and where senior women at UWA are a minority group of more than 15%, remains an important one. There is a different quality to the interviews with women at UWA and those in policing, which replicates differences we observed between the organizations. The smaller numbers and percentages of women in policing do appear to heighten male-female differences, as Kanter's (1977a) work would lead us to expect. For example, Cecilia (police) appears to be much more visible and scrutinised than Margaret or Belinda (UWA), and Samantha's (police) experiences of sexist and discriminatory behaviour are more pronounced than any of the UWA women. Beverley (UWA) experienced exclusion from the (boy's) club however this occurs in an area of the university where women are present in small numbers, demonstrating the importance of specific context. This softening of the difficulties of organizational fit for (most) senior women at UWA supports research that shows that percentages of senior women make a difference to organizational cultures (Chesterman, Ross-Smith & Peters 2005; Ely 1995; Sinclair 1998; Simpson 2000).

What is missing in these accounts is women taking collective action. The lack of politicisation of senior women at UWA is in contrast to the more activist stance of even a decade ago (Eveline & Goldflam 2002; Eveline 2004). Even within the PLGs, where collective action was more possible, the focus on group support for each woman to do things differently in her own workplace might mitigate against this. Formal mentoring provides another example in this research where a focus on individual success (using masculine strategies) might mitigate against collective action (Park 1996).

Despite embedded expectations, particularly within the mentoring, that women would be more gender aware, this research has clearly demonstrated that women were not necessarily more aware, better placed, or more engaged in the gendered change agenda. This is not intended as a criticism. In fact this research adds to Mavin's (2008) suggestion that we should problematise solidarity behaviour for senior women and the criticism this encourages, to prevent unrealistic expectations of senior women.

### ***Men - as supporters***

I have called men supporters here, as I explore men as change agents, because I wish to emphasise men's choice. It is possible for men to support gender equity from a less engaged position and without necessarily engaging in the 'inside out' change as described by Sinclair (1998).

## Chapter Eight

Men occupy a different position relative to the gendered change agenda and are advantaged in almost every respect in these accounts. The combination of low expectations of men in regard to gender equity, the choice they have to get involved, and the positional and informal power they have to drive change became a potent combination in LDW.

Therefore, when men did champion gender equity, as we saw most strongly in the account of Alan (UWA), Geoff and Trevor (police), they were well rewarded with women's gratitude. This virtuous cycle of reinforcement contrasts markedly with the lack of choice, coupled with the risk or cost of championing, extra scrutiny and sense of disempowerment evident in Cecilia's story. Mark's (police) reticence to fully take on the mantle of champion suggests that there may be a potential cost for men if they are not securely positioned as 'one of the boys'.

In drawing attention to the gendering of leadership in relation to championing a cause, this research concurs with Judi Marshall's (2007) work exploring the gendering of leadership in relation to the emerging field of corporate social responsibility. Examining the gender patterning led her to suggest that 'women and men leaders are largely differently placed', with white (older) men using their positioning and credentials while women operate more from the margins. But Marshall (2007:177) suggests:

...men as tempered radicals need to conduct themselves with care to maintain their rights to dominant group alignment. Individuals may have to prove themselves against contextually appropriate norms of masculinity.

I concluded in Chapter Five that men make better champions, and I have advocated increasing our expectations of senior men. But of course there is considerable irony in concluding that men, with all the power of belonging to the status quo, are best positioned to dismantle the gendered status quo. Years ago Audre Lorde (1981:99) argued that the 'master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'. This raises the question of whether change can take place from the centre, driven by those who belong to the current gendered status quo.

Marshall (2007) uses Al Gore as one example to explore this question, noting the tension between the more mainstream positioning of men and their capacity to undertake the more radical transformative change required. Perhaps, I would suggest, the roles of those at the centre and at the margins are complementary. This is a point raised in the accounts of Geoff and Cecilia (police), where each was effectively advocating to a different constituency group. Rather than claiming men as better champions it may be more helpful to see women

A different kind of women's program: Women's development as strategic intervention

and men as undertaking complementary championing roles and to note that both are required.

This research contributes to our understanding of the differences between women and men when engaging in gendered change. Rather than the stereotypical assumptions sometimes found in the literature and evidenced in the allocation of LDW championing duties as women's work, this presents a more nuanced account of the way in which gender, magnified by the gendered nature of the leadership task, situated male and female champions differently.

While I believe this research has thrown light on gendering processes, I am uncomfortable with how the gendered change agenda serves to essentialise gender based on the male/female binary. I argue that this categorical approach is symptomatic of the loss of gender, which is instead replaced with a focus on women.

### **A sustainable and robust intervention for transformative change?**

The final of the three core issues I identified earlier was the robustness and sustainability of the intervention. How did LDW fare as a platform for gendered change? I have already observed the fragility of WO programs, evident in the literature more broadly and exemplified in the Australian HE sector where I have mapped programs coming and going over the last 15 years (de Vries 2008). In this context, 15 years of LDW at UWA is unmatched and an extraordinary achievement. Even 5 years at policing, while we were extremely disappointed at the program's discontinuation, has been sufficient time for 150 women and almost 100 mentors to be involved and for Trevor, and perhaps others like him, to emerge. Both time-frames are longer than would be expected of a research intervention project, which are by definition finite. LDW, as an ongoing program, has the capacity to repeat year after year, with new individuals becoming involved each year. This advantage is to a degree offset by that fact that WO space is often contested and WO programs move in and out of fashion often as organizational imperatives change.

Consequently, the longevity of the program relies on a complex interplay of factors, some of which have been explored during this research. The historical antecedents of the program, particularly in the form of external pressure, play a part. In both organizations, this external scrutiny has abated and its absence may have contributed to LDW's demise at police. Clearly the role and importance of the champion has been extensively explored in this research. Championing at UWA appears to have protected the program at UWA, while

## Chapter Eight

the withdrawal of championing left LDW exposed at police. At UWA, mentors and champions (Margaret, Belinda, David, Raelene, Beverley) re-iterated the views of Alan regarding the strategic importance of the program while at policing some of the men (Howard, George, Simon) queried its relevance, relaying their assessments of good progress and placing gender under the diversity umbrella. It is difficult to know what backlash and resistance were experienced by executive leaders; however, from Alan's account, he has become impervious to the 'what about the men?' protestations that still occasionally occur even after so many years. At police it is difficult to know what has led to the loss of support from Mark.

Women champions and women graduates of the LDW program played a part in its longevity at UWA. For Alan the calibre of these women was an important factor. Chairs of the Planning Group and successful academic women who had participated in the program spoke about the value of the program. While this was an important contribution to the robustness of the program, where support came from a variety of places and not just the top (Rao, Stuart & Kelleher 1999) it meant that the program gained credibility through the usual marker of merit, academic success.

Despite its success, I have identified some risk factors for the LDW program at UWA, linked to the longevity of the program and Alan's sustained and exemplary championing of LDW. Longevity increases the risk of complacency as we saw clearly in the accounts of mentors. The term 'gender equity fatigue' has been used to explain current resistance. Alan, in his speech at the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, was clearly trying to address this fatigue, stressing that there was much more work in relation to gender equity yet to be done. While emphasising that UWA had once occupied the bottom spot, he described UWA as 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> from the bottom (referring to the QUT comparative gender statistics). Succession planning poses another risk given Alan has held the mantle for so long and is nearing retirement.

Mainstreaming poses yet another risk. There is no doubt that mainstreaming has contributed to the sustainability of the UWA program, where for example staffing and budget did not have to be bid for each year, as it was in the early days. On the other hand, stricter adherence to line management has reduced access to program champions and ultimately the loss of a one line budget has served to undermine the mandate of the program. The most immediate risk therefore lies in losing the bifocal approach as continued mainstreaming effectively positions LDW as a training program like any other.

A different kind of women's program: Women's development as strategic intervention

In policing, LDW no longer exists and the WAN (Women's Advisory Network) has also been disbanded. Police are pursuing a new approach disconnected from previous gender initiatives including the *Gender research project* and LDW. A press release in 2009 announced that:

Police has embarked on a fresh and innovative approach targeted at women within the organisation...the appointment of an Executive Committee for Women heralded a new era for women. The Committee will focus on issues that affect women and will operate at a strategic level. The Commissioner said: "The Executive Committee for Women represents a change of direction within the agency with a focus on providing real opportunities for women to lead in policing." The Commissioner acknowledged the former work of the Women's Advisory Network (WAN), but conceded that a strategic focus was required to take the changes further.

This clean slate approach to the gender problem epitomizes some of the difficulties Acker (2000) noted regarding the incapacity of organizations to provide sufficient time for change interventions to work. Failing to draw on previous successes, the cycle begins anew and organizational learning is discarded. From these two case studies it appears that WO program are always at risk, even when they have been firmly embedded for many years as is the case at UWA. In densely masculine organizations like policing the risk is commensurately greater. It is difficult not to conclude that the key to sustainability rests with executive champions, especially at the CEO level.

## **Losing gender**

Earlier I suggested that each of the three core issues was implicated in the losing of gender. I now wish to examine this more closely.

### ***Losing gender, gender = women***

One of the main ways of losing gender in this research occurred when gender was equated with women. This, as Eveline (1994) reminds us, reinforces the focus on female disadvantage and loses sight of male privilege. Much of the work of equal opportunity proceeds on this basis. Losing a gender analysis, an understanding of gendered advantage and disadvantage returns us to Frame 1 'fix the women' or, as we saw in policing, Frame 2 'women are special'.

There are multiple examples of equating gender with women in this research. When champions promoted and framed the program as women's training, gender was lost. When championing was positioned as women's work and men were not required to do this work,

gender was lost. When mentors insisted on being 'gender blind' in order to be 'gender fair', gender was lost. When mentors adopted a problem solving approach with their mentees, based on their own experience as men, gender was lost. When participants were not politicised and failed to see men's advantage, gender was lost.

This focus on women contributed to the further essentialising of men and women, as evident in the exploration of championing roles. Men belong to the dominant (advantaged) group and women belong to the disadvantaged group under the spotlight because of the WO focus of the program. In other words, by including a WO component, the bifocal approach encourages this male /female binary thinking. The focus on men is lost because of the focus on women, thus putting women, but not men in the spotlight. However, to pursue the bifocal approach men and the organization need to be in the spotlight.

### ***Losing gender, losing masculinities***

One of the key strengths of this research and indeed of the LDW program itself is the inclusion of men as change partners. Much has been learnt about men (and women) as a result of this inclusion. The research has contributed to making men's advantage visible, particularly in regard to championing. However, the research process and my role as researcher are also implicated in losing gender. For example, while I asked mentors 'what is this organization like for women?' I did not ask, 'what is it like for men?'. Equally, I could have asked not only what did you learn about women as a result of repeat mentoring, but also what did you learn about men.

Men are advantaged by their 'loss of gender'. Men's gender was unnoticed, unproblematised and unscrutinised by the majority of men and woman in these accounts. There were four men in this study who held onto a gender narrative that included men. Alan promoted the transformative agenda of the LDW program, thus acknowledging the need for systemic change. Geoff acknowledged men's advantage, that it's 'all lopsided for them' and placed the onus on men to drive change. Trevor recognised the systemic gendering of opportunity and the part men played in perpetuating this. David acknowledged men's advantage by saying: '[i]t can't be that you all have to be blokes'. Each saw men as part of the gender picture.

However, despite keeping men in the picture and as part of the problem, the focus of these men largely remained on making the organization a better place for women. This falls short of the Frame 4 'Re-vision work culture', designed to shift the focus from the women to the

A different kind of women's program: Women's development as strategic intervention

underlying and systemic gendering processes that create gender inequity. The role of men and masculinity in maintaining the gendered organization had somehow slipped from view (Collinson & Hearn 1994).

In this LDW intervention men have been courted as supporters but they have not been invited or required to engage in their own journey of 'inside out' change (Sinclair 1998). They have not needed to confront their own masculine identity and privilege and how that contributes to women's disadvantage. Amanda Sinclair (1994:11) noted in her 'Stage 4' 'leadership into a new culture' that executives would need to engage in their own journeys in order to lead change. Likewise, Foldy and Creed (1999:20) in their gay and lesbian advocacy study emphasised that 'individuals needed to work through the issues on their own'. They argued that individual reflection and change was essential so that people re-evaluated their mental models. Men, I conclude, need to be invited to be co-journeyers, rather than supporters, within the bifocal approach.

Engaging men in a journey to explore men, masculinities and the advantage this often confers is not easy. The recent work of Meyerson, Ely and Wernick (2007) however provides some encouragement. Their study of two offshore oil platforms demonstrated the positive outcomes possible when heroic masculinity is challenged. The focus of their study was a culture change initiative that was designed to increase safety and effectiveness, but had the unintended consequence of 'disrupting and revising the hyper-masculine codes of behaviour that were normal in the oil industry' (Meyerson, Ely & Wernick 2007:454). Safety, under these extreme circumstances, 'provides a compelling motive to revise basic assumptions, modes of behaviour, and definitions of self...' (Meyerson, Ely & Wernick 2007:469). Despite the lack of a gender agenda, this is a powerful case study of gendered change with a focus on men and masculinity. While the context is not typical of most organizations lessons can be drawn about the capacity of radical interventions to shake entrenched gender assumptions, practices and definitions of self.

## **Can the 'bifocal approach' be saved?**

The bifocal approach is fundamentally flawed in the same way that all Frame 4 interventions are flawed – because of the difficulties that will inevitably be encountered. As noted earlier, the form that these difficulties take are shaped by the pairing of the short and long agendas. How then does the bifocal approach fare relative to other transformative interventions?

## Chapter Eight

This research has identified both anticipated and unanticipated advantages. Some of these advantages occur because of the tangible and practical nature of the LDW program. Developing women leaders is, for example, much easier for the organization to grasp than the generative experimental approach of the dual agenda, where outcomes are much less clear. In addition LDW, while sharing the danger of the short agenda becoming the fallback position, provides a very different fallback position to those reviewed in this thesis. Even when the bifocal is lost there remains the possibility of working with the women, a point I will return to in the next section.

LDW, because of the tangible base provided by the women's development, provided a firmer position for us (as staff or consultants) than appeared to be the case in other transformative interventions. In addition to the CGO researchers, others have noted the difficulties they have, of holding onto the gender agenda themselves when fearful that the project might be discontinued or relationships be compromised by pushing gender too hard (Benschop & Verloo 2006; Charlesworth & Baird 2007; Coleman & Rippin 2000). I am not suggesting that we did not experience difficulties in knowing how far to push the bifocal agenda. We too experienced this as hard work requiring stamina and courage. However the work with the women, often satisfying in itself, provided the ongoing momentum.

Our goal was made easier when we could design the short and long agendas to be complementary. The PLG presentation was probably the most successful example of this and the resistance we experienced indicated that we were in long agenda territory. Mentoring was also designed to bring the long and short agendas together but this was less successful than anticipated.

LDW has provided access to a wide range of voluntary organizational partners, at both UWA and policing. Initial access was often easy with few potential mentors declining to participate. Participants were also easy to recruit. In both organizations applications for the program outweighed available places. In this sense the program provided a more positive starting base than that described by Meyerson and Kolb (2000) where collaborators were wary of becoming involved in case the initiative failed. The percentage of these potential LDW partners who engaged with the gendered change agenda was small, indicating some advantages in being able to cast the net widely. Moreover, the ongoing nature of the program provided a longer time-frame for people to gradually develop and consolidate gender insight.

## A different kind of women's program: Women's development as strategic intervention

There are some basic principles or 'good bones' (as I described them in Chapter Three), of the LDW approach that have been supported by this research including: a critical focus on leadership development; developing change agency; working with inclusive cohort groups over extended periods of time; a focus on developing gendered cultural literacy; the inclusion of PLGs to create a safe and ongoing development space; and, engaging women and men in the change agenda through mentoring and championing at various levels of the organization.

There are clear implications for future practice that have arisen from the research. In the case of champions, the need to focus on men has already been canvassed. Within mentoring there is a clear imperative to strengthen the developmental focus of mentoring and to increase opportunities for male and female mentors to develop gender insight. Much more extensive training of mentors is required. Given the cultural embeddedness of successful senior women and men found within this research, it may be worthwhile to reconsider the level of mentors. More junior mentors, while perhaps more open and less likely to be instrumental, have less positional power. However, as they and the mentees progress through the organization this may provide renewal in the longer term. Increasing the focus on development away from instrumentality is in line with a broader reclaiming of mentoring that is taking place, making this an easier process to support and justify (Fletcher & Ragins 2007; Ragins & Verbos 2007).

Strengthening the 'gender lens' of participants can be approached through the curriculum of the workshops and through the design of the PLGs themselves. Making gender work a more explicit part of the work of PLGs and decreasing the focus on the individual may assist. The idea of developing a stronger gender narrative, as suggested by Ely and Meyerson (2000a), has merit.

The inevitable individual focus that is part and parcel of the short agenda has constrained our thinking in regard to the collective work that would strengthen the long agenda. Because of this focus on individuals and 'small wins' as the model for change, LDW is engaging in what Martin and Meyerson (1998) refer to as 'disorganised coaction'. In other words, individuals are working for change in an uncoordinated way. There would be benefits in strengthening the possibilities for collective action for participants within the program. The PLGs already provide some examples of working together on issues (Managing Change, UWA and Committed staff, police). Angelique, Kyle and Taylor (2002) provide an example of how peer mentoring can support collective action within a university setting.

I am also struck by the need to more intentionally connect those who are working for gendered change, be they champions, mentors or participants. Meyerson's (2003) work on tempered radicals highlights the vulnerability of these individuals and the need for support to continue to work for change in the long-term.

However, despite any improvements that can be made to the program, the risk of 'losing gender' is ever present. Ely and Meyerson (2000a:601) when reviewing how gender was 'lost' in the *'Moving out of the Armchair'* work, asked the question 'does it matter?'. They concluded that:

Losing the explicit focus on gender during the intervention would clearly compromise our ability to achieve the gender-equity objectives and would likely compromise our ability to achieve the business objective as well.

Does it matter when gender is lost in the bifocal approach? To explore this question I now turn to the development of the women.

One strength of the bifocal approach used in the LDW program is the fallback position when the Frame 4 transformative ideal is not attained. Rather than the hard work of pairing Frame 1 and Frame 4 using the bifocal approach, would it be more pragmatic to focus on bringing a Frame 4 approach to bear on a Frame 1 intervention? Can a focus on the women alone ultimately bring about gendered change?

### **Is leadership development for women enough to transform organizations?**

The question of whether a focus on the women's leadership development is enough to bring about transformative change is difficult. I began this research journey saying this is not enough, but my answer has changed from 'no' to 'yes'. For me, the turning point came when I conducted the group interviews with the peer learning groups. Despite my disappointment at their lack of a gender narrative to politicise (in a feminist sense) their leadership journeys, I could not help but be heartened by the nature of their journeys. There is however, an important proviso to my affirmative answer, I am referring to a particular kind of leadership development.

CGO researchers (Kolb et al. 1998) advocate bringing Frame 4 thinking to bear on the other three frames and in the case of women's development they themselves experimented with this approach (as I described in Chapter Two). They emphasised that this would

A different kind of women's program: Women's development as strategic intervention

include helping women to 'understand the larger *systemic* effects of gender in organizations' in addition to other development activities (Kolb et al. 1998:15, original emphasis).

Our innovative hybrid approach, drawing on the work of Bond (2000) and Sinclair (1998; 2004; 2007) in re-visioning leadership, combined with the tools and approaches provided by CGO researchers, has effectively applied a Frame 4 approach to the WO aspect of the bifocal approach. Therefore, by looking at the development of the women, it is possible to draw some conclusions regarding this approach.

This requires exploring connections between the development of LDW participants as future and current<sup>1</sup> women leaders and their capacity to bring about the desired organizational change. This could be seen as a version of the 'critical mass' argument (Dahlerup 1988; Kanter 1977b), where it is suggested that sufficient numbers of women in senior positions will bring about gendered change. It is often somewhat optimistically used as the rationale for supporting a wide variety of WO programs. While there is support for the idea that increased representation of women in senior ranks does influence organizational cultures (Chesterman, Ross-Smith & Peters 2005; Ely 1995; Sinclair 1998), this falls far short of the transformative change required. As Sinclair (1998:153) observes 'there is still little evidence that this [critical mass] will produce pervasive cultural change'.

This research has highlighted the difficulties for senior women in engaging in gendered change, thus undermining the critical mass argument. Senior women in this study do not necessarily acknowledge gender as important, are themselves enculturated into the dominant culture and are not necessarily well placed to champion gender equity.

Dahlerup (1988:296) suggests that the idea of 'critical acts' may be more useful than 'critical mass':

'A critical act is one which will change the position of the minority considerably and lead to further change. Most significant is *the willingness and ability of the minority to mobilize the resources of the organization or institution* to improve the situation for themselves and the whole minority group (original emphasis).

Others too have highlighted the difficulties of relying on numbers of women, and have emphasised the kinds of women required to bring about change. As Blackmore and Sachs (2003:156) emphasise, it is not 'about getting *any* women into leadership...[but] about getting women up who...have a commitment to promote and become advocates for

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<sup>1</sup> Many LDW participants already hold significant leadership positions and/or exercise leadership without formal leadership positions

## Chapter Eight

women...rather than be good corporate women'. Silvestri (2003:138), in her UK policing study, summed this up:

Challenging and bringing about change to the gendered order of policing *demands a specific kind of woman*: one with a strong consciousness and awareness of the gender politics that govern the police organisation; one who is willing to take action to address organisational inequities; and one who attempts to transform the individual experience of discrimination into collective experience through consciousness-raising (emphasis added).

This is a tall order. How do LDW participants measure up to these requirements? To answer this question I revisit the leadership development that has occurred within LDW and explore possible links between the participants' leadership journeys and the possibility of organizational change.

There was strong evidence in the PLG accounts that LDW participants have been on a leadership journey that had strengthened their capacity to lead in their own ways. In doing the identity work of leadership these women were, to use Sinclair's (1998:178) words, reclaiming 'a sense of self which rightly should be a central and reinforcing component of their leadership'. They were diminishing, with the support of their colleagues, the conflict between being women and being leaders, by re-defining leadership in their own contexts. For the garden metaphor group (UWA) this included re-visioning a generous academic leadership, and for Anne (police) the unproductive search for role models was over. Anne's declaration 'I can do it my way...I don't need to be like anybody else' perhaps symbolises this new sense of self, which is no longer bounded by masculine leadership norms. LDW has been able to achieve what Debebe (2009:1) describes as transformational learning, able to 'generate new mindsets and alternative practices among women leaders'.

In their lack of an overt and guiding (feminist) consciousness LDW participants fell somewhat short, in the main, of Silvestri's glowing description of the kind of woman required to drive radical change. However, there were ample examples of LDW participants disrupting the gendered status quo and a capacity to work for the common good. Missy (UWA) challenged gendered leave norms, Cameron (police) resisted an inappropriate promotion transfer, and Tracey (police) instituted flexible work practices for her female dominated work group. Participants have built a tempered radical foundation and held onto the notion of small wins as a model for personal and organizational change. A firm foundation has been laid for the small wins that may become 'critical acts'.

Will the small wins achieved by the women ultimately make a transformative difference to these two organizations? As Martin and Meyerson (1998) observe, it is easy to under-

## A different kind of women's program: Women's development as strategic intervention

estimate the impact and power of what are often small and subtle acts of disorganized coaction. This may also be an advantage, making them 'harder to combat and less likely to trigger backlash' (Martin & Meyerson 1998:344). I find hope in the way LDW participants are challenging gendered leadership norms by doing leadership their own way, at all levels of the organization. I join with Sinclair (1998:181) who, observing women and men 'doing leadership differently', finishes her book on the hopeful note, that '[w]ith them there is cause for celebration and hope for the future'.

I want to conclude this section on the women's leadership development by using the words of the UWA Managing Change group, with my emphasis added:

Shakti      ...I have seen many women actually come out much better, feel better...*they move differently after that in the university*, they are *more visible* and they are *more comfortable*. I think that's the right word, they are more comfortable with themselves in presenting their ideas and I think that's a positive.

Katherine   I agree, and I think part of that is because they have got that *wider network that's knitted*.

Shakti      That *support*.

Mary        And they have seen other people talk with confidence and say, *just get out and do it* or whatever.

Katherine   They have *been given permission*.

Mary        That's right, because you are in the same room as them and *you speak*, I think that *gives other people confidence* as opposed to a presentation to a different group or something, you are actually in a room talking in those big workshops.

Shakti      *And it is long enough also to gel* in many ways. So had it been just a two day packaged course, it wouldn't have worked like that.

Katherine   There is also a *subconscious urge to question yourself* and say, "Well, are you pushing hard enough? Are you really stretching yourself, or are you just treading water?"

This exchange serves as a reminder that in this research I have been measuring the effectiveness of LDW against the notion of gendered change. The women bring different viewpoints to their weighing up of the effectiveness of the program. I do not want to do a disservice to what it means to them.

## Conclusion

The LDW program presented here is a world away from many of the WO programs in organizations today. Despite the slippage between theory and practice and the inevitability of only partial success, LDW has demonstrated that a WO program can provide the vehicle for a transformative intervention. The bifocal approach has provided both a theoretical model and a realistic benchmark of what is possible. This is useful to others also wishing to move programs away from a purely instrumental approach towards relevance as strategic interventions for building more gender equitable workplaces.

By providing a novel pairing of the short and long agendas, the bifocal approach has extended the variety of models for organizational interventions. And by replicating some of the difficulties in 'losing gender' that others have also experienced, it has contributed to teasing out the 'general problems' (Acker 2000) and those that the pairing itself (the intervention vehicle) introduces to the overall outcomes. This may open up possibilities for further experimentation and has put further flesh to the bones of how gender operates within organizations to resist gendered change. It has contributed to mapping the terrain of organizational interventions which may assist others in design and implementation.

The strong focus on the constituency building process within the bifocal approach has contributed to a greater understanding of the way gender is rendered individually and organizationally irrelevant. Assisting individuals to see gender when organizational discourses mitigate against this remains problematic. The two organizations have illustrated how this can have a different flavour in each organization but that ultimately this resistance to seeing gender as systemic and relevant returns us to two basic issues that emerged in this study: the public/private divide and the construction of the ideal worker.

The investigation of change agency has highlighted that the gendering processes for women leaders do, as expected, translate across to gendered roles such as championing a gendered cause. While this is not unexpected, it has previously been little explored. This gendering has served to highlight the role and importance of men. While this raises issues of power and dominance, there remains an imperative to engage men as allies in this work. Men also need to be co-journeymen, doing their own gender work and problematising their own gender. This may provide future possibilities for interesting 'pairings' that focus on men, as we saw in the work of Meyerson, Ely and Wernick (2007). There is a great deal more work to be done in exploring change agency, as Marshall (2007) suggests, from both the mainstream and the margins.

## A different kind of women's program: Women's development as strategic intervention

The LDW program has created a sense of possibility for both the bifocal approach (pairing Frames 1 and 4) and for women's development programs (applying Frame 4 to Frame 1). The experience of the LDW program, and the findings of this research, suggest that a transformative approach can be pursued within contexts that are less than ideal, for example stand-alone (external) leadership for women programs or in-house WO programs in unsupportive organizations. WO programs retain an advantage as a strategy employed by organizations that can be built on in modest and far-reaching ways to further the transformative agenda.

Transformative change is a long-term process. While transformative change is radical in intent, the change process itself is more modest. As Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) suggest in the *Modest Manifesto*, organizational change is more of an incremental creep than a revolution. This is due to the deeply embedded gendered structures of organizations, which, through the accounts of individuals, we have glimpsed throughout this thesis. The ripples of small wins or of seeds sown may take some time to come to fruition. Yet there are sufficient signs of hope that can be observed in a minority of leaders in this study. Of course, I wish there were more individuals exercising leadership for gendered change, however there are sufficient to make a difference. The extent of that difference is unknowable. It is for this reason that interventions such as these, which can claim only partial success, are nonetheless critical.

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