Women's Studies Journal

2004 18 : 2

WOMEN, WORK AND WELFARE

Summer 2004

Contents

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa

Welcome back to our readers....

After a brief hiatus, the Women's Studies Journal is back, with a new editorial collective and a special issue on Women, Work and Welfare. We look forward to receiving submissions and providing a wealth of provocative and enlivening writing for our readers nationally and internationally.

The new collective is based at Massey University on the Turitea and Wellington campuses. We are a multi-disciplinary group of university women covering psychology, sociology, social policy and women's studies.

A number of interesting articles have already come in for the next general issue. That will be followed by another special issue, on Women and Violence (see page 6).

Ang Jury
Celia Briar
Jenny Coleman
Leigh Coombes
Lesley Patterson
Mandy Morgan

Women's Studies Journal

Volume 18, Number 2

2004

The Women's Studies Association of New Zealand
with University of Otago Press

The *Women's Studies Journal* is published twice yearly by the
New Zealand Women's Studies Association Inc. with the
University of Otago Press

For further information and guidelines for submitters,
see www.womenz.org.nz/wsj

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Women's Studies Journal
University of Otago Press
P.O. Box 56
Dunedin.

Subscriptions
Institutions ... $45
Individuals ... $45
Single copies ... $24.95
Overseas airmail ... Aus$45, US$45

ISBN 1 877276 56 1
ISSN 0112 4099
Printed by Otago University Print, Dunedin

Cover image
NZ Nurses Organisation members gather at Parliament with a petition calling on government to provide funding for District Health Boards to pay nurses and midwives fairly, 19 November 2003. Photo by Anne Manchester.

Women's Studies Association (NZ) Inc.

WSA (NZ), PO Box 5043, Wellington
www.womenz.org.nz/wsa/

The Women's Studies Association (NZ) is a feminist organisation formed to promote radical social change through the medium of women's studies. We believe that a feminist perspective necessarily acknowledges oppression on the grounds of race, sexuality, class and disability as well as gender. We acknowledge the Maori people as tangata whenua of Aotearoa. This means we have a particular responsibility to address their oppression among our work and activities.

Full membership of the Association is open to all women. Other individuals may become associate members. Annual membership includes three newsletters per year and inclusion on the wsanz e-list.

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Women's Studies Journal

The Women's Studies Journal is a biannual peer-reviewed academic journal established by the Women's Studies Association of New Zealand. It is published by a committee of WSA members in association with the University of Otago Press.

The Women's Studies Journal is essential reading for academics with an interest in gender issues, focusing on research and debate concerning women's studies in New Zealand and the Pacific. Issues of the journal are often used as texts in tertiary institutions, as it contains a wealth of resource material.

Submissions

The Editorial Collective welcomes contributions from a wide range of feminist positions and disciplinary backgrounds. The Journal has a primary but not exclusive focus on women's studies in New Zealand and encourages papers which address women's experience, explore gender as a category of analysis, and further feminist theory and debate.

Two issues of the journal are published each year. Contributions for general issues are accepted at any time. Submission guidelines and deadlines for Special Issues on a particular theme are available on the journal's website (www.womenz.org.nz/wsj/). Subscriptions, advertising and distribution are handled by the University of Otago Press. All contributions should be sent to the Coordinating Editor (see page 2).

Call for Papers

Special Issue: Women and Violence

Violence, in all its myriad forms, remains a serious issue in the lives of many women, despite increased awareness of its prevalence and impact over the last thirty-five years. This special issue of the Journal will feature articles from a diverse range of perspectives aimed at increasing our understanding of this social phenomenon. Topics or themes may include, but are not limited to, different forms of violence (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, economic and so on), partner violence, anti-violence legislation, interventions and support services. We are particularly interested in submissions exploring this issue in relation to the lived experiences of rural and immigrant women and we also welcome submissions related to women's experiences as perpetrators of violence.

We invite theoretical, empirical or research-based submissions from all academic disciplines and welcome academically focussed contributions from those working in the field. This special issue will be peer reviewed. Editors are Mandy Morgan (M.Morgan@massey.ac.nz) and Ang Jury (A.J.Jury@massey.ac.nz). Contributions should be between 5000–8000 words, including tables, notes and references and should use either APA reference format or endnotes. The deadline for submissions is **15 April 2005**. We welcome electronic submissions (to J.D.Coleman@massey.ac.nz) or hardcopy manuscripts to the Coordinating Editor (see page 2).

Editorial: Women, Work and Welfare

This special issue on Women, Work and Welfare was inspired by a series of presentations at the Women's Studies Association (NZ) conference in Palmerston North in November 2003. The editorial group's call for articles in this area attracted so many submissions that some articles have had to be deferred to the next issue. Even in this 'post-feminist', post-modern era, a good many members continue to address the material basics of women's everyday lives.

This issue has a stronger social policy focus than some previous ones. Policy directions in the 1990s impacted heavily on women – the repeal of the Employment Equity Act, the 1991 benefit cuts, the deunionisation and casualisation of clerical and service sector jobs, the end of child benefit payments to mothers, and work-testing for beneficiary mothers with school age children.

Since publication of issue 18(1), there have been policy changes on employment and income support that deserve comment. In November 1999, a Labour–Alliance government was elected after three terms of National and National coalition partners. This brought a welcome shift away from the neo-liberal policies of the previous fifteen years, although on economics, labour relations and income support policies have stalled, rather than reversed direction.

On women's employment issues, there has been progress, but also some unevenness. The Labour–Alliance government introduced twelve weeks' tax-funded paid parental leave for women employed for twelve months or more, with two weeks' parental leave for partners. The government is now considering extending eligibility and increasing the period to match the current international standard of fourteen weeks' paid leave. Under Alliance Minister Laila Harré, the Ministry of Women's Affairs released a discussion document *Next Steps Towards Pay Equity* and developed an *Action Plan for New Zealand Women*. In 2003 the Labour–United government appointed a Taskforce on Pay and Employment Equity in the Public Service, Education and Health. The Taskforce commissioned background research and released its recommendations in March 2004.[1] A Pay and Employment Equity Unit has now been set up in the Department of Labour. It is headed by Philippa Hall, former CEO of the Depart-

ment of Women in New South Wales, the leading state on pay equity negotiations in Australia.

This encouraging policy action on employment equity applies to the state sector only. In contrast to Labour's legislation in 1990, there are no plans so far to address pay equity for women in the private sector. Moreover, in late 2003, members of the Campaign on Equal Value Equal Pay (CEVEP) were shocked to discover a section in proposed legislation on improving good faith bargaining and protecting casualised workers that would repeal the Government Services Equal Pay Act 1960 and the private sector Equal Pay Act 1972, as these were considered out of date and under-used. In repealing existing legislation before any concrete alternatives were developed or delivered, little thought seemed to have been given to obligations under ILO 100: Equal Remuneration and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEVEP's efforts in alerting Labour and union women, making Select Committee submissions and meeting with ministers and women MPs contributed to this section of the Bill being dropped in September 2004.

On income support policies affecting women, actions have been less contradictory – because there has been little real change in approach. Despite thirty years of feminist critique, raising children is still not recognised as real work, nor are the gender discrimination implications of this acknowledged. Barriers to employment are recognised, but a paid job continues to be portrayed as the only solution to poverty and 'dependency'. Despite a softer, more supportive approach using case managers, the pressure on welfare mothers to rejoin the workforce continues. Under current legislation, women who are uncooperative in developing plans towards this risk a punitive cut to their benefit. In 2004, rather than restoring benefits to 1991 levels (in real terms), the Budget targeted assistance to 'working' families – although the largest group in poverty are sole parent families, the great majority of them headed by women on benefits.

Despite some improvements in women's material circumstances since 1999, major problems of financial hardship still remain. One theme that emerges in this issue is the low incomes of many New Zealand women. The majority of low-paid workers are women, particularly Maori and Pacific women. Prue Hyman's article 'Significant increases in the minimum wage: A strategy for gender pay equity?' suggests that one effective way of reducing the gender pay gap and

the incidence of working poverty among women is to substantially increase the minimum wage. This will be of most assistance to women employed full time. Part-time employees will require additional strategies to improve their situation, as will women on benefits.

Large numbers of New Zealand women do not have financial independence. In 'Female financial hardship and debt due to marital status', Tina McIvor shows how the current New Zealand welfare system fosters mothers' financial dependence upon a partner, partly through setting very low levels of income support, and partly through the way rules about cohabitation are applied to shift women off benefits, often resulting in welfare debt. Legislation currently before Parliament is redefining 'relationships in the nature of marriage', and will extend cohabitation rules to same sex couples.

When returning to paid employment after a break, women may experience difficulties and discrimination. The article by Doreen Davy and Jocelyn Handy looks at older women seeking employment through agencies, in which younger women apply discriminatory criteria related to age, appearance and 'team fit' on behalf of their business clients.

Further articles explore equal employment opportunities and women's working conditions in three different areas of the education sector. Keren Brooking explores discriminatory practices in the appointment of primary school principals. She looks at the way the 'Tomorrow's Schools' devolution of hiring decisions to school boards of trustees has undermined EEO requirements in state stator employment. Judith Duncan's interviews with kindergarten teachers document the impacts that the education reforms had on their working conditions and work-life balance and their resistance to this. Michelle Lunn's research on Islamic university women in Malaysia explores barriers and religio-cultural considerations affecting equal employment opportunities. These have similarities and differences with university women's career experiences in New Zealand.

Equal employment opportunities is also the focus of Judith Pringle's article, this time for women in management. The question she raises, drawing on liberal and radical feminist theories, is whether career success for these women can be seen as indicating progress for women as a group, or just for individuals.

We hope you enjoy this issue. As guest editors, we are pleased to have participated in publishing the *Women's Studies Journal* with a new

and energetic editorial team. This issue's theme of Women, Work and Welfare will continue in some articles in the next general issue, along with articles on a wide range of topics. In addition, submissions are already being received for a special issue on Women and Violence for Spring 2005.

We are happy to assure you that the *Journal* will continue – provided that you, as our loyal readers, continue to subscribe. We cannot survive without you. Please renew your subscription now!

CELIA BRIAR AND LINDA HILL

Notes

[1] Taskforce on Pay & Employment Equity (2004) Report on pay and employment equity in the public service and the public health and public education sectors. March. www.dol.govt.nz

Significant increases in the minimum wage: A strategy for gender pay equity?

PRUE HYMAN

Introduction

Women's overall position in the labour market has improved in recent years by all conventional measures. Increasing labour force participation, some reduction in both vertical and horizontal segregation, with more women 'at the top' and continued, if slow, improvement in the gender earnings ratio are the obvious features.

Yet many problems remain, particularly increasing earnings differentials among both women and men, with women over-represented in part time, casualised and low paid work. Maori and Pacific women and new immigrants figure disproportionately in these groups. Part-time work, undertaken predominantly by women, has negative effects in both low paid and higher paid work. For professional and higher paid women, part-time employment has negative career implications, and the gender pay gap is wider at higher earnings levels (Dixon 2000). Both low pay and the gender pay gap result in lower lifetime earnings and reduced economic security for women on average compared with men.

It is good to see the gender pay gap and pay equity back on the political agenda under the current government, with the appointment in 2003 of the Taskforce on Pay and Employment Equity for the Public Service, Health and Education, and the establishment in 2004 of a Pay & Employment Equity Unit in the Department of Labour. I was asked to undertake two projects for the Taskforce. The one which informs this paper was on the relationships between low pay, pay and employment equity, and the gender earnings gap.

There are enormous difficulties facing implementation of equal pay for work of equal value. Some stem from the changes to industrial relations law and collective bargaining as part of the deregulation agenda under governments of both major parties in the 1980s and 1990s. High numbers of employees on individual contracts rather than collective agreements, lack of knowledge about other people's pay rates, the removal of union rights only marginally restored since 1999, and the widening of pay differentials in general are all negative factors.

A complementary strategy is to work for more general policies that will benefit low income earners, who are disproportionately women and Maori and Pacific employees. The main protective policy is the minimum wage. Before discussing this, the paper considers the issues of widening pay differentials and reduced influence of collective bargaining, both of which have had a differentially adverse impact on lower paid women. However, low minimum wages and widening inequality tend, as one would expect, to go together. In this situation, the minimum wage takes on an even greater role in protecting low income workers. It is important, therefore, to ensure that the minimum wage rate is maintained at a reasonably high relativity to average wage levels.

Gender aspects of low pay

For the Taskforce project, low pay was defined as earnings below $12 per hour, which was approximately two-thirds of average earnings. In May 2003, 24.1 per cent of men and 34.8 per cent of women were low earners by this criterion. The incidence of low pay among Maori women was an appalling 47.1 per cent, with 10 per cent reporting earnings below the minimum wage of $8.50 at that time. The proportion of Pacific women on low pay was nearly as high, at 45.9 per cent. Part time work, a heavily female area, is disproportionately low paid. Of women earning up to $10 per hour in 2003, 61 per cent were employed part-time, compared with 38 per cent of those earning above $10 per hour. Only 36 per cent of men earning below $10 an hour, and 11 per cent earning above that amount, were employed part-time. These gender and ethnicity differences are striking, while the overall proportion of low-paid workers – at 29.3 per cent – is high by OECD standards. If there is some truth in the belief that New Zealand once had egalitarian wage structures, this has well and truly disappeared under structural adjustment policies.

Women are heavily over-represented among lower incomes generally. In the June 2003 quarter, the bottom quintile (20 per cent) of adults had weekly incomes below $150 per week and about 64 per cent of these were women. The proportion of women among top incomes is increasing but was still only 30.9 per cent of the top quintile, who earned $850 per week or more.

The evidence is clear throughout the English-speaking world that labour market pay differentials or relativities are widening, as

are overall income inequalities among individuals and households. A review for the NZ Treasury stated that 'the increase in New Zealand's income inequality seems to have been proportionately larger than seen in most other developed economies. New Zealand now appears to have one of the highest levels of inequality in the OECD' (O'Dea 2000: 9). The impact of high management salaries on earnings inequality is considerable, spreading the whole pay structure (Hazledine 1998).

The orthodox economics rationale for increased differentials is that higher returns are required to attract scarce skills, with top salaries reflecting high productivity, responsibility and performance in an increasingly complex and technologically advanced environment and in a competitive international labour market. However, the literature also contains rebuttals of these explanations (Hyman 1999). In the USA, the rise of wage inequality is substantially due to institutional forces, with declines in the real value of the minimum wage and in the level of unionisation being significant factors (Fortin and Lemieux 1997). Others challenge the market's verdicts on worth, pointing to 'the benefits of discrimination to dominant groups, and the loose connection between the distribution of earnings and the economic performance of society as a whole' (Kuttner 1997: 76). A New Zealand economics professor has argued:

> There are plenty of good reasons why some people doing some jobs will be paid more than others. But ... we must insist on fair shares. This means reversing the past decade's trend towards a hollowing out of the income distribution in the name of 'international competitiveness': top people paying themselves more and paying those at the bottom less. (Hazledine 1998: 172).

Orthodox economic analysis also assumes that the relationship of skill to productivity is clear, whereas a major body of literature argues that skill evaluation is largely socially determined. The institutional and social forces referred to above which impact on pay structures are clearly imbued with gender, race, and class biases. With definition and assessment of skills very much a social construct, the skills involved in many jobs can be undervalued or ignored, as has occurred in much traditionally female dominated work. This is, of course, the key issue in the argument for equal pay for work of equal value, focussing on such types of work (Cockburn 1983; Hill and Novitz 1985; Hyman 1994; Kusterer 1978; Wood 1985).

Collective bargaining

High levels and increases in inequality are correlated internationally with low levels and decreases in unionisation and collective bargaining. In New Zealand there was a sharp reduction in collective bargaining, especially multi-employer bargaining, after the Employment Contracts Act 1991 was enacted. Occupational wage awards were replaced by enterprise-based individual or collective employment contracts. This weakened unions' ability to recruit and represent members. There was a theoretical symmetry in the Act between the employer and the employee in choice of representation and the form of contract, but in practice the legislation vastly enhanced employer power (Hyman 1994). One US-based observer judged the changes to the New Zealand industrial scene as:

> ... visible and dramatic, because in an astoundingly short time it moved from being a socialized country with labor law that was highly protective of unions and with one of the highest levels of union density in the world to a country that was extremely hospitable to free market ideas with a labor law founded on Chicago school ideas. (Dannin 2001: 1091).

Prior to 1991, New Zealand had high levels of unionisation and collective bargaining, particularly for women employees. Part-time workers, female-dominated occupations and small workplaces were covered by wage awards and agreements to a greater extent than in most overseas countries. The Employment Contracts Act, together with a weak economy, led to a fall in collective bargaining coverage from 721,400 employees in 1990 to 373,100 in 1995. There was a rapid fall in union density, from an internationally high level of 55.7 per cent of all wage and salary earners in 1989 to just 21.4 per cent in 1999 (May et al. 2001). The Employment Relations Act 2000 arrested union decline but with little increase in the extent of collective coverage, although promoting collective bargaining was one of the Objects of the new Act.

The widening pay gaps associated with decreased union membership and decentralised bargaining have differential gender and ethnic implications, in addition to the obvious class aspects. In cross-country comparisons, high levels of female unionisation and centralised bargaining are strongly associated with lower wage differentials generally and with a lower gender pay gap (Blau and Kahn 2003; Curtin 1991; Saar 1992; Whitehouse 1992; Gregory et al. 1989). Whitehouse's

study of thirteen OECD countries showed that collective approaches to equality in the labour market are more effective than those based on liberal individualism. Further, the greater narrowing of the gender pay gap in Australia compared with USA and the UK comes largely from lower overall differentials, with men in female-dominated occupations being relatively higher paid there than elsewhere (Gregory et al. 1989).

Given the grim picture on inequality and bargaining processes outlined in this section, some minimum protection of New Zealand's lowest paid employees is of major importance. This is provided by the minimum wage. The level of the minimum wage is rightly the target of advocacy by the NZ Council of Trade Union (NZCTU). Regular adjustment of the minimum wage level is particularly important for women and Maori and Pacific employees.

The minimum wage and gender equity

An economy-wide minimum adult wage has been required through legislation in New Zealand since 1945. Prior to this, there were minima established for particular industries. These minimum wage rates incorporated gender inequity, influenced by the concept of the 'family wage' for men. Differential pay scales for women and for men continued until the Equal Pay Act 1972, under the influence of the family wage concept.

The Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1894 established the basic framework of industrial relations in New Zealand for nearly a century. The principles used by the Arbitration Court were largely those of fixing a 'fair wage', by which was meant 'what reasonably good employers were actually paying for a particular class of labour' (Woods 1963: 95). In 1907, the Harvester Award in Victoria, Australia, promulgated the principle of a wage designed to guarantee a (male) worker a certain standard of living. This marked the institutionalisation of the 'family wage' or 'living wage', which were equivalent terms for some time in Australasia. This applied to men irrespective of whether individual men or women actually had dependents. The Victoria decision had an impact on the New Zealand Arbitration Court, which by 1908 had adopted a rate of eight shillings a day as the basic rate for unskilled male labour.

By the mid 1920s, the growth of the Labour movement and political party gave momentum to union wage campaigns. As a

result, in 1925 the Arbitration Court was asked by the government to make a statement on its wage fixing principles. The living wage part of its response stated more explicitly than ever before that the minimum (male) rate should be sufficient to maintain a man, his wife and dependent children. When Labour won power for the first time in 1935, legislation was passed requiring the Arbitration Court to make a general order fixing basic minimum wage rates. The male rate was to be sufficient to maintain him, his wife and three dependent children. Wartime provisions then intervened, and the first legislation for a minimum wage covering all employees was finally enacted in 1945 (Du Plessis 1993).

Despite an earlier commitment to equal pay, Labour in government in this period did not question the gender biases implicit in the family wage concept which awarded higher wages to men. The 1936 decision had set the female rate at 47 per cent of the male rate. This increased to 60 per cent with the April 1946 wage rates. The differential was not finally abolished until 1977, the end of the implementation period for the Equal Pay Act.

Minimum wage level

The minimum wage rate in New Zealand is not automatically raised each year, although it must be reviewed annually. Price indexation and relativity to average wages have often been suggested, but never adopted.

The relativity of the minimum wage to average wages has fluctuated widely over the years, with extremes of 83 per cent in 1947 and 30 per cent in 1984 (see Table 1). The proportionality did not fall below two thirds until 1957. It then fell gradually to 44 per cent in 1972 and was restored to almost two thirds in 1973 following a recommendation by the 1972 Royal Commission on Social Security. From 1975 to 1984 under National governments, adjustments were few and well below the rate of both price increases and general wage increases. This was a period of high inflation, and by 1984 the ratio had fallen to 30 per cent. Under the fourth Labour government, the minimum wage rate was raised in three steps between 1985 and 1987 to reach 52.5 per cent of the average wage. Further slippage occurred under National from 1990 to 1999. Before 1993 there was no minimum wage rate for those aged below twenty.

In 1998, seventeen out of twenty-nine OECD had a national

minimum wage rate, and twelve of these had some form of indexation. New Zealand's minimum wage was eighth highest in US$ or purchasing power parity of the seventeen OECD countries that had national minimum wage rates, with largely the lower income countries lower ranked than New Zealand. New Zealand was similarly around the middle on relativity of minimum wage rate to average total earnings for full time workers. The relativity was 43.7 per cent in 1998, putting New Zealand sixth among the thirteen countries for which data was available.

Minimum wage rates have been raised under Labour-led governments since 1999, but this has only partially restored relativities to a current rate of about 47 per cent of the average wage. Annual increases took the level at March 2003 to $8.50 per hour, while youth rates for 16-17 year olds were substantially increased to $6.80. When the adult rate was increased to $9 per hour in February 2004, the youth rate relativity of 80 per cent was maintained with an increase to $7.20.

The Alliance Minister of Women's Affairs and Associate Minister of Labour noted in 2002 that there was:

> ... nothing at all rational about the level it sits at ... Why 42 per cent of the average? Why not 50 per cent or the European goal of 66 per cent. (Harré, 2002: 4).

Fifteen years ago, two economists, strong advocates of a high minimum wage, suggested that New Zealand should return to a level around the 80 per cent of the earliest years (Brosnan and Wilkinson 1989). They used both equity and efficiency arguments, citing the need for incentives to train and retain staff and raise productivity. They also referred to desirable multiplier effects of higher wages (an analysis that is no longer fashionable). They rejected the orthodox account of low pay simply reflecting low skill as 'an argument of impregnable circularity in which the outcome, low pay, is used as the only evidence for the alleged cause – low skill and personal inefficiency' (p. 35). Instead, they saw the explanation of low pay in the 'social structuring of jobs and workers' and 'related considerations of industrial and political power' (p. 37).

For much paid work, the minimum wage rate may be symbolic only. However, some contracts for low paid work specify the minimum wage, whatever it is at the time, as the rate to be paid. In addition, low paid and casualised work, an increasing proportion of the total,

Table 1: Value and relativity of the adult minimum wage, 1946–2004
(Male minimum rates shown until 1970s; selected years until 1981, then each year thereafter.)

Year	Political party in government	Minimum Wage		Relativity of minimum wage to average weekly earnings – per cent
		Nominal hourly (gross $/hour)	Weekly (gross $/40 hour week)	
1946	Labour	0.26	10.50	83
1951	National	0.33	13.17	67
1957	Labour	0.47	18.75	74
1963	National	0.51	20.33	66
1969	National	0.59	23.50	56
1972	Labour	0.68	23.50	44
1975	Labour	1.37	54.88	60
1978	National	1.61	64.41	49
February 1981	National	2.00	80.16	37
February 1984	National	2.10	84	30
February 1985	Labour	2.50	100	34
September 1985	Labour	4.25	170	54
February 1987	Labour	5.25	210	53
February 1988	Labour	5.625	225	51
May 1989	Labour	5.875	235	50
September 1990	Labour	6.125	245	47
1991–1994 no change	National	6.125	245	42 by 1994
March 1995	National	6.25	250	43
March 1996	National	6.375	255	42
March 1997	National	7.00	280	44
1998–1999 no change	National	7.00	280	41 by 1999
March 2000	Labour/Alliance	7.55	302	44
February 2001	Labour/Alliance	7.70	308	42
February 2002	Labour/Alliance	8.00	320	44
March 2003	Labour/United	8.50	340	47
April 2004	Labour/United	9.00	360	n.a.

Sources: Brosnan and Wilkinson (1987) and various Labour Department publications

may not involve a written contract, relying on oral communication. In these circumstances, the minimum wage provides at least a theoretical safety net, which is particularly important for women and Maori and Pacific employees.

This is reflected in the NZCTU's submissions on annual reviews of the minimum wage. In 1998 they argued that the minimum wage:

> ... should not be seen as a *primary* wage fixing instrument, but rather as a *safety net* protection against exploitation for those who do not have conditions of employment determined through a (fair) process of collective bargaining, and who do not have the personal leverage (skills, etc.) to secure an adequate employment contract.

In the NZCTU's view, it should constitute a minimum social standard, implying that 'if jobs will only be provided at wages below some level, society would rather not have them'. This minimum needed to be set because 'there are some people who for reasons of lack of knowledge or out of desperation will work for sub-standard wages, and others ruthless enough to employ them.' The minimum wage could play a role in tackling the problems of low pay and be used to resist widening inequalities. On this measure, it had been unsuccessful in recent years. The NZCTU rightly argued that labour market deregulation has increased the need for this protective role. Their 2003 submission sought an increase in the rate from $8.50 to $10.52, en route to restoring the relativity to two-thirds of average earnings, the European goal mentioned earlier. The increase granted was 50 cents.

The NZCTU regularly called for a clearer definition of the purpose of the minimum wage, explicit criteria for setting it and a formal process of consultation. In response, the government in 2000 adopted specific objectives and criteria to be used in each annual review. These are circulated to interested parties when seeking submissions on the review. The four objectives are:

- Fairness, to ensure that wages paid are no lower than a socially acceptable minimum
- Protection, to offer wage protection to vulnerable workers
- Income distribution, to ensure that incomes of people on low incomes do not deteriorate relative to those of other workers
- Work incentives, to increase the incentives to work for people considering work.

The accompanying criteria by which government will assess changes to the minimum wage, after receiving submissions from central union, employer, Maori and women's organisations, as well as some bodies involved in low waged training, are as follows:

- Do changes in the minimum wage produce gains that are more significant than any losses?
- Is the minimum wage the least costly way of meeting the objectives in the policy?
- Does the level of the minimum wage form part of the most appropriate mix of measures to meet the broader objectives of the government?

These objectives and criteria are, unsurprisingly, open to as much vigorous disagreement by stakeholders as the open slather situation of the past. In particular, scepticism over the income distribution objective is justified. Nevertheless, unions welcomed them as providing some progress.

In its 2004 report, the Taskforce on Pay & Employment Equity in the Public Service, Health and Education recommended that gender equity be an additional objective to be taken into account in the annual review of the minimum wage. Noting that increasing the minimum wage would assist with narrowing the gender pay gap, it proposed a minimum code for the state sector to include an increased minimum wage for the sectors it covered (Taskforce 2004).

Departmental differences

Three key government departments advise Cabinet on the annual review: Treasury, the Department of Labour and the State Services Commission. Internal papers from the late 1990s indicate views that contributed to the slippage in the minimum wage at that time. All regularly took cautious positions, based on an orthodox economic analysis of wage–employment tradeoffs. Treasury has often argued, along with right-wing pressure groups such as the NZ Business Roundtable, that the minimum wage should be abolished altogether. This was the position taken by current National Party leader Don Brash while he was Governor of the Reserve Bank. The underlying philosophy is a belief that labour markets are perfectly competitive, with low wages simply reflecting productivity, not exploitation. Treasury was committed to a view of 'wages as a price', with little or no attention

given to 'wages as a living', let alone considering 'wages as a social practice' (Mutari et al. 2001). Similarly, the State Services Commission, concerned with budgetary impacts of higher pay in the public sector, argued in its 1997 submission on the minimum wage that an increase was inconsistent with a policy of getting disadvantaged job seekers into employment.

In contrast, the Ministry of Women's Affairs argued for increases. Their comments on draft Cabinet papers for the 1998 and 1999 minimum wage reviews questioned the orthodox view approach, arguing that appropriately set minimum wages could raise productivity levels and economic efficiency:

> The issue of vulnerable workers who need protection from exploitation relates not only to those who lack the necessary information and skills to bargain effectively but also to workers who lack bargaining power, for whatever reason. The protection of vulnerable workers is not only a question about whether monopsonies are present in the labour market, it is also a question about the ability of the industrial relations structure to protect workers from discrimination and exploitation. (MWA 27.10.98)

In 1999, the Ministry expressed concern over a draft Cabinet paper that concentrated on the economic impacts of minimum wages at the expense of social impacts:

> The paper contains extensive discussion of the employment effects of an increase, even though they may be statistically insignificant... Yet conversely there is no discussion of the social impacts ... in particular, of what it means to live on the minimum wage and the flow-on effects for other areas of social policy. (MWA to Labour Market Policy Group 6.10.1999).

The Ministry of Women's Affairs' argument for an increase in the minimum wage included the comment that 'the minimum wage is a direct means of improving income adequacy for individuals in low wage work, amongst whom women and Maori are disproportionately represented' (MWA to LMPG 3.11.1999). Around 57–58 per cent of those who would benefit from an increase were women.

Effects of the minimum wage on employment

The shift in government policy towards raising the minimum wage is supported by a considerable body of literature challenging assertions that minimum wage rates and other centralised wage policies will

have negative effects on employment. For example, in the UK, where minimum rates used to be set by local Wage Councils, research found that when wage regulation under this system reduced in strength in the 1980s, wage inequality in the relevant industries increased but adult employment declined, rather than increasing as orthodox economic arguments would predict (Machin and Manning 1994). The UK adopted a national minimum wage rate in 1999.

In New Zealand, empirical evidence on the employment impacts of the minimum wage is relatively weak. The most quoted article found negative employment effects for young adults (Maloney 1995), but has been criticised on methodological grounds. Chapple (1997) found mostly insignificant results. A later study of females with no qualifications – a 'high risk' group – found 'little evidence that the increases in the adult minimum wage diminish their employment prospects' (Pacheco and Maloney 1999: 67). The most recent study by Treasury of the large increases in minimum wage rates for teenage workers in 2000–2003 found 'no robust evidence of adverse effects on youth employment or hours worked'. The hours worked by 18–19 year olds changed little and their earnings increased slightly, while the hours worked by 16–17 year olds increased and their earnings increased significantly (Hyslop and Stillman 2004). In short, there is little evidence to back assertions that a minimum wage or moderate increases in its level will have a negative impact on employment, and some evidence that effects are neutral.

Conclusions

Since the late 1980s, New Zealand has become a society divided between rich and poor to an extent that could not have been imagined half a century earlier. Widening pay inequalities have increased relative poverty. Although equal pay legislation in the 1970s helped to reduce the gender pay gap, persistent inequalities remain. Women are the majority of those on low incomes, and a high proportion of the 'working poor' are Maori and Pacific Island women. For this reason, regular increases in the minimum wage have the potential to help reduce the gap in average hourly earnings between men and women.

Women employed full-time on low rates gain most benefit from minimum wage increases, and additional strategies are needed to increase the incomes of women in part-time and casual employment. Ongoing increases in the minimum wage help protect the most vulner-

able workers, many of whom are not currently organised in unions. The lowest paid men also benefit from such increases, widening general and union support for this policy. Higher minimum wages, increasing the relativity with average earnings, could help reduce the social divisiveness that has accompanied the widening disparity in earnings. As we have seen, it is unlikely that there would be any significant impact upon the availability of jobs from moderate increases in the minimum wage. Increasing its level and maintaining – or preferably improving – its relativity with average earnings should therefore be a key indicator for any government concerned with gender equity and social justice.

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Female financial hardship and debt due to marital status

TINA McIVOR

Introduction

The Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) was initially introduced in New Zealand, in 1973, to provide independent financial assistance to single mothers with dependant children. The eligibility criteria set out in section 27B of the Social Security Act still states that the benefit is for:

> ... a woman who is the mother of one or more dependent children and who is living apart from, and has lost the support of or is being inadequately maintained by, her husband.[1]

The section goes on to list the other circumstances of sole parenthood including women who are divorced, unmarried women and finally an additional paragraph for sole parent men.

Even though we have the DPB in New Zealand, the state still reinforces women's economic dependence on men. This paper explores two examples of how this is done. The first example concerns the extremely low income of women on benefits, illustrated by the statistics collected at the Wellington People's Centre.[2] The second example is the way government and Ministry of Social Development (MSD) policies treat women on benefits in terms of their relationships with men. The 'relationship in the nature of marriage' concept will be explored along with the consequences for women who have been said to have entered into such a relationship.

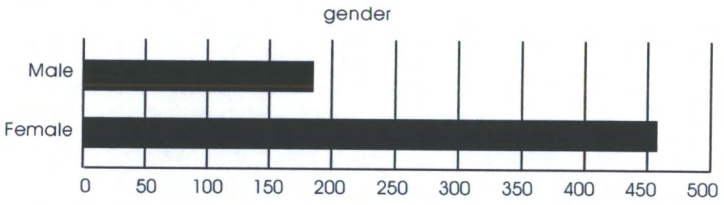
In the early 1990s, the National government implemented neoliberal welfare polices which included the 1991 benefit cuts. One of the largest percentage cuts was to the DPB, with severe impacts on the incomes of women bringing up children on their own.[3] The government also introduced an extraordinary policy intended to 're-partner' those receiving a DPB. Since 1999, governments led by Labour, which criticised those cuts at the time, have still done nothing to reverse them, nor depart from the 're-partnering' philosophy that National introduced.

Community groups such as the Wellington People's Centre have

seen a steady rise in the number of people who use their services. Community resources have been stretched, as government funding for benefit advocacy work was also cut in the 1990s and now remains limited. However, beneficiary advocates maintain their work, often voluntarily, because the need is such that, without it, Work and Income NZ (a service of MSD) would not be scrutinised and beneficiaries would often be left without legal support or representation.

Figure 1 shows the gender breakdown of those who used the Benefit Rights Service at the Wellington People's Centre. There were 180 men compared to 452 women who contacted the service over a three month period in late 2002. This means that on average 71.5 per cent of Benefits Rights Service clients are women. Benefit Rights Service statistics have consistently shown that the most common issue for clients is ongoing financial hardship – particularly where there are dependent children.

Figure 1: Benefit Rights Service clients [4]



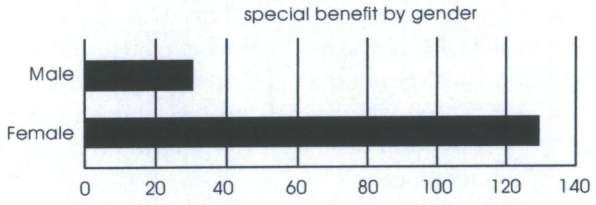
Financial hardship

When a client comes to the Benefit Rights Service because they have insufficient money, an advocate will usually check their eligibility for a Special Benefit. The Special Benefit is designed for people in financial hardship – those who simply cannot make ends meet. It is the last 'safety net' in the welfare system. Benefit Rights Service statistics for three months in 2002 showed that advocates dealt with 130 women requiring a Special Benefit, compared with 30 men. This showed that women in hardship was the single most significant issue encountered by the Service (Figure 2).

Women with children are more likely to experience more ongoing financial hardship than men, for a number of reasons. There are the difficulties of combining paid and unpaid work and the high cost of childcare, the time spent out of the workforce and the sense of powerlessness and lack of skills to re-enter it, and women are less likely

to earn high enough pay to allow them to save. Sole-parent men are more likely to be in paid employment than sole mothers, because of greater earning power and society's different expectations of men and women as parents.[5]

Figure 2: Benefit Rights Service clients [4]



The Special Benefit is a statutory benefit paid under the Social Security Act 1964. Section 61G provides wide discretion to grant a Special Benefit. It reads:

> 61G. Special Benefit – (1) Subject to section 68A of this Act, the chief executive may, in the chief executive's discretion, fix a special entitlement to a special benefit in respect of any person, whether or not that person is receiving any other benefit under this Act ... if the chief executive is satisfied that, after taking into account all of that person's financial circumstances and commitments ... such a special entitlement is justified ...[6]

The assessment process for a Special Benefit is subject to a Ministerial Direction on how the discretion under s.61G should be used. While the Minister's power to issue guidelines comes from statute, it cannot be used to override legislation.

The Ministerial Direction sets out a two-step process for determining eligibility for the Special Benefit. The first step involves a calculation called the Formula Assessment – in effect, a test for financial hardship. The Formula Assessment determines the rate of Special Benefit that Work and Income NZ regards as justified – subject to the second step in the process. The second step involves considering whether or not there are reasons that justify departing from the first step, such as any special or unusual circumstances or costs.[7]

In 2000, the Wellington People's Centre published a report on the number of people who were potentially eligible for a Special Benefit but missing out on it.[8] It was conservatively estimated that

159,000 more people should be receiving a Special Benefit based on their accommodation costs alone. If a woman on the DPB with one child had accommodation costs over $145 per week, she would have a deficiency under the Formula Assessment and would normally be eligible for a Special Benefit.

In October 2001, 48,712 DPB recipients had accommodation costs which would usually qualify them for a special benefit, and 91 per cent of all DPB beneficiaries are women. This means that 44,327 women who receive the DPB are on incomes which, by the standards set in the test for a Special Benefit, keep them in a perpetual state of financial hardship. These women, left by the state to struggle financially, are then likely to be seen as a warning to other women contemplating leaving relationships.

Debt due to relationships in the nature of marriage

The state intervenes to create relationships of economic dependence for DPB recipients. It does this through its investigative and debt establishment regimes for beneficiaries who, the state decides, are in 'a relationship in the nature of marriage'.

The Benefit Control Unit is a unit within MSD which is responsible for detecting benefit fraud. The Unit has a history of using intrusive investigative methods when trying to identify a relationship in the nature of marriage. The investigators are motivated by financial incentives to detect fraud related to relationships in the nature of marriage and to establish debt against DPB recipients for benefit money they received from the date at which they were categorised as having entered such a relationship and therefore no longer entitled to the DBP.[9] Many women do not feel comfortable with the type of personal and often graphic questions that are asked by Benefit Control Unit investigators, especially if the woman is subject to male violence. Many women who use the Benefit Rights Service are unaware of their rights when a Benefit Control Unit investigator appears at their door. The client's rights are not often explained by the investigator and the information offered on the legal definition of a relationship in the nature of marriage is, at best, limited.

An independent report commissioned by the government in 2000 (the 'Joychild report') found that from 1996 through to the end of 2000 the Benefit Control Unit had ignored a ruling by the Court of Appeal that defined a relationship in the nature of marriage. The Unit

had continued to use an incorrect legal test for determining whether a relationship in the nature of marriage existed.[10] This meant it might have incorrectly established debt against thousands of women on the DPB. In response, the government set up a review process whereby almost any debt established due to a determination that a person was in a relationship in the nature of marriage could be reconsidered to see whether the correct legal test had been used or not. If the correct test had not been used, the debt was to be disestablished.

A relationship in the nature of marriage is currently defined by legal precedent as there is no definition in the Social Security Act. Section 63(b) of the Social Security Act allows the Ministry to 'regard as husband and wife any man and woman who, not being legally married, have entered into a relationship in the nature of marriage'.[11] In *Ruka v Department of Social Welfare* in October 1996, the Court of Appeal ruled that the principal elements in deciding whether there was a relationship in the nature of marriage were:

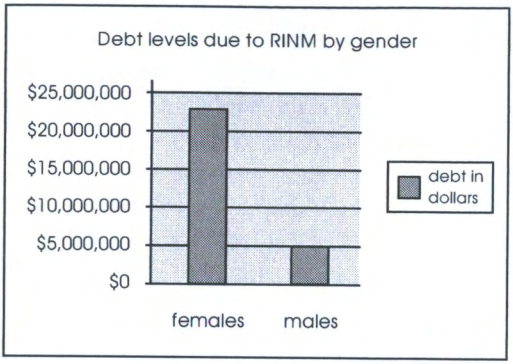
> where co-habitation and a degree of companionship demonstrating an emotional commitment ... are found together with financial interdependence, there will be such a merging of lives as equates for the purposes of the legislation to a legal marriage ... the significant point is that both mental and emotional commitment and the financial interdependence must be found to exist ...[12]

Frances Joychild found investigators were not applying this criteria when they determined whether a relationship in the nature of marriage existed and thus any consequent debt was thrown into question.

When the Ministry determines that a relationship in the nature of marriage exists, it is predominantly women who are prosecuted and/or required to repay benefit income, rather than both the man and the woman involved. In the year to 31 December 2001, 1936 females owed a total of $23,360,694 due to relationship in the nature of marriage over-payments, compared to 931 men owing $5,247,689 (Figure 3).[13]

This gender inequity is due largely to the fact that more women are in receipt of the DPB than men, thus the men involved in these cases generally receive either a different benefit or are not on a benefit. However, because the DPB was designed for people with dependent children who have no income and who are not in a marriage or

Figure 3: Debt levels due to relations in the nature of marriage by gender



relationship in the nature of marriage, Work and Income NZ tends to pursue these clients with greater fervour.

Work and Income's reluctance to recognise notional entitlement – calculating what someone would have received legally if they were on the 'correct' benefit and establishing debt only for the difference – means that women on the DPB are made liable for larger amounts; that is, the whole benefit they received over the period in question. By comparison, a male 'partner' on an unemployment benefit is permitted to be in a relationship in the nature of marriage and any debt is calculated on the reduced benefit he would have received if his 'partner's' income had been recognised.

The consistency with which this injustice occurs has led to cases where vindictive ex-boyfriends have 'dobbed in' women to the Benefit Control Unit, claiming that they had been in a relationship in the nature of marriage with them. In doing so, they can be confident that she will be punished while they will go untouched, or she will at least be harassed and treated as 'guilty until proven innocent'. Work and Income NZ follow every allegation with an investigation interview. Investigators often check bank accounts without first gaining permission from the beneficiary, as required by s.11 of the Social Security Act. The client's benefit is often stopped before any decision has been reached as to the validity of the allegation.

The practice of making the woman culpable in situations where Work and Income NZ establishes a debt raises a number of issues. Financial inequity is experienced by the woman (and her children) as a result of a relationship that, by definition, includes an equally participating partner. It is the woman who suffers the invasive invest-

igation process. These practices can damage a woman's relationships – through fear of being 'dobbed in' for having a male friend or boyfriend, although many women may simply wish to ensure male input into their children's lives. Extraordinary pressure is placed on any new 'partner' type relationship as it progresses because the Benefit Control Unit's view tends to demand either superficial interaction or full financial sharing. The overriding expectation is that the woman could and should expect to be financially supported by a (any) male.

Once a decision has been made by Work and Income NZ to establish a debt as a result of a relationship in the nature of marriage, the first question to ask is: Did a relationship, as defined by the *Ruka* decision, exist? For such a relationship to exist, the couple must be financially interdependent for social security purposes and have a mental and emotional commitment to the relationship for the foreseeable future. If the person does not believe themselves to have been in a relationship in the nature of marriage, the usual process taken by Benefit Right Service advocates is to lodge a review of decision on behalf of the client. The journey through the judicial process is then underway.

If a relationship in the nature of marriage did in fact exist, making the woman responsible for the over-payment ignores the fact that both parties – according to the definition – had the financial benefit of the income. In fairness, one would expect any debt to be shared equally between them. While it may make little practical difference while the relationship continues and the parties pool their income, if the relationship ends, the debt will follow the party in respect of whom the debt was established.

Aside from the issue of benefit inadequacy discussed earlier, the level of benefit debt established against women is the most alarming effect of MSD policy on the current numbers of women and children living in poverty. The crux of the issue is the age-old assumption that a man and a woman in a relationship comprise one cohesive financial unit. Yet we know this is often not the case.[14] The other problem at the core of the issue is that a person's income is being determined by their marital status. For example, two adult flatmates on the unemployment benefit are paid $161.65 per week each, but if they enter into a relationship in the nature of marriage this drops to $134.70 – an overall reduction of $53.90 a week. If a married heterosexual couple apply for an unemployment benefit, and the woman is the carer of

children, benefit entitlement is established in respect of the man and the woman is considered to be his dependant spouse.

Individual entitlement to benefits without reference to marital status would eliminate this dynamic and ensure that income support is available to women when needed, independent of their relationship to a man. Individual entitlement to benefits would eliminate the difficult and highly fraught social policy that surrounds the relationship in the nature of marriage concept and save the tax resources fed into investigating people's intimate lives.

Instead, the Labour government is expanding the relationship in the nature of marriage concept to include same sex couples as part of proposed legislation for them to register 'civil unions'. Same-sex relationships will be subject to the same system of anonymous allegations and investigation as heterosexual relationships.

At the time of writing, a Relationships (Statutory References) Bill is being considered by Parliament in conjunction with the Civil Union Bill. The Bill will replace the term 'relationship in the nature of marriage' with the terms 'de facto relationship' and 'civil union' in legislation on family policy, including the Social Security Act 1964. The Bill uses a multi-factor definition of 'de facto relationship' – the same definition proposed in a Conjugal Status Bill in 1998 and rejected by Parliament.

In amending the Social Security Act, the Bill includes the Court of Appeal's criteria of emotionally and financially support, including support of any child, as well as the new multi-factor definition. This allows the deciding person or court to give weight to any factor that seems appropriate. If passed, these multiple option criteria could allow decisions on DPB entitlement that replace the *Ruka* decision with the very approach that the Court found to be wrong.

The Avenues pilot project

Other interventionist welfare polices related to the relationship in the nature of marriage concept that have impacted negatively on women include the 2001 Avenues pilot project,[15] set up to explore alternative avenues for DPB applicants, and the Benefit Control Unit's Early Intervention Programme.

Although the DPB is a poverty level benefit, it has continued to provide financial independence for women with children since 1973. The Avenues pilot project, introduced by the Labour government,

sought to deter women entitled to the DPB from making an application. It was scrapped, but is still worth mentioning because it provides an example of the mind-set behind recent welfare policies.

The Avenues pilot was conducted at a number of Work and Income NZ Service Centres throughout the country. When a person called the 0800 number to apply for a DPB benefit, they were referred to a client adviser. The adviser would arrange to meet with the applicant within 48 hours of the call, either at their home or at an office of Work and Income NZ. The client adviser would provide 'information brokerage' to the client looking at alternative options, rather applying for the DPB. The adviser would require the applicant to fill in an Interview Form. This was used to decide how often the person might need to be contacted by the Benefit Control Unit (if it was thought that a relationship in the nature of marriage was likely). The Interview Form asked questions that were not required under the Act to test eligibility for the benefit. A number of the questions were considered offensive by Benefit Rights Service clients who experienced this process. MSD officials reported that, after going through the Avenues programme, three people decided to apply for the unemployment benefit rather than a DPB because of the 'social stigma attached to the DPB', despite the harsher abatement regime and requirement for work-testing. Being on the unemployment benefit rather than the DPB also meant these people could not access the Training Incentive Allowance. The Minister of Social Services told advocates that the use of the Interview Forms was only a matter of 'using up old stock'.[16] The forms had been developed under National policy in the early 1990s.

The Avenues project needs to be understood in the context of politics around the DPB. The Labour government was (and still is) criticised about the increasing numbers of people on the DPB, and about its welfare policies in general. The Avenues project was intended to be fiscally neutral. That is, the salaries and other resources put into the scheme had to be paid for by reducing the numbers of people being granted the DPB. The main reason the pilot did not become standard practice is that it failed the test of fiscally neutrality – it failed to have any significant impact on the number of people applying for the DPB.[17] This real purpose behind the Avenues scheme was at odds with the government's public relations about it providing information and options to women.

The Early Intervention programme

Another programme that highlights discrepancy between policy and reality and that deters many women from claiming their entitlements is the Early Intervention Programme. This entails an unsolicited visit from an investigator soon after a women claims the DPB.

Clients often come to the Benefit Rights Service confused and distraught by a standard early intervention letter that is sent out randomly to women on the DPB. The letter appears to be from the Benefit Control Unit, yet it states that an officer must meet with the client to check that they are receiving their 'full and correct entitlement' to income support. If the person does not make contact with the officer, their benefit will be cut. Clients are wary of a letter from the Benefit Control Unit and often fear an uninvited meeting where their personal lives will be made the knowledge of the state. Beneficiaries have no choice but to meet with the unit known to be responsible for investigating fraud.

Conclusions

The experiences reported by the Benefit Right Service are a disturbing reminder of the underlying assumption behind the state's welfare polices that a woman should expect to be financially supported by a man. Even though the DPB is provided, it is inadequate to support sole parent families. In addition, the Ministry of Social Development pursues many women beneficiaries to investigate their relationships with men. This state intervention reinforces women's economic dependence on men.

The Ministry's current method of determining benefit entitlement by marital status fails to meet the needs of women and children both financially and socially. Around twice as many women as men owe twice as much money to Work and Income NZ, as a result of being found to be in a relationship in the nature of marriage. One way of addressing these inequities is through the introduction of benefits that are paid to individuals in their own right rather than subject to their marital status. Costing the change to individual entitlement requires further work, but must be measured against the negative impacts on women reported in this article.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to the workers at the Wellington People's Centre, particularly Stacey Gasson and Stephen Ruth. Thanks to Tony McGurk from the Combined Beneficiaries Union and to Keri Ford for his support.

Notes

1 Social Security Act 1964, s 27B.

2 The Centre was set up in 1992 by a group of organisations including the Wellington Unemployed Workers Union and DPB Action with the help of the Inner City Ministry. The aim was to complement the political lobbying of these groups by creating an organisation to provide practical help for people on benefits and low incomes. It offers low-cost or free medical, dental and other services, as well as welfare advocacy and a political voice for people on low incomes and The Benefit Rights Service of the Wellington People's Centre provides accurate information and advocacy on benefit entitlements. All services are free to members of the Centre and non-members.

3 Christine Cheyne, Mike O'Brien and Michael Belgrave, *Social policy in Aotearoa New Zealand: A critical introduction* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 170.

4 Figures 1 and 2 are based on data for a three-month period in late 2002.

5 Prue Hyman, *Women and economics: A New Zealand feminist perspective* (Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1994), pp. 157–188.

6 Social Security Act, 1964, S.63(b).

7 Ministry of Social Development, *Direction in relation to special benefit* (10 February 1999).

8 Wellington People's Centre, *Special Benefit Report 1995–2000.*

9 NZ Government, *Vote Work and Income, Purchase agreement, 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003, between the Minister of Social Services and Employment and the Chief Executive of the Department of Work and Income.*

10 Frances Joychild, *Review of Department of Work and Income implementation of the Court of Appeal Decision Ruka v. Department of Social Welfare (1997) 1 NZLR 154,*18 June 2001.

11 Social Security Act 1964.

12 *Ruka v. Department of Social Welfare* [1997] 1 NZLR 154 (CA).

[13] Letter from Peter Hughes, Chief Executive Officer, Ministry of Social Development, 11 February 2002. Up to date information has been requested and declined under 18(f) of the Official Information Act 1982.

[14] Robin Fleming, *The common purse: Income sharing in New Zealand Families* (Auckland University Press, 1997).

[15] Work and Income New Zealand, *Report to the Minister of Social Services and Employment, Domestic Purposes Benefit Pilot* (13 August 2001).

[16] Minister of Social Services at National Consultation with Advocates meeting, 2002.

[17] Work and Income New Zealand, *Report to the Minister of Social Services and Employment, Domestic Purposes Benefit Pilot* (13 August 2001).

Age and gender discrimination in recruitment agency employment practices: A qualitative study of older women's job search experiences

DOREEN DAVY and JOCELYN HANDY

Introduction

This article explores the ways in which age and gender discrimination interact in New Zealand employment. It does so through an empirical investigation of mature female job-seekers' experiences of using private employment agencies to find clerical work in the Auckland region. The article starts with a brief literature review linking research on age and gender discrimination with recent analyses of the growing importance of private employment agencies and the increasing casualisation of clerical work. It then describes twelve female job-seekers and five agency staff who were interviewed for the research. Key themes emerging from the interviews are summarised. Although the job-seekers and consultants occupied different positions within the employment relationship, several complementary themes emerged from the two sets of interviews, with both groups identifying the 'double jeopardy' of ageism and sexism as an employment issue for older women. In contrast to most previous research which highlights skills-based issues, the problems of appearance and 'team fit' were seen by both groups as more intractable barriers to permanent re-employment. These findings are discussed in relation to the expanding role of employment agencies and policy approaches to combating gendered ageism in employment.

New Zealand, in common with most developed countries, has an ageing population and diminishing birth rates. In consequence, older people constitute a growing proportion of the working age population and ageism is increasingly recognised as a workplace and social issue. Current government policy, as within most other OECD countries, emphasises the importance of retaining older workers within the workforce (Dalziel 2001). Both human rights legislation and employment law prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of either age or gender. Despite this, there is an increasing amount of empirical

evidence which suggests that older workers are discriminated against, both within New Zealand (Burns 2000; McGregor and Gray 2001; Murray 2002) and internationally (Hirsch, Macpherson and Hardy 2002; Walker 1998). Older workers who experience redundancy have been identified as a particularly vulnerable group who often face lengthier periods of unemployment than similarly skilled younger workers, and experience reduced income and status when they succeed in finding new employment (Davey and Cornwall 2003).

Until recently, research on older women's employment experiences has been limited, with most research concentrating on the problems experienced by male workers (Duncan 2003). However, as many feminist researchers have pointed out, the social construction of ageing is a gendered phenomenon and the combined effects of age and gender discrimination within the workplace are experienced differently by men and women (Ainsworth 2002). Research suggests that women are discriminated against at younger ages than men and are frequently perceived as both less attractive and less competent than younger women (Brook Street Bureau 1990; Itzin and Phillipson 1993; Loretto, Duncan and White 2000).

Older women who grew up when the male breadwinner and female carer model of gender relationships predominated may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of ageism within the workplace. These women were often socialised into leaving school with limited qualifications, entering traditionally female occupations and either withdrawing from the labour force or working part-time whilst their children were young. If their life-circumstances change and they are forced to become economically independent in the later part of their working lives, they may have few financial assets, limited or non-existent occupational pension entitlements and may only be able to obtain low-skilled and precarious employment providing little economic security (Warren, Rowlingson and Whyley 2001).

Women in clerical, secretarial or reception positions may be particularly vulnerable to discrimination during the later part of their working lives as they work within female-dominated occupations where ageism and sexism frequently combine to create the 'double jeopardy' of 'gendered ageism' (Onyx 1998). A British study by Wallace (1999) found that employers saw the ideal age for secretarial and administrative positions as around twenty-five years, with women in their late thirties and beyond experiencing considerable

discrimination. Similar findings were reported in an Australian study which found that employers preferred clerical and reception staff to be twenty-five or younger and had little interest in recruiting women over forty-five years (Steinberg, Walley, Tyman and Donaldson 1998). Mature female clerical workers who are made redundant may therefore face considerable problems finding new employment within the same occupational category.

Overseas research suggests that private employment agencies are becoming increasingly important intermediaries between workers and employers. This trend is particularly likely to affect women as clerical, reception and secretarial workers are the largest single group within the agency labour force (Phillpott 1999). Data from both the USA and Europe show that employers increasingly contract out the recruitment of permanent staff to agencies, using them for the initial screening of candidates. There is also an increasing use of temporary clerical labour and growth in long term contractual arrangements between employment agencies and organisations (Forde 2001; Gray 2002; Stanworth and Druker 2000).

The effects of these structural changes in the labour market are the subject of considerable debate within the employment literature. On the one hand, agencies have been accused of offering exploitative and insecure employment to job-seekers with few alternatives (Peck and Theodore 2000). It has also been suggested that agencies intensify age and gender discrimination within the labour market by applying discriminatory criteria on behalf of employers (Encel and Studencki 1997). On the other hand, it has been argued that agencies may help disadvantaged groups circumvent employer prejudices by promoting candidates on the basis of different characteristics to those specified by employers (Gray 2002). It has also been suggested that the temporary work available from agencies facilitates the retention of work related skills and provides a possible route into permanent employment (Meadows 1996).

While temporary jobs may provide a stepping stone into permanent employment for a minority of workers, many people return to unemployment at the end of their contract (White and Forth 1998; Korpi and Levin 2001). Many workers fear the insecurity of temporary work, worry that their benefit entitlements may be compromised and are concerned that the lower pay and status associated with short term employment will send a negative signal about their employability to

prospective employers (Gray 2002). The temporary work offered by agencies therefore carries considerable risks for older women choosing this route into re-employment.

To date, there has been little New Zealand research examining the relationship between job-seekers and private employment agencies and no research looking specifically at the problems faced by mature women seeking clerical work. Relevant statistical data is limited. However, the extant data suggests that this is an issue which merits further investigation. A recent report by Else and Bishop (2003) for the Ministry of Women's affairs shows that, at the one-digit level, clerical work is the largest single occupational category for women: 21 per cent of employed women work in this almost exclusively female area. Statistics New Zealand (2003) estimates that the number of private employment agencies has grown from 342 in 1997 to 714 in 2003, with approximately 40 per cent located in the Auckland area. Neither Statistics New Zealand nor the Employers' Federation collects data on the number of clerical jobs advertised through private employment agencies. Five agencies contacted during this research and the *NZ Herald* marketing department estimate that around 80 per cent of clerical vacancies in the Auckland region are advertised by recruitment consultants on behalf of employers. Research by McGregor and Gray (2001) and Burns (2000) shows that mature job-seekers use advertised vacancies and employment agencies as their main job search strategies. It was reported that most viewed their experiences negatively and believed that agencies discriminate on the basis of age.

As this article shows, the increasing use of employment agencies as intermediaries between job-seekers and employers creates a triangular set of relationships which can exacerbate the problems of gendered ageism faced by older women in clerical occupations.

Methodology

The empirical research described in this article was carried out during the later half of 2002. Female job-seekers were recruited as study participants through advertisements in two North Shore newspapers. These invited women to be interviewed for a study of mature female workers' experiences of redundancy and job search. The advertisements stipulated that participants must be forty-five years or more, have worked in clerical, secretarial or receptionist positions in the

Auckland area for at least twenty hours per week and have experienced redundancy from those positions during the last four years.

Twelve women meeting these criteria responded. Their ages ranged from mid forties to early sixties with a median age in the fifty to fifty-five year age band. All women had at least twenty years part- or full-time experience in office work. Eight women were divorced, widowed or separated. Four were married or partnered. All women had children, though only two still had children living at home. Paid employment was an economic necessity for all women in the sample. The four women in relationships had partners who were unemployed, disabled or in insecure employment themselves.

The women had been made redundant between two months and four years prior to their interview. Six women had originally worked as receptionists, two as secretaries and four as office administrators. At the time of interviewing, eleven had regained employment. One worked as a receptionist, two as secretaries, four as call-centre staff and four as home care providers. Although the majority of the positions were long term, all women saw their current jobs as less secure and of lower status than their previous employment and described themselves as significantly worse off financially.

Women were interviewed in their own homes. Interviews lasted between an hour and ninety minutes and covered a wide range of topics including previous career history, reactions to redundancy and unemployment, coping methods, job search techniques and current attitudes towards work. Only those parts of the interview relevant to women's experiences with private employment agencies are reported here.

Five recruitment consultants were interviewed, all of whom had experience in selecting office staff for Auckland employers. Four consultants were found through personal contacts and one through the Yellow Pages. The four women consultants were in their late twenties or early thirties and employees of different agencies. The male consultant was in his mid forties and the owner of a large, up-market Auckland agency. In terms of physical presentation, the four female consultants were perceived by the researchers as both physically attractive and fashionably attired. Reception staff at all the agencies were young women in their early twenties who were also perceived as physically attractive and glamorously dressed. The majority of job-seekers observed at agencies were women in their twenties, again fashionably garbed.

Consultants were interviewed in their offices. Interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes and covered their perceptions of mature women job-seekers, employer perceptions of older women, employers' ideal candidates for office work, and issues encountered when placing older female job-seekers in temporary and permanent employment.

Interviews with all seventeen participants were taped and transcribed. The transcripts were then analysed for key themes using a grounded theory framework.

Findings

Three key themes emerged from the interview data. First, the difficult relationship between female job-seekers and consultants; second, the 'double jeopardy' of gendered ageism within the clerical labour market; and third, the role of agencies as providers of temporary employment.

Interactions between jobseekers and agency consultants

The mature women in this study all described their interactions with female consultants as difficult. Most respondents had initially approached agencies fairly confidently, believing their solid work record, experience and computer literacy would enable them to regain permanent employment relatively easily. Most respondents also believed agency staff were there to help them and expected consultants to advocate on their behalf with employers. To their surprise, many women experienced the staff as uninterested and found their interactions with consultants difficult. These difficulties were usually interpreted as resulting from generational differences between women which encapsulated the problems they were experiencing within the wider employment context.

A former receptionist in her mid-fifties explained:

> On the telephone I can sound animated and I would often get called in for jobs, and then they would see me, and not that I looked bad, but I looked my age, and they instantly weren't interested. There were so many incidents (pause) they're run by young, upwardly mobile, stunning young women. They wanted a younger person that looked like them.

The female consultants took a more nuanced view of their relationship with older job-seekers, although it was clear from their comments that the relationship could also be difficult for them. All

consultants highlighted the fact that their primary clients were the employers who paid fees to the agency and that their main goal was therefore to help employers find suitable staff. The consultants are employed by the agency on a commission basis. As one consultant in her late twenties explained:

> You'll appreciate that we're basically driven by what the client wants, so we're usually looking for what they are looking for.

Despite this, several consultants expressed sympathy for older women and shock at the attitudes of some employers towards them. Consultants also emphasised their attempts to help women bypass employer prejudices by highlighting the skills-based strengths of mature job-seekers to employers. The success of these attempts is debatable in a labour market characterised by increasing competition between agencies and a large pool of applicants for each job. Other comments by both job-seekers and consultants suggested that employer preferences dominated.

At a more personal level, the comments of several consultants suggest that interactions with older women may have aroused their own fears of ageing. A consultant in her late twenties, who was discussing employer prejudices, remarked, 'Oh, my god, I'll be turning thirty this year', as though this was a self-evidently alarming event. Another consultant in her early thirties extolled the virtues of mature women but, when asked how she could improve her own job prospects if she were over forty, she replied:

> If I were in that age bracket – and thanks for knowing that I'm not – but if I were looking old, I'd make sure my skills were as high as possible.

Such advice contrasts sharply with the more cynical advice of a former secretary in her mid-fifties who commented that the best thing older women could do to improve their job prospects was to lose weight, invest in high-heeled shoes and become as glamorous as possible.

The consultants' comments seem compatible with Pearlman's (1993) suggestion that younger women may experience highly ambivalent feelings towards mature women because such women personify their own fears of ageing in a youth oriented culture. The relationship between the two groups of women is further complicated by their different structural positions within a gendered labour market. The older women are an underpowered and vulnerable group who

are reluctant to contest perceived discrimination for fear of worsening their relationships with consultants and prospective employers. In contrast, the short term interests of consultants are clearly best served by meeting discriminatory employer demands, even when these militate against the longer-term interests of all women.

Looking good and fitting in

Much of the literature on age discrimination in employment has investigated negative stereotypes held by employers. Among the most commonly identified stereotypes are older workers' perceived lack of relevant skills, resistance to change and new technology, slower pace of work and increased risk of ill health (Taylor and Walker 1998). Negative stereotypes concerning appearance and ability to interact with younger workers have received less attention within the ageing literature. The findings of this study suggest that, at least for older women in clerical occupations, negative stereotypes concerning their appearance and perceived lack of 'team fit' may be important.

Although the women in this study lacked tertiary qualifications, they all had office computing qualifications which they had updated throughout their careers. Despite this, all women had difficulty obtaining permanent employment. Most women perceived rejections based on appearance or lack of 'team fit' as a more intractable problem than skills deficits. Most experienced a rapid decline in self-esteem as a result of unsuccessful job search experiences. A fairly typical experience was recounted by a 61-year-old former secretary who was told by a young female consultant that she was unsuitable for a secretarial position because the manager was a young man and she would remind him of his mother. In her words:

> I was never aware of my age ... but suddenly your age comes to the fore and you think, 'Oh my god, it does count now, nobody wants me because I'm too old' ... This negativity comes through to you from these people and you start feeling negative about yourself. (pause) I lost my confidence in lots of ways, not just for jobs.

The women's descriptions of employer requirements were corroborated by the interviews with agency staff. All consultants placed great emphasis on physical presentation, suggesting that gendered discrimination based on appearance was particularly problematic for women applying for front of the house positions as receptionists.

As one consultant rather cynically put it: 'They always want good looking at reception'.

The male agency owner repudiated the notion that women become less effective employees as they age but also stated that physical presentation can be a problem for older female candidates:

> I think the physical presentation is probably the key thing. We place value on experience but some people have the perception that you're clapped out when you reach a certain mileage on the clock. It seems to be a beauty thing. As you become more mature, some people might perceive that you're not so attractive.

The importance of 'team fit' was also highlighted by consultants. This was defined as fitting the personality of the candidate to the characteristics of the existing team. Whilst all consultants stressed that 'team fit' was not necessarily about age, it clearly functioned as a mechanism for screening out older candidates. As one consultant explained:

> Obviously nobody's meant to discriminate based on age or that sort of thing, but I think what people say is 'team fit' because, if they've got a young team, then they don't necessarily want an older person.

This consultant also noted that during the last decade the age of the typical management team the agency dealt with had shifted from the mid fifties to the mid thirties. She believed this demographic change made it harder for mature women to find work, as many younger managers seemed reluctant to employ older women. Her observations are compatible with other New Zealand and overseas studies that have found employees are being promoted to middle management positions at a younger age and this trend is contributing to gendered ageism within the labour market (Burns 2000; Wallace 1999). The move towards decentralised management structures within organisations may also facilitate ageism, as these structures may enable lower level managers to use inappropriate working practices without being observed by senior management. Comments from both the mature job-seekers and consultants suggest that younger managers possibly perceive older workers as a threat to their authority. As Lawrence (1996) noted, such discrimination may not be deliberate or conscious and may therefore be unrecognised by employers, making it particularly difficult to combat.

Temporary employment

None of the women in this study had obtained permanent employment through an agency, but all had obtained temporary work this way. The positions ranged from full-time jobs in the same company for several weeks to a few hours in several different companies over the course of each week. While all women were grateful to have work, most disliked temping, finding it insecure, lonely and badly paid. The constant requirement to be immediately available if the agency had work and the fear of losing work or alienating the agency by turning down work made it difficult for women to engage in other activities. As explained by a divorced clerical worker in her mid-fifties, recently redundant for the fourth time:

> It can be hard going into strange places, you feel like everyone's looking at you, and you've got all these different systems and five minutes later you have to know it all. It's a bit daunting, but what's the choice? I have to go temping because the dole money's only $164 a week.

Several women compared the relative ease with which they obtained temporary positions with the difficulty of obtaining permanent employment. A secretary in her late fiftiess remarked:

> I find it disconcerting when people say temp jobs turn into permanent jobs because that's never happened in my case. There was one job where I'd been for twelve weeks and then got invited back for another nine and when a vacancy came up I was told I didn't fit the culture. The people were in their thirties. They didn't want me permanently, so I found that hard.

In this particular case, insult was added to by injury by the fact that she was asked to stay long enough to train her younger female replacement. Despite this, the respondent expected to continue doing temporary work until she retired at sixty-five, explaining:

> With temp work, people don't look at who you are, they only look at what you are doing.

The women's perceptions of temporary work were validated by the consultants, all of whom described temporary work as requiring both technical and interpersonal skills and high energy. As one consultant explained:

> Temping requires very hard work, a lot of flexibility, a lot of energy

> because you're going into new environments all the time and that's tiring.

The consultants' descriptions of the ideal temporary worker contradict stereotypes of the older worker. Consultants' willingness to place older workers in temporary positions and employers' willingness to accept them suggest that the reasons mature women experience difficulty finding permanent employment are not simply related to perceived skills deficits but also to more intangible manifestations of gendered ageism.

For most of the women in this study, the constant round of applications, rejections, temporary work and unemployment was eventually demoralising and financially insecure enough for them to move into lower status work in order to obtain more stable employment. Women's willingness to accept lower status employment is sometimes conceptualised as giving them a relative labour market advantage over older men, who are traditionally seen as less willing to downgrade their employment (Duncan 2003). While flexibility in job choice facilitated re-employment for these women, the move to lower status work was often associated with financial hardship and psychological distress. As explained by a former secretary now working as a home carer:

> It's less pay, less everything. I feel [pause] in this job I've got, I'm referred to as a carer but I'm not, I'm only a cleaner. I feel degraded.

As Ainsworth (2002) points out, such significant personal costs are minimised by discourses that construct women's willingness to accept low-paid, low-skill employment as the appropriate response to late career unemployment.

Discussion

This study shows that gendered ageism can be a serious problem for mature women seeking office or reception work. The age discrimination older women experience seems to be based as much on prejudices concerning their appearance and the perception that they may not relate well to younger employees as on any perceived deficiencies in their work-related skills. All women in the study had solid work histories and had heeded standards advice to update their work skills regularly. The technical competence of many of the women was illustrated by stories several women told of being asked to train

up their younger replacements and by the consultants' acknowledgement that many employers were prepared to accept mature women as temporary employees because of their technical competence but were unwilling to appoint them permanently because of their appearance and perceived lack of 'team fit'. The findings of this study suggest that, for older women in the clerical occupations examined here, technical competence alone will not necessarily result in permanent re-employment.

All the consultants in this study emphasised the importance of acting within the law and avoiding age discrimination. They nevertheless described a range of indirect tactics used to screen out older candidates. These included estimating age by asking about women's schooling or earlier career or explaining that 'team fit' was a key requirement of a job. The concept of 'team fit' was used by all consultants and currently seems to function as an acceptable, psychologically mandated rationalisation for discrimination that can be legitimated with reference to academic research on the importance of teams in organisational life.

The actions of the consultants need to be interpreted within the wider context of the agency labour market in the Auckland region at the time of this research. Official unemployment rates in New Zealand were low, averaging around 4–5 per cent. However, the local employers and recruitment consultants that the researchers spoke to estimated that 70 to 100 applicants commonly applied for each clerical position, with up to 300 applicants applying for some of the more desirable positions. As Gray (2002) points out, when agencies are short of job applicants, it is in their own interests to resist discrimination and encourage employers to accept a wider range of candidates. However, when agencies have large numbers of job-seekers to choose from, they are likely to reject 'harder to place' candidates in favour of job-seekers who more nearly meet employer specifications.

This tendency is strengthened when, as in Auckland, an increasing number of agencies are in competition with each other to supply staff. The requirement to gain regular or repeat business from employers may mean that discriminatory employers can more easily condition agencies into accepting covert age discrimination as a business norm. A recent survey of Australian Human Resource managers by Dasborough and Sue-Chan (2002) suggested that the initial stages of the business relationship between employment agencies and employers

is often characterised by a degree of mutual wariness. The costs of early mistakes are particularly high for agencies, as employers tend to withdraw their custom permanently after negative experiences early in the relationship. Over time, the relationship between agencies and employers tends to become more trusting with both sides gaining greater understanding of each other's business norms. It is therefore possible that the increasing propensity for agencies and employers to enter into long term contractual relationships will eventually make agencies more willing to advocate on behalf of a wider range of job-seekers.

The relatively widespread discrimination reported in this study suggests that recent legislative and policy initiatives aimed at ending age discrimination and encouraging older workers to remain in the labour force are not totally effective. The most obvious changes of recent years have been the raising of the state superannuation age from sixty to sixty-five during the period from 1992 to 2001 and the passing of the Human Rights Act, which disallows employment discrimination on the grounds of age. These changes have dramatically increased the proportion of sixty to sixty-four year olds in employment, from 24 per cent to 45 per cent. However, there is some evidence that employers are reluctant to recruit older workers in the absence of clear retirement criteria (Murray 2002). In this study, all the consultants highlighted this issue, also suggesting that older workers' tendency to stay with the same employer longer than younger workers is currently perceived as a disadvantage by some employers who fear being saddled with increasingly unproductive staff.

The government's 'Jobs Jolt' initiative, announced in August 2003, contains specific provisions for helping mature beneficiaries find new jobs by providing specialised case management and re-training. The initiative specifies that beneficiaries in the fifty-five to fifty-nine age group are no longer exempt from work testing and must accept any suitable employment offered by either government or private employment agencies. For many older women clerical workers, this initiative may have the unintended effect of worsening the problems they face and forcing them into a series of increasingly low-paid, low-skilled and insecure jobs.

The business case for employing older workers has been made by many politicians, business leaders and researchers (e.g. White 1999; Davey and Cornwall 2003). This highlights the positive attributes

of older workers and exhorts employers to enhance their own best interests by cultivating a mixed age workforce which maximises the potential of older workers. While there is some evidence that some New Zealand employers are deliberately seeking a mixed-age workforce that matches their customer profile (Walker, 2004), other research suggests that many employers retain negative stereotypes of older workers. This study suggests that the negative impact of such stereotypes on mature women seeking clerical work may be intensified by the increasing casualisation of the clerical labour force and the growing tendency to outsource the recruitment of clerical staff to private employment agencies.

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Exploring discriminatory practices in the appointment of primary school principals

KEREN BROOKING

Introduction

In this paper I discuss the results of a nation-wide research project carried out in 2002 which revealed gender discrimination occurring in principal appointment processes in some New Zealand primary schools. I argue that the original equity reforms that accompanied the administrative reforms of 'Tomorrow's Schools' have lost their emancipatory powers by being devolved down to local boards of trustees in an unregulated context. The Education Amendment Act 1989, which restructured the New Zealand education sector, gave boards of trustees unprecedented powers and autonomy to appoint the principal of their choice. Ever since, boards have shown a marked preference to appoint males to the principalship. In spite of the requirement of government for EEO programmes and monitoring under the State Sector Amendment Act 1989, there has not been a significant shift in the gender diversity of principalships. Equity objectives were devolved to school boards in the original School Charter framework of 1989, but these were watered down significantly in the 1993 National Administration Guidelines (Ministry of Education 1993). In the context of restructuring, the responsibility of equity has been decentralised to the local level and boards have articulated these policies in a variety of ways, which I show suit a range of local purposes that are not based on merit or equity. Findings from my research reveal considerable inconsistencies by boards in the interpretation and outcomes of these policies.

In 2002, men comprised 60 per cent of principal positions in New Zealand primary schools, yet made up only 18.5 per cent of the workforce (Ministry of Education 2002). This pool is rapidly decreasing as senior males retire and the profession fails to attract high numbers of male recruits (Gronn and Rawlings-Sanaei 2003). In spite of the correspondingly low number of suitable male potential principals that one must assume in a decreasing pool, boards of trustees in my 2002 research consistently espoused a preference for male principals. My research findings revealed a range of responses

by boards. Some boards were making very professional appointments. Others were resorting to personal preferences based on 'gut reactions' and stereotyped responses to candidates. The latter are the focus of this paper.

Education reforms

The reforms that transformed governance of schools in the United Kingdom and New Zealand were part of public sector reforms in line with New Public Management concepts (Boston 1996). The aim was to increase responsiveness and flexibility, including new opportunities of leadership (Levin 2001). In New Zealand, the Education Act 1989 devolved administrative and governance responsibilities to each board of trustees for the 2700 primary and secondary schools. Boards comprised elected and co-opted parents or community members, the school principal and one staff representative.

The opening up of principal leadership opportunities for women has not occurred in New Zealand to the same degree as it has in Britain, for a number of reasons. One is the unregulated context around the appointment process that the administrative reforms have produced. In New Zealand, no officials representing Ministry of Education interests are required to be included on appointment panels. This contrasts with the English state school system in which governing boards include local education authority representatives. The current gender representation of the primary principalship in both countries reflects, to a degree, this crucial difference in the composition and ensuing degree of autonomy of the governing bodies. In England and Wales, where the local education authority monitors and moderates the appointment decision, the representation of women is more proportional than in New Zealand. In 2001, women were 84 per cent of the primary workforce and comprised 61 per cent of the heads in British primary schools (Fidler and Atton 2004: 109), while in New Zealand women are 82 per cent of the workforce but only 40 per cent of the principals. The high degree of autonomy that boards here have in the principal's appointment, as well as the fact that they are not subject to any form of central control, has not produced a conducive environment for women applying to become principals.

In addition to boards appointing whoever they like, there is no accountability required at any level by central government in the appointment process. One example of this arises under employment laws,

currently the Employment Relations Act 2000. Dissatisfied employees can take a personal grievance against a *present* employer for discrimination in promotions, but not against a *potential* employer. This has, in fact, always been the case in employment law where personal grievance procedures originated in the old wage award documents. An applicant to a position in another school is not able to take a grievance against that board for the way they were treated in the appointment process, because they are not employed by that board. In other words, there is no recourse to address discriminatory practices in new appointments at the local level. Aggrieved applicants can redress this situation by taking a complaint under the Human Rights Act, but in my study women stated they were very reluctant to do so because of the high media visibility such cases attract. Women principals commented that, in a small education community like New Zealand:

> We would hang ourselves if you dared to do it. It would go around in about two seconds – 'don't touch that person – they are a stirrer'.

In effect, this gives boards 'carte blanche' in the choice of their principal. This paper argues that the cost of policies that have enabled this unregulated situation is too high and needs to be challenged.

Compounding this problem is the unregulated pool of applicants for the principalship with no mandatory credentialing required (Stewart 2000), so that first or second year teachers have been known to win principal positions (Whittall 2001). Senior management experience at the deputy or assistant principal stage is usually regarded as the most important criteria to leading a school in the absence of pre-principalship training, but even this experience appears to be overlooked by some boards. Women hold 80 per cent of the deputy principal, associate principal and senior management positions in primary schools (MOE 2002), while men hold 20 per cent. Yet men are six times more likely to win a principal's position, indicating the operation of a glass ceiling (Livingstone 1999).

A problem that further exacerbates this situation is that board training in the protocols of fair appointment processes is not provided by a central agency. Yet it has been consistently reported by myself and others (Notman 1997; Wylie 1997; Hague 1998; Martin 2001; Kyle 2002) that this is one of the most stressful tasks of a board of trustees. Comments from board chairs in my research such as the following indicated the impact on boards:

> ... the whole employment process in a school like ours – I mean that's a huge, huge ask of people ... people were just so exhausted and shattered at what we'd had to manage in a couple of weeks.
>
> (Female chair of small school with woman principal)

This situation puts trustees in murky waters. On the one hand, as lay volunteers, they are being handed huge responsibilities, but on the other they are ill-equipped and untrained in the function of recruitment and selection.

Methodology

The purpose of my research was to investigate the lack of representative gender diversity in principalship positions in primary schools. I was also interested to find out how New Right policy, reform and legislation has influenced board decisions around this. A feminist qualitative methodological approach was used to collect and interrogate information, mainly acquired through focus group interviews with board chairs and principals. Eleven focus groups and three case studies were undertaken, involving a total of thirty-six board chairs, thirty-six principals and fouteen advisors to the board[1] from around New Zealand, representing schools from a range of socio-economic and cultural differences. I also held telephone interviews with eleven women principals and conducted a postal survey with fifty boards to determine the gender of applicants for principal positions at their school.

The argument presented in this paper draws on feminist discourse analysis as advocated by Carol Bacchi (1999), in order to understand both how the problem is represented in policy and how 'policy as discourse' is interpreted, adapted, rejected or even subverted as it is taken up by policy makers, administrators, principals and members of the boards and communities. It explores how these players read the official and popular media discourses and interpret them locally.

The study found that the most obviously unprofessional appointment processes appeared to ignore stated criteria and person specifications at the interview stage and instead revert to emotional aspects or 'feelings', 'gut instincts' or stereotyped impressions about particular applicants. Often the decision appeared to be based on unspecified criteria that best fitted the board's local circumstances, such as wanting a male principal to discipline the boys, provide gender balance on the staff, be a role model to the boys, and so on. They

used a form of 'local logics' to rationalise the decision (cf. Barth's (1990) concept of 'list logics'). The concept of 'local logics' covers a wide range of factors that are most easily encapsulated under the term 'community fit' or what is referred to in the literature as 'fitness for this school' (Morgan 1986). Trustees were quite open about the importance of this:

> Interviewer: 'Is it really hard to take that into consideration when you are doing an appointment? How is this person going to fit into our community? Is that a factor?'
> Female: 'Yes. We ask them.'
> Male: 'We do the same. "How do you see yourself fitting into our community?" Straight out.'
> Female: 'And especially in one like ours, I mean probably all of ours. There are such diverse lifestyles. We have farmers, dope growers, Dallies (Dalmatians) professional people, families, Maori, Pakeha, and Chinese. That's part of the job.'
>
> (Board chairs of small schools with male principals)

'Local logics' privileged the personal qualities that board members felt were important about their chosen candidate, suited their particular school or community and ensured a comfortable fit. These qualities typically remained undiscussed as criteria or person specifications, emerging only at the interview stage. Often, however, they were the factors or qualities that tipped the balance in the decision to appoint. One advisor to the board described this process as 'loose as a goose':

> Sometimes the inappropriate things, like the gender issues, ethnic issues … some of the gut reactions that we were talking about, those beliefs – people know to keep them to themselves. I'm not saying just because they don't voice them that they are not part of their decision making in the end. Because that's something that we can't quantify really.
>
> (Female advisor to the board)

The gender politics of selection

The official discourses of equal employment opportunity, human rights and gender equity principles were frequently acknowledged in interviews with board chairs, but often quite blatantly disregarded or subverted in subsequent actions or decision making. Comments such as 'we appointed the best person to the job …' or 'gender didn't come

into the decision …' signalled an awareness of the official discourse, but the transcripts also revealed considerable evidence of sexism, gender prejudice against women, homophobia, homosociability, as well as examples of racism and ageism. Two 2002 advertisements for senior management positions that appeared on the same page of the *NZ Education Gazette*, a Ministry of Education publication, demonstrated a disregard for the official EEO discourse. The sexism of both was overt, as was the blatant preference for a male. One asked, 'Have you got the balls to do this job?' and then went on to develop a metaphor of a juggler in the rest of the text. The other called for a 'Headmaster' for a co-educational boarding school (MOE 2002b: 69). The *Education Gazette* is usually much more professional in its editing.

Women were commonly discriminated against when boards argued for a male principal to balance the gender ratio of the staff. They used gender balance as a criteria that superseded criteria related to qualifications and experience:

> Male 1: 'We had eight female teachers. So we decided that we wanted to push for a male teacher – at least get one male teacher. That was difficult.'
> Male 2: 'It just so happened that the same position was a principal position?'
> Male 1: 'At that time.'
> Male 2: 'So you've done it on the basis of a sort of balance? Trying to improve the balance?'
> Female: 'I'd be lying if I didn't say we all prayed that the best applicant was going to be male, because, hey, we would have been an all female school otherwise.'
>
> (Board chairs of small schools with male principals)

This example illustrates how boards use 'local logics' to actually subvert EEO principles. The gender balance of the teaching workforce has become more skewed as older males retire and fewer young men enter teaching every year (Brooking, Collins et al. 2003). This is seen as undesirable because schools, it is widely believed, should be reflecting society. Boards understood the gender imbalance of the teaching workforce generally, but appeared to choose to ignore the gender imbalance of the principalship. Media-provoked moral panic around 'feminised schooling' and 'failing boys' also influenced appointment decisions based on role models for boys (Smith 1999):

> Female: 'The connection to the perceived lack of male role models was very much an issue in our community as to why they wanted a male principal. There has to be those male role models.'
>
> (Board chair of small school with woman principal)

> Male: 'I mean we know that we need males in schools to give role models and stuff like that for the boys … if you had a female and male with the same sort of skills and qualities, you would have chosen the male.'
>
> (Board chair of school with male principals)

Discourses about 'failing boys', discipline and heroic leadership were linked together, reproducing masculinised notions of the effective principal:

> Male 2: 'Our issue is that – they [the boys] still get into trouble, they still break the rules, but when the rules are broken the consequences are consistent. That is probably going back to this guy's cv and him having involvement in Outward Bound courses for delinquents, that was a big part – he had strategies. The other applicant [the woman] was going to remove kids from the classroom and it wasn't the answer that we wanted to hear.'
>
> Male 1: 'Gender didn't come into it. Well, okay, the discipline thing, her size and that type of thing probably would have counted against her with dealing with some of the characters we've got. Some of the board did have "we want a man, no matter what" attitude.'
>
> (Board chairs of small schools with male principals)

There is evidence of the populist discourse of 'failing boys' in these dialogues, with its compensatory culture of aggression (Jackson 1998; Reay 2001), which is positioned against the discourse of women and leadership styles. The addition of cultural 'local logics' to this combination produced even more pronounced preferences for males, as an advisor to one board reported:

> Female: 'Men in some cultures do not regard women as equally suited to some roles … sometimes to do with discipline of students. There are some, certainly some of my Pacific Island trustees don't believe a woman can keep discipline for their Pacific Island boys. They are quite blunt and say, "we need a man to sort these boys out".'
>
> (Principal advisor)

These boards seemed unaware that women who have been deputy principals were usually responsible for behaviour management on a

school-wide basis. This is commonly part of the deputy principal job description. Many are so experienced and successful at this role that the principal rarely sees a child for misbehaviour reasons.

Board chairs also talked about the importance of the principal having an interest in and ability to encourage and coach team sports. By this they appeared to mean boys' sports, as there were no references to girls' sports. The media privileges male team sports, and this discourse is linked to hegemonic masculinity (Skelton 1999) and a gendered construct of discipline – presumably as an acceptable vent to excess energy and an outlet for channelling highly charged testosterone levels. The Australasian obsession with male team sports provides a public stage through the media for national heroes, as well as for legitimised aggression. National male sporting heroes have often been 'failing boys' in their school years, and so sport is seen as an important area in which boys can achieve success. Unsurprisingly then, some boards rated male teachers and principals highly for their interest and aptitude in team sports:

> Male 2: 'It was just something – okay, we'd had female teachers and we identified that we were lacking in the sports side of things. The physical education type of thing. The kids were out on the tennis court doing exercises every morning, that was good, but they wanted to play the team sports thing and that wasn't happening.'
> Male 3: 'So the male … '
> Male 2: 'Brought in the team sports. He brought in the discipline.'
> Male 3: 'That was on the basis of his skills and his background, not on the basis of him being male?'
> Male 2: 'No.'
> Female: 'See that was the same for us. I mean, our ex-principal was good at the team sports. He spent every Saturday with teams of one sort of another at the various soccer tournaments, etc.'
>
> (Board chairs of small schools with male principals)

Another reason used to exclude women from the principalship is a stereotypical notion of single women, in which safety issues were aligned with a paternalistic view that women need men to look after them:

> Male 2: 'An issue with our female applicant was that she's single and that – she would be mid fifties to sixties range age group, and she was going to be in the house by herself. That was a concern of the board's.'

Interviewer: 'Was it a concern of hers?'
Male 2: 'At the interview it was a question raised by one of the other females: "How would you feel staying in the house by yourself, because you've got the school, you've got a school house and your nearest neighbour is a kilometre away?" She didn't actually really clearly address the issue. She didn't say, "Oh, I'm a black belt in Kung Fu, I will look after myself" type of thing. She sort of said, "Oh well, maybe I'll only be here during the week".'
Interviewer: 'And yet you probably wouldn't have asked that same question of a single male?'
Male 2: 'Unless he was homosexual.'
(Board chairs of small schools with male principals)

The final statement illustrates an assumption that gay men are feminised in the same way that single women are constructed, and are incomplete individuals incapable of looking after themselves.

Gender stereotypes, rather than experience and qualifications, were frequently reported by boards as the critical criteria that influenced 'local logics' and decisions about the best person for the job. Interviews with the women principals endorsed that this was happening, although they were not told this explicitly by the board chair in conversations about why their application was unsuccessful. The following account encapsulates the many reports of extremely competent women being overlooked for younger less experienced and less qualified men:

'I mean, I felt aggrieved and as soon as I didn't get the job, having been short-listed. I decided that okay, the message from our board was that it was good enough for me to do all the school development, lead all the curriculum development, do all the performance management stuff, but when it came to two females and a male who had been my third year student in the past, to appoint him into one of the biggest intermediates in (place name), I felt was rather revealing.'
Interviewer: 'So he got the job over you?'
'Yes, over the Deputy Principal and the Associate Principal. We were both short-listed. The DP was ten years older than I was, but she was a highly professional and extremely good applicant as well, and I won't say I would have happily worked under her, but she deserved the position, like I felt I did. Then when we were short-listed, the principal who was retiring was referee for all three of us. Now can you beat that? I was still kind of smarting a bit, having put so much energy into the school. But

I went to see the principal advisor on the panel … and I said, "Where did I go wrong? Were there any areas that I needed to sharpen up on as far as the interview process went?" He said, "I felt your interview was superb."'

Interviewer: 'So this guy was a younger less experienced guy, was he?'

'Way less experienced. I had him as a third year student. He did a couple of years in an intermediate. He went overseas for a while. Well, he came back and he worked for a little while, then he got appointed to a U2 [school with a roll of 50–100 students] as a principal … was in that position, and I mean talking to those principals, they said he didn't have a clue really about the things that he needed to know in small schools. He just didn't have the background. He didn't have the experience … But the whole thing I guess that really annoyed me was the fact that they were saying that you were doing a great job there, but the chances of you moving up within your own school or into a bigger one were really non-existent.'

Interviewer: 'So there is a glass ceiling?'

'Yes. I mean I can understand, I think it is good for schools to get new blood … and had he done the hard yards and had the qualifications, don't get me wrong …, then I would have quite happily accepted the position, but I just didn't have what I call professional respect, because I didn't think he'd earned it. I was hurt I guess about my whole first experience, but when I went to conference and when you get those people saying to you, "Oh everyone feels that you and Karen were shafted". I thought, "Oh, so it isn't just me." It was a perception amongst other colleagues and it actually made me feel better. It's a hard lesson really. I felt personally affronted by the board.'

(Woman principal of small school)

Resorting to 'gut instincts' about leadership has allowed the masculinist image of the principalship to be perpetuated in a way that is no longer appropriate in twenty-first century educational settings, considering the feminised nature of this industry. These practices not only discriminate against women applicants to principalships, they disadvantage children who are deprived of the most competent school leader available. Less competent and unprepared males who are prematurely propelled into jobs as principals may subsequently be hounded out of them by dissatisfied parents (Whittall 2001).

Conclusion

As each community in this study developed a particular 'local logic' to justify their decision about the principalship they drew on market and managerial discourses, and discourses of equity or community to explain their idiosyncratic decisions about their preferred principal. The gender bias that emerged in their selection practices is in a sense unsurprising, when the unregulated context in which boards perform this task is considered. The policy climate during the last fifteen years of New Right reforms has consistently eroded and undermined the original equity and social justice policies of EEO. New Right and New Public Management ideas have dominated the political landscape, and responsibility for employment issues have been decentralised and devolved down to the local level. I believe it is necessary to change present policies in order to limit the unprecedented powers of boards of trustees in the area of principal appointments, to re-establish basic human rights and equity principles. In view of this, I offer the following recommendations:

1. That the Ministry of Education put in place accreditation courses for principals and aspiring principals so that a national pool of qualified principal candidates is available to boards of trustees.
2. That boards be required to select only from this nationally accredited list.
3. That advisors to the board are selected, trained and recommended to boards.
4. That boards be required to use the services of a trained principal advisor unless they can provide convincing evidence that this is not necessary.
5. That boards be required to be publicly accountable for the appointment decisions they make and provide much more transparency about the process. That they also be required to produce explanations of decisions to unsuccessful candidates.
6. That boards be made accountable for discriminatory appointments by being answerable to a grievance process.

In my view, central government has an obligation and professional interest in guaranteeing the quality of educational leaders available to schools. This is too important a responsibility to be devolved to individual boards, some of which clearly do not have the skills to make appropriate decisions. By providing a register of trained profes-

sional school leaders, the Ministry can be assured that quality will be maintained.

The problem of the imbalance in the gender representation of the principalship could be resolved relatively easily by the implementation of the recommendations above. This would ease the shortage of principals and ensure a more equitable balance of women principals. It would maintain boards' right to choose their principal, but one based on merit rather than gender. It would decrease chances of inappropriate appointments which could impact negatively on student learning, and enhance career paths in education by re-establishing a series of steps based on experience and credentials. Overall, it would have the effect of raising the public perception of the profession, and it would guarantee an assurance of quality principals to boards.

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Note

[1] Advisors to school boards of trustees are often principals or ex-principals invited to help the board with the appointment process.

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Talking personally: Kindergarten teachers talk education reforms, 1984–1996

JUDITH DUNCAN

Introduction

This article addresses the impact of the 1984–1996 education reforms and the changes to the kindergarten service, as these reforms were experienced personally by eight New Zealand kindergarten teachers.[1] While research studies have often queried the effect of home on a career, particularly when discussing women and work,[2] the reverse of this question was more relevant to the eight teachers in this study. The impact of their work on their home lives was a major consideration for all the teachers and the teachers identified that the early childhood education reforms of the 1980s and 1990s had increased this impact. For teachers both with and without children, leaving work behind, both physically and emotionally, became harder to achieve. The division between home and work had become more blurred. Between 1994 and 1996, the teachers decided to put limits on the amount of intrusion into their lives from their increasing role as a kindergarten teacher. They worked on strategies to minimise the work that came home, to limit how available they were in out-of-work hours, and to deal with the stresses and worries by increasing outside interests and activities that took them, and their minds, away from teaching. Consistent with their professional strategies, the teachers also began to reshape their constructions of who they were and what they, and their families, were prepared to do in the new education climate.

Women in teaching

In any work examining early childhood, and the kindergarten sector in particular, the fact that 99 per cent of New Zealand kindergarten teachers are women[3] cannot be ignored. Indeed, the centrality of gender in understanding and changing the working lives of teachers has become essential in any education research endeavour.[4]

Feminist understandings of women's lives have challenged the public and private dichotomy. Scholars have traced the division be-

tween the private and the public realm to what they have called the 'cult of domesticity'.[5] This occurred late in the nineteenth century, when men's work took them outside the home into the capitalist market place and women were excluded from the public spheres of work. New definitions and constructions of what it meant to be a 'woman' and to be a 'man' emphasised women's emotional and moral sensibilities. Women's duty of caring was contrasted with men's right to compete in the market place and the obligation for the state to provide care for its citizens. The intensely private nature of caring contrasted with the public nature of business and profit-making and state responsibility for care. Also emphasised was women's moral responsibility for maintaining social order through control and imposing domestic order on the menfolk. These factors placed caring firmly in the hands of women and, it has been argued, laid the foundation for the feminisation of the human services and caring occupations as teaching and nursing.[6]

Studies which have looked at the intersection of the public (teaching) and private (the rest of their lives) in women teachers' lives have demonstrated the inadequacy of research which has attempted to separate the two. Seifert and Atkinson found that home affected work and vice-versa and that the long-term effects were most significant to the teachers.[7] Likewise, Spencer in her research with women teachers described teachers as having a 'triple day of work' rather than the standard 'double day' commonly referred to in discussions of women and work.[8]

> They taught all day, did most of the housework (including childcare) and then did more school work, such as grading papers.[9]

She concluded that the balancing act required of women was extremely difficult and that in research, policy and practice women's marital status and home life was virtually ignored, making women's true experiences and needs invisible.[10]

Grumet argued that the nature of both housework and working with children requires women to accept patterns of work and time that have no clear boundaries; to move from the isolation of the kitchen to the isolation of the classroom; and to accept that their work is secondary to maternal and conjugal responsibilities.[11] Evetts' research with women teachers identified how parenthood, rather than marriage, was most significant in generating home-

work conflicts. This was because the care of the children ultimately was the responsibility of the women:

> So, whereas men can and do talk about their careers as something totally separate and distinct from their personal and family lives, for women career goals and personal ambitions are more intimately intertwined and interrelated. The study of women's subjective careers has to include the strategies they devise for coping with their personal as well as their work responsibilities.[12]

The early childhood education reforms

The context for the teachers in this study was the early childhood education changes of the 1980s and 1990s in New Zealand. The changes in the compulsory education and early childhood sectors were part of the wider economic and industrial restructuring which the Fourth Labour Government undertook in its first term (1984–1987). In Labour's second term of office (1987–1990) the focus moved from restructuring the economy to restructuring all state agencies, including education, health and welfare. The changes, while tailored to the New Zealand context, were part of a world-wide movement to reform educational administration occurring during the 1980s.[13] The main thrust was expressed in the three key policy documents addressing the primary sector: *Administering for Excellence: Effective Administration in Education* (commonly called the 'Picot' report),[14] *Tomorrow's Schools: The Reform of Education Administration in New Zealand* (the government's white paper in response to the Picot Report)[15] and the later Treasury driven report *Today's Schools: A Review of the Education Reform Implementation Process* (commonly called the 'Lough Report').[16] The changes centred around devolving responsibility for the educational institutions to those working and using those institutions, the repositioning of the government as a purchaser of education services rather than as a provider; and the centralisation of policy and control in newly created government agencies.[17] The new contexts created through these documents and the resultant changes to the Education Act 1989 worked to disrupt existing practices in education and were also applied to the early childhood sector. The key documents for this sector were *Education to be More* (the 'Meade Report')[18] and the resultant government paper *Before Five.*[19]

The reforms for the early childhood sector which arose from these were at the same time visionary and offered the potential for a fully-funded and government-recognised sector. However, the tensions involved in reconciling the devolved management structure with an increased neo-liberal philosophy behind funding and welfare changes, and a slow and cautious implementation of the changes, meant that the outcomes of the reforms were not as envisioned either by the authors of the Meade report or the early childhood sector itself. As May noted, the Labour government's rhetoric about funding support for early childhood education was louder than its actions. Due to the slow implementation of the *Before Five* funding package, only the first stage had begun when the National government took office in 1990. As May summed up this time, 'women and children certainly got a "foot in the door" but that was all'.[20] Neo-liberal philosophy at all levels of society gained ascendancy under successive National and National Coalition Governments (1990–1999).

Key elements of the educational restructuring that are particularly pertinent to this article are the increased devolution of administration and responsibility for the provision of early childhood education from the government and government agencies to the providers themselves. Kindergarten associations[21] that had previously overseen the day-to-day running of the kindergartens now had new additional responsibilities as employers, on top of administering and budgeting for government funding grants that covered all expenses, including salaries from 1992. For the kindergarten teachers, new systems of accountability and reporting increased their paper work and much of their time was spent meeting new managerial requirements. This meant time and energy was taken away from the children and the other satisfying aspects of the teaching day.[22]

Eight New Zealand kindergarten teachers

To investigate the impacts of the educational restructuring on women teachers and their lives eight New Zealand kindergarten teachers were interviewed. All eight teachers lived in the South Island of New Zealand and were women. Six were head teachers[23] of their kindergartens, one a teacher who had considerable head teacher experience, and one was a relief teacher. All had taught in

kindergartens prior to 1984 and all were teaching in kindergartens at the time of their first interview. Using a life history interview schedule, I interviewed the teachers in 1994 and again in 1996. While the interviews focused on the education reforms, using a life history method allowed the teachers to draw on the years preceding 1984. The teachers reflected at length on the impact of the changes both within the kindergarten service and their lives more generally:

> Jane: 'My life has to fit around my work … Basically ... life has fitted around work ... . But I don't really regret it and it probably will for a while yet (laughter).' (1994)

Jane's quote is a typical example of how the teachers' lives, in many ways, fitted around their work. This meant that families, likewise, were often made to fit around the teachers' work and the teacher experienced exceptionally long days trying to fit both her work and her family commitments in. As in similar jobs that involve people and children, the nature of the work meant that the teachers often brought their work home emotionally. While several of the teachers mentioned this as something they had always experienced, all eight teachers emphasised that this had increased as a result of the education reforms. Elizabeth explains this as a consequence of working with people:

> Elizabeth: 'I think [the job] takes over because even when you're not at work you're always, well often, thinking about [it] … . I suppose other people in other jobs do think about their jobs outside work too but I think a lot of jobs you can switch off a lot more than you can from teaching and I think it's because (pause) it's a people job. It's more difficult to switch off from it.' (1994)

'Stewing over' the day and losing sleep was mentioned by all eight teachers as something which had increased in the past few years, as captured here by Jane and Lynne:

> Jane: 'Well, I probably stew inside about things more than most people would probably realise I do ... I can wake up in the night thinking about kindergarten (pause) – many times – and stew over things.' (1996)

> Lynne: 'I'm a dreadful one for lying in bed and, you know, rehashing the entire day (pause) and everything you've said to everybody ... That's the worst thing when I get stressed I don't sleep. I don't sleep – I'm not a happy person – and that happens really quickly.' (1994)

Holding themselves together all day and protecting the children from the upheavals of the new requirements had its price. The teachers related how they relaxed at home and dealt with all their negative emotions there:

> Laura: 'My home life is my haven ... because I can allow myself to be grumpy or tearful or whatever, all those emotions. Like at work I do really try hard to have an image that I've always got it together and often that's my self-preservation. But at home, of course, that front can come down and I can swear and cry and grump and argue. I mean in an irrational-stupid-not-thinking-about-it-way. So ... my home is the haven.' (1996)

> Elizabeth: 'There is a side that you've got to put on a cheery face all the time and that's not always easy. But like you can come home and give your husband hell .... They learn to take it (laugh). [My husband] keeps going, "You're so impatient". "Well", I said, "I've got to be patient all day. I can't be patient all night as well" (laugh). And usually swear like a trooper at home as well (laugh). All the things I can't do at work I do when I get home (laugh). Snap at people and swear at them (laugh). Dear, oh dear, it's like Jekyll and Hyde actually (laugh).' (1996)

Margaret asked me, when I first approached her to be part of the study, if I was going to interview the teachers' partners as well. At that point I was merely interested that she saw this to be relevant, but as the interviews with the eight teachers progressed and so much of their stories were tied up with their families and their partners, the question became increasingly important. Margaret's whole family had been involved with supporting her teaching:

> Margaret: 'Oh, it['s] played a mammoth part of my life ... it really probably has, you know. Over the last ten or eleven years, it has probably taken up a big chunk out of our lives really. I mean the kids have been supportive too. If anything needed to be mended, or all those little bits and pieces you'd bring home or notices stapled together. Or you get involved with all those sorts of things, like [son]'s been painting shelves and that in the holidays. Bits and pieces like that .... I mean whatever jobs you get into and if you get involved with people ... it involves the way you feel so it involves who you live with doesn't it?' (1994)

Lynne's response to the question about the impact of the changes on her life also demonstrated the impact on her family:

> Lynne: 'There's no one more depressed than a kindergarten teacher's partner.' (1994)

To clarify her statement, Lynne explained that what happens at work gets taken home and it is the 'nearest and dearest' who have to live with it also:

> Lynne: 'Well, I think it's mainly just because of the fact that you get so down yourself and of course you bring it home and so it just becomes really difficult for [my husband] ... I think that he got really down by it all and ... I wasn't a very happy person to live with so, yeah, it's certainly sort of wore him down a lot.' (1996)

'Fitting in family' left Nikki feeling that it was her family, rather than her kindergarten work that suffered. This had been a concern as her children had been growing up and it had become particularly acute by 1994, as the increased kindergarten demands resulting from the education changes ate into her time:

> Nikki: 'I think my family misses out (pause). To an extent my family dip out ... . I get home probably half-past five and I'm out sometimes at half-past six. So my family time just goes out the back door. I come home and I make sandwiches for lunches before I go to bed (pause) and I may not get back from a meeting till eleven, half past eleven.' (1994)

New increased paper work requirements were being done in the teacher's own home or out of work time:

> Margaret: 'Every night I've probably got something at home to do (pause). Every night ... I don't think the same sort of things were expected of us ten years ago (pause). Always something extra to be done. There's always extras, you know. There's all these rules and regulations – just never ending (pause). Whereas ten years ago things were just cogging along, weren't they really? They really were.' (1994)

Working late at night so as not to take time away from the family was a strategy used by Nikki. Nikki regularly took administrative home for two main reasons: the sheer volume of it – not enough time through the day to do it – and to fit it around family commitments:

> Nikki: 'My best book work is done in the middle of the night. I'll do the housework, get the kids to bed, get the lunches done, tidy the house and sit down and do my book work. And I may work from 10 o'clock at night to 2 o'clock in the morning ... The fact that I have to do more

> to know us quite well over that time, sometimes we're the one that they'll confide in. Perhaps the first stepping stone, you know, "Help me"... because the Plunket nurses aren't like they used to be. You don't have your regular visits and perhaps GPs[24] too are quite costly for some families to go to now. You know, "I've got this rash. Do you think I should really go to the doctor or should I not?" I mean, it's going to cost them money. So there's more of those sort-of situations and behavioural problems. So they probably consult you more than they used to.' (1994)

In the 1994 interviews, all the teachers referred to the need to take 'time out' to be able to maintain the energy and enthusiasm to cope with the teaching day. They identified different strategies that worked for them and the consequences when they did not work. For example, for Elizabeth, Jane, Josie, Lynne, Maggie and Nikki, having other things to do which were separate from teaching was extremely important:

> Lynne: 'Having real projects to do that don't involve work. I think that's really important. I probably have developed more of my outside interests in the last few years. I think that's been a major strategy – just the fact that you can shut off and go and do something completely different. Whereas if you just are moping around the home thinking about [work], well, it just makes it worse and just builds up to be even bigger than it is.' (1996)

> Jane: 'Well, I think we've got a life after work. (pause) And I mean I could be thinking of kindergarten twenty-four hours a day if I really wanted to and I don't think that's healthy for anybody. So you've got to have something other than your work place to think about (pause) ... but I think for your own sanity and (pause) to keep you fresh you've got to have other things to think about'. (1996)

For Lynne, developing friendships outside of teaching had also become an important strategy:

> Lynne: 'When you're in a small community, it's quite difficult to be socialising and spending time with people in your personal life that you also see professionally through the other side of your life.' (1996)

There was a difference here between the 1994 and the 1996 interviews in the teachers' strategies. By 1996, six of the teachers had made a deliberate choice to put limits on the impact on their personal lives in the same way that they had decided to limit what they did

at work. They had worked out various ways to avoid the intrusions into their home spaces. Nikki's family had worked out a way for both winter and summer:

> Nikki: 'I'm doing lots of things, like we go fishing as a family in the weekend and I just sit and read a book in the back of the boat and, as [my husband] says, it's the one time he knows that I can just sit and relax and not think kindergarten. Not have phone calls. Not have any worries ... Well, that's the solution we've come up with – just to actually get me out of the house. If I'm not home, they can't do anything about it.' (1996)

Elizabeth had found new activities to do:

> Elizabeth: 'Just getting involved in things that aren't work related really, because I tended to, as I said, really everything did revolve pretty much around work and work related things. And whilst I had other hobbies, they weren't go-out-and-meet-people type hobbies. They were sit-at-home-and-do-things-by-yourself type hobbies. So now I'm doing other things that involve me going out and meeting other people and making new friends and things like that. I'm much more of a social butterfly (laugh) – much to our husbands' disgust (pause). Husbands plural – mine's not as disgusted as some but (laugh) it's a more rounded life I think.' (1996)

Discussion

While research questions for women teachers have often been how their home lives affect their work commitment, the experiences reported here demonstrated that, for these eight teachers, their work impacted greatly on their home both emotionally and physically. The teachers' 1994 interviews demonstrated that this intrusion was particularly acute with increased paper work requirements being fulfilled in the evenings and weekends. Parent demands spilled over into phone calls to the teacher at home and, in several cases, visits to the teacher's house. Not only was the emotional side of the job being brought home, but also the physical side impacted greatly with increased out-of-hours contacts happening over work related tasks, issues or conflicts. In addition, the emotional toll of the work led to the teachers being unable to sleep, experiencing increased stress and anxiety, and increased conflicts with partners over home versus work commitments. For teachers involved in this study, their lives were

shaped by being a kindergarten teacher both at work and at home.

By 1996, the teachers had put strategies in place to minimise the incursions into, and regulation of, their personal lives. The change appeared to be for two main reasons. First, the teachers wished to have a better balance in their lives and the physical toll in terms of stress and health supported this decision. Second, they wished to have more time with their family and friends. The strategies included finding other activities and friendships to engage in the weekends and evenings, to creating other things to think about and do in place of kindergarten work. These strategies are consistent with other research which has looked at how women have coped with restructuring in other social services and agencies. For example, the women working in human services interviewed by Fisher expressed the view that bureaucratic authority dominated their caring practices and they had little or no hope in changing the bureaucracies. Instead, they turned to changing themselves and their own lives in an attempt to fulfil their ideals in another way.[25]

Teaching, at any level of education, cannot be divorced from personal life. A key to the teachers' stories is the impact on their whole lives from the changes to the workplace. Any discussion of education policy changes needs to go beyond the building and grounds where the kindergarten is located or structures that shape the kindergarten working day. As the teachers' stories demonstrated, the blend between home life and work, the public and private, and the perceptions of 'self as a teacher' and 'self outside of teaching' all come together in experiencing considerable change over the years under study. To attempt to separate them out into 'work versus the private lives' of these teachers would be to dismantle the teachers' life stories and make invisible one real impact of the education reforms from 1984–1996.

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Acknowledgements

Research for this paper was funded by the Blair Trust Postgraduate Scholarship, a University of Otago Humanities Division Research Grant, a University of Otago Postgraduate Award, a Harriet Jenkins Award (NZ Federation of Graduate Women) and a Rosemary Seymour Research and Archive Award (Women's Studies Association NZ). Judith wishes to thank her supervisors Dr Peter Rich and Dr Mark Olssen for their support through this project.

Notes

[1] A version of this article was presented at the 2001 Pacific Early Childhood Research Association Conference, Christchurch. This article arises from a larger Doctoral study completed in 2001 entitled *Restructuring Lives: Kindergarten Teachers and the Education Reforms 1984–1996.* Available through the Children's Issues Centre, Dunedin.

[2] Sandra Acker, 'Creating careers: Women teachers at work', *Curriculum Inquiry*, 22:2 (1992), pp. 141-163; Julia Evetts, *Women in primary teaching: Career contexts and strategies,* (Unwin Hyman, London, 1990); Kelvin L Seifert and Laura E Atkinson, 'Does home hinder professional commitment? The case of early education', *Educational Policy,* 5:1 (1991), pp. 76–96.

[3] Ministry of Education, *Education statistics news sheet: July 1999 Early childhood statistics,* (Ministry of Education, Wellington, 2000).

[4] Patti Lather, 'The absent presence: Patriarchy, capitalism, and the nature of teacher work', in Lynda Stone (ed.), *The education feminism reader,* (Routledge, New York, 1994), pp. 242–251.

[5] Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith, *Gender, culture and power,* (Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1989).

[6] Berenice Fisher, 'Alice in the human services: A feminist analysis of women in the caring professions', in Emily K. Abel and Margaret K Nelson (eds.), *Toward a feminist theory of caring,* (State University of New York Press, Nelson, Albany, 1990), pp. 108–131.

[7] Seifert and Atkinson, (1991) pp. 76–96.

[8] Dee Ann Spencer, *Contemporary women teachers: Balancing school and home,* (Longman, New York, 1986).

[9] ibid, p.13.

[10] ibid, pp. 11–13.

[11] Madeleine R Grumet, *Bitter milk: Women and teaching,* (The University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1988).

[12] Evetts (1990), p.64.

[13] Brian O. Cusack, *Evaluating education reform,* (Paper to the NZARE Conference, 1994).

[14] Taskforce to Review Education Administration, *Administering for excellence: Effective administration in education,* (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, Wellington, 1988).

[15] David Lange, *Tomorrow's schools: The reform of education administration in New Zealand,* (Department of Education, Wellington, 1988).

[16] Education Reform Implementation Process Review Team, *Today's schools: A review of the education reform implementation process,* (Ministry of Education, Wellington, 1990).

[17] Brian O. Cusack, 'Political Engagement in the restructured school: The New Zealand experience', *Educational Management and Administration,* 21:2 (1993), pp. 107–114.

[18] Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, *Education to be more,* (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, Wellington, 1988).

[19] David Lange, *Before five: Early childhood care and education in New Zealand,* (Department of Education, Wellington, 1988).

[20] Helen May, *When women's rights have come to stay, oh who will rock the cradle?* (University of Waikato, Hamilton, 1993) p. 15.

[21] The Kindergarten Associations are the managing body for all of the kindergartens in New Zealand. The kindergarten movement was the first early childhood service to be recognised by the government, in the 1890s. Each kindergarten has its own parent committee but management responsibility lies with regional kindergarten associations. These are linked to one of two national associations.

[22] Judith Duncan, 'Taking the life out of what you do: Kindergarten teachers talk education changes, 1984-1996', *New Zealand Research in Early Childhood Education*, 4 (2001), pp. 103–124.

[23] Head teachers have the additional responsibility for the administration and leadership role, on top of their teaching, within each individual kindergarten. Most kindergartens have two or three full-time teachers, and some have part-time teachers also, depending on child group size numbers.

[24] 'GP' refers New Zealand medical doctors who are general practitioners in the community.

[25] Fisher, 1990, pp. 120–125.

Women senior managers: Successful individuals or markers of collective change?

JUDITH K. PRINGLE

For more than twenty years, persuasive political efforts have been directed to move women into, and upwards, in management. What have been the fruits of this energy and effort? In this paper I will examine the progress of managerial women in New Zealand, a country where women obtained the right to vote in 1893 and today hold the five 'top jobs' of Prime Minister, Governor-General, Chief Justice, Attorney General and Chief Executive Officer of the largest corporation. As a result of these prominent appointments, 'the rhetoric about women's power is upbeat'.[1]

In the process of evaluating the apparent success of women leaders and managers, I will briefly consider the historical and societal evolution of women's culture. Liberal and radical feminist theory will be invoked to evaluate the relative success of women managers within a broad feminist agenda – an agenda that has focussed on increasing opportunities for women and their access to power, as well as trying to increase the value ascribed to feminine characteristics. The progress of women in management will be considered through an examination of common statistical indicators. I will then draw on a research study of thirty women senior managers who discuss their experiences in management and perceptions of the potential for positive organisational change. Commonly advocated success strategies of mentoring, networking and broader organisational change are discussed before considering whether the prominence of women in senior positions signifies success for the individual or whether it is an indicator of collective success for women.

Historical and socio-political influences

Explanations for the rise of women into powerful positions in New Zealand can be sought from a number of sources: historical development of women's culture, recent shifts in the socio-political environment, plus the reactive and proactive actions of women, individually and collectively.

An examination of the historical and societal context provides an

indication of what may be defining features of a feminine culture or cultures. Within Maori culture there is evidence of strong female leadership, from pre-colonial times to the present day.[2,3] Women leaders have brought change for all Maori people through direct action (e.g. hikoi or marches) and actively pursuing agendas to improve Maori health, education, welfare, and economic development.

Somewhat in contrast, British women immigrants were brought to New Zealand as part of the colonising process, to provide 'helpmates' for the male immigrant population. However, these pioneering women did not remain in submissive servitude, where femininity embodied a cult of domesticity[4] and their roles were as moral and emotional guardians. This was a significant part of 'a gendered culture where social relations were understood through a prism of gendered relations'.[5] Yet, as pioneers, women's direct engagement with the physical environment created roles marked by independence and active decision-making. As a result, domestic feminine characteristics were combined with a pragmatism wrought from pioneer life. Consequently there has developed an assertive Pakeha feminine culture, more agentic than British femininity from which most women settlers originated.

These early beginnings defined a woman's place in a gendered culture that was significantly reconstructed through the feminist movement of the 1970s. This major contemporary socio-political movement affected the attitudes and aspirations of many women growing up at that time.[6,7] Many women became aware of the shared nature of their individual experiences for the first time through consciousness raising groups, which led to strong feminist networks. This cohort of women was also the first generation to take up opportunities for tertiary education in substantial numbers.[8] The involvement in tertiary education served to extend their networks and gave them confidence and knowledge to assert arguments for change.[9]

In summary, there is a strong rationale for Pakeha and Maori women to exhibit an assertive and independent form of femininity. There are multiple historical and socio-political influences that have contributed to women's involvement in public roles. Additionally, the feminist movement has contributed to an awareness of the efficacy of collective action for change. Before evaluating the progress of women in leadership and managerial roles in the present day, I will briefly outline two major feminism threads that were influential at the time when the current women leaders were growing up.

Liberal and radical feminist agendas

One difficulty in attempting to evaluate women's progress according to a feminist agenda is deciding which feminist agendas have legitimacy. As Ferree and Hess ask, 'Is the goal of feminism to produce free and unfettered individuals or to create a new form of community?'[10] As noted above, the roots of feminism came from the commonality of women's experiences; experiences that were associated with oppression in the power structure. Changes from this form of patriarchal domination were sought[11] through actions directed towards social institutions, as much as attempts to shift the social attitudes and roles of women.[12] The broad goal was an improvement in the conditions for all women but a variety of feminist theories proliferated from these original bases.[13] I will focus on two dominant strands to analyse the actions of the senior women managers: liberal and radical feminism. Both of these theoretical approaches carried the hope of tangible positive changes for women in groups as disparate as grassroots activists[14] and public sector femocrats.[15]

In liberal feminist theory, the status of women is 'an issue of individual accomplishment' and liberal feminism doesn't challenge 'or acknowledge the power relations within the capitalist economic and social systems'.[16] This feminist theory is founded on the ideology of liberal individualism,[17] and the emphasis is on the 'individual over the community'.[18] Liberal feminist theory is more congruent with organisational structures than radical feminist theory,[19] in that it complies with the hierarchical systems of power. An important tenet is the underlying sameness of women and men, with each gender possessing the same capacities and potentially able to achieve the same performance.[20] This equivalent potential of women and men is viewed as being distorted by sex role stereotyping and discrimination.[21] Socialisation and education are viewed as the means by which women can become more equal (to men) and 'can do anything'. In the organisational research, liberal feminist theory has given rise to an extensive 'women in management literature'[22] in which women were viewed initially as anomalies in management positions and then became measured against a masculine norm.

Radical feminist theory advocates alternative possibilities and ways of being outside the patriarchal system. Radical feminists view the 'male–female relationship [as] the paradigm for all power relationships'[23] and they challenge these hierarchical power relations. Gender

is theorised as 'a system of male domination',[24] a fundamental principle upon which society and organisations within it are structured. Political strength is recognised as lying in groups of women working toward change collectively, rather than action being an individualistic activity. At an organisational level, the concrete outcomes of radical feminist analysis are feminist collectives.[25]

Distinctions and nuances in these two theoretical approaches have been discussed most thoroughly in the organisational literature through the implementation of equal employment opportunity (EEO) initiatives. Case studies have demonstrated the ambiguities and difficulties of implementing liberal and radical theory in practice.[26] These analyses have led EEO action in New Zealand to be reconfigured as into a 'short' or a 'long' agenda.[27, 28]

These two timeframes may be useful to assess the experiences and actions of the senior women in this study. Using short-term accomplishments can be misleading as they are commonly linked with organisational performance, such as exceeding last year's targets. It may be more valid to assess any positive shifts in the organisational working environment from a longer term view. The following section reviews relevant statistics to describe women's representation in public positions and their progress into positions of management over the past decade.

Women in power

To some extent, the rise of women has reflected the nature of the government in power; although somewhat ironically, the country's first woman prime minister emerged from a conservative government. Since the Labour–Alliance coalition government in 1999, there has been a notable increase in the numbers of women in prominent public positions. Prior to becoming the government, the Labour Party engaged in affirmative action within the party using systematic policies and practices to increase the numbers of women standing as candidates, which subsequently resulted in more women being elected.[29] Women constitute 29 per cent of the members of parliament (MPs)[30] and 30 per cent of government ministers[31] – a positive representation when compared to the proportion of women MPs in Australia and Britain (25 per cent and 18 per cent respectively).[32]

In 1996, women made up 20 per cent of the directors of Crown (quasi-governmental) companies,[33] and by 2003 this had increased

to 35 per cent.[34] In contrast, in private sector businesses listed on the stock exchange, women constitute just 5 per cent of directors,[35] demonstrating a clear dominance by men. In these situations, where corporate boards are responsible for appointing Chief Executive Officers, women are more likely to be disadvantaged and even discriminated against.[36] While women have made gains in the public sector, where the selection involves a process of democratic voting, these gains are not as great as might be expected from the historical and social context. Indeed, the recent CEDAW (Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women) committee response to the 2003 New Zealand report recommends that policies and practices be adopted in the public and private sectors to promote more women into decision-making roles.[37]

Statistical surveys reveal that there has been a consistent increase in the proportion of women in management roles. The proportion of women in the broad census category of 'legislators, administrators and managers' increased from 33 per cent in 1991 to 40 per cent in 2001,[38] while the proportion of women in the workforce (full-time equivalent) has increased more slowly over the same time period (from 44 per cent to 47 per cent).[39] These broad statistics suggest that women are making progress in terms of their increasing involvement in higher-level decision-making roles.

Specific tracking of women managers has been carried out through two matched surveys of organisations, one in 1993 (covering 62,000 employees) and the second in 2000 (covering 82,074 employees).[40, 41] Postal questionnaires sampled organisations from both the public and private sectors.

Table 1 shows that there was considerable success for women over the 1990s, with an increase in the proportion moving into management. Nevertheless, the proportion of senior managers who are women remained virtually unchanged. The results reflect the commonly cited worldwide pattern of vertical sex segregation,[42,43] with women concentrated at the lower levels of organisations.

Parallel inequity is apparent when considering pay conditions. An examination of average pay levels for all women, from the Equal Pay Act 1972 until the Employment Contracts Act (1991), shows that the gender pay gap had slowly decreased. In 1972 women earned 72 per cent of men's hourly rate[44] and by 1990 women earned, on average, 82 per cent.[45] The shift to more individually negotiated contracts in

1991 slowed the rate of change but by June 2004 the average hourly rate was 85.8 per cent.[46] The survey findings on relative pay rates at various levels of management revealed that the pay gap between men's and women's salaries was virtually static over the decade to 2000.[47] Explanations are complex, but a contributing factor is that managers are on individually negotiated contracts. In addition, exploratory research has tracked the different and more diffident negotiating styles of women middle managers.[48]

Table 1: Percent of women in management

	1993	2000
Total management group	16%	27%
Junior management	54%	57%
Middle management	39%	34%
Senior management	8%	9%

Table 2. Median remuneration package for women as percentage of men's

	1993	2000
Junior management	90%	92%
Middle management	91%	86%
Senior management	85%	88%

Pay rates at senior levels reveal that as women progress up the management ladder, their level of remuneration worsens when compared to men at the same levels (Table 2). Even the incoming woman CEO of the largest company received a salary approximately three-quarters that of her male predecessor (although it was over a million dollars). Based on the survey findings, the researcher suggested that the success of women's progress into power is more 'rhetoric than reality'.[49]

There have been few empirical studies on New Zealand attitudes to women managers, although more studies have been carried out in other OECD countries. In the 1970s, two key US studies into attitudes towards women managers among male and female middle level managers led to the oft-cited phrase 'think manager, think male'.[50] A replication of these studies twenty years later affords international

comparisons amongst undergraduate students from US, Britain, Canada, Germany, Japan, and China. The tight methodology dictates that respondents are asked to indicate which adjectives describe men in general, women in general, and managers in general. Unlike most other countries that still endorsed stereotypical male characteristics, the findings for New Zealand revealed that 'both male and female students perceived women as likely to possess characteristics necessary for managerial job success, albeit to a lesser degree than men'.[51] The male students were significantly more positive that female characteristics were appropriate for managers, compared to male students in the other countries. The authors suggest that it is likely that the presence of prominent women and the daily media coverage of women in leadership positions are contributing to more positive attitudes towards women managers. This solitary study is heartening in its report of more positive attitudes to women as managers. However, it provides no insight into the experiences of the women in those roles.

Study of senior women managers

A qualitative study[52] was carried out to supplement the broad quantitative surveys reported above. Senior women managers were interviewed on their experiences of being women in senior management positions. According to the usual criteria of success (personal power, money and influence), these women had 'made it'. As women with organisational power, could they be instrumental in making positive changes for women in the workplace?

Thirty women senior managers in the public and private sector were identified through public documents and professional magazines and approached to be involved in the study. Three experienced interviewers[53] conducted semi-structured interviews over 2001–2002, asking questions about demographics, roles, tasks and perceived issues arising from their senior management positions. The interviews were transcribed and content analysis[54] was carried out summarising the major themes that emerged in response to each question. This paper describes the sample and then focuses on the perceptions of whether or not women are remaining in management and trying to affect change at senior management levels.

Half the participants were the organisation's most senior executive (CEO, partner or managing director) while the remainder were in senior management positions; 90 per cent of the women were European

New Zealanders[55] and 10 per cent were Maori. The modal age range was forty-six to fifty, with 75 per cent of the sample aged between forty-one and fifty-five years. The women were highly educated: 63 per cent had tertiary qualifications and 40 per cent held postgraduate degrees or diplomas. Commensurate with their senior position, these women were high income earners, with most earning more than five times the median income for women.[56] Half identified themselves as the major income earner for their household.

On average these women had been in their current position for four years, and six and a half years in their current organisation. Most of the sample had substantial management experience; two-thirds had been managers for more than ten years. Two-thirds of respondents were in the private business sector and the remainder were in the public governmental sector.[57] Demographic differences between the two sectors were not significant, apart from salary, with those in the private sector earning more.

At the time of the interview, three-quarters of the women were living in a long-term relationship and 70 per cent had children. Thirteen (43 per cent) of the women had dependent children (two were solo parents) and one further woman cared for 'other dependents'. Substantially more women in this study had children, compared to other overseas studies of senior women managers.[58] The women with dependents relied heavily on a system of paid labour, such as nannies, sometimes supplemented by a supportive spouse or family members.[59] Due to their relatively long hours of work, they tended not to use systems of childcare paid by the hour and/or after school care.

Interview responses

All of the women in the study were asked, 'Would you like to see senior management change in any way?' Their responses focussed primarily on the nature of senior managers, particularly the 'lack of competent people' and the 'need to develop leaders' in the senior management role. As one woman noted, 'A lot of senior managers don't make decisions easily and hide in the hierarchy'. Another woman expressed her vision for the kind of people that she wanted to lead our corporations:

> I'd like to see secure people. Open-minded people, adventurous people, people who share diversity, people who have sense of vision, fun and all that stuff.

Notable in these comments was the focus on the qualities and nature of people in senior management and how to develop more people for these exacting roles.

Another major discussion was how the senior management role could be enacted more effectively and efficiently:

> [Our role is to] stretch and grow the organisation.
>
> I'm part of senior management here so, if I feel it needs a change, then I'm quite vocal about it. Rather than sit on the sideline and criticise, get amongst them and help change it. I'm a person who, if I see an issue I have to address it. I just can't allow it to sit there. So, that can be good for you and bad for you.

There was awareness that senior management and organisations had 'changed hugely' and that there was a continuing need to be responsive to shifting global and local conditions. This need to focus on the immediate issues and exhibit a pragmatic outlook was commented on by a number of women. It was summed up by the statement of one woman as 'a seriously philosophical question that I haven't got the time to answer'.

In all the responses about changing senior management, there was a significant omission. There was no specific comment about strategies for challenging the prevailing masculinity of senior management culture. One woman discussed how women could survive in the culture but alluded to a process of adaptation rather than acting as an advocate for change. 'Part of the role of women in senior positions is creating change, there's a crafty way you can go about it ... by using humour'. She also perceived a shift in attitudes within the legal field, commenting:

> Everywhere there are more women ... it's far easier to walk into a meeting than it would have been twenty years ago. First of all, there probably won't only be men there. Secondly, if there were, the men wouldn't care that you're the only woman. Things have changed.

Although this woman talked about being the only woman at a senior level in her organisation, she did note that there had been a positive change. There have been increasing numbers of visible women in the profession, which subtly increased tolerance in the culture.

Generally, the women distanced themselves from discriminatory gender issues. As one woman noted, 'Sexism and "power over" is still

an issue out there'. 'Out there' referred to wider society and other, more clearly male-dominated occupations such as engineering.

Participants were then asked 'whether women were leaving senior roles because they felt uncomfortable with the culture'. Half the sample gave some qualified endorsement to the statement with a variety of reasons. Three women included men in their response, noting that they did not believe that the organisational exiting was specific to women. One woman explained women's movements are noted at the top because of the rarity factor. 'I've seen a hell of a lot of men fall out of the system because they can't make it to the top, but you and I notice the women'.

In the following comment one woman noted the high personal cost that some women bear:

> Oh, they already have [left]. And a lot of women think they want to be in senior roles, get into them and hate it ... we've had articles in our magazines about women who lose hair over stress and get illnesses. All the stress-related illnesses are increasing for women who often get into those senior roles ... yeah, the price tag's actually huge.

In contrast, one woman in the private sector talked about the inaccuracy of the common view of senior management as tough and political. She suggested that, if more women had an accurate view of management, more women might aspire to it:

> No, I wouldn't like to see it change but I'd like there to be more of an understanding that it [senior management] is actually a human part of the organisation as well. That it isn't all the tough hard stuff. I think people sort of think, 'Oh, I don't want to ever get to that level because the politics must be awful'. They aren't. I think that might turn off a lot of people, might turn off a lot of women, aspiring to get to senior levels.

Another woman questioned the popular and superficial view that the presence of women in the top roles implied that things have improved for women in senior management:

> There's great role models around and I think we have come so far ... if you look at women in top positions in New Zealand, people love talking about this but they are on a pedestal. Whereas, it would be very interesting to see the actual [numbers of women in] senior management positions.

A small number of women disagreed with the suggestion that women were leaving because they were uncomfortable with the or-

ganisational culture: 'I think New Zealand women would think that they could change it.'

The most explicitly feminist statement came from the CEO of a government organisation, although it was not encouraging:

> Younger women were sold a bill of goods about 'women can do anything' and women ended up doing everything ... It's a bloody dud deal. Feminists were right to say opportunities should be made available ... but then it started to go wrong, I think.

Many of the women in the study were aware of, and commented on, the masculine environment in which they were working. Generally, it was viewed as part of the job that had to be dealt with, rather than necessarily being a problem. One woman outlined the gendered nature of the networks as she fantasised about the changes that she might be able to make as CEO:

> When I get to the top, there will be corporate shopping days and corporate cooking classes, corporate massage days! No more yachting, no more rugby, no more cricket.

These women were at or near the top of large influential organisations and were involved at the highest levels of decision-making. As Wajcman notes from her study of senior women managers, 'Women in senior management hold jobs that allow them access to considerably more organisational power and economic resources than most women in the paid workforce'.[60] What methods could these senior women use if they had the goal of creating positive change for women, even within their own organisation?

Recurring strategies advocated for women managers are mentoring and networks.[61, 62, 63] Mentoring is usually defined as a more experienced and wiser person guiding a less experienced person. This differs from the distant and observation-based dynamic of role modelling. It is a face-to-face, purposeful relationship that is consciously developed between the two people involved. Mentoring is primarily a process which advances the prospects of the individual mentored woman.[64] Hence, I categorise it as a tactic for affecting a liberal rather than a radical feminist change.

This study showed that mentoring and coaching were more likely to be discussed in the government organisations. Some women spoke of the rewards that they gained from fostering and encouraging their not-so-confident staff. In contrast, those in the private sector preferred

to hire people already skilled. They targeted women who were already confident, ambitious and competitive.

Senior women may have an indirect influence in change where their presence as role models may shift attitudes. The potential effects of role modelling cannot be evaluated merely by speaking to senior women, and this specific strategy would need to be investigated in a research study focussed on role modelling. Neither can the strategies of mentoring and role modelling be evaluated in the short term as they have a developmental component that grows over time.

Networks are also founded on relationships but are looser linkages between individuals that have the potential for shared information, shared power and more radical action.[65] Informal women's networks, particularly those sponsored within an organisation, tend to reinforce a supportive social ambience for women.[66] Not all the senior women were involved in networks and a few women, particularly CEOs, spoke of the isolation of being a senior woman:

> One of the things I've noticed being a woman in a senior role is that there is not much of a network for the women. So you kind of hear of names of people, someone over there and someone over there but you might not actually ever meet them.

In organisational research, networks are generally described as being an important source of support for women isolated within an organisation.[67] However, in this study networks were seen more as a milieu within which to pursue individual gain, rather than being a place for personal support or a platform from which to launch collective action.

Many of the senior women in the study also talked openly about the importance of networking for 'doing the business'. One woman noted that senior women networks were more pragmatic than social:

> Generally, it seems to me that the networks I belong to are largely ... they've got a purpose ... They're not just general clubs or something. We don't just go and talk. We're coming together for a purpose ... It just happens to be the way that my life is, maybe. But it's the way a lot of other more senior women work. God, they're so busy.

The masculine culture of the informal 'out of hours and off site' networking was described more and more frequently:

> You know, sometimes the way information's transmitted through a com-

> pany is … informal … so if you're not going to be drinking beer and talking about rugby with the boys, sometimes you miss out on critical conversations … Work will come up and they will make a decision in your absence.
>
> I get sick of the rugby talk. Definitely get sick of the rugby talk, blokes talk about sport a lot. … Sometimes I find the social circuit a bit gruelling.

These quasi-social business networks of male and female senior managers were not likely to foster a shared consciousness for change.

Discussion

Mentoring and networking are strategies that do not tend to create direct changes in the workplace. They are more likely to affect the confidence and self-efficacy of the individuals involved than directly alter either the way work is done or the organisational culture.

An alternative approach that lies within the gambit of senior women is broad organisational change. Such change initiatives need the endorsement of senior managers to be effectively implemented. However, even when the instigator is a senior manager with positional power, change requires co-operative alliances with others.[68] Being a change agent bears the risk of being judged as a dissident, one who may disrupt the status quo and a productive workplace. Additionally, the masculine culture of senior management dictates that these women must deny or at least de-emphasise aspects of their womanliness in the process of becoming 'successful' senior managers.[69] They are specifically rewarded for exceptional individual performance within a constrained structure. To survive and flourish in such a masculine culture, women are required to move away from displays of femininity. With women generally concentrated at lower organisational levels, most senior women managers have separated themselves from any collective power of women.

Identifying as a woman and not fitting within a dominant masculine culture (however that is configured) may place pressure on each individual to alter her psychic state to reduce any subsequent dissonance and anxiety arising from a misfit.[70] Alternatively, such incongruity may be reduced through the individual initiating action to create a work environment that is more congruent with her values.

Even if a senior woman professes the desire to radically change the power and gender relations in senior management, at a practical level the long hours culture, the pressure to maintain credibility and achieve at a high level, plus the additional informal workload from business conducted 'out of hours', leaves little energy to be directed towards change.

Aggregating these pressures on senior women, it is unlikely that the presence of even large numbers of women in senior management ranks could change the culture beyond reformist tweaking. The power relations between managerial women and men, and the relative value accorded masculinity and femininity, remains bounded within the hierarchical structure and reward systems that reinforce individual achievement and masculinity. Although some women in power have been influenced by the feminist movement when growing up, it now has become, at best, a weak influence on the senior women as they play their roles within organisations that are imbued with the norms of masculinity.

The senior women managers in this study have not (yet) created a work environment that is more comfortable for women. There has been an increase in women's share of the power and fruits of management, but only for a select few. The presence of increasing numbers of senior women managers is not an indicator of the success of a radical feminist agenda delivering positive change for women collectively. The under-representation of women at senior levels – especially in the private sector – and the reflections of senior women managers reported here provide a crude indication of a lack of widespread organisational change. This counters suggestions by the popular media that the presence of prominent women indicates positive advances for women in organisations more generally.

It can be argued that the presence of senior women managers might shift attitudes in the future, but not necessarily in the short term. Deliberately grooming potential successors to some of the women in power is a concern for some of the 'tall poppies', but whether the presence of women as political leaders will develop as a female line or remain an isolated cohort remains a question for the future.

The senior women managers in this study have sought and achieved power as individuals, while the power relations and the culture within organisations remain largely unchanged. Nevertheless, at best, the presence and work of the current 'crop' of senior women

can be conceptualised as the fruits of a liberal feminist agenda that focuses on success for women as individuals.

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Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the collaboration of the NZ Centre for Women and Leadership, Massey University, and the University of Auckland Research Grants Committee and the School of Business and Economics for partial funding of this study.

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Women and academic careers in Malaysia

MICHELLE LUNN

Introduction

How do the career experiences of women academics in Malaysia, an Islamic country, compare with those of academic women in the secular west? In this article, comparisons are drawn between the narratives of women in Malaysia and western analyses of women's academic careers as identified in the literature and interpreted through my own experiences within the New Zealand university system. Utilising a feminist qualitative methodology, the research investigates the experiences of women in the early to mid stages of their academic careers, focusing particularly on the process of establishing a place within the academic hierarchy.

Malaysia is not an Islamic State in the sense that it is governed under syariah (religious) laws like Saudi Arabia or Iran. Nonetheless, it is a country where racial preferential policies exist. It is important to take into account the fact that academic life unfolds differently for Muslim-Malay, Chinese, Indian, Eurasian and European women. Ethnicity rather than academic merit tends to mediate access to University, scholarship and career progression.

A growing body of literature exists on the gendered nature of academic careers. Most of this literature considers academic careers in western countries. Given the increasingly globalised academic environment and Malaysia's historical roots in the British colonial education system, it is not surprising that many of the issues for women in Malaysia accord with those identified in the literature.[1] Salient themes in the western literature include 'glass ceiling' effects that limit women's access to the higher echelons, work/life balance issues particularly those relating to child care, and the relationship between spousal support and career progression. There are also significant gaps in the literature, the most striking of which is any analysis of the impact of religion, a factor integral to career advancement in Malaysia.

This article begins by introducing the participants, the research method and defining what is meant by an academic career. Three key

themes emerging from the narratives of the sixteen women who took part in the study are then analysed. Senior academic appointments are not made on merit in Malaysia and the analysis begins with a discussion of concrete career ceilings that curtail women's progress.[2] A limited comparison with the position of women academics in New Zealand is undertaken in this section. The next section considers an issue popular both in the western literature and the narratives of the participants; the work/home life nexus. The supportive husband, a key motif in the interview narratives, features strongly in this section. The religio-political context, an important determinant of career in Malaysia where preferential policies privilege Malay and indigenous peoples, is the subject of the final section.[3]

The participants

Sixteen academic women, from four universities, located in two different States in Peninsula Malaysia, were interviewed. Fourteen of the women were married and two unmarried. Diversity is a feature of Malaysian society and this is reflected in the ethnicities of the research participants. Eleven of the participants were Muslim-Malay, two were Indian, one Chinese, one Eurasian and one European.

In order to evaluate structural and institutional frameworks, it is necessary to distinguish between those who are privileged by racial preferential policies – Malays and indigenous people (bumiputra) – and those who are not (non-bumiputra). Identifying participants by ethnicity would allow for a nuanced analysis of academic career issues. However, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this article and as a consequence I have identified participants only as Malay or non-Malay in the transcripts below.

The research focuses on the process of establishing oneself as an academic woman. I was particularly interested in the period that I loosely defined as the ten year post PhD phase. As a consequence the majority of the participants were in their late thirties and early forties. Eleven of the women were in the ten year post PhD phase of their careers, and two (both non-Malay) did not yet have PhDs. Three of the participants, professors in the later stages of their careers, two in their fifties, shared their reflections on the process of establishing themselves within the university system.

The academic level of participants ranged from lecturer to full professor. Thirteen of the sixteen participants held administrative

positions ranging from Deputy Director of an institute to Dean. Three of the participants were lecturers with no formal administrative responsibility.

The method

Debates in feminist epistemology during the 1980s and 1990s challenged feminists to analyse the differences among women and avoid speaking for 'the other'.[4] Cross-cultural research requires sensitivity to the central tenets of these epistemological debates, identity and difference. hooks, for example, cautions that talk of the other often annihilates or erases the voice of those who might otherwise be speaking.[5] This challenge leaves feminism in the grip of a potentially paralysing self-reflexivity. How do we do research without some degree of speaking for the other? Lather offered a solution suggesting that 'while anything short of full collaboration cannot avoid some degree of objectification and speaking for others, it can aim towards an introspection–objectification balance'.[6] Encouraging and then acknowledging the participants' own analyses of the research questions is one way that a degree of balance might be achieved. To this end, underpinned by feminist principles, the method used in this study was designed to stimulate dialogues encouraging participants to take an active part in the analysis.

Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an information letter detailing the participative nature of the interview, identifying issues popular in western career literature and inviting discussion of other topic areas they considered important. Participants were encouraged to tell their own career story and identify issues they considered important through an interview method of topical life histories. In an attempt to avoid speaking for the other, feminist interrogations of difference often privilege the narrative voice of the participants. In order to capture the analytic voice of the participants, I have used excerpts from the interview transcripts extensively in this article.

Defining academic careers

Career is traditionally linked to the process of reflection on the course of one's vocational behaviour. Investigations of career tend to focus on objective career, actual events that occur in the occupational context, or subjective career, biographical themes.[7] Objective accounts of

career based on advancement, qualifications and job title have gained most attention in career theory.[8] Feminist examinations of career, on the other hand, tend to situate career within structural or institutional frameworks analysing the influence of gender and power relations in shaping organisational structures and practices.[9] In this examination of the process of establishing an academic career, I consider women's career stories within a framework that takes into account power relations and the globalised academic environment.

The question driving this research grew out of a multi-disciplinary reading group comprising women in the early stages of career. In the reading group, drawing mainly from social science literature, we considered an eclectic range of subjects. An issue that particularly resonated for the group was women's academic careers in the increasingly constrained academic environment. Most of the women in the group were new to the university environment, with some having recent experience of contract teaching and research or part-time contracts. Added to this, our university was 'restructuring' at that time, with publication track record featuring highly in the criteria for axing staff. It was not difficult to locate ourselves within Bourdieu's analysis of job insecurity as a means of forcing workers to acceptexploitation in an increasingly casualised globalised market place.[10]

A literature search provided further impetus for the decision to focus on early career and to locate the research outside of a western context. There is a plethora of career literature with a major proliferation of material related directly to women and academic careers.[11] Information abounds on women's careers in the west, while information on other geographical areas is scarce. There have been a number of comparative international studies undertaken since the 1990s with analyses tending to focus on higher education management.[12] Higher education management in general receives a lot of attention in the feminist literature. There is less attention paid to women in the beginning stages of their careers.

The idea of universities as masculinist institutions in which women have limited access to the academic hierarchy and are required to undertake disproportional amounts of teaching are also well documented in the literature.[13] Recent studies undertaken in New Zealand identify gender discrimination as an ongoing problem in the university and suggest the need for future research directed towards providing a more positive workplace for women.[14] In Malaysia, little in the way

of career literature exists and this study suggests that, while there are some commonalities, the issues raised in an equivalent body of literature might be significantly different.[15]

Concrete ceilings

The glass ceiling, against which women bump their heads as they progress in their careers, is an established metaphor in feminist career literature. Some commentators such as Schlafly suggest that it does not exist: 'No one can see this Glass Ceiling except feminists – hence the artfulness of the term'. [16] However, the smaller percentages of women in top management positions are testament to its tangibility. In their study of the (plexi-)glass ceiling in higher education, Quina, Cotter and Romenesko suggest that the glass ceiling can be observed at every rung of the academic career ladder. They suggest that the bulk of the research literature supports an institutional explanatory model in which formal and informal institutional policies affect women and minorities differently.[17] This analysis can certainly be extended to the Malaysian context in which the limits of career progression for women are explicity defined.

Many of the women interviewed moved into management positions early in their careers. Despite this rapid early career progression, they suggested that it is difficult to get promoted beyond Dean and that competition for top middle management positions is fierce:

> Actually there are no women who are VCs [Vice Chancellors] at the moment so, if women are rising up, you just [dis]place them [other women] to be Director of an Institute. You sideline them. There are a lot of women who are Deans but that's about it.
>
> (Deputy Dean, Malay)

Appointments above this middle management level tend to be political appointments, rather than the result of academic merit. Omar, in her report of women managers in higher education at the University of Malaya, suggests that there is no feeling of prejudice in the appointment of women into lower level academic and administrative posts.[18] The picture is different, however, for top-level management positions. Only two women have ever held positions as Deputy Vice-Chancellor in Malaysian universities.[19] The reason for the dearth of women at this level may be that senior appointments are political appointments. They are not made on merit, nor are they open to competition. There

is no accountability and appointees must also be aware of and render their support to the ideology and aspirations of the government of the time.[20] The limits to women's career progression were clearly articulated in the majority of the interviews:

> I have never really thought of my career reaching this [level?], I thought I would maybe get a Masters. I do like to do things well but I never thought seriously of being here.
>
> (Professor/Deputy Director, Malay)

> Well, I want to be a Vice Chancellor one day if I can ... but I know I can't.
>
> (Professor/Deputy Director, Malay)

> As far as staff here are concerned, there is not affirmative action for women but there are women who are HODs [Heads of Department] but I am not sure as far as deanship goes. Clearly, it also has to take into account ethnicity.
>
> (Deputy Dean, non-Malay)

> If I am very ambitious and I am very driven, then I must move along because anything more than Associate Professor is unlikely at a public university.
>
> (Lecturer, non-Malay)

The inevitability of gender inequality in career progression, coupled with the participants' explicit recognition of racial disparity, make for a career ceiling that even Phyllis Schlafly could not deny. In an alternative analysis of women in senior management in Malaysian Universities. Luke labels this the 'concrete ceiling'. She suggests that:

> There is nothing hidden or transparent about women's inability to reach the most senior ranks of the university management, because all senior executive positions in the sector are political appointments.[21]

The women who took part in this study were aware that their careers could only progress to a certain level. The reasons for their seeming acceptance may lie in the political domination of Islam. Mohamad suggests that, although many women do want a policy of gender equity, this principle is invalidated by a religious system that privileges a male-centric discourse and outlook.[22] The myth of individual merit and the reality of a patriarchal support system in

academic careers have been explicated in the western literature.[23] However, the politics of the career ceiling with its untimely curtailment of career progression sits uncomfortably within western rhetoric of equal opportunities. Analysing the western literature on how to overcome the 'glass ceiling' effect, Luke suggests that the self-promotional tactics advocated in the western literature are unsuitable in the Malaysian context:

> Clearly, such individualist and completive strategies ... are inappropriate in cultural contexts where women are socialised to enact a more 'subdued', 'quiet', invisible and family-oriented femininity.[24]

A variety of issues relating to impediments to career advancement were discussed and analysed in the interviews. Fifteen of the sixteen women interviewed received their postgraduate education in western countries in which equality is a firmly established principle. Some reflected critically on the differences between western women's struggles for equality and the status of women in Malaysia:

> I don't like the way Americans treat their professional women ... . I could have stayed in the States, I was offered a post but I told them if I came home I would be treated like a Queen Bee, if I stayed there I would have to slog it out.
>
> (HOD/Professor, Malay)

> You see, I did do my research on gender .... Also these gender struggles are very fragmented ... That kind of struggle as a political struggle or conscious struggle has not worked, so the education abroad has been an eye opener.
>
> (Deputy Dean, non-Malay)

Morely and Walsh point to the paradox of instigating affirmative action in an environment geared to reward merit and point out that:

> ... it could also be argued that, located as it is within the framework of discriminating practices and prejudice, affirmative action policy remains ameliorative and thus rooted within a surface perspective of racism and sexism which neglects to address the structural detriments of social inequality and other social practices that produce and reproduce racial and sexual inequality.[25]

The failure of EEO policies to effect change has led some feminists to call into question the future of feminism in the contemporary

university.[26] Krefting, on the other hand, suggests that a feminist poststructuralist analysis of factors such as ambivalent sexism in the academy and the gendered nature of the micro-politics of everyday life provide openings for challenge and resistance.[27] Regardless of how we analyse the problem, the material realities of gender inequity remain. Ascent of the academic hierarchy and the corresponding attrition of women's participation are well documented in the literature.[28] In New Zealand, women are still seriously under-represented above the level of senior lecturer. According to Ministry of Education figures, in 2002 15 per cent of Associate Professors/Readers and 14.5 per cent of Professors in New Zealand universities were women.[29] Information on gender ratios in Malaysian Universities is limited. However, figures drawn from seven universities in Malaysia in 1993 put the figures at 19.6 per cent for Associate Professorships and information drawn from a sub-set of four of these Universities put the figure at 9.4 per cent women Professors.[30]

In New Zealand, the first country in the world to give women the vote, we proudly parade our women Prime Ministers and Chief Executive Officers. The rhetoric of equality in employment is well established in New Zealand legislation. We have had the Government Service Equal Pay Act since 1960 and the Equal Pay Act, which applied the equal value principle to the private sector, since 1972. But, despite being amongst the first countries to adopt equal value policies and even with the existence of robust institutional equal employment policies, there is still a pattern of female under representation at higher levels in New Zealand universities. In New Zealand in 2002, 36 per cent of all university academic staff were women.[31] Despite the ad hoc nature of information on Malaysian Universities, crude comparisons suggest a similar ratio of women to men in academic positions exists in both countries. According to a study done by the Women and Human Resource Studies Unit at the University Sains Malaysia in 1993, 28.2 per cent of academic staff and administrators in seven universities in Malaysia were women.[32] Information gained from the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in 2002 placed the percentage of academic women staff at 43.9 per cent. While it is not possible to draw any definitive conclusions from the data, it is possible to conclude that, despite the different discourses circulating in each academic environment, the chances of establishing an academic career are not so disparate.

The supportive husband

Almost every one of the fourteen interviews with married women contained a reference to the importance of having a supportive husband. 'My husband is very supportive' could, in fact, be the catchphrase for the project.

The support of husband and family has been identified as important in the western literature to the point that there is a disproportionate amount of literature on dual career couples. In terms of the academic environment, Chrisler identifies the support of family as one factor necessary for scholarly productivity, while Peterson discusses the advantages of being a partner in an egalitarian dual career relationship.[33] The supportive husband label covered a range of practices, from a turn as househusband during the last six months of a participant's PhD to husbands who allowed participation in academic life only to the point where it did not interfere with domestic life:

> I could only do PhD if it was on top [of childcare and domestic work] … I think my husband gave me permission to study so I must make full use of that green light given to me.
>
> (Director, Malay)

> My husband didn't come to the UK [for Masters and PhD study] but he was very supportive. In our culture you are not supposed to go against your husband.
>
> (Professor/Deputy Director, Malay)

> There is a glass ceiling, there is patriarchy and then there is Islam, and the constant tension of, should women be out? shouldn't they be in the home? primarily as mothers … there are these tensions as well.
>
> (Associate Professor, non-Malay)

As the excerpts above demonstrate, the discursive construction of women's 'proper' place in the domestic sphere in Islam adds an extra dimension to the work/home life nexus. Asian feminine values also play a part in that in Malaysia 'women are socialized to enact a more 'subdued', 'quiet', invisible, and family oriented femininity'.[34] Given the combination of Asian feminine ideals and the Muslim emphasis on gender complimentarity rather than equality, it is not surprising that work/home role conflict featured strongly in the life history narratives. The excerpt below emphasises many of the tensions raised in the interviews.

> My husband, at 8 o'clock, he will be in his office and he comes home at 6 o'clock. But I had to run the errands every day and send the children to school, bring them home and look after the children, prepare their cut lunch and take them to badminton and all those things, I had to do. I don't know why, but that is my obligation. I say I don't mind doing all these things as long as he gives me the support.
>
> But it is still difficult because now we need to publish, do research, things that you enjoy doing, you know. I really enjoy doing all this stuff. I want to tell others, I want to share this with others, women can do many things, but not men they can do only one. Women can take the challenge; women are more competent, men are more independent.
>
> (Director, Malay)

The difficulties of balancing child rearing and a work life are a popular topic in western career literature.[35] Fourteen of the sixteen women who took part in this project were married with children. I was struck by the number of children the women had: one woman had eight. My own experience of the academy is that many women have few or no children. This observation is supported by recent research undertaken at Massachusetts Institute of Technology that suggests most senior women faculty do not have children.[36] For Muslim women, there exists both an expectation that you will have children and a lack of public day care facilities. At first glance, this seems an untenable situation. What it does not take into account is that the Malaysian 'double day' is mediated by the fact that it is not unusual for academic women to have maids.[37] Women's employment is also often supported by the extended family. Grandparents had looked after the children of several of the participants while they went overseas to complete their PhDs. Islamic discourses of women's responsibility for the domestic realm, combined with the availability and affordability of maids, produces different balances of freedoms, choices and constraints in the work/home life nexus.

Sexual politics play an important role in the home and in the academic workplace. The supportive husband was repeatedly invoked with regard to extracurricular activities. The participants suggested that even supportive husbands might have problems with women's work interfering with home life:

> I go to functions with my husband because it is expected the wife will go with the husband. I go to functions at the university only if I think I will be missed … (Professor/Deputy Director, Malay)

Women are expected to fulfil their feminine roles and go to work. Formal and informal work relationships that involve interaction between the sexes can be problematic for Muslim women. This is particularly the case with informal professional relationships, such as conversation over morning teas, travelling to and from functions and mentoring relationships. People are aware of the importance of profiling themselves: going to university functions, sitting on committees, socialising informally, and getting known within the academic hierarchy. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the choice to profile oneself will be made:

> I have a husband … and he is – I wouldn't say old fashioned, but he still holds to the traditional values … . Sometimes we have night responsibilities like opening ceremonies, travelling dignitaries and that does not include spouses, so I have to ask him. And he always says, 'Well, do you have to?'
> Interviewer: 'So there are freedoms to go so far as a woman but there are limits?'
> 'Yes, well, I am married so I always go to the Islamic side and ask my husband. Sometimes it isn't so much asking his permission but acknowledging his presence as the head of the family.'
> Interviewer: 'Has he ever said no?'
> 'No, but there are things like I cannot ride in a car with a male staff [member]. It is because he doesn't want people gossiping, oh, I saw your wife with someone. He says, 'I don't have any questions about it, it's just a no'.'
> Interviewer: 'Is this to do with religion or is it just him?'
> 'I think it's more about religion because for him it's the Koran about relationships and all that.'
>
> (Deputy Director, Malay)

As another participant stated succinctly:

> Being a woman, you don't talk about things informally at the coffee table with your peers … Regardless of your ethnicity, it is difficult to be part of a gang so the social aspect is missing.
>
> (Professor, Malay)

The importance of profiling oneself for career purposes is taken for granted in the western literature. In Malaysia, the profiling process is more complex. Serving to limit women's access to informal career networks, gendered social conventions such as those identified

in the excerpts above are tied to religious identity and ethnicity. Like the career ceiling beyond which women know they are unlikely to progress, sexual politics, such as those that would be classified as the workings of the old boys network in the western literature, are explicitly articulated in Malaysia. On the positive side, this means that the reasons for women's lack of participation in some aspects of university life are understood and this may release women from time-consuming obligations. However, as the feminist literature points out, this exclusion from formal and informal networks negatively affects women's careers. The development of professional networks is particularly vital and difficult task for early career academic women.[38] The interview narratives provide many examples of the gendered boundaries to career advancement. However, religion and the function of religious identity featured more pervasively, providing the most striking point of departure from the mainly secular western literature.

Ethnicity and religion

This project privileged a feminist analysis by specifically problematising women's place in academia. This feminist focus reflects my own background and location as a western academic. The participants did acknowledge that gender was a salient factor in career progression. However, the intertwining discourses of ethnicity and religion featured far more strongly in their narratives. The emphasis on ethnicity reflects the fact that Malaysia is a multi-cultural society in which efforts at restructuring society are underpinned by constitutionally enshrined policies of ethnic supremacy (Ketuanan Melayu) which privilege Malay-Muslim identity.[39] As the following excerpts from the narratives of two of the participants humorously illustrate, these policies impact directly upon academic careers:

> Interviewer: 'Politics in what sense?'
> 'Politics in the sense of who you know and the added advantage is being a Malay. But if I am not and I have strong links to a minister or important person then I can still move on.'
> Interviewer: 'If you have strong connections and are Malay is that going to advance you even more?'
> 'Of course, I would be the Prime Minister – hahaha.'
>
> (Lecturer, non-Malay)

> Race governs life in Malaysia ... Even to join the AA, you have to state race ... I always write 'human'. (Lecturer, non-Malay)

Ethnic-religious identity dominates the career landscape in Malaysia whereas in western societies, which tend to be secular, religion tends to be regarded as one factor among many. This major point of difference is reflected in the western career literature where religion does not feature. In this study, religion – be it Muslim, Christian, or Buddhist – was regarded by participants as a positive influence on career progression. For example, religion was seen to 'help people to focus' and 'provide clarity of vision'. My questions about career and religion initially focused on the 'influence of religion on career'. However, the following excerpt illustrates that, in the context of Malaysian academic life, to talk of the 'influence' of religion on career is naïve as the two are integral factors in a complex matrix of identity:

> I was interested in the debates about science and religion and the idea that science and religion cannot go together. I love my religion and wanted to practise Islam so … religion was an influence.
>
> (Professor, Malay)

Another factor that illustrates the interconnectedness of religious identity and career is the politics of what you wear to work. This issue was raised in the formal interviews and in more casual conversations with participants. Several of the women in the study had only recently begun to wear a tudong (veil). Most of the participants spoke of recent changes in dress standards, with several linking appropriate dress and career progression:

> How you dress … is important. Some policy makers don't wear a tudong, but you don't wear a short skirt either, like ten years ago people were wearing things like this [indicating a short skirt].
>
> (Lecturer, Malay)

The changing norms of acceptable attire identified by the participants can be linked to the politicisation of Islam. Liow suggests that recent moves to a more assertive expression of Islamic consciousness are manifest most vividly in the popularity of Islamic dress.[40] Linking the stereotypical image of the woman in a *burqua*, completely swathed in black, to the popularity of Islamic dress, we could view this resurgence as a restriction of women's freedom. However, several of the participants extolled the career benefits of wearing a baju karong in terms of comfort, style, and universal acceptance: 'In Malaysia this is our national dress so you can wear it anywhere.'[41] In a more politicised

analysis of Islamic dress, one of the participants analysed her recent decision to begin wearing a tudong as a political act designed as an active mark of resistance against anti-Islamic sentiment on the world stage. For this participant, giving a keynote speech at an international conference, wearing a veil and being an emancipated woman makes a statement about the power and freedoms Islamic women have. In this context, the veil is not a simple marker of women's marginalisation. Rather the veil is symbolic of many discourses specific to the Islamic context and vulnerable to particular acts of resistance. Although the discussion of clothing was generally positive, there were some tensions and contradictions in the narratives.

> Even though I wear my headscarf now, and I didn't when I first came back from England, I don't wear it at the house when I am watering my garden. Most Muslim women wear a head scarf but I didn't always, only since the year 2000. I wear it because I wanted to.
>
> I think that people do take me seriously. But I tell you what, I will not dress like a woman, I will not dress colourfully ... I will wear tailored garments, a jacket and long skirt or pants if I go to the chancellery for a meeting. It's just me but I have felt it. When I saw other women dressed like this (colourful baju karong), I felt that they would take me more seriously dressed like a man. I don't know.
>
> (Deputy Director, Malay)

Martinez's analysis of the effects of Islamic fundamentalism on Malay/Muslim women living abroad and the disciplinary nature of pressure to conform to religious dress codes reveals similarly contradictory discourses.[42] Some of the participants in Martinez's study felt disciplined or restricted by the pressure to conform to traditional dress standards, while others found it acceptable and pointed out that Malaysian women have a great deal of freedom in comparison to women from other Islamic countries.

The participants in this study suggested that religious identity and politics are intimately linked and play a major part in career progression. Muslim-Malay identity and the wearing of religious dress clearly emerged as factors that advantage career. Feminist analysis is present in the participants' narratives but takes a back seat to religious/ethnic identity as an analytic framework. Religion of all kinds is viewed as a positive factor in career development. Even the decision to wear a veil, a decision that as a western woman I find challenging, is viewed largely positively.

Conclusion

Academic women are part of an international community. It is therefore not surprising that western analyses of academic careers address many of the themes raised by the participants. 'Career ceilings', issues involved with networking and profiling yourself, and the work/home life nexus, for example, are common to both. Other areas, particularly the politico-religious context, are specific to Malaysia. Even in areas such as the home/work life nexus where the issues are ostensibly the same in Malaysia and the west, a different set of tensions are manifest. Islamic sensibilities limit women's participation in extra curricular activities. Feminist analyses of the workings of the old boys' network suggest that such a lack of opportunity for informal networking and profiling of oneself may limit career progression. On the other hand, the corresponding expectation that women engage in activities outside of work hours is removed, freeing women from potentially time-consuming obligations. Concrete ceilings halt career progression to higher management positions but women commonly hold administrative positions such as Deputy Dean in the early stages of their career. The participants in this study viewed their career prospects positively, notwithstanding the concrete ceiling and the lack of opportunity to profile oneself.

Child rearing is another area where tensions manifest themselves differently. Islam promotes childbearing and women are expected to have children, an obligation which does not feature so prominently in the west. However, while child raising responsibilities clearly do mediate women's workforce participation in Malaysia, the pressures are ameliorated by the affordability of maids and nannies and the participation of the extended family.

How do the career experiences of women in Malaysia compare with those of women in the west? The stories of the participants and the limited statistical information on gender composition within Malaysian universities, paint a picture of relative opportunity for women. This article suggests that it is not a simple matter of the patriarchal bias of Islamic doctrine curtailing women's potential to progress.

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in Malaysia, she has undertaken research on change in community organisations, on science and love and doctoral work on feminism and disability.

Notes

[1] Bill Readings, *The university in ruins,* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996); Carmen Luke, *Globalisation and women in academia: North/West – South/East,* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mulwah/New Jersey, 2001) pp. 213–14; Maznah Mohamad, 'At the centre and the periphery: The contribution of women's movements to democratisation' in Francis Loh Kok Wah and Khoo Boo Teik (eds), *Democracy in Malaysia: Discourses and practices,* (Curzon, Richmond, Surrey, 2002).

[2] Asmah Haji Omar, 'Women managers in higher education in Malaysia' in Elizabeth Dines (ed.), *Women in higher education management* (UNESCO/ Commonwealth Secretariat Publications, New York, 1993) pp. 123–36; Luke (2001).

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[13] Anne Brooks, *Academic Women,* (The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, Buckingham, UK, 1997); Brooks and MacKinnon, (2001); Morley, (2003).

[14] Brooks, (1997); Neale and White, (2004); Vasil, (1993).

[15] See also Luke, (2001).

[16] Phyllis Schlafly, *Feminist Fantasies,* (Spence, Dallas, Texas, 2003) pp. 135.

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[27] Krefting, (2003).

[28] Bell and Gordon, (1999); Brooks, (1997); Brooks and McKinnon, (2001); Krefting, (2003); Luke, (2001); Quina, Cotter and Romenesko, (1998).

[29] Information collected in single data return (SDI) and reported by the Data Management Unit, Ministry of Education, PO Box 1666, Wellington, Sourced October, 2003.

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[31] Data Management Unit, Ministry of Education, New Zealand.

[32] ibid.

[33] Joan Chrisler, 'Teacher versus scholar: Role conflict for women' in Lynn Collins, Joan Chrisler and Kathryn Quina (eds), *Career strategies for women in academe: Arming Athena,* (Sage, London, 1998); San Peterson, *The changing meaning of feminism: Life cycle and career implications from a sociological perspective,* (International Scholars Publications, San Francisco, 1998).

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[35] Marilyn Waring, *Counting for nothing: What men value and what women are worth,* (Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, Wellington, 1988); Arlie Hochschild, *The second shift: Working parents and the revolution at home,* (Viking, New York, 1989); Susan McRae, *Cross-class families: A study of wives' occupational superiority,* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986); Ruth Habgood, 'On his terms: Gender and the politics of domestic life.' In Rosemary Du Plessis (ed.), *Feminist Voices: Women's Studies in Aotearoa/New Zealand,* (Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1992).

[36] Lotte Bailyn, 'Academic careers and gender equity: Lessons learned at MIT', *Gender Work and Organisation,* 10:2 (2003), pp. 137–53.

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[38] Kathleen Quinlan, 'Enhancing mentoring and networking of junior academic women: What, why and how?' *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management,* [Electronic Version] 21:1 (1999), pp. 31.

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[40] Liow, (2003).

[41] Although not strictly religious dress, the traditional baju karong, a loose fitting, usually bright coloured tunic and long skirt is acceptable Islamic dress.

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Book reviews

NICKEL AND DIMED: UNDERCOVER IN LOW-WAGE USA

Barbara Ehrenreich, including an introduction by Polly Toynbee

London: Granta Books, 2002, 221 pages
ISBN 1-86207-521-2

Barbara Ehrenreich is a prolific author whose work will already be familiar to New Zealand feminists. *Nickel and Dimed* is an investigation of the question, how do low-paid workers survive in post-welfare America? To answer this question, Ehrenreich set out, initially in her own locality, and subsequently in three other parts of the USA, and without declaring her qualifications (or she would have been presumed insane), to get the best jobs she could find, as a 'divorced home maker'.

The entry level jobs she was able to find, in cafes, a rest home, for a cleaning firm and a huge retail organisation Wal-Mart, all paid no more than $6 to $7 per hour. Some, like the waitressing jobs she undertook in Florida, paid considerably less – under $3 per hour – on the assumption that tips would bring the wages up. It appeared that the tight labour market of the late 1990s had not caused wages to rise. Around one third of Americans, the majority of them women, work in such jobs. Rents, by contrast, have risen appreciably.

After years of living on a good income, with a healthy diet and regular visits to the gym, Ehrenreich was fitter and stronger than many of her co-workers. She worked hard and performed well in the jobs she did, often assisting less privileged workmates. She no longer had any dependent children. Yet the wages she was able to earn in the full-time jobs she was able to get were insufficient for a single woman to even pay the rent. Like many other low-paid workers, Ehrenreich was obliged to take a second job to manage to pay for the absolute basics of shelter, food and cleanliness.

What is life like in low waged USA? For Ehrenreich's co-workers, condemned to live long term on low pay, the situation was bleak. Housing problems were common. Some of her female workmates were sleeping in cars, as their only affordable option, despite being in demanding full-time work. Many others were in cramped, substandard, though expensive, accommodation.

Despite the low pay, the jobs performed by Ehrenreich and her companions were demanding and required detailed attention. Sometimes, as in the rest homes, workers were responsible for the welfare of other people. In general, Ehrenreich found her workmates to be kind, hard working and helpful to others. However, employers appeared to ritually demean and humiliate these employees. Drug testing and personality testing of employees were routine. A general mistrust of employees by employers was a theme that ran through the various types of low paying establishments where Ehrenreich worked.

Another striking feature of the lives of the people Ehrenreich met while researching for *Nickel and Dimed* was the near impossibility of low income earners being able to improve their situation and move out of poverty. Being able to search for a better job is dependent on access to transport, a telephone, spare time and smart clothes for interviews. Accessing any of these is difficult for anyone who has been on a low income for any length of time. It has been found in the USA that poor women are not only worse off than poor men, but are also far more likely to remain in poverty over a long period of time (fifteen years or more) than men are.[1]

Ehrenriech's answer to the question of how the poor survive in these conditions was that they don't. Health hazards for low-paid workers identified by Ehrenreich included poor diet and insufficient food as a result of low pay; exhaustion from overwork; musculoskeletal problems from repetitive or heavy work (e.g. working while carrying a backpack vacuum cleaner), and skin problems such as dermatitis. Stress and anxiety about making ends meet are the norm. She found women working under these conditions whilst pregnant and while sick or injured.

Nickel and Dimed describes an invisible America, and should be read by every American. It should be borne in mind, however, that the situation described in the book has since deteriorated. Ehrenreich did her tour of low-wage America at a time of comparative prosperity at the end of the 1990s. Since 2000, the USA has gone through a depression and a jobless recovery. Among those worst hit have been mothers with dependent children. For these women, there are now only temporary benefits, since the Aid for Families with Dependent Children was discontinued from 1996.

In her chapter on working in Wal-Mart, Ehrenreich commented on the low levels of unionisation in the lowest paid jobs. Change was

already beginning to occur, however. One more hopeful development since the book was completed has been dozens of law suits brought against Wal-Mart by unions representing workers who had been underpaid and working unpaid overtime for many years.

It might be imagined that the situation described in *Nickel and Dimed* could never happen in New Zealand. However, it is quite likely that a similar exercise could be conducted in New Zealand, and that similar stories could be revealed about the plight of low-paid women. During the time I was reading this book, I witnessed a woman who was recovering from a broken back struggling to open the door of her workplace to begin her shift as a cleaner. She said she could not afford to stay off work. This is at a time in New Zealand's history when official unemployment is relatively low and benefit regulations are more relaxed than they have been for over a decade. Don Brash has already made it clear that if Labour loses the next election and a National-led government gains power, he will follow the US example and reduce or remove welfare benefits. Women, who are around three quarters of low paid workers, and their children, will be the ones who will suffer most when this happens.

Ehrenreich's book is a quality piece of investigative journalism. It has echoes of George Orwell's 1930s classics *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*. It is highly readable and deeply shocking.

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Note

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WOMEN, GENDER AND WORK

Martha Fetherolf Loutfi (editor)

BREAKING THROUGH THE GLASS CEILING: WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT

Linda Wirth

International Labour Office, Geneva, 2001

Women, Gender and Work brings together in one volume an important set of articles published in the *International Labour Review*, the journal of the ILO. Many of these articles will be essential reading for academics and students working on labour market issues for women.

As well as articles on equal employment opportunity, equal pay, part-time work and occupational segregation, this book covers the interface between work and family, parental leave, unpaid work, income security issues and gender-based management styles. *International Labour Review* Editor-in-Chief Martha Fetherolf Loutfi emphasises the importance of taking a holistic view of labour market. To seek equality for women at work without seeking equality in the larger society is, in her view, illusory since labour market differences between men and women reflect social constructs of gender that greatly influence behaviours and interactions. She believes that there will always be social and institutional constructs around what is male and female, but that these need not be unequal in value. This view will be shared by many women in New Zealand where policy is being called for on equal pay for work of equal value, to extend current laws and policies on employment discrimination and equal opportunities.

Women, Gender and Work begins with three articles on concepts and values. Two consider women's employment issues from a human rights perspective. One of these takes a 'capabilities approach' to human rights and women's employment rights, which is relevant to the Human Capabilities Framework adopted by the Department of Labour in 1999. A third article by a French philosopher specialising in social policy is the most stimulating in the book.

Other articles are grouped into sections on labour markets statistics, policy issues and the role of law. Three articles on labour statistics by gender, gender and race/ethnicity, and measuring unpaid labour are fairly technical but educative. The first explains much about

New Zealand's data collection and its derivation from international standards. Reading it has helped me appreciate what we've got, not just complain about its limitations. An article based on the ILO's international study of occupational segregation[1] describes this as 'one of the most important and enduring aspects of labour markets around the world … a major source of labour market rigidity and economic inefficiency'. The author found feminist labour market theories to be more explanatory than segmentation theory or neo-classical economics theories about supply and demand or human capital. These feminist theories and concepts appeared to be unfamiliar, however, to the author of the following article on differences in occupational pay by sex. A further article explores continuing occupational segregation in the Nordic countries where pay gaps are relatively low, despite partial reductions in centralised wage bargaining. There is ample international evidence that centralised bargaining systems and minimum wage laws, as well as pay equity policies, can contribute to narrower gender pay gaps.

Part-time employment is an area in which the ILO has been working to develop international standards providing similar rights, pay and conditions as full time employment. 'Part-time work: Solution or trap?' is an article that points out that, particularly during economic downturns, policies that seek to increase part-time employment 'choices' for women often lowering its cost in relation to fulltime employment. Such policies are likely to increase the proportion of involuntary part-time workers – that is, increase under-employment – with adverse social and economic consequences.

The third section of the book is policy-focused and wide-ranging, exploring issues of gender inequality across the whole economy and deep into family relationships. One article looks at how the new global economy impacts on families, drawing on the cheap 'permanent temporary' labour of wives and mothers and requiring long hours and job mobility of high skilled or intellectual workers, while relying on the family to preserve social coherence and transmit the skills and knowledge children will need for success in the adult world. Another article likens the assigning of caring responsibilities primarily to women to the ancient Chinese practice of foot-binding: it restricts women's mobility, their independence and their productivity. A third looks at the way women's fragile employment and their caring responsibilities create an equally fragile financial dependency on men; yet

income support policies and criteria reflect assumptions of privileged, long term employment and of mutual financial support. Within this framework, economic independence is pitted against poverty for many women. The solutions suggested are the individualisation of benefit entitlement – a NZ Labour Party issue in the 1980s – together with income support credits for unpaid caring work.

The last section provides three articles assessing the progress of different laws enacted to address discrimination against women. These cover major decisions related to affirmative action in the US, South Africa and the European Court of Justice, 'supra-national' policy on equal pay and equal treatment in the European Union, and laws and practices on sexual harassment in north America, Europe, the far East and Africa.

Two articles in the book focus on women in management. One looks at management 'style' – do women do it differently and can 'management culture' change to benefit from that difference? The second analyses structure not culture, investigating international data on 'vertical' gender segregation within management. Women may do it differently but do they get high enough up the success ladder to have the chance?

This second article draws on another major study by the ILO, reported more fully by Linda Wirth in *Breaking through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management*. Such international comparative studies are made possible by standardised data collection in ILO member countries. Management provides a case study of a middle class occupation that can provide high earnings and social status, yet it is as much patterned by gender segregation and pay inequality as the whole labour markets described in Fetherolf Loutfi's anthology. Wirth's study of management is prefaced with a short discussion of general labour market patterns and inequalities and concludes with a useful account of ILO international conventions and strategies that aim to address them.

Women are now 40 per cent of the global labour force and reaching higher education in numbers approaching or exceeding those of men. Gender differences continue in subjects studied, which Wirth sees as presenting a real obstacle for women in their careers. Fewer women have university qualifications in maths and computer science, engineering and architecture, and there is a continuing preference for the humanities. Women are outstripping men in gaining medical

degrees and in many countries have caught up in the natural sciences. In most countries in business and law – appropriate qualifications for a career in management – women have nearly caught up with their male counterparts on degrees and have more non-university qualifications. However, their career progress in management continues to be 'uneven and slow'. Wirth found 'glass walls' – horizontal segregation concentrating women in particular kinds of management role or businesses – as well as 'glass ceilings' – vertical segregation concentrating women in the lower ranks of management, with very few in senior executive positions in major corporations. She also found pay inequalities between women and men in similar management jobs. Although this may reflect lower seniority among women, it may also be understated as actual pay is often just part of the reward package offered to higher level managers. Wirth goes on to explore personal strategies and practices for career development, as well as organisational policies that can help promote women to more equal opportunities in management.

Wirth shows many of her international comparisons in bar graph form, so New Zealand's performance will attract the reader's eye. 'Glass ceiling' in management will be no surprise to those who have followed the series of Vice Chancellors' Committee reports on university graduate destinations and noted that the largest gender pay inequality follows a commerce degree.

The labour market patterns and issues raised in both books are very relevant to New Zealand. They can help inform thinking and debates now that gender inequalities in the labour market are once again being raised by government ministers.

LINDA HILL

Note

[1] Gender and Jobs: Sex segregation of occupations in the world. Geneva: International labour office, R. Anker (1998)

WHILE YOU'RE AWAY: NEW ZEALAND NURSES AT WAR 1899–1948

Anna Rogers

Auckland: Auckland University Press. 2003, 300 pages
ISBN 1869403010

In this publication, Anna Rogers uses diaries, letters and interviews to trace the work of New Zealand nurses in war zones from South Africa to most of the World War II arenas. The author is an experienced writer and historian. She wrote *A Lucky Landing: The Story of the Irish in New Zealand* (1996), along with a range of other publications on writing and selling books. She has been involved extensively in journalism and book editing for major publishing houses and holds an MA in English from Canterbury University.

While You're Away is the result of an award in oral history and a New Zealand History Research Trust Fund award. These awards enabled Anna to interview numerous former nurses and Volunteer Aides (VADs), as well as search through written and oral records. The result is a valuable record of part of our feminist history.

The book takes a chronological approach to this history, beginning with the difficulties nurses had in being recognised as more than just 'domestics' – pointing out that it wasn't until the 1880s that formal training for nurses was established. The book explains the lack of Maori nurses serving overseas as resulting from the lack of formal training available to them until after World War II, along with the early habit of sending newly trained nurses (after a shorter course than that offered to pakeha women) back to Maori settlements to nurse 'their own people'.

When a few women insisted on going to the Boer War in South Africa, they had to pay their own way or join with the British Army Nursing Service. The women faced male attitudes ranging from disapproval and resentment to lust. However, their reputations grew as they worked in appalling conditions and shared the hardships of the soldiers. Only three nurses served in the Spanish Civil War, but numbers exploded shortly after this, with 340 trained nurses available by the end of 1939 for service during World War II.

Anna outlines the stories of nurses in World War I, with fifty nurses sent following the establishment of the New Zealand Nursing Service in 1915. These women served on several fronts, from France

and Belgium to Egypt, Serbia and throughout the Persian Gulf. The sinking of the *Marquette* caused the deaths of ten nurses from New Zealand; a major tragedy in this part of our history. Another sad episode was that of many nurses who were caught up in the influenza epidemic as they came back to New Zealand after the war.

A section of particular interest was the story of Ettie Rout and the establishment of the Volunteer Sisterhood in 1915, an event resulting in two groups going to nurse soldiers in Egypt. The VADs continued to be an important part of the nursing sorority until after World War II. The remainder of the book goes into some detail about nursing experiences in various arenas throughout Europe, the Egyptian desert, in the Pacific and Japan, and on hospital ships during World War II.

The book includes a short discussion on the difficulties nurses faced when they wanted to marry while on active duty. Although a few married women had gone overseas as nurses, those who married while working in war zones were forced to resign. Nurses also had problems on their return to New Zealand, as they faced gender discrimination at work and found settling back into New Zealand culture an uneasy experience.

The book concludes with a reminder that the nurses created a special part of the New Zealand identity that soldiers left behind as New Zealanders in war zones. Women who spent time working in such extreme situations and conditions affected the attitudes of all those they worked with.

Anna has written a valuable document that adds to a plethora of war histories. The book is also a valuable addition to our feminist history. However, it is a rather dry document to read, unnecessarily so, I feel. The culture of nursing is captured very well, the stories are tantalising, and the experiences the nurses had were intense and often amazing. It's a pity they weren't written in a more adventurous manner.

JUDE MARSHALL

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ECONOMIC THOUGHT

Robert Dimand, Chris Nyland and Edward Elgar (editors)

Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, 2003, 315 pages
ISBN 1 84064 478 8

The main argument of the editors of this book is that 'the classical political economists gave more attention to the economic and social status of women, and commonly did so with a great deal more insight, than is generally recognized'.[1] To demonstrate the truth of this contention, the book has fourteen papers on aspects of the writings of classical economists, mainly male but including some women, over the period from the middle of the seventeenth century to the late 1800s. The earliest is Poulain de La Barre (1647–1723), a French Catholic Priest who converted to Calvinism and wrote three books on the status of women.

Most chapters usefully contextualise the works discussed, the authors and the earlier writings and historical events which influenced them, including for many the industrial and French revolutions. The economists covered range from the best known of their time – Adam Smith, Jean-Baptiste Say and John Stuart Mill – to the obscure. About half these articles have been published previously over the last eleven years in *History of Political Economy*, the *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, and *Feminist Economics*, while others have no prior attribution.

The editors' case is convincing up to a point. While Mill, in conjunction with Harriet Hardy Taylor Mill, is well known for championing improvements in the status and opportunities of women, few of the other male economists discussed in this collection would have this as one of their main claims to fame. The authors have found and reviewed lesser known parts of their work which certainly attempt to explain, and in some cases seek to improve, the disadvantaged positions of various groups of women. However, most of the insights and policy positions so revealed go only a small way to challenging the status quo orientation in terms of patriarchy and class divisions linked to classical economics. In this connection, at the risk of being thought an essentialist, it is worth pointing out that only four of the articles are female authored, and the editors are both male. The sympathetic treatment most of the writers give their subjects in this

area of their work contrasts with more trenchant feminist critiques published elsewhere on the better known and later authors on whom more has been written.

For example, with respect to Adam Smith, Michelle Pujol wrote critically in 1992:

> Smith inaugurated the tradition of making women and their work (productive and reproductive) invisible, of ignoring the sexual division of labour and its articulation with the reproduction of the capitalist system, and of obscuring the part played by women in the creation of 'human capital'. He started the theoretical institutionalization of a rigid (as well as arbitrary and biased in so far as it comes from a male and capitalist point of view) separation between public and private, economic and non-economic, male and female, dichotomies of which the first half only is the object of 'science' and 'economic inquiry' (Pujol, 1992, p. 42).

By contrast, Chris Nyland in this volume is much more sympathetic to Smith's analysis of sex roles. He outlines Smith's explanations of women's status as changing through the economic stages from hunter-gatherer societies, though pastoral to manufacturing and trade. According to Nyland, Smith asserts only strength and fertility roles as 'natural' sex differences, rejecting the arguments of Montesquieu and others that women had a natural intellectual disadvantage. Smith accepted that 'the process of economic development implied that human progress would involve a movement towards greater equality between men and women' (p. 102).

Pujol considers that Smith's lack of challenge to the structural basis of male privilege and the gender division of labour was largely perpetuated by John Stuart Mill, despite his reputation for pro- feminist ideas expressed in *The Subjection of Women* and elsewhere. The belief of Pujol and others that his wife Harriet Taylor's analysis and critique was far more radical than Mill's is challenged in this volume by Evelyn Forget, who agrees that Taylor wants a more basic rethinking of sex roles, but within a largely unchanged overall social system. Forget argues that Mill's reluctance to see women have access to paid employment on the same basis as men was largely due to concern over the likely reduction of wage rates for both genders toward subsistence due to crowding, rather than concerns over women's competence or the desire to restrict them to the private world.

One fascinating aspect of the book for me was the discussion of no less than four important male figures who all worked closely with

women. These women strongly influenced their thinking on gender issues but are much less well known – the familiar writing out of women from history. The earliest is John Locke, better known as a philosopher, but through that 'a major contributor to the establishment of the philosophical foundations upon which the general principles of political economy were subsequently constructed' (p. 40). Nyland argues that, with respect to marriage, 'his work was without doubt both progressive and emancipatory' (p. 58) in the context of the time, where wives had no property rights or refuge from family violence. Locke rejected the contention that husbands had a natural right to dominate their wives, while nevertheless believing that women would still normally be subordinate partners when bargaining a marriage relationship since women were physically the weaker sex. Locke can thus be viewed as an early precursor of Becker's New Home Economics, seen by many feminist economists as status quo and patriarchally oriented. Nevertheless, he was ahead of his time on 'the woman question'. My major delight in this chapter was to learn that in this he was influenced by a twenty-three year friendship and writing collaboration with feminist Damaris Masham, who has been described as the first bluestocking.

Less well known, later and much more radical than Locke was Nicholas Concordet, whose wife Sophie de Grouchy made a major contribution to the economics of gender. Both were active in human and political rights activities in France prior to the Revolution and Concordet died in the Terror. The editors argue that 'there can be little doubt that her feminism drew Concordet to consider gender status' and both 'enthusiastically embraced the idea that unending progress would lead to gender equality' (p. 7). De Grouchy was pioneering by explicitly recognising difference among women, paying attention to the needs and concerns of working-class women. She is one of the few writers discussed for whom class issues were of key importance. Others are the Saint Simonian socialists, but the book stops before Marx.

A third pairing new to me (this reviewer does not claim to be expert in the history of economic thought) is William Thompson and Anna Doyle Wheeler. They were socialists born in the eighteenth century, influenced by the French and Industrial Revolutions and by Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism. Believers in a collectivist society, where benevolence and reason would triumph over force and an

identity of interest would exist between the sexes, their anti-capitalist, anti-individualist and gender equality writings were unfortunately neglected, 'swamped in Marx's formidable wake' (p. 259), according to Nyland and Heenan. The final pairing is Mill and Taylor, discussed above.

Other women writers discussed are Harriet Martineau, with a focus on economic analysis of her anti-slavery works, and Priscilla Wakefield, who in 1798 published *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex, with Suggestions for its Improvement*. Here I was delighted to find a connection with New Zealand, as Priscilla was grandmother of Edward Gibbon Wakefield. *Reflections* stresses women's responsibilities, which should be associated with greater economic opportunity. Dimand's analysis of her work says it 'took for granted that all useful labour was productive labour, and that the labour of women, whether within the household or in the market sphere, was useful and productive' (p. 196). That argument, frequently reiterated by feminists, is still insufficiently recognised by politicians and orthodox economics.

I strongly recommend this book for providing easy access to a range of economic thought on gender issues covering an extensive period. The contextualising of the writers discussed is extremely helpful and provides a quick history of intellectual thought in the period more generally. This context helps explain the highly sympathetic accounts of the contributions to the analysis of sex roles and gender economics made by the writers discussed. Given the actual extreme gender inequality in paid and unpaid work at the time and the relatively minor changes advocated by many of the thinkers, some readers may be impatient with this sympathy. But if the book stimulates reading of the original sources and careful comparison of the analyses here of Smith, Mill and others with the arguments of Pujol and others less sympathetic to those writers' views on gender roles, it will have done an excellent job.

PRUE HYMAN

Note

[1] *Feminism and Anti-Feminism in Early Economic Thought*, Edward Elgar, Michele A. Pujol, (1992)

Contents

Cover image: NZ Nurses Organisation members gather at parliament with a petition calling on government to provide funding for District Health Boards to pay nurses and midwives fairly, 19 November 2003. *Photo by Anne Manchester.*

ISBN 1-877276-56-1

University of Otago Press