Article

Fixing the Women or Fixing Universities: Women in HE Leadership

Paula Burkinshaw [1],* and Kate White [2]

1   Leeds University Business School, The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK
2   Faculty of Education and Arts, Federation University Australia, Mount Helen VIC 3350, Australia;
     kate.white@federation.edu.au
*   Correspondence: p.burkinshaw@leeds.ac.uk

Abstract: The lack of women in leadership across higher education has been problemitised in the literature. Often contemporary discourses promote 'fixing the women' as a solution. Consequently, interventions aimed at helping women break through 'the glass ceiling' abound. This article argues that the gendered power relations at play in universities stubbornly maintain entrenched inequalities whereby, regardless of measures implemented for and by women, the problem remains. The precariousness for women of leadership careers is explored through two separate but complementary case studies (from different continents and different generations) each one illuminating gender power relations at work. The article concludes by arguing that it is universities themselves that need fixing, not the women, and that women's growing resistance, particularly of the younger generation, reflects their dissatisfaction with higher education leadership communities of practice of masculinities.

1. Introduction

This paper examines two generations of women leaders using two different case studies—the first, Vice-Chancellors (VCs) in the UK and the second, younger women at a newer Australian university who were in middle management positions or are aspiring to management jobs—and how increasing job insecurity and continuous organizational restructuring affects gender power relations at work. The case studies each involved different methods; in the first qualitative interviews with VCs and in the second a quantitative survey, which included provision for additional comments, with mid-career women who were middle managers or aspiring to management. Thus, the study examines data from a sample of top women leaders in UK universities, and a case study of the next generation of women leaders who completed a professional leadership development program for women in an Australian university. The richness of data from these varied sites and methods helped to uncover the exclusionary structures and practices and seemingly entrenched gender power relations experienced by women at all levels of leadership in universities, and how the precariousness of women's university careers compounds these relations.

The data generated from both sites and methods was analysed through a communities of practice of masculinities lens as the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Briefly, this theoretical framework builds on the work of Paechter (2003) who applied the concept of communities of practice to the learning of gender (through communities of practice of masculinities) and this study borrows the extension of her work by Burkinshaw who argues that this also applies to higher education leadership (Burkinshaw 2015).

1.1. Literature Review

Gender pervades structures and processes in organisations. Karatas-Ozkan and Chell elucidate the notion of gendering by describing gender as: "A powerful ideological device, which is produced and reproduced in social situations as the interactional scaffolding of social structure and the social control processes that sustain it" (Karataş-Özkan and Chell 2015, p. 12). Organisational culture, Bagilhole et al. suggest, is a dynamic process that can be conceived as something an organization has, something an organization is, and something an organization does (Bagilhole et al. 2007). In relation to management the concept of organizational culture has been used to refer to a complicated fabric of management myths, values and practices that legitimize women's position at the lower levels of the hierarchy and portray managerial jobs as primarily masculine (O'Connor 2011, p. 168). However, organizational structure is not gender neutral and organizational culture reflects the wishes and needs of powerful men. Thus, the ideal worker is male: "Images of men's bodies and masculinity pervade organizational processes, marginalizing women and contributing to the maintenance of gendered segregation in organisations" (Acker 1990, p. 139).

A key impact of organizational masculinity is the emotional labour expended by women in order to succeed. We refer to this emotional labour throughout the paper because it underpins the experience of many women in leadership, an additional pressure to their workload which continues to reify masculine cultures.

The transition in organizational culture from collegial to managerial governance has been a feature of universities in the past few decades (Bolden et al. 2012). Meek (2002, p. 55) explains that "increasingly pressure has been placed on universities to institute strong managerial modes of operation". Deem (1998, p. 47) argues that 'new managerialism' is characterized by public sector organisations adopting "organisational forms, technologies, management practices and values more commonly found in the private business sector", and it is suggested that this managerialism "gnaws away at professional autonomy and control" so "the power status, and role of academics in university governance and management have declined" (Deem et al. 2008, pp. 22–27); see also (Bolden et al. 2012).

Managerial universities value research above all other academic activities and especially value and reward academics who bring external funding to the organization (Acker et al. 2010). This emphasis impacts disproportionately on women who often have less success in accessing funding (Faltholm and Abrahamsson 2010). So, has new managerialism benefitted or hindered the careers of academic women? Carvalho and Machado-Taylor assert that it is not possible to identify a single impact of new managerialism on gender dominant notions or on the impact it may have on gender power relations (Carvalho and Machado-Taylor 2009). Rather, there are a myriad of non-convergent directions in the way it influences gender in organisations. However, Parsons and Priola argue that managerial universities reinforce rather than reduce gender inequalities (Parsons and Priola 2010), while Lynch et al. maintain that senior management positions in managerial universities are gendered as they are assumed to be care-free; "those appointed are assumed to be available to participate in a long-hours work environment that precludes having responsibility for primary care work" (Lynch et al. 2012, p. 200).

A great deal of literature focuses on gendered career paths in higher education. The gendering of particularly academic careerscan often be established for some women during PhD candidature through lack of support and mentoring and sponsorship particularly in relation to advice about career paths and in the early career phase (Van den Brink 2009), and can then persist throughout the careers of women in universities (see, for example, (Etzkowitz and Kemelger 2001)). Early career academics often juggle career and family. Ward and Wolf-Wendel argue that both motherhood and academic work are 'greedy institutions,' demanding total commitment and dedication (Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2012). Academic mothers must negotiate both institutions without sufficient time, support, and resources in either.

Academic women are therefore often building their careers later than their male colleagues, and are less likely to have a traditional trajectory starting as a lecturer and then progressing through the ranks to senior lecturer, associate professor and full professor (Bagilhole and White 2011). Women

in administrative roles are more likely than male colleagues to have interrupted careers and to work part-time. Consequently, women in universities face increasingly precarious career paths due to lack of job security, the impact of managerialism and heavy workloads (Bagilhole and White 2013; White et al. 2011; O'Connor 2014). And although the representation of women in leadership roles has increased, it is mostly in administrative areas (Burkinshaw 2015). While Sandberg (2013) argues that women in leadership roles can improve working conditions for all women in organisations, one of her critics asserts that "Relying on one woman at the top, or even a handful, to understand what all women below them need and to act on that is simply naïve" (Covert 2013).

Hence, the focus is often on women's deficits in HE leadership rather than the "organisational culture as the problem and take[ing] a systemic approach to re-visioning work cultures" (De Vries and Webb 2005). Such explanations, O'Connor asserts: "implicitly or explicitly define women as 'the problem' and so obviate the need to look at intra-organisational culture and procedures in explaining these patterns" (O'Connor 2011, p. 179). Whereas, successful leaders in organisations question work cultures by carefully interpreting uncertainty for colleagues across the institution and frame the current situation in ways that collaboratively connect with others, so this helps to reposition organisational work cultures as problematic rather than (women) leaders (Fairhurst 2011). Fundamentally higher education leadership cultures are manifest through communities of practice as the prerequisites are well satisfied: domain of knowledge; community of people; and shared practice (Wenger 1998). Through participation in the leadership community its members establish norms and build collaborative relationships. Their interactions as members create a shared understanding of what brings them together, their joint enterprise. As part of its practice, leadership communities produce communal resources, their shared repertoire. Communities of practice provide a context for people to learn: learning skills, knowledge, behaviours and attitudes; in other words, learning leadership. Members of (leadership) communities of practice hold certain status—apprentice, legitimate peripheral participation, and full member—with some remaining as outsiders (other) who never fully belong. The *other* is an outlier, on the margins and sometimes not even tolerated. *Othering* is barely acceptable even when mainstream behaviours are absent such that leaders practicing their gender through femininities are familiar with feelings of *othering*. This positioning transfers into the workplace where *othering* is reinforced and reproduced by (leadership) communities of practice of masculinities (Paechter 2003). As the literature on communities of practice shapes the theoretical framework for this study it is explored further in the methodology section below. Furthermore, the framework used to analyse data from the two case studies was communities of practice of masculinities and femininities which Burkinshaw found help us to learn about leadership in higher education (Burkinshaw 2015). Fundamentally leadership is a community performance which historically learned masculinities.

While much has been written about women not measuring up to the demands of the modern managerial university (Bagilhole and White 2011; O'Connor 2014), women themselves assert that they have been marginalized in the gendered research economy (Lynch et al. 2012; Morley 2014) which perpetuates their continued under-representation. Although managerialism in higher education can provide opportunities for women to develop their careers, in reality it perpetuates and even intensifies the gendered organizational culture (Acker 1990). Thus, women report being more affected by heavy workloads (Barrett and Barrett 2011) often due to the precariousness of their contracts, combined with their wish to 'do a good job' (Kandiko Howson et al. 2015).

Thus 'the problem is women' appears to shift the responsibility towards programs and measures aimed at 'fixing the women' and away from the organisation reflecting on a culture that is not generally encouraging to women. This emphasis on fixing the women helps to rationalise why women are not progressing in their careers (Ely and Meyerson 2000). Such a 'deficit model' focuses on why women do not measure up to HE leadership roles and does not inspire confidence in building career paths or in their institution, adding yet again to the precariousness of their leadership careers. Not surprisingly some women can become ambivalent about their role in the academy and disengage

(Blackmore and Sachs 2007), while others look at and dismiss HE leadership, making a conscious decision in the current organizational context not to seek leadership roles (Morley 2014).

It can therefore be asserted that the organizational culture of higher education needs fixing (Fitzgerald and Wilkinson 2010), rather than the women. This viewpoint emphasises the social justice case for women not continuing to be marginalised in HE and raises the question about whether or not "it is in society's interest to perpetuate lack of diversity in senior leadership positions" (O'Connor et al. 2015).

1.2. Methodology

The first case study was semi-structured interviews with 18 senior women professors who were leading UK higher education institutions (normally as vice-chancellor/principal/president) between 2010 and 2013. The second study was an on-line survey in March and April 2014 which was an evaluation of a professional leadership development program for women (the Women in Leadership (WiL) program) at a newer Australian university undertaken nine months after its completion. 53 per cent of the 85 participants completed the survey which is the average for reported response rates in the field (Baruch and Holtom 2008). While most of the survey questions required responses on a five point Likert scale, they also provided an opportunity for respondents to make comments. This is a mixed methods study. It merges two different data sets—the first qualitative interviews and the second a quantitative survey—and uses different methods to address the research problem (Creswell and Plano-Clark 2008). The study does not seek to directly compare these two individual cases. Thus, this research design enables the findings to be generalized to different groups (Morse 2003). The study also acknowledges the similarity in the context of higher education in Australia and the UK. Australian universities were traditionally based on the British model and universities in both countries operate within national equal opportunities legislative frameworks.

The above literature review introduced the theoretical framework which was used to analyse the data from the two case studies. This framework is higher education leadership communities of practice of masculinities (and femininities). Burkinshaw found that exploring women in leadership through the lens of communities of practice of masculinities helps to illuminate HE leadership cultures and the learning of leadership (Burkinshaw 2015). Communities of practice engender networks of full members, apprentices or those practising 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Wenger 1998), whereby membership at any level requires 'fitting in' to some extent. Membership of these networks helps create "individual and group identity" (Wenger 1998, p. 73) and "learning full participation in a community of masculinity or femininity practice is about learning one's own identity and how to enact it" (Paechter 2003). Thus gender is fluid, not a fixed state, so precarious in itself, meaning that learning leadership and power relations in higher education are also fluid and determined to some extent by membership of these communities of practice. So fundamentally leadership is a community performance which historically inevitably learned masculinities because people learn to be leaders within higher education through leadership communities of practice and these predominantly perform masculinities. Moreover, these communities define their membership by initiating emerging leaders as novices, apprentices (practicing legitimate peripheral participation) and (for some) full members. By using communities of practice of masculinities to interpret the learning of leadership we allow for the fluidity of boundaries across and between different masculinities and femininities and for local and negotiated ways of being. This recognises how resistant these communities are to change and that leadership (and leaders) can be constrained by membership of communities of practice of masculinities. Hence communities of practice of masculinities traditionally have shaped leadership practices and forged the status quo and we are therefore using leadership communities of practice as a framework to analyse our data. The interviews from the UK case study were transcribed by the interviewer, so analysis started at that point. Themes emerged both inductively from the interview data as well as having been framed by the questions which were also informed by the literature. The data analysis software Atlas Ti helped to code these themes during the analysis process. In the Australian case study,

thematic analysis was undertaken in the light of themes emerging from the data in conjunction with those from the literature.

We argue that this theoretical framework underpinning our data analysis helps us to understand whether or not women are 'fitting in' to those HE networks (communities of practice) which are crucial for career enhancement. This argument is strengthened by Williams' (Williams 2012) repudiation of 'ideal worker norms' which are reinforced by lack of flexibility in working practices despite equality policies (which she describes as 'shelf paper'). These ideal worker norms (long hours' culture, prioritization of work, support from home) are reproduced by communities of practices of masculinities which deny flexibility and even create 'flexibility stigma'. Williams found that 33% of professors did not request parental leave because they feared career penalties. Similarly, our framework builds on women's experiences of homosociability in the workplace (O'Connor 2014) whereby male (and female) members of leadership networks (communities of practice of masculinities) are continually "mobilising masculinities" which exclude and disadvantage "the other" (Martin 2001, p. 589), Burkinshaw proposes that this framework of higher education leadership communities of practice can contribute to the absence of networking for women (Burkinshaw 2015), another performative practice crucial to building leadership power relations and careers.

Overall our framework reflects higher education gender power relations that involve exclusionary structures and practices which are exacerbated by precarious careers. For the women in our studies this means more pressure on the one hand on their emotional workload of 'fitting in' to get on, or on the other hand resistance to taking on more leadership communities of practice (O'Connor 2001). Fundamentally we argue that our theoretical framework helps to explain the seemingly intransigent nature of leadership cultures thus perpetuating the status quo. Nevertheless, more hopefully, we also show through both our case studies that a combination of agency and dedicated initiatives has a potential to bring about change. For example, a recent initiative in the UK is 'Sci Sisters', a scientific sisterhood with the aim of building a network that underpins deserved confidence among senior women and highlights excellence (http://www.chemicalimbalance.ed.ac.uk/scisister/).

2. Results

2.1. Case Study 1

The first case study found that even women who had succeeded to very senior roles in UK higher education still experienced precarious careers in the process. Although it might be expected that women who had reached top positions would be treated with respect by senior colleagues, their experience of leadership could often be quite confronting and be characterized by men behaving in an aggressive, loud and domineering manner, particularly in meetings with other senior managers. As one interviewee described it:

> Just them [men] being louder, talking more, dominating more, whether it's round the board table or any kind of meeting men tend to be more assertive and more confident about what they are saying and they express what they are saying in a different way as well. Women use words like, perhaps, potentially, like, might wish, but the sayings, the verbs and adjectives for men are different ones. The language they use is different.

Another interviewee made a similar observation:

> I think a lot of male leaders repeat themselves and use up air time, this is a bit tricky, and I think that there is a danger for women if they do that because women who take up air time will be seen to be taking up air time and men are not seen to be taking up air time so women can't behave like that because it's not seen the same way.

It seemed here like a case of women being dammed if they do and dammed if they don't. What is being described are acceptable ways of behaving for men in HE leadership ('repeat themselves and

use up air time') which are nevertheless not acceptable for women 'so women can't behave like that because it's not seen the same way'. The double bind is that women can try hard at 'fitting in' but they cannot do so in the way that men do. However, it is not clear what *is* an acceptable mode of behaviour for senior women in HE.

Consequently, women were aware that they were operating in a highly competitive environment (Acker 1990), where it was often hard to be heard, where their performance was evaluated differently and where they were not being promoted by their peers, as the following interviewee explained:

> there's something about this rather male dominated environment that says they see these pushy bright men as having more potential. Women who are perhaps not shouting so much about what they are doing, I don't know what it is, who are actually good or sometimes better at work are not being tapped on the shoulder.

Women then were often ignored by talent spotters in favour of 'pushy bright men'. The issue here was that women needed to more loudly promote their potential.

For women to be promoted through the gendered organisational hierarchy they needed to work hard at 'fitting in' to masculine models of leadership, often denying their femininity:

> It might be a male culture but there are certain things you cannot do at work. Losing emotional control, you cannot do. It's a sort of no-no.

Again, what is being described is a narrow masculinist definition of acceptable behaviour in HE leadership usually associated with transactional leadership (Currie et al. 2002). On the one hand, senior male managers can be aggressive, loud and overbearing, but on the other women cannot express themselves in a way that leads to losing emotional control. Women as leaders often prefer a more open, expressive style described as transformational leadership; that is, to use an interactive style, share power and information, use personal power, enhance people's self-worth, and make them feel part of the organization (Rosener 1990). Lipman-Blumen (1992) similarly talks about connective leadership styles—collaborative, contributive and mentoring behaviour—in which women excel. But it is evident that HE leadership continues to reward transactional leadership.

Ultimately part of this 'fitting in' was to also understand how leadership operated within higher education and how masculinist leadership was the only acceptable form of leadership, rather than to challenge these accepted norms, as the following interviewee explained:

> I think leadership is defined by powerful leadership, it's if you look at the words you use to describe leaders they tend to be male words and sometimes they put in the odd thing about nurturing and engaging people, that's a girly thing. Things like that. They tend to be male in that sense. Actually, the way that the leadership club works tends to be like that, a club. Let's have a beer. Let's meet for breakfast. That's all the constructs about meetings. You go to meetings and you have to stand from the floor and orate. That's a very male thing, rather than sitting down and having a discussion.

This description elaborates on the aggressive domineering behaviour described above. As well as the aggression, there are strict rules of conduct for university leaders—the language they use (which is male) and ways of networking which operate like a male club with rituals such as having a beer or having breakfast together. This 'clubbiness' then translates into how HE leaders behave in more formal settings: in meetings men stand from the floor and orate—suggesting a sense of performance and needing to impress that reinforces a sense of entitlement men have as university leaders (Bagilhole and White 2013). In contrast, women might prefer to sit down and discuss an issue.

The picture painted here was of exclusionary structures and practices that reflect traditional male values, consistent with Acker's view. There seemed to be no room for experimenting with a different leadership style. A consultative style—sitting around the table—was not condoned, nor was taking a less definite position in discussions—and using words like 'perhaps, potentially, like, might

wish'. Rather, HE leaders needed to be confident and assertive and did this by 'being louder, talking more, dominating more'. This robust homosociability in HE leadership, also observed by O'Connor and Lynch et al. (O'Connor 2014; Lynch et al. 2012), demonstrates strong communities of practice of masculinities and provides the context in which women build their careers.

These women Vice-Chancellors had a choice about whether or not they wished to pursue leadership ambitions, given that they fully understood the masculinist context in which university leadership operates. So, in order to be successful, they had to learn to navigate and negotiate the gendered organisational culture in order to overcome its obstacles for women, as the following interviewee explains:

> I think sometimes women think that they do have to behave in this way too. Probably I find myself occasionally doing it and recognizing it's not my natural way of behaving and I see it occasionally in other women. Whether it's the women that get into roles like that have a bit of male feistiness about them and they are prepared to put themselves in that position or when they are there they change their behaviour. It's about survival partly.

It was evident here that this woman VC had to behave differently in order to fit in, and had to suppress her preferred leadership style or even to explore what might be an alternative style with which she was comfortable ('it's not my natural way of behaving'). Such a straightjacket could be the high price women paid to become successful leaders. The note that 'It's about survival partly' suggests that once women make a decision to pursue leadership roles and ultimately reached top jobs, there was little room to move; it was merely a matter of working out strategies to survive in order to maintain their position.

For women who had reached top positions, survival in HE leadership could come in many forms as demonstrated in the following two examples. One woman discussed decisions that needed to be made about how she dressed and the impact that had on perceptions of her leadership:

> I look at my own personal growth I think personally in trying to establish how I am comfortable operating. In the early days, it was power suit dressing time and there was a lot of emulating of what men would have done. I was not immune to that. I think nurture versus nature. You are influenced by what's going on and what you are about.

She admitted to being influenced by power dressing for women and trying to emulate men. In this description, there seems to be little room to move in choosing appropriate clothes for the role or exploring what clothing might be appropriate. So even a small matter such as what to wear in the role becomes precarious for women in HE leadership, as an example of a seemingly insignificant obstacle with serious consequences. Thus, dressing is performative too, subtly reinforcing critical gender and leadership norms, again reflecting assumptions about 'the ideal worker'. Similarly, another woman VC spoke about dress and not 'frightening the horses' in the way that women leaders dressed and behaved:

> So, I think there's a group going through where there is a range of masculinity. It's not just what you wear, that you have to wear a suit. It's not that. It's, the way I see it, it's by being female and entering the room I am different. I can extenuate or reduce the differences. And that puts them at their ease.

The price women therefore needed to pay to be successful in top jobs in HE was to strictly conform to accepted male norms of what a leader looked like and how they should behave. This interviewee saw it as a woman's responsibility in a senior position 'to put them at their ease', yet the mechanism for doing so was not clear. How is a woman expected to dress and behave to achieve this outcome? Therefore, in order to 'fit in' women were continually walking a tightrope because of the exclusionary structures and practices embodied through communities of practice of masculinities that made their leadership much more precarious than was the case for male colleagues.

2.2. Case Study 2

The participants in the second case study were both academic and administrative women who were either in middle management positions or who were aspiring to management roles, and were mostly in their 30s and 40s. The survey responses indicated that the Women in Leadership program at this newer Australian university provided skills and knowledge to assist career development. Most were positive about their participation and the opportunities it presented for building careers. Several mentioned strategies gained that helped them to deal with the prevailing communities of practice of masculinities: One participant had "more confidence in [the] ability to express views and learnt new negotiation skills", and another reported: "I am not easily intimidated when trying to communicate with the wider university's internal stakeholders. I now negotiate successfully with external parties as well".

But the program was less effective in providing a better understanding of the organisation, and some participants were critical of gender discrimination in the increasingly managerial university. They were clear, as the following quotes indicate, that universities were not a level playing field for women; males dominated leadership positions and gender disparities were obvious:

> Women at this institution are so poorly represented in leadership.

> I believe that women face different challenges to men. It is difficult to break into a traditionally male domain in higher education.

> The academic environment of the university-sector is generally masculinised; strong "boys" networks are in operation; academic promotion still favours male applicants. Issues confronting women are different, as they generally have many conflicting roles to juggle because of the glaring gender inequities in the workplace.

These women perceived themselves to be outsiders in the masculinist HE culture. They saw women as underrepresented as leaders, as unable to permeate the male domain, as excluded from male networks, and as needing to try that bit harder because they were women. Communities of practice of masculinities were therefore impacting on their experience of the workplace and excluding them from full participation. In some senses, their observations of men as HE leaders were not too dissimilar from the women in the first case study. But the difference between the two case studies is that the women VCs had been conditioned by the masculinist culture and decided nevertheless to pursue careers in leadership, while women in the second case study as a younger generation with a raised consciousness of gender discrimination were mostly standing on the periphery, and not wanting to be a part of this organizational culture (O'Connor 2014). Therefore, women in the leadership pipeline still perceived universities as focusing on fixing the women rather than the structure or culture of the organization, as the following respondent so incisively remarked:

> much of the 'advice' was focused on us changing rather than us working together to fix the system that is the problem. Without real "buy in" from the university's leadership and our male colleagues nothing will change.

She saw a gender mainstreaming approach—where both women and men are involved in changing the organizational culture—as the only way to fix the system and create a culture that would be more welcoming to women. Without the university's leadership demonstrating commitment to change there could be no transformation of gender relations.

Two other respondents identified weak and inadequate leadership in the organization as the main barrier to women's career advancement:

> I felt we were being encouraged to 'play the game' to get ahead and then 'manage' people so that they do what we want regardless of the adverse effects this may have on them. While this may pass as leadership at [the case study university], it really isn't.

> ... my overall experience is one of frustration because, in isolation, such a program changes nothing—I do not see any evidence of the leadership of the university doing anything to improve things for their women employees and I do not want more 'leaders' trained in ways that emulate the poor leadership I see throughout our university.

There was a strong sense of frustration, even anger, in these comments. And the message was consistent: stop trying to fix the women and instead try to improve working conditions and career opportunities for women. At the same time, they argued that the university needed to also focus on the impact of poor (mostly male) leadership models on those they managed. Presumably the solution was to 'fix the system' by greatly improving the predominantly masculinist models of leadership throughout the university, instead of offering programs to 'fix the women' that trained leaders in the same mould as the existing leadership.

Most participants were not encouraged by the program to seek new positions or look for further opportunities within the organisation, often because of their difficult work situation. A related narrative was about the stress that the current organizational restructure was causing to some participants and the impact of heavy workloads on their health and wellbeing—characteristic associated with managerial universities (Lynch et al. 2012; Bagilhole and White 2011)—as this respondent described:

> Work is a very stressful place at times and I am at a very unstable place at present. I used to be able to cope with workplace stress but in the last two years I am less able to cope. I do not think as clearly as I used to and it is almost like I have forgotten everything I know.

This is a worrying comment. It was evident that instability in the workplace and stress were all taking their toll and negatively impacting on the ability of the woman to think straight and to remember. Another had a similar experience, saying that as a result of the program: "I realised I was not coping with work life at the university". A further participant's response, after finishing the program, was resistance to the prevailing organizational culture: "Having time to think about my career and to learn and reflect on the workings of our university has had an impact ... this has acted to convince me that I am a poor fit with this university".

The program overall did not have any significant impact on the career aspirations of participants in the medium term because many felt marginalised and were unhappy and so stressed they had little time for reflection. Therefore, it had not encouraged career planning.

These women were insightful in their analysis of the problem and argued that aspiring to HE leadership was not a priority in the current organizational climate with its exclusionary structures and practices. Unless the managerial culture of the university could be changed and what they considered poor leadership could be overhauled by introducing gender mainstreaming, they would remain on the periphery. Thus, the above narratives reinforce a resistance model evident in the experiences of these younger mid-career women. They took a social justice view that fixing the university leadership model/culture could help to address the disengagement and disempowerment of women.

3. Discussion

These two case studies of two different generations of women in or aspiring to leadership in higher education indicated that they experienced gender power relations that impacted on their careers. It is not our intention to juxtapose the two case studies or to present our findings as in opposition, an either/or scenario. Instead the rich data which emerged from our international research sites explores the lived experiences of women in higher education leadership throughout their careers and the challenges masculine cultures pose for them.

The women in the first case study headed up UK universities and had learnt throughout their careers to navigate and negotiate the gendered and gendering leadership culture, and these skills were partly responsible for their success. Only when these senior women leaders had made it to the top did they feel more secure in leadership to the extent that they could 'be themselves' to some extent, while still acknowledging the straight jacket that hegemonic masculinities created for them.

Yet this research with very senior women found that being a minority creates precariousness in itself. As Charles notes, women aspiring to senior management positions "in order to be accepted . . . have to behave in ways which are appropriate to the organization and the job" (Charles 2014, p. 368). Invariably during their careers women in this study had been the 'only woman in the room' and their experience of continually adapting to this minority status was emotional hard labour. Othering oneself and being othered is a precarious existence indeed, with these women positioned as outsiders on the inside (Gherardi 1995) or what can be described in communities of practice of masculinities as not yet full members.

Referring back to the explanation of our theoretical framework in the introduction, we concur that invariably the women in both our research sites had merely achieved 'legitimate peripheral participation' in leadership communities of practice of masculinities, whereas their male counterparts achieved full membership almost by default. These communities of practice function on an organisational level (as well as individually of course) to constitute gendered understandings. For example, symbolically organisational masculinity creates reification of leadership codes. Similarly, the myth of organizational rationality whereby the way universities operate through their structures, processes, and practices reinforces masculinities (Acker 1990). So much so that leadership communities of practice of masculinities work to reinforce organizational cultures where masculine power is promulgated (and sometimes resisted) (Burkinshaw 2015). Yet ironically, the women in the first case study were top university leaders operating successfully within this masculine organizational context. However, it was only once a 'critical mass' of diversity was achieved that these women felt more secure in leadership, at whatever level. They argued that this critical mass helped to dilute their insecurity and inevitable precariousness, although any minority needs to reach beyond 30 per cent for this to occur (Erkut et al. 2008). This finding reinforces our argument regarding the entrenched organizational exclusivity of HE leadership communities of practice of masculinities, where lack of diversity in organisational leadership at all levels is both cause and effect. A major feature of communities of practice of masculinities is that they are policed from within by existing full members who generally shun difference thus perpetuating masculine organizational cultures. Nevertheless, Martin and O'Meara's study demonstrates how strategies used by women leaders can challenge and change institutional culture to advance gender inclusion (Martin and O'Meara 2017), although the experience in Austria, for example, indicates that the use of quotas to get more women into leadership positions does not necessarily impact on the organizational culture (Wroblewski 2014).

The lived experiences of these women VCs reflect how precarious women's careers are within the exclusionary culture of higher education, and this finding echoes the research of O'Connor and of Morley (O'Connor 2014; Morley 2013). Their inevitably unique stories bear many similarities across the different organizations they led, fundamentally of the gendered nature of 'doing' leadership and the precariousness of 'fitting in' to leadership communities of practice. Their career stories help illuminate the choices and challenges faced by women on their leadership journey, culminating in a level of unevenness in their careers, and extra requirements on their job specification, apparently not experienced by many of their male colleagues. Of course, this is not to deny the agency of these women leaders (at all stages of their careers but especially in their most senior roles) which enables them to infiltrate and adapt leadership communities of practice for the better, perhaps reflecting the tension between more traditional male leadership styles and the requirements of modern universities for collaborative leadership. By performing leadership differently, they are influencing higher education leadership culture, however slowly. This is hopeful for the future, despite much evidence to the contrary. Williams agrees that workplace expectations are changing albeit recalcitrantly (Williams 2012). Maybe entrenched masculinities practices will be successfully challenged by younger, more agentic leaders coming through. Strategies such as professional leadership development for women can help equip this challenge, as we observed in our Australian research.

In this second case study, the impact of managerialism on the organizational culture was clear. In managerial universities decisions are from the top down, the influence of academics is reduced, and

the focus is on accountability, evaluation and economic efficiency (Goransson 2011). Managerialism positions women as outsiders in competitive, managerial regimes (Lynch et al. 2012). Thus, some participants felt excluded and were strongly critical of what they perceived as a failure of leadership during this period of uncertainty in their increasingly managerial university. They spoke of the stress that poor leadership and continuous change created in their working lives. Their views reflected Bolden et al.'s observation that managerialism leads to "diminishing opportunities for academics to self-determine their own sense of direction and in so doing undermining their commitment to the institution and the profession" (Bolden et al. 2012, p. 37).

The present research therefore found that the precarious work environment did not encourage women in the leadership pipeline to be pro-active in building their careers as they confronted communities of practice of masculinities. These women were critical of the program as an initiative of management to help women to deal with rapid organizational change. Rather, they asserted that they needed more support to deal with the current restructure and the uncertainty it created, and this finding resonates with that of Carvalho et al. (2013). And similar to Sluis' observation of younger academics (Sluis 2012), they were incisive in their analysis of how the organizational culture needed to change to enable them to have decent careers. Some of the participants had seriously looked at moving into more senior roles and, like those in Morley's study (Morley 2014), were dismissing careers in higher education leadership.

Once again, our findings illuminate the theoretical framework, because leadership communities of practice of masculinities are more visible to these enlightened mid-career women. As women in the leadership pipeline they had been observing older women at the top having to fit in to get on. But many of these emerging senior leaders were uncomfortable about negotiating homophilious network apprenticeships in this way and were unwilling to settle for 'legitimate peripheral participation' either. Hence, there was evidence of resistance to traditional career paths and ambitions (Bagilhole and White 2013; Blackmore and Sachs 2007) which highlights tensions in higher education leadership whereby the environment increasingly demands collaborative approaches which generally do not flourish within masculine models. Therefore, women's missing agency is not sufficient to explain their continuing underrepresentation in senior positions in higher education; instead "talented and ambitious women may be disadvantaged by a number of structural factors associated with the recruitment and selection process for senior posts" (Shepherd 2017, p. 5).

4. Conclusions

This comparative study of two generations of women at different levels in two different countries found marked similarities in their experience of the gendered organizational culture in British and Australian higher education. Leadership communities of practice made it difficult for them to progress in their careers. Clearly the women VCs had learnt to accommodate the prevailing organizational culture in consolidating their careers on the way up to top jobs, but few considered that even as VCs they could change this culture, possibly owing to their minority status at the top—reinforcing gender power relations and exclusionary structures and practices. Nevertheless, they had mostly learnt to 'fit in' to get on, arguably choosing to fix themselves and adapt to an entrenched masculine culture rather than fixing universities. However, the younger women in the leadership pipeline mostly questioned if the price of accommodating the organizational culture to progress their careers was worthwhile (Wroblewski 2014). The current leadership in their institution did not inspire them and they resented the pressure that continuous organizational restructure placed on their working lives. Their response was ambivalence (Bagilhole and White 2013; Blackmore and Sachs 2007) or resistance (O'Connor 2001).

It can therefore be concluded that leadership communities of practice produce and reproduce hegemonic masculinities (Karataş-Özkan and Chell 2015) shaping gendered power relations and harnessing the emotional labour of fitting in to get on. While higher education continues to focus on fixing the women rather than fixing the university culture, many women currently in top management

or newly appointed to management may continue to experience precarious leadership careers and those aspiring to leadership positions may struggle to find motivation to invest in further career progression. With younger, aspirational women in the leadership pipeline resisting senior leadership, exclusionary structures and practices will prevail across and beyond higher education. We recommend further research to explore this resistance more fully and to see how leadership communities of practice might be challenged, given this resistance.

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