



Griffith Journal  
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**GENDER, CULTURE  
& NARRATIVE**

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## CONTENTS

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MICHELLE GUNAWAN	<i>EDITORIAL</i>	1
DR KATHERINE FALLAH	<i>RE GEORGIO: AN INTIMATE ACCOUNT OF TRANSGENDER INTERACTIONS WITH LAW AND SOCIETY</i>	6
PIDGEON PAGONIS	<i>FIRST DO NO HARM: HOW INTERSEX KIDS ARE HURT BY THOSE WHO HAVE TAKEN THE HIPPOCRATIC OATH</i>	40
DR CARMEN LAWRENCE	<i>WOMEN, SEXISM, AND POLITICS: DOES PSYCHOLOGY HELP?</i>	52
RACHEL KUO	<i>SCRIPTING RACED AND GENDERED MYTHS OF (UN)BELONGING</i>	68
TUANH NGUYEN AND REYNAH TANG	<i>GENDER, CULTURE, AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION: A TRAFFIC JAM AT THE INTERSECTION</i>	91
DR LAUREN ROSEWARNE	<i>FROM MEMOIR TO MAKE BELIEVE: BEYONCÉ'S LEMONADE AND THE FABRICATION POSSIBILITY</i>	112
ELISE STEPHENSON, KAYE BROADBENT, AND GLENDA STRACHAN	<i>CLIMBING THE 'STAIRCASE': DO EEO POLICIES CONTRIBUTE TO WOMEN ACHIEVING SENIOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN UNIVERSITIES IN AUSTRALIA AND HONG KONG?</i>	122
JUNTAO LYU	<i>THE STORY OF A 'LEFT-BEHIND' CHILD OF CHINA</i>	153
JUDITH HERRMANN	<i>EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES, AND LESSONS LEARNED — INTERVIEWING RWANDAN SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE</i>	165
HAZAL GACKA	<i>LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD: DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN SPORT</i>	189

# CLIMBING THE 'STAIRCASE': DO EEO POLICIES CONTRIBUTE TO WOMEN ACHIEVING SENIOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN UNIVERSITIES IN AUSTRALIA AND HONG KONG?

ELISE STEPHENSON, KAYE BROADBENT & GLENDA STRACHAN\*

*Often at the vanguard of equal employment opportunity ('EEO') interventions and movements for equality, it is surprising that universities remain inherently gendered in leadership, with few women making it to senior leadership positions worldwide. While EEO policies have been expressly designed to achieve equality and redress gender imbalances inherent in university structures, it is unclear whether EEO policies practically contribute to this, with an enduring leadership imbalance evidenced globally. To determine the contributions of EEO policies across the international labour market in which universities operate, this case study compares the EEO policies and experiences of ten women university leaders in Australia and Hong Kong. This study finds that more-developed EEO policies correlate with more women in leadership and better experiences of leadership for women within the universities. However, it is clear from a sustained gender imbalance in leadership that EEO policies do not redress gender inequality alone. Limitations of EEO interventions include the narrow focus on aspects of discrimination and inequality and over-reliance on traditional concepts of "merit" and leadership. Grounded within the Asia Pacific region, this case study demonstrates that the contributions of EEO policies to women's leadership in universities are nuanced.*

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## CONTENTS

I	INTRODUCTION.....	123
II	WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN UNIVERSITIES.....	125
	<i>Table 1: Universities in Australia.....</i>	127
	<i>Table 2: Universities in Hong Kong.....</i>	127
III	SETTING THE CONTEXT.....	127
IV	METHODOLOGY.....	132
V	CASE DETAILS.....	133
	<i>Table 3: Individual University Statistics.....</i>	134
	<i>Table 4: Participants' Details.....</i>	135
VI	WHAT IT MEANS TO WORK IN THE UNIVERSITIES.....	135
	<i>A The provision of targets and measurable goals.....</i>	136
	<i>B Transparency in the promotions processes.....</i>	138
	<i>C The provision of appeals and grievances mechanisms.....</i>	141
VII	DEFICITS IN THE EEO POLICIES	142
	<i>A The narrow focus on aspects of discrimination and inequality</i>	142
	<i>B Inadequately addressing subjectivity and bias in forming and</i>	
	<i>enacting policies.....</i>	144
VIII	CONCLUSION .....	145

## I INTRODUCTION

The Asia Pacific region has the fastest-growing higher education sector in the world, yet compared to international standards for gender equality, its universities are falling behind on women's leadership.<sup>1</sup> Equal employment opportunity ('EEO') policies have increasingly been implemented over the past decades, with the express aim of achieving

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Marginson, Sarjit Kaur and Erlenawati Sawir (eds), *Higher Education in the Asia-Pacific: Strategic Responses to Globalisation* (Springer, 2011).

equality and reducing barriers to leadership for women. Research suggests that merely implementing these provisions for equal opportunity does not increase the number of women in leadership.<sup>2</sup> However, the university context remains relatively untested, as does research that compares EEO policies across the international labour markets in which universities operate.<sup>3</sup> This research therefore compares the situations in two universities across cultures in the Asia Pacific, one in Australia and one in Hong Kong, to begin to understand the contributions of EEO policies on women's leadership.<sup>4</sup> The case studies confirm that, despite the introduction of EEO policies, women in general still occupy few positions of leadership and are clustered at lower levels of leadership.<sup>5</sup> Yet, there are also clear correlations between the level of development of the policies and the numbers of women and their experiences in leadership, suggesting that EEO policies may have an effect in contributing to the women's leadership across the universities.

Prior studies on factors influencing women's leadership in universities have found that it is essential to understand the impact of organisational policy, practices, and processes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Glenda Strachan and Erica French, 'EEO: Is it Living Up to its Promise of Gender Equity?' (2008) in Pauline Stanton and Suzanne Young (eds), *Workers, Corporations and Community: Facing Choices for a Sustainable Future: Volume 1: Refereed Papers* (Paper presented at the Proceedings 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference of the Association of Industrial relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand – Workers, Corporations and Community: Facing Choices for a Sustainable Future, Melbourne, Australia, 6-8 February 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Alex Bryson and Carola Frege, 'The Importance of Comparative Workplace Employment Relations Studies' (2010) 48(2) *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 231; Geraldine Healy and Gill Kirton, 'The Early Mobilization of Women Union Leaders – A Comparative Perspective' (2013) 51(4) *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 709.

<sup>4</sup> Australia and Hong Kong were chosen as research locations due to their: demographic similarities; geographical position in the Asia Pacific; education and research ties; the Australian Government's policy priority on engagement with Hong Kong and the "Indo Pacific" (Hong Kong being chosen as one of four pilot locations for the recently launched New Colombo Plan); Australian Government policy priority on education exchange with Hong Kong; English as an official language; similar European-American university system; colonial histories; and contrasts regarding culture, political regime, and levels of gender equality.

<sup>5</sup> Louise Morley, 'Lost Leaders: Women in the Global Academy' (2014) 33(1) *Higher Education Research and Development* 114.

<sup>6</sup> See Jennifer de Vries, 'A Realistic Agenda? Women Only Programs as Strategic Interventions for Building Gender Equitable Workplaces' (PhD Thesis University of Western Australia, 2010); Carmen Luke, 'One Step Up, Two Down: Women in Higher Education Management in Southeast Asia' (2000) 1 *Academic Work and Life* 285; Louise Morley, 'The Rules of the Game: Women and the Leaderist Turn in Higher Education' (2012) 25(1) *Gender and Education* 116; Niki Murray, Marianne Tremaine and Susan Fountaine, 'Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling in the Ivory Tower: Using a Case Study to Gain New Understandings of Old Gender Issues' (2012) 14(2) *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 221; David Peets, Glenda Strachan and Carolyn Troup, 'Discipline, Change and Gender in the Academic Workforce' (Paper presented at the 28<sup>th</sup> AIRAANZ Conference Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand, 7-9 February 2014); Karin Sanders, Teneke M Willemsen, Carla C J M Millar, 'Views From Above the Glass Ceiling: Does the Academic Environment Influence Women Professors' Careers and Experiences?' (2009) 60 *Sex Roles* 301; Wendy Saunderson, 'Women, Academia and Identity: Constructions of Equal Opportunities in the 'New Managerialism' – A Case of Lipstick on the Gorilla?' (2002) 56(4) *Higher*

One pre-eminent theorist, Acker, provides a framework which will be used in this research to identify how policies and practices affect gender inequality and representation.<sup>7</sup> Acker's argument rests on the notion that all organisations have inequality regimes, defined as 'interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities'.<sup>8</sup> Even organisations with EEO policies and interventions can, over time, develop structures which negatively impact on women's experiences and constrain women's leadership. This key point makes Acker very relevant for studying how EEO policies contribute to women's leadership across the two case universities.

Research will first set the context by outlining a brief historical, cultural, and political overview of each country and university, of particular interest to this Special Issue on *Gender, Culture & Narrative*. The literature will be canvassed briefly and the methodology explained. Discussion will centre on the universities' context and the experiences of the women leaders. Through comparing the universities' EEO policies and the women leader's experiences, it is clear that EEO policies do correlate with more women leaders and better experiences of leadership within the universities.

## II WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN UNIVERSITIES

Universities are key players capable of driving women's participation in leadership. The Asia Pacific region is a global growth hub, with universities increasingly taking the foreground and the numbers of female graduates globally skyrocketing.<sup>9</sup> For the first time in history, women in both Australia and Hong Kong are enrolling in universities in greater numbers than men, representing 58 per cent and 53.7 per cent of enrolments

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*Education Quarterly* 376; Kate White, 'Women and Leadership in Higher Education in Australia' (2003) 9(1) *Tertiary Education and Management* 45.

<sup>7</sup> Joan Acker, 'Inequality Regimes: Gender Class, and Race in Organisations' (2006) 20(4) *Gender and Society* 441; Joan Acker, 'From Glass Ceiling to Inequality Regimes' (2009) 51(2) *Sociologie Du Travail* 199.

<sup>8</sup> Joan Acker, 'Inequality Regimes: Gender Class, and Race in Organisations' (2006) 20(4) *Gender and Society* 441, 443.

<sup>9</sup> Simon Marginson, Sarjit Kaur and Erlenawati Sawir (eds), *Higher Education in the Asia-Pacific: Strategic Responses to Globalisation* (Springer, 2011).

respectively.<sup>10</sup> Women currently represent half the population and approximately half of the university workforce.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, there are striking gaps when it comes to the leadership sphere. Despite representing half the population, women in Australia hold just under one-quarter of vice chancellor roles, approximately 30 per cent of deputy vice chancellor and pro vice chancellor roles, and comprise on average under 20 per cent of the professoriate.<sup>12</sup> Hong Kong has never had any women vice chancellors. Women comprise only 7.3 per cent of positions of dean and above, and women hold only 18.7 per cent of associate and assistant deans and heads of departments.<sup>13</sup> Gender should be equally represented across society, however, within the world of work, women across Australia and Hong Kong continue to participate in labour markets on an unequal basis, are paid less than men globally, bear a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work, and are more often found in insecure work.<sup>14</sup>

Statistics on Australia and Hong Kong are not immediately comparable because of the different statistical methods and rubrics used, however **Table 1** and **Table 2** provide a breakdown of employment by gender in the university sector in each context.<sup>15</sup> Despite

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<sup>10</sup> Australia has had more women enrolled in universities since 1987, almost three decades, which debunks the 'pipeline' myth that it will only be a matter of time before women reach leadership; See Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Hitting the Books: Characteristics of Higher Education Students* (2013) <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features20July+2013>>; Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, *Women and Men in Hong Kong: Key Statistics* (2014)

<[http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content\\_1149/Terms%20and%20Definitions.pdf](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content_1149/Terms%20and%20Definitions.pdf)>.

<sup>11</sup> University Grants Committee, *Table 12 Academic and Research Staff (Headcount) in Academic Departments of UGC-funded Institutions with Salaries Wholly Funded from General Funds by Staff Grade, Sex and Institution, 2008/09 and 2009/10* (2010)

<<http://www.ugc.edu.hk/big5/ugc/publication/report/figure2009/pdf/table12.pdf>>.

<sup>12</sup> Jill Blackmore and Naarah Sawers, 'Executive Power and Scaled-Up Gender Subtexts in Australian Entrepreneurial Universities' (2015) 27 *Gender and Education* 320; Carmel Diezmann and Susan Grieshaber, 'Gender Equity in the Professoriate: A Cohort Study of New Women Professors in Australia' in M Devlin, J Nagy and A Lichtenberg (eds), *Research and Development in Higher Education: Reshaping Higher Education* (Paper presented at the 33<sup>rd</sup> HERDSA Annual International Conference, 6–9 July 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Aiston, *A Woman's Place at the Top Table is Not Assured* (27 March 2015) University World News <<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20150325170011964>>.

<sup>14</sup> UN Women, *Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation* (2016)

<<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#notes>>.

<sup>15</sup> Where actual numbers could not be sourced, percentages are used. Data is sourced from the most-recent statistics publicly available.



women leaders being labelled as “indispensable” both in policy and in general, they continue to be insufficiently represented.<sup>16</sup>

<b>TABLE 1: UNIVERSITIES IN AUSTRALIA</b>		
	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Vice-Chancellors	10 (25%)	29 (75%)
Deputy Vice-Chancellors	34%	66%
Senior Administrative Staff	40%	60%
Above Senior Lecturer	3902 (31.7%)	8404 (68.3%)
Senior Lecturer (level C)	4494 (43.9%)	5753 (56.1%)
Lecturer (level B)	7252 (52%)	6698 (48%)
Tutor/Associate Lecturer (level A)	3783 (51.1%)	3616 (48.9%)
<b>TABLE 2: UNIVERSITIES IN HONG KONG</b>		
	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Vice Chancellors	0 (0%)	8 (100%)
Dean and Above	8 (7.3%)	110 (92.7%)
Associate and Assistant Deans and Heads of Departments	18.7%	81.3%
Senior Academic Staff	245 (14%)	1508 (86%)
Junior Academic Staff	1037 (33.4%)	2069 (65.6%)
Academic Supporting Staff	1156 (52%)	1065 (48%)
Research Staff	885 (44.7%)	1097 (55.3%)

### III SETTING THE CONTEXT

The background to each university and country provides context for the development of EEO policies and women’s leadership within the universities. Universities in Australia and Hong Kong operate within an international labour market, based on similar global

<sup>16</sup> Y Wang, Q Yue and K Yu, ‘Women Leaders of Higher Education: Female Executives in Leading Universities in China’ (2013) 9(6) *Cross-Cultural Communication* 40.

European-American university models, with similar colonial histories, and similar demographic profiles within universities. Yet the universities are also based within two very different cultural contexts, with different political regimes, and marked differences between the numbers of women reaching leadership positions and the levels of leadership they are reaching. This section will briefly outline the cultural and ideological contexts of Australia and Hong Kong.

Australia is a democratic capitalist economy with a comprehensive workplace anti-discrimination legislative framework which, in theory, should make it easy, or at least achievable, to attain an equality in university leadership. A British colony, Australia has high international citizenry and is a well-developed federal constitutional monarchy guided by a parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, guaranteed freedoms, and adherence to international human rights laws and conventions. Australia is noted for its wide cultural diversity across society, and predominantly Western, individualistic values. Australia in general subscribes to a meritocratic understanding of career advancement and leadership — that promotion and position is awarded on merit, regardless of factors such as gender. Liberal ideologies around equality are reinforced and legal protections are ensured by anti-discrimination legislation and various governmental and non-governmental bodies.<sup>17</sup> However, Australia still has some underlying notions of “women’s” work versus “men’s” work. Covert forms of discrimination and bias are common, and there is a prevailing and significant gender pay gap across almost all fields of work.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (‘SAR’) is a part of the People’s Republic of China (‘PRC’). It is characterised by a “one country, two systems” regime of political leadership, whereby political rule is autonomous, in theory, from the rule of the Chinese Communist Party on the mainland. Much like Australia, Hong Kong represents a melting pot of politics, societies, and heritage. However, Hong Kong is informed by its Confucian heritage and, arguably, “Asian values” which place an emphasis on the collective above the individual, a reverence for hierarchy, and heavily-gendered

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<sup>17</sup> See, eg, *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth); See also, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *About Workplace Gender Equality* (2016) <<https://www.wgea.gov.au/learn/about-workplace-gender-equality>>.

<sup>18</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Gender Pay Gap Statistics* (2016) <[https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/Gender\\_Pay\\_Gap\\_Factsheet.pdf](https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/Gender_Pay_Gap_Factsheet.pdf)>

concepts of public and private life.<sup>19</sup> While modern ideas of family and state are changing, Hong Kong's historical backing is significant for understanding the ideologies around gender and the framing of societal expectations.<sup>20</sup> Hong Kong was subject to many British patriarchal leadership structures, cultural, and legal influences due to British colonisation.<sup>21</sup> Being under British control until 1997 also meant that Hong Kong was not a part of the dismantlement of many patriarchal and feudal elements of Chinese Confucianism in the mainland, with the coming of modern egalitarian principles being espoused by the Communist Party in the PRC. As such, Hong Kong has a historical backing inclusive of both British and Chinese Confucian patriarchy, with Western feminism and Chinese egalitarianism yet to be fully grasped.<sup>22</sup>

Women leaders in Hong Kong currently experience a unique cultural context influenced by both British values and Chinese Confucian traditions. This has resulted in an environment which favours paternalistic leadership, traditionally rigidly defined gender roles and behaviours, and a historical hierarchy which 'placed Chinese women in secondary or subordinate roles to men.'<sup>23</sup> In this context, women have made substantial gains in professional and private sector occupations, however, this is not matched in universities. Further, while legal frameworks in Hong Kong have been an important step in addressing gender-based discrimination and equal opportunities over the past decades, their effectiveness is debated and the practical mechanisms to appeal against gender discrimination are not as well-developed as in Australia.<sup>24</sup>

While abundant literature is available on the Australian context, few studies exist regarding Hong Kong's circumstance. Literature suggests that overt discrimination, as predominantly tackled by anti-discrimination legislation and EEO policies, has given way to deeply entrenched inequalities, embedded in organisations through promotions

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<sup>19</sup> Fred Dallmayr, 'Confucianism and the Public Sphere: Five Relationship Plus One?' (2003) 2(2) *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 193; Ambrose King, 'Kuan-his and Network Building: A Sociological Interpretation' (1991) 120(2) *Daedalus* 120.

<sup>20</sup> Carmen Luke, "'I Got to Where I Am By My Own Strength": Women in Hong Kong Higher Education Management' (1998) 26(1) *Chinese University Education Journal* 31.

<sup>21</sup> Adelyn Lim, *Transnational Feminism and Women's Movements in Post-1997 Hong Kong: Solidarity Beyond the State*, (Hong Kong University Press, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Irene Chow, 'Gender Differences in Perceived Leadership Effectiveness in Hong Kong' (2005) 20(4) *Women in Management Review* 216, 218.

<sup>24</sup> See, eg, *Sex Discrimination Ordinance 1995* (Hong Kong); See also, Woon-Kwong Lam, *Gender Equality Policy/Practice in Hong Kong: Equal Opportunities Commission* (2011) <<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/hkiaps/grc/pdf/EU-panel1-Mr.WKLam.pdf>>.

processes, informal norms, incomplete mentoring and professional development, and everyday interactions within universities.<sup>25</sup> As scholarship indicates that Asian culture has rigid expectations around women's experiences and participation in the workforce — valuing quiet, subdued and withdrawn characteristics which are antithetical to common perceptions of leadership — then academic women in Hong Kong face specific cultural challenges not matched in the Australian context.<sup>26</sup>

The introduction of EEO policies and mechanisms for appeals are relatively new, mostly having been spurred by the second wave of feminism from the 1960s and unified national systems for higher education in the 1980s.<sup>27</sup> Such affirmative action policies are called on by liberal feminism to remedy past and ongoing sex discrimination and improve women's representation in non-traditional occupations and leadership positions.<sup>28</sup> EEO policies have been used as an attempt to redress gender imbalances that have often been inherent in university structures. Many EEO policies aim to address overt problems, yet the development of EEO policies is often specific to the organisation and they are often applied inconsistently, even across public sector institutions such as universities. Recurring themes in literature surrounding the effect of EEO policies on women's leadership include the minimal recognition being given to covert discrimination and disadvantage; the lack of practical application of EEO policies; low penalties for failing to report on gender equality to overhead bodies; and the over-reliance on EEO policies to redress gender imbalances.<sup>29</sup> In parts of Asia, EEO policies often only represent 'an empty

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<sup>25</sup> Sarah Aiston, *A Woman's Place at the Top Table is Not Assured* (2015)

<<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20150325170011964>>; Yvonne Benschop and Margo Brouns, 'Crumbling Ivory Towers: Academic Organising and its Gender Effects' (2003) 10(2) *Gender, Work and Organisation* 194; Irene Chow, 'Gender Differences in Perceived Leadership Effectiveness in Hong Kong' (2005) 20(4) *Women in Management Review* 216; Louise Kloot, 'Women and Leadership in Universities: A Case Study of Women Academic Managers' (2004) 17(6) *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 470; Hilary Winchester, Colleen Chesterman, Shard Lorenzo and Lynette Browning, 'Academic Women's Promotions in Australian Universities' (2006) 28(6) *Employee Relations* 505.

<sup>26</sup> Sarah Aiston, 'Leading the Academy or Being Led? Hong Kong Women Academics' (2014) 33(1) *Higher Education Research and Development* 59.

<sup>27</sup> Joan Eveline, *Ivory Basement Leadership: Power and Invisibility in the Changing University* (University of Western Australia Press, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Bagilhole, *Women in Non-traditional Occupations. Challenging Men* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Joan Williams, *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do About It* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Glenda Strachan and Erica French, 'EEO: Is it Living Up to its Promise of Gender Equity?' (2008) in P Stanton and S Young (eds), *Workers, Corporations and Community: Facing Choices for a Sustainable Future: Volume 1: Refereed Papers* (Paper presented at the Proceedings 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference of the Association of Industrial relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand – Workers, Corporations and Community: Facing Choices for a Sustainable Future, Melbourne, Australia, 6 – 8 February 2008).

shell or toothless tiger construction of EEO.'<sup>30</sup> Further, while the policies have been reasonably successful in providing equality in participation, they have had limited success in providing access or movement into senior leadership or management roles.<sup>31</sup> Inconsistencies in policies particularly affect women who are ultimately more reliant than men on support to overcome organisational challenges, like unconscious bias, to transform traditionally-male spaces into gender equal and supportive work environments.<sup>32</sup>

Literature suggests that universities need more transparent promotion procedures and a deeper awareness of gender inequality to overcome institutionalised inequality. Literature also notes that an over-reliance on concepts of merit, as often enshrined in EEO policies, can reproduce longstanding gender imbalances because of implicit notions of university leadership as "masculine" and "inherently gendered".<sup>33</sup> Rather than being proactive in providing pathways for women in leadership, EEO policies are often reactive in preventing discrimination or providing grievances mechanisms only after the fact.<sup>34</sup> This suggests that EEO policies, as a sole intervention, may have a limited effect in contributing to increased women in leadership positions in universities, particularly if they are applied in isolation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Faiza Ali, 'A Comparative Study of EEO in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh' in Mustafa F Ozbilgin and Jawad Syed, *Managing Gender Diversity in Asia: A Research Companion* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Joan Acker, 'From Glass Ceiling to Inequality Regimes' (2009) 51(2) *Sociologie Du Travail* 199; Clare Burton, *Monograph No. 2: Redefining Merit* (Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988); Clare Burton, *Monograph No. 3: Gender Bias in Job Evaluation* (Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988).

<sup>33</sup> Yvonne Benschop and Margo Brouns, 'Crumbling Ivory Towers: Academic Organising and its Gender Effects' (2003) 10(2) *Gender, Work and Organisation* 194; Louise Kloot, 'Women and Leadership in Universities: A Case Study of Women Academic Managers' (2004) 17(6) *The International Journal of Public Sector Management* 470; Hilary Winchester, Colleen Chesterman, Shard Lorenzo and Lynette Browning, 'Academic Women's Promotions in Australian Universities' (2006) 28(6) *Employee Relations* 505.

<sup>34</sup> Glenda Strachan and Erica French, 'EEO: Is it Living Up to its Promise of Gender Equity?' (2008) in Pauline Stanton and Suzanne Young (eds), *Workers, Corporations and Community: Facing Choices for a Sustainable Future: Volume 1: Refereed Papers* (Paper presented at the Proceedings 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference of the Association of Industrial relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand – Workers, Corporations and Community: Facing Choices for a Sustainable Future, Melbourne, Australia, 6 – 8 February 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Joan Acker, 'Inequality Regimes: Gender Class, and Race in Organisations' (2006) 20(4) *Gender and Society* 441.

## IV METHODOLOGY

Literature on workplace employment that compares and contrasts findings across countries remains relatively rare.<sup>36</sup> This research seeks to address this gap within the field of gender and universities using two case studies. A comparative case study approach was chosen with the aim of exploring the on-ground experiences and situations of women in two disparate polities. Since both Australia and Hong Kong have few women in university leadership and decades of EEO policies in place, the comparative approach provided a way to understand the problem from different contexts across the international labour market in which universities operate.

The research primarily involved semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of women senior leaders. Interviews were conducted face-to-face with 10 senior women leaders in Australia and Hong Kong over eight months from April 2015 to October 2015. Women in senior leadership were defined as those in Vice Chancellor/President, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor, Dean, and Director positions. The problem of selection bias was mitigated by focussing on experiences of individual women selected from university employment databases to reflect different levels of senior leadership, roles, and portfolios. While there were several executive-level women leaders to interview at Australian University, Sino University had no executive-level women. The lack of women leaders at Sino University and the prevalence for most senior leaders to be at lower levels of leadership made it more difficult to gather interview participants.

Participants were initially contacted via email and the interviews generally took place in the women's offices for around one hour. This was followed by some follow-up meetings and emails to clarify points. Interviews were conducted in English and were then transcribed for analysis and sorted in themes guided by the research questions and Acker's theory of inequality regimes.<sup>37</sup> For the purposes of the interview, an interview guide was compiled using main questions or topics, yet the process was flexible and

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<sup>36</sup> Alex Bryson and Carola Frege, 'The Importance of Comparative Workplace Employment Relations Studies' (2010) 48(2) *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 231; Geraldine Healy and Gill Kirton, 'The Early Mobilisation of Women Union Leaders – A Comparative Perspective' (2013) 51(4) *British Journal of Industrial* 709.

<sup>37</sup> Joan Acker, 'From Glass Ceiling to Inequality Regimes' (2009) 51(2) *Sociologie Du Travail* 199.

adapted according to participant responses. Since the research involved multiple case studies, some structure was retained in order to ensure cross-case comparability.

Analysis centred on each university's EEO policy and practice, the women's career and life paths to leadership, and organisational impediments to change. Data was organised and analysed manually and quotes were chosen as representative of common themes or issues raised by interviewees, unless stated as an abnormality. Overall, research and analysis was undertaken from a critical social science methodological understanding, to '[go] beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves.'<sup>38</sup>

#### V CASE DETAILS

Two case study universities were selected for this study. Both are publicly funded, have student populations in excess of 20 000 students, have multiple campuses, are based in major city centres, and are reasonably representative of other universities in each locality. Pseudonyms for both the participants and their institutions have been used in this research to protect confidentiality. The Australian case institution is referred to as Australian University ('AU'). With a track record of being an Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency ('EOWA') women's employer of choice, AU is viewed as one of the more progressive universities with regards to women's leadership.

The second case study university is in Hong Kong and is referred to as Sino University ('SU'). Like many universities in Hong Kong, SU has gender-specific studies centres and rhetorical support for gender equity. SU is viewed as one of the more progressive universities in Hong Kong in regards to gender equity. The Chief Executive of Hong Kong is automatically granted the position of Chancellor for every university in Hong Kong, resulting in a degree of politicisation in senior university appointments.

Although women comprise of approximately half of employees in both AU and SU, there is a considerable disparity when it comes to the gender balance in positions of senior leadership. While statistics on gender and employment are readily available in Australia, SU keeps no statistics on university employment and gender. In fact, in Hong Kong

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<sup>38</sup> Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Pearson Education Limited, 2013) 110.

statistics on gender are limited. This is a key example of how little attention is paid to the issue of gender at SU and other Hong Kong universities. Overall, AU has significantly more women in leadership than SU. University staff gender compositions have been collated in **Table 3.**

**TABLE 3: INDIVIDUAL UNIVERSITY STATISTICS<sup>39</sup>**

	Australian University		Sino University	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Chancellor	-	Yes	-	Yes
Vice Chancellor or President	-	Yes	-	Yes
Deputy Vice Chancellors, Pro Vice Chancellors, Provosts (executive positions)	36%	64%	0%	100%
Deans	33.3%	66.6%	18.1%	81.9%
Levels Equivalent to Directors, Associate/ Assistant Deans and Heads of Department	39.2%	61.8%	27.5%	72.5%

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<sup>39</sup> Data was collated from the individual Australian University and Sino University websites, details of which remain with the researcher and supervisors due to confidentiality. Where position titles did not match exactly due to title differences, the equivalent positions were sought. For example, the position of Head of Department in Australia correlated with the position of associate Dean or Director of a school/centre in Hong Kong. Percentages were used instead of real numbers in order to help preserve anonymity.



**TABLE 4: PARTICIPANT DETAILS<sup>40</sup>**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Title</b>
Natasha	Australia	Pro Vice Chancellor
Georgia	Australia	Dean
Catherine	Australia	Pro Vice Chancellor
Sandra	Australia	Pro Vice Chancellor
Ruth	Australia	Dean
Anna	Hong Kong	Associate Dean
Penny	Hong Kong	Associate Dean
Lilian	Hong Kong	Associate Dean
Beth	Hong Kong	Director
Anika	Hong Kong	Director

## VI WHAT IT MEANS TO WORK IN THE UNIVERSITIES

Gender inequality within universities is often addressed through EEO policies and processes. Both of the universities provide these EEO policies (country and institution-wide) and the “right” rhetoric around achieving gender equality. Across analysis, AU had more developed EEO policies, more women in leadership, and overall better experiences of leadership as expressed by the women leaders interviewed.

AU was founded on a commitment to equity and social justice, a rhetoric of which is foregrounded throughout the university and policy documents. Beyond just prohibiting discrimination, AU’s EEO policy also includes deliberate references to unconscious bias, ensuring representation across students and staff, and the continued education of

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<sup>40</sup> Table 4 provides basic information on the women senior leaders interviewed. Identifying factors such as race and ethnicity have not been included but generally AU participants were overwhelmingly white, Anglo-Saxon women, whereas SU participants reflected a higher diversity of ethnicities from European to South and East Asian backgrounds. This was particularly interesting to note considering that Australia has a much more diverse multicultural population. Although participant age was not part of the demographics sought, most participants were in their late 30s-60s. Participants were either in the middle or late stages of their careers, generally (although not in all cases) older and with no children or older children when they reached senior leadership.

university community members is centred around equality and diversity. Further, it references the impact of discriminatory language versus inclusive language, has promotion panel training on overcoming bias, and has specific programs for women leaders. By surface appearance, the overall policy is found to be comprehensive and strong, inclusive of overt and covert forms of discrimination, and complementing strong equal opportunity laws nationwide.

In contrast, SU has one specific EEO policy based around discrimination and harassment. The policy prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, disability, sexuality, marital status, pregnancy, family status or race, as well as prohibiting any forms of harassment. While addressing sex discrimination, the University does not have an overarching policy commitment to gender equality. In comparison to AU, SU's policy is still developing and is yet to integrate gender equality aims into the overall university strategic plan or direction.

The universities' EEO policies are analysed around three main provisions that contribute to women achieving leadership: (a) targets and measurable goals; (b) transparency in the promotions process; and (c) appeals and grievances mechanisms. Similarities and differences are contrasted in order to gain a more detailed picture of how the EEO policies contribute, or fail to contribute, to women gaining leadership positions. This allows for a reflection on how EEO policies are experienced in practice, and where future potential developments may be needed.

#### *A The provision of targets and measurable goals*

The provision of targets, quotas, and measurable goals is a common mechanism used to address workplace gender imbalance. The use of targets and quotas is contested, however, they do provide a measurement which ensures that at least a minimum is undertaken — as the management maxim goes, what gets measured, gets done.<sup>41</sup> AU had targets for gender equality, yet SU had no publicly available targets and there were no explicit measurable goals against which comparisons could be made. One participant states, 'I am the kind of person that thinks the university should be doing more, have frameworks, but I wonder if all my colleagues feel the same way'.<sup>42</sup> This approach "may

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<sup>41</sup> Petra Meier and Emanuela Lombardo, 'Gender Quotas, Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Relations in Politics' (2013) 65(1) *Political Science* 46.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Lilian, Associate Dean, SU (Hong Kong, 5 October 2015).

be more acceptable to management” because there is no responsibility to produce measurable change, but progress at SU in particular appeared hampered by the absence of set targets or goals.<sup>43</sup> Participants indicated how goals for inclusion reaffirmed not only that they were welcome in the leadership spaces they occupied, but that there was acknowledgement that the lack of women in leadership was a problem to be rectified. Yet at SU, women leaders were sensitive that targets may not be welcomed among their colleagues.

Through processes such as funding, promotions, or appointments of new leaders, targets and measurable goals ensure that an awareness of gender equality goals is reached. Programs like the Athena SWAN Charter ('UK') and SAGE in Australia are gaining traction, whereby university funding is determined by how gender equitable a university or department is — the more equitable, the more funding a university receives.<sup>44</sup> When similar awards or benchmarks were explored at SU, a different story was found in the dialogue between interviewer and participant.

Participant: I work with a team of people in the United States and when they apply for research grants through the federal government there's a statement that you have to provide that you've done this and that for gender equity and you can actually get your application rejected if you don't take equity into account, they actually score you on it.

Interviewer: Do you know of anything similar in Hong Kong?

Participant: Are you joking? (laughs).<sup>45</sup>

Gender targets and benchmarks were yet to be made a priority at SU, despite it being common practice in many Western universities worldwide. This appears to have had a major effect on SU's ability to acknowledge and then retain a minimum percentage of women in leadership. Consequently, having targets and measurable goals does appear to correlate with more women achieving senior leadership, with greater gender representation being witnessed in AU as a result and more welcoming experiences of the leadership environment being reported. This may be because, unlike many of the

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<sup>43</sup> Joan Acker, 'Inequality Regimes: Gender Class, and Race in Organisations' (2006) 20(4) *Gender and Society* 441.

<sup>44</sup> Equality Challenge Unit, *Athena SWAN Charter* (2016) <<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/>>; Australian Academy of Science, *Gender Equity* (2016) <<https://www.science.org.au/supporting-science/gender-equity>>.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Penny, Associate Dean, SU (Hong Kong, 16 September 2015).

provisions of EEO policies, the setting of targets is a proactive, empowering measure that goes beyond “prohibiting discrimination” to “promoting women leaders”. This is a major difference between the EEO policies of AU and SU — with AU's policy more proactive in promoting women leaders and SU's policy more reactive in preventing discrimination and harassment.

### B *Transparency in the promotions process*

Transparency in promotions is key to the advancement of women.<sup>46</sup> This is largely due to the impact of longstanding structural sex discrimination, the prevalence for leadership to be associated with masculine attributes, and the persistence of old boys' networks and theories of homosociability, which has traditionally disadvantaged women from gaining promotions to senior leadership.<sup>47</sup> AU outlines the importance of transparency, and as a publicly-funded institution, is subject to many laws and policies that require transparency. However “back door” methods of advancement in Hong Kong added to a lack of transparency around promotions and provisions for transparency in SU's EEO policy.

Hong Kong still employs the use of *guanxi*, loosely translated as a network of relationships, which places ‘emphasis upon getting things done through whom you know’.<sup>48</sup> It is part of a strategy that employs good relationships or use of the “back door” to accomplish objectives, such as filling or applying for new positions of leadership. Although it is officially railed against in China and Hong Kong, the practice seems to still be commonplace enough to affect participants working in this globalised university in 21<sup>st</sup> century Hong Kong. This can disadvantage women seeking leadership and promotions by not providing a clear and transparent pathway to leadership, also disadvantaging those who may have weaker social networks (often, women). One SU leader comments, ‘the Chinese masculine culture, as it's expressed at this university, if they are in positions of leadership ... they typically like to lead by the “back door”. So the decisions have all been

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<sup>46</sup> Hilary Winchester, Colleen Chesterman, Shard Lorenzo and Lynette Browning, ‘Academic Women's Promotions in Australian Universities’ (2006) 28(6) *Employee Relations* 505.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid; Joan Acker, ‘Inequality Regimes: Gender Class, and Race in Organisations’ (2006) 20(4) *Gender and Society* 441; Louise Kloot, ‘Women and Leadership in Universities: A Case Study of Women Academic Managers’ (2004) 17(6) *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 470.

<sup>48</sup> James Wall, ‘Managers in the People's Republic of China’ (1990) 4(2) *Academy of Management Executive* 27.

made in advance, and the meeting is really a perfunctory ceremony to endorse and put the final seal on it'.<sup>49</sup> SU women leaders interviewed indicated a level of uncertainty and a lack of transparency when they applied for positions of advancement which was not evidenced among the AU women leaders.

Further to a lack of transparency, a lack of clear criteria and definition of leadership was felt to obscure the appointment of new leaders across both SU and AU. One participant lamented that 'I wish there was a policy paper or there was a manual that would tell you what they want ... nobody knows what [leadership] is and how to quantify it. It is not in the promotion policy papers'.<sup>50</sup> Many SU participants detailed how this allowed outright discrimination to occur. Without a clear understanding of leadership from both the person wanting to be promoted and those assessing promotion applications, unconscious bias can play into how decisions are made. Hence, the recent emphasis on promotion-panels training and the importance of transparency in process, which was more evidenced at AU.<sup>51</sup>

AU appeared to have a better organisational environment around transparency, yet issues were still found. One AU participant talked about continued practices and processes which subvert efforts to increase women's equity, equal participation, and recognition. She spoke firstly about the traditional conception of a leader as male when it came to the appointment of a new head and the lack of transparency around definitions and criteria for the role.

I am the second-in-charge but I have already been given the signals first of all — too soon, not what the Vice Chancellor is looking for, not the right image — none of which has got anything to do with my ability or what I've achieved. So I think that the messages around what leadership is are very mixed here and certainly not what I'd be looking for in someone taking on a leadership role in [this school] in this day and age.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Penny, Associate Dean, SU (Hong Kong, 16 September 2015).

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Anna, Associate Dean, SU (Hong Kong, 11 September 2015).

<sup>51</sup> Louise Kloot, 'Women and Leadership in Universities: A Case Study of Women Academic Managers' (2004) 17(6) *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 470; Hilary Winchester, Colleen Chesterman, Shard Lorenzo and Lynette Browning, 'Academic Women's Promotions in Australian Universities' (2006) 28(6) *Employee Relations* 505.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Georgia, Dean, AU (Australia, 29 April 2015).

This had an impact on the participant not applying for the senior position on the executive, with her commenting that she felt that she had reached as far as she would in her career. Her experience was not linked to specific and transparent criteria or definitions around the position, but instead focussed on intangible and unmeasurable comments on her image. This demonstrates that even when there are specific criteria, as there are at AU, it seems that there is “something else” — the image and the values around that perceived image — that is needed. Georgia stated that:

I am perceived as a strong woman, and [the leadership] doesn't like strong women. That was actually said. On more than one occasion ... [they] will refer to me as 'she is no shrinking violet' or 'you could call her bossy,' and I mean you wouldn't use that language with men.<sup>53</sup>

Language perpetuates inequality as it can marginalise and trivialise women and their contributions to the workforce, as well as shape how their achievements, leadership styles, and personalities are perceived in the workplace.<sup>54</sup> Van Krieken et al note that language plays a crucial role in the maintenance of particular understandings of masculinity and femininity, and can work to constrain women seeking leadership in the workplace.<sup>55</sup> Despite AU's EEO policies around inclusive and non-discriminatory language, inequality continues to be perpetuated in this way, suggesting that transparency in promotions processes begins well before the actual application for promotion. It is clear that while having provisions for transparency in EEO policies is important for helping provide women leaders with more information and clarity around leadership positions, at neither university did it ensure that opportunities for promotion are always equitably received or assessed.

Where SU evidenced a less transparent promotions process and no provision for promotion panel training, the women spoke more often of difficulties in signalling for, applying for, and getting promotion. AU had stronger policies around transparency which seemed to create a more transparent overall environment which helped the women leaders, however there were still some clear divergences between policy and practice.

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Georgia, Dean, AU (Australia, 29 April 2015).

<sup>54</sup> Yvonne Benschop and Margo Brouns, 'Crumbling Ivory Towers: Academic Organising and its Gender Effects' (2003) 10(2) *Gender, Work and Organisation* 194.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Van Krieken, Daphne Habibis, Philip Smith, Brett Hutchins, Greg Martin, and Karl Maton, *Sociology* (Pearson Education, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, 2010).

*C The provision of appeals and grievances mechanisms*

In the case of such divergences, appeals and grievances mechanisms are key structures for women in university employment. Some provisions of grievances mechanisms include committees that can investigate and decide on matters of discrimination or harassment. They were available in both universities, yet as will become clear, there are nuances in policy and application.

In SU, formal procedures for investigation against discrimination are available for all full-time and part-time staff and students, however, no mention is made of casual staff who are mostly women. There is a commission to deal with discrimination complaints within the university, yet the focus of the documents is on overt forms of discrimination. There is no mention of the fact that much of contemporary gender inequity is a result of “invisible” inequalities, unconscious bias, and general exclusionary practices, and interactions (old boys’ clubs, et cetera) in the university environment.<sup>56</sup> In this way, the EEO policy of SU addresses the important issue of preventing discrimination, but this does not necessarily create an equal workforce.

The importance of appeals and grievances mechanisms was demonstrated through one SU participant when she applied for a job within the university. She states that:

There was a position that became available in the university which I applied for but did not get ... I thought, oh, maybe my portfolio wasn't what they wanted or maybe it wasn't good enough, but it turns out, someone told me afterwards, 'oh you should know actually at the time you were not chosen because you were a woman'. This is through the university. And the main reason was that they said the department at that time thought that women would have children and would be out of action for a long time.<sup>57</sup>

This is a clear example of discrimination on the basis of gender and an example of where appeals can be important for women's career progression. While discrimination on this basis is illegal in Hong Kong, an appeal or grievances process was not followed by the participant. For women seeking leadership within the universities, appeals and grievances mechanisms are important, however, the women for whom they apply can

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<sup>56</sup> Joan Acker, 'Inequality Regimes: Gender Class, and Race in Organisations' (2006) 20(4) *Gender and Society* 441.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Lilian, Associate Dean, SU (Hong Kong, 5 October 2015).

often be reluctant to use them, or feel that there is no point in going through the process. Since there is a focus on the “reactive” remedying of discrimination where it occurs, rather than “proactive” measures of encouraging leadership, it is unclear whether this contributes to more women in leadership in the universities. However, appeals and grievances mechanisms do contribute to the overall university environment whereby women have options and supports. This may contribute more to the retaining of women leaders, even if it does not actively increase their numbers. AU had a stronger appeals process which appeared more integrated and easier to access in the university design, which may have contributed to its more accessible and inclusive working environment for the women.

The three provisions (a), (b), and (c) begin to demonstrate correlations between the level of development of each universities' EEO policies and the levels and experiences of the women university leaders. AU had a more developed EEO policy which correlates with its higher numbers of women in leadership and more positive overall experiences of leadership. Yet an underlying similarity was found. Although both universities had developed EEO policies over a number of decades, neither university had achieved equal gender representation in leadership, indicating only a “moderate success” in terms of the effect of the EEO policies.

#### VII DEFICITS IN THE EEO POLICIES

Two key factors were found to limit the effect of the EEO provisions. They include: (i) the narrow focus on aspects of discrimination and inequality; and (ii) the inadequate addressing of subjectivity and bias in forming EEO and enacting policies. Acker's theory of inequality regimes is used to understand why EEO policies have had only moderate success. Outlining the effect of these policies is important because they often ‘fail to address other underlying processes of inequality’.<sup>58</sup>

##### *A The narrow focus on aspects of discrimination and inequality*

By failing to encompass some of the nuances and covert ways in which inequality is produced through everyday university life, EEO policies can obscure elements of inequality regimes. At SU there is only one reference to gender (sex) in the entire EEO

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid 457.



policy document and no definition or description is provided for what “sex discrimination” actually means. As Reilly et al state, by not making specific reference to women and their unique challenges within the university, there is an implication that the genders are equally disadvantaged and that no targeted response for women is needed.<sup>59</sup> Further, the focus on “narrow areas of inequality” and limited recognition of intersectionality (the intersection of multiple areas of inequality) can result in EEO policies failing to address underlying organisational inequality.<sup>60</sup>

One SU participant demonstrates the limitations of EEO policies that fail to build a gender equitable university environment. She talks about the all-permeating nature of a masculinist and rigid cultural environment, an intersection of inequalities which can act to constrain women’s leadership. In her position:

what I became very aware of was that it wasn’t just that women weren’t in senior positions, because [gender] should not be the sole reason why a person is in a senior position, but that there was this kind of invisible barrier, I don’t know how else to describe it, there’s no staircase for women to even access [leadership]. And that’s because it’s quite a masculine culture, but enmeshed with Chinese culture. It’s the two kind of mutually working together which prevented, at least from my observations, women having a real voice.<sup>61</sup>

Narrow EEO policies that fail to address organisational culture and environment can silence the voice of women in the workplace, making it hard to both enact leadership and observe that leadership being enacted.<sup>62</sup> The intersection of culture and gender was felt to limit women's leadership at SU. With limited provisions to address this intersectionality, and procedures around promotion panel training or combating unconscious bias or problematic language not evidenced, SU’s overall policy for addressing gender inequality was still developing. Many of these issues have been addressed at AU.

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<sup>59</sup> Amanda Reilly, Deborah Jones, Carla Rey Vasquez and Jayne Krisjanous, ‘Confronting Gender Inequality in a Business School’ (2016) 35(5) *Higher Education Research and Development* 1025.

<sup>60</sup> Joan Acker, ‘From Glass Ceiling to Inequality Regimes’ (2009) 51(2) *Sociologie Du Travail* 199, 213.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Penny, Associate Dean, SU (Hong Kong, 16 September 2015).

<sup>62</sup> Amanda Reilly, Deborah Jones, Carla Rey Vasquez and Jayne Krisjanous, ‘Confronting Gender Inequality in a Business School’ (2016) 35(5) *Higher Education Research and Development* 1025.

*B Inadequately addressing subjectivity and bias in forming and enacting policies*

The second limitation of EEO policies concern definitions of leadership and merit. Much EEO legislation in the public sector in Australia (and internationally) bases initiatives around the concept of merit, commonly understood to be based on a person's ability or capacity to perform in a position.<sup>63</sup> Merit is, however, subjectively assessed, and evidence continues to suggest 'that men are perceived to be more able, to have more natural ability in a range of areas, than women'.<sup>64</sup> EEO policies can therefore have limited effect if they fail to take into account the subjective biases not only of those forming the EEO policies, but of those applying the policies, and whether the policies encourage the rethinking of traditional structures.<sup>65</sup>

This limitation is exemplified by the theme that most participants felt that they had not experienced "too much" overt discrimination or bias; like Reilly et al's study, many rejected gender as an explanatory framework for challenges encountered.<sup>66</sup> However, gender stereotyping and assumptions at the universities were regularly brought to the fore as issues not dealt with well by the universities' policies, and therefore also staff within their work environments. An AU participant states:

I have very rarely ever experienced overt discrimination at all, but what I experience on a daily basis ... is that I turn up to the breakfast this morning and all of the guests, pro vice chancellors, were male, and there are expectations of who am I and what am I doing here. It's always a little bit critical ... it's never disrespectful, it's just the expectation and probably, if you were to go to an engineering breakfast and you saw a woman there, you mightn't automatically think that she's somebody senior ... it's those kind of things that you're a little bit of novelty, you know, 'oh what are you doing here' and 'how did you get here'.<sup>67</sup>

The impact of these kinds of perceptions is put clearly by one SU participant when she acknowledges the importance of the perceptions of her colleagues (which are in some

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<sup>63</sup> Clare Burton, *Monograph No. 2: Redefining Merit* (Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>66</sup> Amanda Reilly, Deborah Jones, Carla Rey Vasquez and Jayne Krisjanous, 'Confronting Gender Inequality in a Business School' (2016) 35(5) *Higher Education Research and Development* 1025.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Sandra, Pro Vice Chancellor, AU (Australia, 12 May 2015).

cases, also the same people sitting on promotion panels) on her advancement to leadership. She asks:

If I were the dean, could I get a bunch of associate deans to believe in me? I would question that because I'm not sure, and this is something to do with the kind of feeling you get from the ground level. It's like, well, if you walk in and people still think you're the secretary, it says something about whether you're able enough. So would they be backing me if I had a tough thing I had to do?<sup>68</sup>

Without EEO policies which take into account non-traditional definitions of merit and leadership, policies may be inherently subjective and be inadequately dealing with the unconscious bias and gender stereotyping that they aim to address. Having non-traditional conceptions of leadership and merit may also open up a more inclusive collegial environment, which was desired at both AU and SU by the women leaders.

#### VIII CONCLUSION

This case study has demonstrated that EEO policies do contribute to women achieving senior positions of leadership. The benefit of a cross-cultural comparative study has shown clear differences in the level of development of university EEO policies and the level of women in leadership. More-developed EEO policies are positively correlated with more women in university leadership and better experiences of leadership. Addressing both overt and covert discrimination was important to achieving better representation in leadership. This was done at AU and could indicate why there were higher numbers of women in leadership. On the other hand, the EEO policies and mechanisms for women within SU focussed exclusively on overt discrimination, leaving covert discrimination unaddressed. The differences in policies appear to be a major factor contributing to the differences in the numbers of women leaders between the universities. This is a key insight as a result of analysing differences in the EEO policies.

Further, Acker's theory of inequality regimes offers key insights into why EEO interventions within universities often fail to produce the change they aim to instil: true equality. Primarily, this is because EEO policies and mechanisms for appeals within universities are only part of the solution. These policies and interventions are important

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Lilian, Associate Dean, SU (Hong Kong, 5 October 2015).

for providing a framework for working towards equality, but they do not produce equality simply by virtue of existing. This reinforces much of the literature around EEO policies beyond universities, findings of which include that 'merely having organisations produce equity plans does not increase women's participation in senior positions'.<sup>69</sup> In fact, Acker finds that successful efforts to attain gender equality have a number of common characteristics: targeting a limited set of EEO objectives; combining social movement and legislative support outside the organisation with support from inside the organisation; and, coercion or threat of loss as a result of not acting to achieve equality.<sup>70</sup>

Due to the complexity of the issue, this study focussed on comparing the EEO policies and the experiences of the women leaders. The small sample size allowed for a deep analysis of each individual women's career paths and experiences within each context, however this has limited the ability to make generalisations, and the study could benefit from more participants in future. Further research directions could include a deeper analysis on how the different cultural environments influence the development of EEO policies and women's leadership. Acknowledging that EEO policies are only one of a multitude of factors impacting women's progression, issues surrounding culture persist and are worth investigating further. Hong Kong universities appear to require even more robust and comprehensive EEO policies than Australia to counter other known barriers and challenges for women, whether they be cultural, political, or legal within the Asian context.

Overall, it is clear that the EEO policies and guidelines at SU are still requiring development compared with AU, but even with stronger EEO policies, AU has not achieved its targets (see **Table 3**). One AU participant sums up the contemporary leadership experience:

It has almost gone full circle of women working really hard to get this level of work and have children, but at the end of the day it's still the women who have to do the

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<sup>69</sup> Glenda Strachan and Erica French, 'EEO: Is it Living Up to its Promise of Gender Equity?' (2008) in Pauline Stanton and Suzanne Young (eds), *Workers, Corporations and Community: Facing Choices for a Sustainable Future: Volume 1: Refereed Papers* (Paper presented at the Proceedings 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference of the Association of Industrial relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand – Workers, Corporations and Community: Facing Choices for a Sustainable Future, Melbourne, Australia, 6-8 February 2008) 10.

<sup>70</sup> Joan Acker, 'Inequality Regimes: Gender Class, and Race in Organisations' (2006) 20(4) *Gender and Society* 441.

majority of the work in the space ... you have to be 'all in', and women just choose or can't be all in.<sup>71</sup>

Luke's summary of gender equity progress in the workplace still seems to hold true:

Women have worked hard to gain entry into the public sphere, the professions, and to break through old stereotypes and seniority barriers – in short, they have worked hard to earn the right to work the double-day.<sup>72</sup>

EEO policies are important, but greater awareness of covert discrimination and the everyday practices and processes of inequality, as well as the reviewing of policies, may be needed. The implications of incomplete EEO policies and mechanisms, or reliance only on EEO policies and mechanisms to produce change leaves women leaders exposed to organisational challenges. It appears that AU should have a better organisational environment for women leaders, however neither institution has leadership equality. In spite of many years of gender reforms and awareness, universities globally are still sites of gender inequality.

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Georgia, Dean, AU (Australia, 29 April 2015).

<sup>72</sup> Carmen Luke, "I Got to Where I Am By My Own Strength": Women in Hong Kong Higher Education Management' (1998) 26(1) *Education Journal* 31, 54.

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