UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

STATUS EVALUATIONS OF

SENIOR EXECUTIVE WOMEN LEADERS

IN AUSTRALIAN ORGANISATIONS:

STRATEGIES AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS

A Thesis submitted by

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**Abstract**

This thesis is expected to make a major contribution to diversity management practices within Australia – and to the literature more broadly - by explicating what type of strategies and support mechanisms are required for women to excel in leadership positions. The thesis explores the status-imposed limitations on senior executive women's agency in Australian workplaces through the lens of status characteristics theory (SCT). It adds to existing theory by employing an empirical lens of the actual workplace experiences of Australian women in leadership. This thesis suggests that women leaders are aware of status-imposed limitations on their agency and identify a range of successful behaviours to shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings. Findings suggest that status is as important as power and resources in perceptions of workplace competence. Perceptions through cultural assessments are made about women and these perceptions limit women leaders' agency. Furthermore, this thesis provides significant empirical confirmation that personal and institutional support mechanisms significantly assist women leaders' progression. The thesis extends current thinking and elevates status beliefs and characteristics to those of resources and power.

## Certification of Thesis

This Thesis is entirely the work of Ainslie Waldron _____
except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not
previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Principal Supervisor: Professor Peter A. Murray_____

Associate Supervisor: Doctor Kim Southey_____

Student and supervisors signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

## Statement of Contribution

The following detail is the agreed share of contribution for candidate and co-authors in the presented publication in this thesis:

- **Refereed book chapter**

Waldron, Ainslie and Southey, Kim and Murray, Peter A. (2018) *How women executives survive the isolated echelons of the corporate ladder.* In: Work and identity: contemporary perspectives on workplace diversity. Palgrave Explorations in Workplace Stigma. Palgrave Macmillan Ltd., United Kingdom. IBSN 978-3-319-73935-9, pp. 85-99.

The overall contribution of *Ainslie Waldron* was 60% to the concept development, analysis, drafting and revising the final submission; Dr Kim Southey and Professor Peter Murray jointly contributed the other 40% to concept development, analysis, and editing.

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*Ainslie Waldron*
20 December 2018

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

**CHAPTER 1**

**INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER**

## 1.0    Introduction

This thesis explores the limitations imposed on senior executive women leaders' (SEWL) agency in Australian workplaces. The limitations on successful SEWLs are studied in order to identify a range of successful behaviours the SEWLs engage in to overcome or obfuscate the effects of workplace assessments. This thesis investigates the behavioural manifestations of stereotypical evaluations and attitudes that occur subconsciously in informal workgroups.

The theoretical construct that forms the basis of this thesis is status characteristics theory (SCT). SCT describes how people use subconscious assessments of other individuals because of deeply held beliefs about them (Berger et al. 1980; Lucas & Baxter 2012). SCT rests on the belief of a status organising process, where differences in informal workplace attitudes and evaluations in informal work group task situations, leads to differences in the way people interact within the group. Informal workplace status is determined by the attributes that people possess in different amounts and the extent which any attribute or combination of attributes invites levels of reverence or worth (Ridgeway 1993). This status is not traditional status as acquired by job position or by position title, rather it is the subliminal status assigned to individuals on the basis of one or more characteristics e.g., sex, age, or ethnicity, within work groups. These workplace interactions become stable and visible characteristics of the process of workplace interaction (Berger et al. 1977).

The Australian Workplace Gender Agency's statistics on education levels (WGEA 2015) indicate that of all women aged from twenty-five to twenty-nine, 39.9% have achieved a bachelor's degree or above, compared to 30.9% of men. A slightly higher proportion (5.9%) of women aged fifteen to sixty-four years attained a post graduate degree than men (5.8%) in the same age bracket. In 2018, women hold 13.7% of board chair positions and 24.9% of company directorships. Women also represent 16.5% of CEOs and 29.7% of key management personnel in companies who have over 100 employees. Over two-thirds (70.9%) of such companies have male only key management personnel (WGEA 2018). Key

female management personnel earn on average $89,576 *less* than their male counterparts indicating an average gender pay gap of 24% (WGEA 2018).

The previous paragraph highlights issues that are one of the driving forces behind this research. Women now comprise 47.0% of all employed persons in Australia (WGEA 2018). It is known that despite Australian men and women attaining appropriate qualifications, women are highly underrepresented on boards. Similarly, they are underrepresented in the upper management ranks of Australian companies and when they reach executive level they suffer from a significant pay gap (WGEA 2018).

This thesis is of value both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it explores and develops SCT within the Australian workplace context, providing insights about characteristics that are deemed to affect a person's positioning in the power and prestige order of the group. From a practical perspective, the results are expected to highlight which status characteristics in workplace status evaluations are more likely to determine whether women will be more or less successful in leadership positions. It is expected that this thesis will make a major contribution to diversity management practices in Australia – and to the literature more broadly - by explicating what type of support is required for women to excel in leadership positions.

## 1.1 Background to the research

The thesis focuses on women at the senior executive management level. As illustrated by the statistics quoted in section 1.0 there is an underrepresentation of women in the most senior positions. The progression of women into the most senior management and board positions remains slow.

The theory of status characteristics describes how status organising processes operate. These are processes by which differences in cognition and evaluations of individuals become the foundation of status perceptions in the observable and stable features of social interaction. The theory predicts the emergence and structure of power and prestige orders in task groups from the qualities that members possess. It also predicts this emergence over time as members participate. Over time status hierarchies cause one group to be seen as more able

and influential than another group and cultural beliefs about gender become beliefs about gender status inequalities (Ridgeway 2008). Status is crucial in creating and reinforcing group differences such as differences in class, gender and race into organisational structures of power and resources (Ridgeway 2014). Status underpins continuing social inequalities founded by social differences.

Women are entering executive roles in the Australian workplace however progression of women into the most senior positions is occurring at a very sluggish rate. At present it is unclear which status characteristics contribute to shortening the path of relevance - the cognitive connection between the individual and the task that links the status characteristics possessed by the individual to an outcome state of the task (Berger et al. 1980, p. 485). For instance, Australian women with higher status assessed as more competent will have shorter paths than those assessed as less competent with longer paths (Murray & Southey 2017). Importantly also, the thesis explores the role of status organising processes to help enlighten the practice of diversity across social, cultural, and institutional customs and traditions and how these affect women's progression into managerial roles.

A number of scholars have analysed the paucity of women in the most senior positions. Some scholars have focussed on women opting out to be at home (Belkin 2003) and others on women shunning the male-type characteristics that are valued at the top in organisations (Fine 2009). This thesis does not focus on what the barriers to progression are; rather, it focuses on how status and competence are used to automatically rank women in informal problem-solving groups such that women become disadvantaged, silenced and excluded as equals in the workplace principally because of the gender female characteristic. Further, it explores how diversity practices need to change in ways that remove gender as an unconscious gender bias or stereotype in the assessments of women for top management roles. As Berger et al (1980) identified, these gender status biases are often unconsciously determined by groups, yet they tend to be slight and persistent (Ridgeway 1997). It is those characteristics used for status assessment and status ranking which are of special interest in this research.

This thesis adds to existing status characteristics theory by applying the theory empirically on Australian women in leadership. Accordingly, the thesis examines how status characteristics in workplace status evaluations determine whether women will be more or less successful in leadership positions. The results will lead to better support for women in leadership in Australia. Here, the results of the thesis are expected to contribute to the continued development of business systems, models, practices and policies within the Australian business context.

## 1.2 The research problem and research questions

This thesis is designed to improve our knowledge as to how women can be better supported for top leadership positions in Australian companies by exploring the application of SCT within an Australian workplace context. As such, the research problem in the study is:

> Using SCT as an underlying theory, to what extent can women's roles be better supported by understanding the links between power-prestige orders and the subliminal gender characteristic as a status cue?

The power-prestige order of people in an informal workgroup determines their influence in the group (Berger et al. 1977). Those members who are ranked higher in terms of their perceived contribution to task success will be more highly valued in a power-prestige order (Berger et al. 1977). SCT states that regardless of the fact that status characteristics can be unrelated to the given task, group members will form performance expectations and evaluate such expectations as though the task is relevant. Here, once a path of relevance links an expectation of high or low competence with a particular status characteristic, no matter how weak the path is, it is assumed to provide evidence of the degree of task competence until it is *disproven* (Murray & Southey 2017). This is known in SCT as *the burden of proof*. The *burden of proof* states that it is only when a characteristic is proven to be unrelated to the task that it will be considered no longer relevant (Berger et al. 1977).

### 1.2.1  Research question one

<u>RQ 1:</u>

*1.1 How do senior executive women leaders shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings?*

*1.2 Why do some senior executive women leaders decide not to strive for the top positions?*

*1.3 Are senior executive women leaders excluded from opportunities that will shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings?*

Individual members of a group undertaking a group task may have status characteristics that are related, either directly or indirectly, to the ability to complete a task. The more that individuals possess a characteristic deemed highly related to task success, the shorter and potentially stronger the path of relevance is. On the other hand, individuals assessed with characteristics which either do not influence or indirectly influence task success, suggests the *path of relevance* will be longer and potentially weaker. If individuals possess indirect connections to task success, SCT assumes that group members will search and try to find linkages between the features and requirements of the task at hand and the individual's status characteristics. The shorter the path of relevance the stronger it is, which in turn strengthens the performance expectations of an individual (Berger et al. 1977).

Status characteristics can either be *diffuse* or *specific*. Diffuse characteristics trigger both general and specific expectations about the performance of a person. For example, gender, race, and educational accomplishments activate both general and specific expectations. Specific characteristics activate distinct expectations about specific abilities of a person. Examples of specific characteristics are mathematical and mechanical ability. Groups will import external evaluations of status characteristics into work group task situations (Berger & Fisek 2006). Status characteristics (both specific and diffuse) become *salient* or activated when they differentiate group members (Ridgeway 1993).

Identifying how these characteristics are linked to SEWL's progression into senior roles is explored in this thesis. According to Ridgeway (2011), the basis of SCT and power-prestige ranking derive from deep-seated cultural assessments (Ridgeway 2011). According to extant research, many factors will influence status assessments not least a person's cultural, social and ideological background including, but not limited to, contextual factors such as loosely related inequality regimes at work (Acker 2006; Ridgeway 2011). The latter relate to procedures, practices and systems that often define and construct gendered differences and how they are played out in places of work. Other factors that might influence status evaluations related to gendered subtexts, are often not identifiable (Bendl 2008).

A number of media articles address the issue of women deciding to opt out. Six out of ten Australian businessmen believe that the principle reason for women not entering management roles is limited agency and engagement by women themselves; women are holding themselves back (Dalla-Camina 2014). Research indicates that women in senior positions wish to make a positive contribution to the world and behave ethically, and if they feel that they are not doing this, they will leave leadership positions (Fine 2009). Belkin (2003) found that women left leadership positions because of family care commitments. None of the women in Fine's (2009) research stated this. Women mostly left the workplace because they had little desire for power in organisational life. Many were looking to help others through their leadership roles and styles. A survey in 2012 found that only forty-one per-cent (41%) of women aspired to join the senior executive team (Barsh & Yee 2012). In the Australian workplace context, it is unclear why some women opt-out of striving for the top positions. To the researcher's knowledge, no research has been undertaken to date identifying the status characteristics of such women and how persistent but subtle status rankings affect women's decisions of preferred job choice.

### 1.2.2   Research question two

*RQ 2:*

*To what extent do status and cultural assessments limit senior executive women leaders' agency?*

Status is a critical factor in determining and reinforcing group differences such as differences in gender, race and class into organisational structures of power and resources (Ridgeway 2014). Status underpins continuing social inequalities founded by social differences. The diffuse lower-status characteristic of the female gender affects cultural assessments limiting women's agency (Ridgeway 2008). Ridgeway (2014) calls for more research and a greater understanding of how cultural status beliefs relate to resources and power.  The extent to which cultural assessments affect senior women in the Australian workforce will be explored.

### 1.2.3   Research question three

*RQ 3:*

*3.1 To what extent are senior executive women leaders supported by personal support mechanisms such as networks, mentors and sponsors?*

*3.2 To what extent are senior executive women leaders supported by legislative and organisational support mechanisms?*

In RQ 3.1, it is important to explore the role played by internal and external influences. Internal support mechanisms include personal support arrangements such as mentors and sponsors (Reinhold 2005; Kark & Eagly 2010). In RQ 3.2, the influence of legislation and policies that institutionalise equality practices (Murray & Southey 2017) are also explored as well how these institutionalised policies contribute to and alter the experience of women leaders for career progression.

Taken together, all research questions help to explore the research problem re-stated here: 'Using SCT as an underlying theory, to what extent can women's

roles be better supported by understanding the links between power-prestige orders and the subliminal gender characteristic as a status cue?'

### *1.2.4    The conceptual model*

Figure 1.1 is a conceptual model depicting the main variables. When undertaking a workplace group task senior executive women leaders will possess diffuse and/or specific characteristics relative to the task being undertaken.  Gender is always considered as a diffuse characteristic in mixed sex group task situations.

The SCT *burden of proof* dictates that expectations of performance will be carried over from one task to another unless there is some reason not to carry over the status evaluation.  The *path of relevance* in Figure 1.1 is the cognitive connection between the individual and the task that links the status characteristic possessed by the individual to an outcome state of the task, either success or failure (Berger et al. 1980, p.485). Cultural beliefs and assessments contribute to reinforcing the lower female status characteristic (Ridgeway 2011).

Informal workplace competency evaluations are made which may or may not eventually result in determining power-prestige rankings and the opportunity to perform.
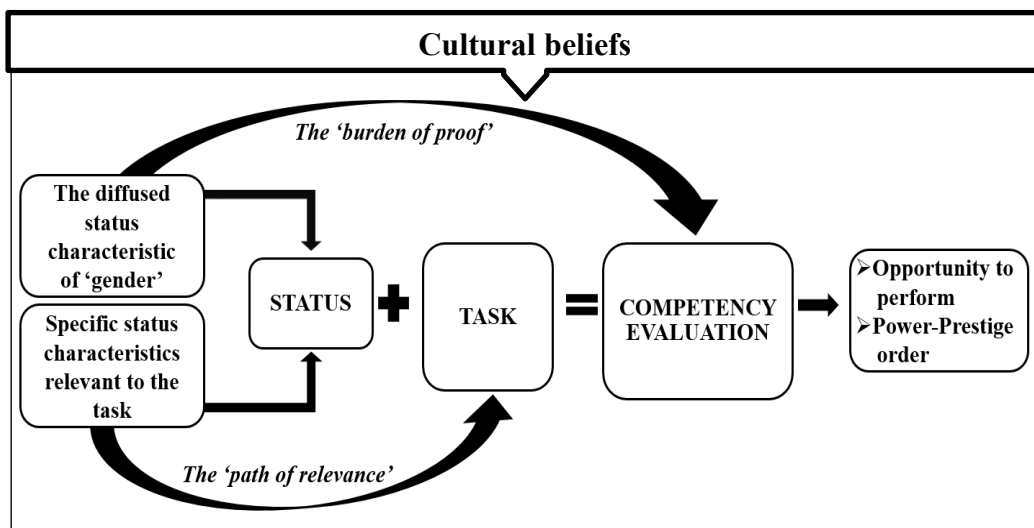


**Figure 1. 1**  *Conceptual model depicting the main variables*

## 1.3    Delimitations of this thesis

Much recent research explores the reasons for women making slow progress into executive positions. Chapter 2 outlines these in detail.

A number of established enablers of positive gender equality outcomes are well known such as pay equity, flexibility and a whole-of-enterprise gender strategy (AICD 2015). Although these enablers are important, limited understanding exists related to the causes of, and solutions to, workplace gender inequality. The business and investment case for addressing inequality has not always led to productive outcomes especially for women in management. Among company director cohorts, there tends to exist support for the principles of gender equality but less understanding of the "*need for a whole-of-enterprise, root and branch diagnosis of and response to the systematic and cultural barriers that inhibit women's progression*" (AICD 2015, p. 7).

This research is *not* designed to consider the known educational enablers or 'stock enablers' for executives such as a Master of Business Administration (MBA) or Australian Institute of Company Director's (AICD) Course (CDC). It does not consider policy workforce enablers such as paid maternity and paternity leave; child care facilities, allowances and payments; flexible working conditions; and special leave.

For the purposes of this research, SEWLs are defined as those who have demonstrated superior competence and skill to carry out leadership and management roles at the top management level. This includes Chief Executive Officer (CEO), senior executive, chair and board membership roles.

## 1.4    Justification for the research

There is growing empirical research examining the financial benefits of diversity in the top management team, with increasing backing for more workforce diversity (Desvaux et al. 2007; Barsh & Yee 2012; Catalyst 2014) as well as recognising specific situations where diversity improves performance (Dezsö & Ross 2012).

The progression of women into the most senior positions is slow despite much effort in educating and supporting Australian women in the workplace. The MBA and similar programs such as the Company Director's courses of the AICD have been developed as skill paths for executive roles. These "stock" enablers are already well established and acknowledged by many groups as helpful in women's progression (Barrick 2017). Similarly, contemporary workplace diversity policy and action exists surrounding issues such as paid parental leave, childcare for working women, and schemes which strongly encourage workplace diversity (WGEA 2018). The above are enablers which assist women. While this research acknowledges that these time-honoured traditions potentially influence women's roles for the better, they do not address how status differences occur and how these differences become embedded in workplace behaviour. It is accordingly necessary to explore how gender status at the management level leads to inequality regimes in the form of power-prestige orders that tend to dictate how behaviour is enacted and constructed into patterns of action within the Australian workplace. Beyond this practical justification for this thesis, this investigation is also justifiable on theoretical, economic, policy and social grounds.

***The underpinning theory*** for much of this research is SCT. Status Characteristics theory has been tested empirically and experimentally with many studies finding support for the relationships between status beliefs and the subliminal gender as a status influence (Ridgeway 2008). The research explores the reality of slow progress by women into senior management roles and the dominant belief by seventy-five per-cent (75%) of Australian employees that it would be good for business if there were more women in leadership positions (Dalla-Camina 2014). Although extant research suggests status beliefs exist below the level of conscious awareness (Ridgeway 2001; Ridgeway 2014; Murray & Southey 2017) this research is expected to add to extant knowledge leading to a better understanding of the links between power prestige orders, gender as status and expectations of performance. Empirically, these links will assist both scholars and practitioners to better support and prepare women for leadership roles. There is no unique process that can explain the construction of status categories.

***On economic grounds***, the outcomes of this thesis may contribute to broader economic development if new strategies can be found that enable and encourage

more women to stay in the workforce which can contribute to broader economic development. It is generally accepted that when women develop their full labour market potential, there can be significant macroeconomic gains (Loko & Diouf 2009). At the international level, Aguirre et al (2012) suggest that raising women's participation in the work force to country specific male levels would raise GDP in the United States by 5 percent, and in Japan by 9 percent. In rapidly aging economies, higher workplace participation rates can boost economic growth by mitigating the impact of the shrinking workforce. In developed economies, women produce just under 40 per-cent of official gross domestic product (GDP) (The Economist 2006). Increased financial profitability by companies with more women in top leadership positions was noted in a 2016 study analysing the performance of 21,980 companies across ninety-one countries (Noland et al. 2016). If the research results assist in supporting women into senior roles then women could contribute to GDP, providing a stronger base for long-term growth.

*From a policy development perspective*, the results of this research will inform those involved in policy development, particularly in the area of diversity management development within corporations. It has become mandatory for Australian employers of 100 or more employees to have in place strategies which support gender equality in relation to a range of diversity categories as determined by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA 2018). Non-compliant companies are named in parliament however there is no other legislated punishment for non-compliance.

Diversity management as a concept originated in the United States and has been widely adopted in Australia as well as other western countries. It has been argued that diversity is *"essentially a concept that marginalises the importance of equality"* (Noon 2007, p. 780). Adopting a relational approach to diversity management, as promoted by Syed and Özbilgin (2009) will help to overcome such marginalisation. The three relational components through which one would analyse diversity management relate to the macro or societal level, the meso or organisational level and the micro or individual level. Analysing the thesis findings at the micro level could, in turn, inform policy makers at the organisational and the national levels. The intersection of the three levels within the diversity policy area is quite complex and currently it is considered that

probably too much emphasis is put on the meso or organisational level, *'highlighting the inadequacy of a blanket legal or organisational policy towards gender equality'* (Syed & Pio 2010, p. 133). Once cultural objects are identified at the micro level, they can become established in a larger population (Berger et al. 2002; Berger & Zelditch 2002). This would result in an approach to diversity management that is unique to the Australian context.

***This thesis makes a social contribution*** by investigating ways to better support women managers which will enable more women to enter the higher echelons of management and boardrooms and will result in a positive social effect. Increasing the numbers of women at senior levels is considered advantageous for the nation. For instance, women are frequently champions of other women, encouraging them to enter the workforce at all levels. Women in senior positions serve as role models for other women and their presence encourages women to join the senior ranks (Whelan & Wood 2012). Women making a greater contribution to GDP, as discussed above, would help Australia's welfare state as population's age and require more funds in areas such as aged health care. When women are employed on an equal basis with men, organisations gain a larger overall pool of talent, potentially increasing creativity, innovation, and productivity (Nye 2013). Such innovation and creativity will benefit society as a whole.

Women bring different styles of communication and decision-making that can positively influence boardrooms and company management (WGEA 2017). They can provide boards with insights into women's consumer behaviour and they can improve company brands and reputations for companies targeting the female market (WGEA 2017). Women can be cautious and risk averse which can make them perform better in senior roles yet uncomfortable with self-promotion which is often perceived as a lack of confidence (Coates & Herbert 2008). When males and females are equally represented in senior roles, this can assist in companies attaining quality outcomes by confirming that the issues, perspectives and needs of both sexes are equally considered when making organisational level decisions (WGEA 2017). These quality outcomes ensure that the interests and needs of society as whole, rather than those predominately of one group, are considered potentially benefiting society.

## 1.5    Methodology

This thesis utilises research which is exploratory in nature. A qualitative approach is adopted to address the research problem.   Qualitative techniques deal with different types of data in different ways.   For example, the numerous use of *'subjects'* dialogue indicates a concern to build understandings in terms of their own natural language. As Bryman et al. (1988) contend, emphasising subjects' interpretations together with the delineation of context provides the researcher with a backcloth that greatly facilitates understanding of what is going on within an organisation (Bryman 1988, p. 137).   Rich data can be collected utilising a qualitative approach. The need for qualitative research is further justified in Chapter 3.

The research paradigm for this study draws from the interpretivism view - the epistemological position that promotes essential understanding of the differences between humans in their role as social actors (Saunders et al. 2012).   The data collection techniques, in line with an interpretivism philosophy is qualitative by design.  The research includes small sample sizes and in-depth investigations and follows the plan outlined in Table 1.1.

**Table 1. 1**  *Research methodology framework*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Initiation** | Conceptual | Expert interviews – three women leaders ↙ |
| **Integration** | . Develop interview themes and develop material to be supplied to interviewees before the interview ↘ | |
| **Implementation** | | Interview appropriate sample size of SEWLs ↙ |
| **Interpretation** | Organise and analyse the data collected ↘ | |
| | | Interview feedback group ↙ |
| | Further analyse the data collected Inform and infer | |

This thesis on women leaders seeks out women in senior management positions and women in board positions as well as women executives aspiring to be in board positions. All of the SEWLs work in Australia. The researcher initially interviewed three senior women in the expert interviews, to help develop the guided structure and themes, as well as the materials to be sent to interviewees before the interview. The expert interviews were conducted to ensure that the proposed questions were fit for purpose.

The sample size of those being interviewed was twenty-five people, within the minimum advocated range of 12-30 (Saunders et al. 2012). An interview protocol was developed for twenty-five women. A focus/review/feedback group of 8 participants who had been previously interviewed was used as a form of member checking which aided in the triangulation of the data and its interpretation. Women were sourced through the significant networks held by the researcher, through referred contacts from within professional organisations to which the researcher belongs, and by use of snowballing techniques (Coleman 1958).

All interviews were recorded. Once data was collected it was explored to determine which themes emerged for subsequent investigation (Corbin & Strauss 2008). The findings of the interviews reflect the perceived reality of the individuals interviewed and the findings are unique to this set of interviews and are not meant to be repeatable (Marshall & Rossman 2006). The effects of research bias were minimised by ensuring that data analysis was undertaken with care and precision and data management decisions made were recorded in detail. Reliability was further addressed by using standardised questions and procedures (Yin 1994).

## 1.6    Outline of this thesis

Figure 1.2 below identifies the outline of this thesis.

**Introduction**

**Parental literature on gender**

**Parental literature on SCT and related theories**

**Methodology**

**Results**

**Conclusions**
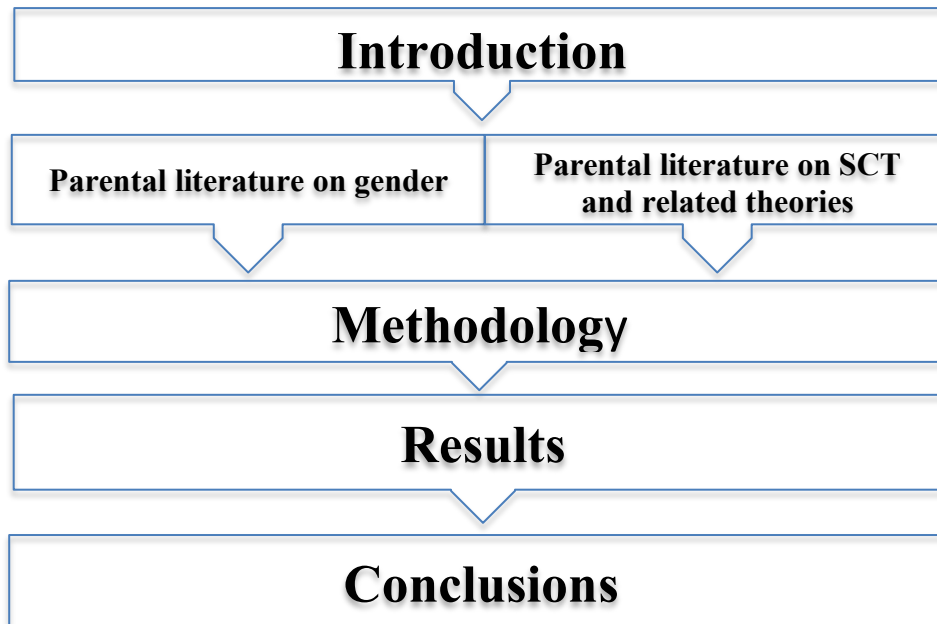
**Figure 1. 2** *Outline of this thesis*

## 1.7 Definition of terms

Definitions used in this thesis appear in Table 1.2. These provide a quick reference for terms and concepts as use in this research.

**Table 1. 2** *Definition of terms*

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| SEWLs | Senior executive women leaders |
| WGEA | Workforce Gender Equality Agency (Australia) |
| SCT | Status characteristics theory: how status organising processes operate: group members share subliminal performance expectations (often carried over from previous performance) based on status characteristics even if the characteristics are not applicable to the task at hand (Berger 1972; Berger et al. 1980; Berger et al. 1998; Ridgeway 2001; Ridgeway & Bourg 2004; Berger & Fişek 2006; Ridgeway 2014) |
| Specific status characteristics | Characteristics possessed by a group member which are specific to the task at hand e.g. mathematical ability to solve an algebraic equation or technical expertise to solve a technical problem (Berger et al. 1972; Berger et al. 1980; Berger & Zelditch Jr 1998; Berger & Webster Jr 2006) |
| Diffuse status characteristics | Characteristics possessed by group members such as race, gender or age (Berger et al. 1972; Berger et al.1980; Berger & Zelditch Jr 1998; Berger & Webster Jr 2006) |
| Gender as a diffuse status characteristic | In mixed sex workplace group tasks, gender is always salient. The female diffuse characteristic in the workplace is lower than the male diffuse characteristic because of stereotypical biases that men are more agentic than women (Berger et al. 1972; Berger et al. 1980; Berger & Zelditch Jr 1998; Berger & Webster Jr 2006) |
| Burden of proof | A performance expectation of an individual group member will carry over from one task to the next unless the status characteristics on which the performance expectation are based are explicitly proven to be unrelated (Berger et al. 1972; Berger et al. 1980; Ridgeway 1993; Berger & Zelditch Jr 1998; Ridgeway 2001; Berger & Webster Jr 2006) |
| Path of relevance | The cognitive connection between the individual and the task that links the status characteristics possessed by the individual to an outcome state of the task (Berger et al. 1972; Berger et al 1980; Berger & Zelditch Jr 1998; Berger & Webster Jr 2006) |
| Power-prestige order | Those with higher status are deemed to be higher in the power-prestige order and those with low status are deemed to be lower in the power-prestige order (Berger et al. 1972; Berger et al. 1980; Berger & Zelditch Jr 1998; Berger & Webster Jr 2006) |
| First, second and third order belief systems | First order beliefs are what individuals think. Second order are what someone thinks that specific others in the situation think. Third order are what most people think. Complying with the beliefs of others who have higher status is a very strong influence on individuals (Troyer & Younts 1997; Troyer et al. 2001; Kalkhoff et al. 2011) |

## 1.8    Research scope

Senior executive women leaders in Australia are the subjects of the interview protocol in this study. This includes women who are CEOs or senior executives and senior managers in both private and public Australian corporations. It further includes women who are on the board of Australian corporations and women executives who aspire to be on boards. All organisations employ a workforce of over 200 employees. Small to medium enterprises (SME)s are not included in this study.  Reasons for their omission include for instance, that a number of SMEs are family businesses with different internal board and executive dynamics and differing relationships between the Executive and Non-Executive Directors (Boxer et al 2014).

## 1.9    Limitations

These are several limitations to this research discussed in this chapter (Perry 2013). Limitations relating to the methodology used are discussed in Chapter 3.

In terms of external validity, generalisability could be considered problematic because this thesis is taking the structured interview qualitative approach.  For instance, researching individual cases can offer a poor basis for generalisability. However, although some scholars are critical of this aspect of external validity when using a qualitative approach to testing, Yin (1994, p. 36) indicates that in analytical generalisations, the researcher is trying to generalise particular sets of results to some broader theory and this upholds external validity.

This research is restricted to Australian women in leadership and it is unclear whether the findings will translate directly to other countries with variegated workplace cultures.  Women in leadership in small to medium enterprises (SME)s are outside the scope of this research. The research findings may have some applicability to these groups, however this would need to be tested.

## 1.10    Conclusion

This chapter posed the foundations and general structure of this thesis.  It initially explained its objective to explore the propositions of status characteristics theory on Australian SEWLs and to examine how women's roles might be better

supported by understanding the links between power-prestige orders, gender as status and expectations of success. Three research questions were identified. The assumptions underpinning this research were identified and it was made explicit that this will be exploratory, qualitative research. Introductory information about the qualitative approach was provided. Justification for the research was given on theoretical, economic, policy and social grounds as well on practical grounds. The scope and limitations were discussed, and the outline of the thesis was presented as were the terminologies used throughout this thesis.

# CHAPTER 2

# PARENT THEORIES AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

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## 2.0    Introduction

This chapter builds a theoretical foundation upon which this thesis is based (Perry 2013). Relevant extant literature is reviewed and as a consequence various research gaps are identified consistent with exploring the research problem identified in Chapter 1. The parent and related literatures and theories are reviewed consistent with exploring the research questions and several emerging themes are developed that will be explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

This chapter commences with an investigation into many aspects of inequality regimes or loosely related workplace practices and behaviours. The chapter reviews the underlying theories related to status characteristics. This is followed by an exploration of status, power and resources. The chapter then proceeds to investigate the research issues and gaps in the extant literature and their relationship to the research problem.

## 2.1    Inequality regimes

### 2.1.1    Introduction

There are now more women graduating from universities than men (Vinnicombe et al. 2013). Women are entering the workforce in large numbers and the percentage undertaking graduate degrees in many areas is almost equal to that of men (Vinnicombe et al. 2013). Women are consistently better academic performers (Sinclair 2005; Norton et al. 2016) yet they continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions (Carter & Wagner 2011; Morley 2014; Seierstad et al. 2017). Numerous studies have found underrepresentation of women at the top management team level in organisations (Catalyst 2014; Glass & Cook 2016).  When discussing women's progress, studies have found that gender equality would appear to be at the front of the global humanitarian agenda (Joshi et al. 2015, p. 1459). It appears that women experience unequal opportunities generally across many sectors, countries and workplace situations

(Yeganeh & May 2011; Ngunjiri et al. 2015). This section discusses issues surrounding gender inequality.

The McKinsey Global Institute advocates that twelve trillion dollars can be added to global growth by improving and developing women's equality (Woetzel 2015). The report highlights that one of the challenges is to increase the number of women in leadership positions. Gender inequality is a pervasive workplace and societal problem that to date has not diminished in the majority of workplaces. For instance, Ridgeway notes:

> History, of course, has shown that gender inequality has remarkable resilience. In the past, it has indeed managed to reconstitute itself in new social and economic forms as older ways of organizing things have collapsed (Ridgeway 2011, p. 14).

Why does this happen? Why does gender inequality persist generation after generation? These questions are explored in this chapter from multiple perspectives. The thesis now explores many of these perspectives related to gender stereotypes, workplace gender inequalities, gender diversity in boardrooms, the gender pay gap, policies relating to gender inequality and developing a career environment for women.

### 2.1.2 Gender stereotypes

Ridgeway (2011) defines gender as a *'system of social practices that constitutes males and females as different and organizes relations between them on the basis of the presumed differences'* (Ridgeway 2011, p. 16). As early as 1947, Basow identified problems related to gender stereotypes and roles (Basow 1986; Basow & Basow 1992). Both terms appear to be integrated as follows:

> Gender is essentially a composite of stereotypes — beliefs, positive or negative, that people hold about a group and its members.... gender stereotypes influence the choices people make about themselves and others. They are so ingrained in society, that to go against gender stereotypes can generate uneasiness, confusion, fear, and hostility (Huntoon 2009, p. 379).

Gender stereotypes can be both prescriptive and descriptive (Heilman 2001; Eagly & Karau 2002; Heilman 2012). Descriptive gender stereotypes indicate what males are females *are* like. Prescriptive gender stereotypes indicate what males and females *should* be like (Heilman 2012, p. 114). Both functions of gender

stereotypes obstruct women's progress in the workplace. Women are not always impacted negatively by descriptive gender stereotypes because in certain non-workplace situations they can be considered positively (Eagly & Mladinic 1989, 1994). However, within workplace situations stereotypes affect expectations about women's performance. Heilman (2001) suggests that, apart from predictions relating to performance expectations, people are also affected by their '*fit*' with the attributes thought required to successfully undertake the task at hand (Heilman 2001; Eagly & Karau 2002). Thus, descriptive stereotypes are problematic for women if a '*lack of fit*' is thought to be evident between a woman's qualities and the qualities believed to be essential to be successful in what would conventionally be considered male positions and occupations (Heilman 2012). Women who are mothers add to the saliency of their gender and are assessed even more negatively (Heilman & Okimoto 2008; Fuegen & Endicott 2010). Women evaluate themselves according to the same gender stereotypes as those determined by society as a whole. The way they assess themselves is similar to the way society assesses women in general (Hentschel et al. 2013).

Research indicates that society possesses clearly identified and generally consensual gender stereotypes (Diekman & Eagly 2000; Koenig et al. 2011; Cuddy et al. 2007; Connell 2014). Commonly, men are described as agentic or instrumental whereas women are described as communion oriented or expressive (Eagly 2013). Thus, men are regarded as surpassing women in areas such as confidence, forcefulness, dominance, assertiveness and instrumental competence (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt 2001, p. 783). Women are regarded more highly in areas such as kindness, sensitivity, responsiveness and nurturance (2001, p.783).

The descriptive gender stereotype qualities highly valued for men and those for women are the same gender stereotypes that are prescribed for them. The prescriptive gender stereotypes signify what women should do and also what they should not do (Heilman & Okimoto 2007; Heilman 2012). Thus, women should not behave in ways associated with agentic behaviour in men such as demonstrating assertiveness, dominance and displaying a desire to achieve.

Behaviours perceived as unattractive in men are those of being weak or of being emotionally yielding and the areas perceived as unattractive in women are those

of arrogance and being dominant (Prentice & Carranza 2002; Rudman & Phelan 2008; Bono et al. 2017). It is interesting that the undesirable traits in women are not those related to lacking in kindness or nurturance, but those of being dominant. The undesirable traits for both men and women would seem to be unattractive because they challenge the cultural assumptions that men are superior and women are subordinate. As a result of these shared gender stereotypes a gender *status hierarchy* is formed and imposed on society. Research indicates that gender stereotypes contain aspects of difference and inequality. Women's stereotypical traits are gauged to be more positive or *'good'* than men's (Eagly & Mladinic 1989; Glick et al. 2004). Men's stereotypical traits are deemed to be of higher status and more powerful than those of women (Glick et al. 2004; Rudman et al. 2009).

### 2.1.2.1 *Gender Stereotypes in the home*

Why does gender inequality not disappear with changing times? After all, many believe that it will be different for the next generation, a belief that has anecdotally occurred for many generations. An exploration of gender stereotypes in the home provides insights into why gender inequality is maintained in society. Categorising by gender is how individuals first form impressions of one another and the subsequent knowledge that is acquired about those individuals is embedded within the awareness of them as being either male or female (Brewer 1988; Fiske et al. 1999). The largest predictor of who undertakes which household duties, and the extent to which they undertake those duties is gender. Women do most of the cooking and cleaning and work twice the number of hours on housework and child care than men (Bianchi et al. 2000; Bianchi et al. 2008; Perales et al. 2015). Whether women employ others to assist in undertaking the household duties depends on the amount that the woman earns, rather than her partner's earnings (Gupta 1999). When women increase their hours of paid employment, that reduces the amount of housework that is undertaken at home and men marginally increase their input into household tasks (Bianchi et al. 2000; Bianchi et al. 2008; Hook 2010).

Holding alternative gender beliefs, as is the case in some ethnic minority groups, tempers the division of labour within a home (Dugger 1988; Collins 2002).

Getting married lessens the amount of housework that men do and increases the amount that women do and intensifies gender as a basis for the separation of household tasks (Bianchi et al. 2008). As a result of these behaviours, cultural schemas appear in society about marriage, with the provider husband and the dutiful wife. These intensify the beliefs about the segregation of the sexes in doing household work and gender inequality in general.

Once couples have children, mothers spend more of their time with household tasks and less with paid employment (Sanchez & Thomson 1997; Sayer 2016) which increases earnings disparity between couples and inequalities in long term career probabilities. This further emphasises gender inequality. The Australian experience reinforces these findings with the majority of home caring activities being undertaken by women (Chalmers & Hill 2007; Charlesworth & Macdonald 2015) and many of these women combine the household caring with part time work (Ziguras 2006).

This persistent sex-typing of household work and reinforcement of gender inequality is a strong influence and bolsters the thought that men are the providers and agentic by nature and women are kind and care giving. These repeated beliefs which start in the home act as forceful and enduring forces for the system of cultural beliefs and material procedures that conserve and support gender inequality in society (Ridgeway 2011).

### 2.1.2.2     *Gender stereotypes in the workplace and society*

The ideas of meritocracy and equality in the workplace disappear when faced with the results of research into gender stereotypes in the workplace. Stereotyping of women in the workplace is a contributing factor towards women's slow progression into senior positions (Agars 2004; Koenig et al. 2011; Sanders et al. 2011; Eberhard et al. 2015).

Disrupting gender prescriptions results in a negative backlash for women (Rudman & Glick 2001). For example, scholars have found that when assessing workplace misbehaviours such as abusing customers, covering up mistakes or theft from colleagues, men assess male misbehaviour more leniently than female

misbehaviours, thus men behaving badly in the workplace is considered less of an issue than misbehaving women (Bowles & Gelfand 2010).

Research following the careers of MBA graduates from leading business schools reveals that there are system biases from the first job level. There are indications that the first level wage of those women graduates is US $4600 less than for men (Catalyst 2016). After the initial disparities, these sometimes are rectified by mid careers however after that the disparities become substantial (Catalyst 2016). It would seem that stereotypical gender bias is at play and despite the vast number of legislative changes to promote equity which have taken place over the last half century, women continue across the world to be represented in fewer than anticipated numbers in top leadership positions and in board rooms (Kartikeyan & Priyadarshini 2017).

It seems implausible yet true that while the cognitive abilities, such as intelligence and being analytical, of men and women are similar, that these abilities are viewed as being more desirable in men (Prentice & Carranza 2002; Koenig & Eagly 2006). Men continue to be regarded as being more agentic than women and therefore more able to reach targets and accomplish goals. The fact that women are perceived to be better at caring types of skills relegates them to being associated with lower status tasks (Jackson et al. 2001). Gender stereotypes therefore make a meaningful and definite contribution to the limited presence of women in leadership positions and stereotypes of leaders remain culturally masculine (Koenig et al. 2011).

It has been suggested that much of the research into stereotypes has been theoretical rather than reality based.

> Both stereotyping and research study designs are sufficiently far removed from real work settings as to render them largely useless for drawing inferences about most, but not all, forms of employment discrimination (Landy 2008, p. 379).

However, these beliefs have been contradicted by more recent research undertaken with actual managers indicating that gender stereotyping by both men and women influences decisions (Hanna Li et al. 2013).

In seeking to provide answers to why gender stereotypes do not disappear with changing times, it is worth considering that gender stereotypes are seen as '*the cultural rules for enacting the material structure of gender difference and inequality in our society*' (Ridgeway 2011, p.162). Although this suggests a shared link between the material arrangements that organise men and women's lives and their gender stereotypes, gender stereotypes trail behind societal changes in these changing times. Studies of start-up companies in Silicon Valley found that the companies who performed best in the market tended to be the companies whose organisational structure and arrangements were least welcoming to women scientists and most likely to produce a '*boys' club*' company culture (Baron et al. 2007). This indicates that cultural beliefs continue to imprint gender beliefs on modern IT companies even when many other material factors have changed.

The driver behind the notion of holding onto gender stereotype beliefs after societal changes have occurred is related to gender stereotypes in the home as discussed earlier. That is, gender is highly important to people as their primary method of understanding self and others. People use these gender stereotypes to organise their social relations therefore they feel compelled to hold onto them (Ridgeway 2011). There are two further reasons for this, individual confirmation bias (Fiske et al. 1999) and the assumption held by people that gender stereotypes are common knowledge and widely accepted in society (Prentice & Carranza 2004). The assumption that gender stereotypes are widely shared has a major influence on people's inclination to act in accordance with those stereotypes (Sechrist & Stangor 2001). Thus, there is generally overall compliance to act in accordance with gender stereotypes and people react negatively if individuals make statements which defy these stereotypes (Rudman et al. 2009). Therefore, individuals try to avoid any negative public reaction by conforming to the use of the existing gender stereotype (Rudman & Fairchild 2004; Brescoll 2016).

Gender is, in essence, a cultural device for creating societal micro-order and because people constantly use gender and status as micro-ordering processes, they become linked and gender becomes a basis for social inequality. The persistence of gender inequality is almost guaranteed through the use of these micro-ordering processes which means that, as society changes, gender inequality is rewritten into new social and economic arrangements, since '*a social hierarchy based on gender*

*in Western society survived the profound transformation from an agrarian to an industrialized society'* (Ridgeway 2015, p. 189). Having survived the agrarian and industrial revolutions, it is not too surprising that gender inequality continues in Silicon Valley IT start-up companies today.

### 2.1.2.3    *Behavioural bias predictors*

Is it gender alone that predicts bias in behaviours? To explore that question, interpersonal status hierarchies are worthy of examination. Studies indicate that in mixed sex groups, men display more emphatic actions (Dovidio et al. 1988; Meyers-Levy & Loken 2015), are more visually dominant (Ellyson et al. 1992), use less cautious or faltering discourse (Carli 1990), talk more (Dovidio et al. 1988), make more recommendations and proposals in task situations (Wood & Karten 1986) and dominate and persuade more than women (Pugh & Wahrman 1983; Carli 2001). Men are more self-oriented, are less cautious responders, are less responsive to negative data and are less sensitive to differentiating conditions and factors than women (Meyers-Levy & Loken 2015).

When performance expectations are equalised, the sex differences in task directed behaviours disappear (Wood & Karten 1986). Other social differences related to status such as race and education have been found to be mediated by the effects of status on performance expectations (Driskell & Mullen 1990) indicating that the results are not related solely to gender but to gender as status beliefs, firmly embedded within gender stereotypes. Thus, it is not gender alone, but status beliefs about gender which generate predictable patterns of bias in task-oriented behaviours.

### 2.1.2.4    *Summation – gender stereotypes*

In summary, gender stereotypes exist and are generally agreed by all; men being perceived as confident and dominant, and women as kind and nurturing. Men's stereotypical traits are seen to be of higher status than women's and status beliefs about gender generate predictable patterns of bias in behaviour. Gender is the primary method of people's understanding of themselves and others and gender stereotypes begin in the home

including sex typing of household work and reinforcement of gender inequality. This is a very strong force and the basis of cultural beliefs which impact gender inequalities in society. By affecting the micro-level societal interactions and group processes within which people construct meanings, macro-level social orders are formed and endure as individuals reproduce them. Gender stereotypes continue into the workplace, with men being perceived as dominant, and gender stereotypes are so strong that they trail behind societal and organisational changes. It would seem that trying to change societal perceptions of gender stereotypes is almost impossible although Ridgeway (2011) does offer some hope giving the analogy that like waves constantly crossing the sand, given time and constant effort there could be some impact of change, however small.

### 2.1.3    *Workplace gender inequalities*

In the previous section, gender stereotypes in the workplace were briefly examined. Next is a further exploration of a range of gender inequalities in the modern workplace where competing forces are continually at play to undermine gender inequality and to reproduce it.  Much of the extant literature about promoting women into leadership positions is constrained by discussing relatively few organisational barriers compared to actual barriers that confront women leaders (Diehl & Dzubinski 2016). Gender barriers are created at the macro, meso and micro levels in society.  Syed and Özbilgin (2009) define the macro as at the national level, the meso as at the organisational level and the micro at the individual level of analyses.  Their paper bridges the divide between each of the levels by proposing a relational framework for managing diversity (Syed & Özbilgin 2009, p. 2436). The macro level includes societal issues such as gender stereotyping and cultural barriers affecting women; the meso level includes organisational issues such as women being excluded from boys' clubs and shortages of mentors for women; the micro level includes issues such as conscious unconsciousness and limitations and differences in communication styles (Diehl & Dzubinski 2016). Many of the issues related to gender barriers at macro, meso and micro levels, gender stereotyping, and mentoring are now discussed in the next eight sections.

### 2.1.3.1 Kanter's homosocial reproduction

Kanter's (1977) '*homosocial reproduction*' describes employees within workplaces who select new co-workers by replicating themselves. They tend to select for positions based on individuals who have similar backgrounds and characteristics to themselves. It is thought that possessing this homogeneity can improve understanding and communication which in turn can lead an organisation that is dominated by men to contend that promoting and employing men instead of women improves organisational effectiveness (Tharenou 1999). Thus, where homogeneity is common place, it is difficult for women to permeate the male work domain and gain promotion to senior roles. However, once a number of women are employed in senior positions, especially as partners in a company, it has been found that the number of women being hired will increase (Gorman 2009). Furthermore, scholars have found that token men receive greater job benefits, more pay and advance quicker than token women (Hultin 2003; Smith 2012).

In Kanter's (1977) original study, women were rare enough to be considered '*tokens*' in the positions that they occupied. The paucity and distinctiveness of the minority increases their visibility and initiates certain us-and-them dynamics in the workplace. Their increased visibility increases the pressure that they feel at work. How the pressure affects them depends on whether the minority are in a lower status group than the majority. Thus, it effects men in predominantly female dominated jobs differently from how it effects women in predominantly male dominated jobs. The lower gender status of women managers in male dominated industries triggers questions in others about their abilities to perform. These questions generate anxieties in women managers which add to their difficulties in attaining success, comparative to their male co-workers. The distinctiveness and visibility of the minority increases the focus on gender. The members of the majority increase their self-perception more in terms of sex and institute more gendered jokes and comments inside the workplace. This exacerbates the differences between the '*tokens*' and the majority and increases the difficulty for the '*tokens*' in the workplace in terms of accessing information and strategies which in turn adds to their difficulties in achieving workplace success.

Kanter (1977) posits that these workplace dynamics put workplace 'tokens' at a disadvantage compared to their majority colleagues and to some extent implies that women are lacking in what it takes to be a manager. She suggests that *'women differ from men in their character, temperament, attitudes, self-esteem, language, gestures and interpersonal orientation, whether by nature, early socialisation, or accumulated learning as a result of coping with an inferior position'* (Kanter 1977, p 283), the inference being that women can address these issues by undertaking personal development and training. This notion fails to take into account that women in management positions are under significant social and organisational constrictions. Kanter's 1977 theory suggests that once *'tokens'* reach 15 per-cent of the workplace population, they begin to experience fewer workplace difficulties. However, it is questionable if tokenism can be measured by quantities alone (Archbold & Schulz 2008), as it is more complex than simply a numbers game (Stichman et al. 2010). Women who are not *'tokens'* still face discrimination in the workplace.

### 2.1.3.2    *Men vs women differences in the workplace*

The days when the majority of people worked life-long in one company are quickly disappearing. People change jobs more frequently now and there are less people in permanent positions and more people in casual positions than previously. This can create work uncertainty which is a recognised factor which increases the number of males promoted indicating a stereotypical gender bias and this effect is stronger the more males that there are in the company, indicating additional in-group bias (Gorman 2006). Such in-group biases subtly incite managers and employees to search for same-sex others to depend on. In the majority of work-places, the high-status people are men and this encourages men in the workplace to connect with other men (Cabrera & Thomas-Hunt 2007). It is therefore not unexpected that working in a male dominated industry increases the probability that women will resign from their employment, regardless of their skills (Maume Jr 1999).

There are, of course, differences between men and women, and it is these differences that can be forces that drive cultural change offering overall benefits to organisations:

> ..we must continue to show-case the ways that women have the potential to be truly transformational leaders in business, using their developmental and life experiences of "differentness" from men to drive healthy and necessary changes in organizational life, culture, and performance (Reinhold 2005, p. 55).

Women are much more likely than men to employ a transformational leadership style (Eagly et al. 2003). Transformational leadership generally involves using a collaborative approach and agentic goal orientation and is associated with superior leader effectiveness (Eagly et al. 2003, p. 571). Thus women, particularly if they practise transformational leadership, should have a good chance at gaining promotion to the top positions. We examine these claims later in this chapter.

Women can be adversely perceived when displaying leadership characteristics (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014). Extant research indicates that women who display male types of behaviour are regarded as less effective than men who display similar behaviours yet are often less capable to do the job (Joshi et al. 2015, p. 1519).

At the top level in organisations there are references to individuals playing the game to stay ahead. While men do tend to play the game, women generally do not play the game and prefer to be upfront with their bosses which can result in women being incorrectly labelled as not having the ability to be *'true ideal workers'* (Reid 2015). Additionally, women manager's performance is scrutinised more than their male counterparts (Glass & Cook 2016). Scholars for instance indicate that there are major challenges for women in management as they encounter two major biases related to their ability, those being that women are assumed to have less leadership and agentic ability than men and that women's behaviours are viewed as less effective than similar behaviours in men (Joshi et al. 2015). Men's agentic nature is a given whereas women are challenged with having to overcome stereotypes related to women being caring and less agentic (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt 2001, p. 783).

Other reasons for women not receiving the same prospects as men include that women do not have the same opportunities for professional development and breadth of experiences as their male counterparts (Lyness & Thompson 2000; Chuang 2015). This lack of experience can hold them back from future promotions as there is an expectation that having the breadth of experience is

required in preparation for the most senior roles. When exploring management development, it may be beneficial for women to undertake some educational and developmental programs separately to men. Women's experiences and interests tend to be dissimilar to men's (Kark 2004) and there may be some benefits in designing programs for women whose experiences are moulded by the existing masculine management paradigm (2004, p.166). There is a contention (Ely et al. 2011) that educators do not presently have a suitable framework for creating and facilitating leadership programs which are suitable for women (2011, p.475).

Within companies lacking in diverse leadership, women are twenty per-cent less likely than their male, white counterparts to win commendation and backing for their ideas (Hewlett et al. 2013). Women are often disadvantaged because they cannot follow existing male workplace norms of how work is organised, including the hours people are required to stay at work (Murray & Syed 2010). Inequality is also prevalent in externally adjudicated employment dispute settlements (Southey & Innes 2010; Southey 2012). Effort expended on paid work is more positively associated with promotion and advancement for men than in women (Konrad et al. 1997; Evetts 2014).

Another prospect dampener is the fact that women bear children and have primary responsibility for home and child care. This impacts on women's careers as women still have the highest share of child and home care duties (Thomas et al. 2018). Good mothers are perceived to put their family and children first, seeing to their daily needs (Sharon 1996) and ideal workers should be loyal and dedicated to their work (Acker 1990; Williams 2000). This creates a cultural conflict which is faced by mothers but not fathers whose primary family role is that of provider.

At work, the cultural dilemma between the devoted mother and the ideal employee triggers motherhood to be seen as a gender related status characteristic that is even more directly related to performance at work than just being either male or female (Ridgeway & Correll 2004; Correll et al. 2007). This dictates that working mothers are often presumed to be lower status, less valued and less competent employees, less in all of those respects than women generally. Parenthood, and particularly female parenthood, tends to polarise the judgments of men's and women's job-related abilities (Fuegen & Endicott 2010). The lower

status assigned to working mothers necessitates that mothers are held to a higher standard to prove their ability and their commitment to their jobs than men and women who are not mothers.

Within much of the literature relating to management in general, the concept of gender is frequently underemphasised or, if it is referred to, it is pigeon holed, resulting in the visibility of the connections between gender and leadership and other management practices becoming blurred or indeed invisible (Eden et al 2015). It is believed that the ways that people in general perceive women in organisations is affected by the metaphors that are used within organisations and within management literature more generally (Kemp 2016). The metaphors used affect people's perceptions of women's equality and inequality. Kemp (2016) contends that the metaphors lock people into fixed frameworks (2016, p.18) which do not reflect the wider realities of the situation.

Discourses constituting masculinity and femininity add force to workplace gender inequality as they reinforce the belief that men are more suitable for high-level positions than women and, even when women are aware of this behaviour, they rarely challenge it (Bevan & Learmonth 2013). Language used can reinforce the belief that men are more suitable for high-level positions than women (Acker 2006; Bevan & Learmonth 2013; Bao et al. 2014).

It is clear that both men and women subtly and continually discriminate against women. Both sexes are often unaware of taken-for-granted masculinist actions and even when women are aware they rarely challenge sexist behaviour. The '*law of the father*', which constitutes males as the norm and women as the '*other*', represents the current main organising principle of organisational discourse regardless of which framework, theory or texts are examined (Bendl 2008). Both men and women leaders can favour men over women, yet those beliefs co-exist with conscious egalitarian intentions (Rashotte & Webster 2005). This reinforces the idea that men's agentic nature is a given whereas women are challenged with having to overcome stereotypes related to women being caring and less agentic (Eagly 2013).

Adding to the workplace inequalities is the reality that a large number of corporate organisations retain a predominantly masculine work culture.

Historically, men were generally the leaders in organisations and many features in the corporate world traditionally have been, and in many cases, continue to relate to masculine experiences, male preferences and the male way of life (Liff & Ward 2001; Kark & Eagly 2010). This leads to male executives preferring to hire men as per Kanter's homosocial reproduction predictions. Studies further indicate that bias exists when job applications are reviewed. Identical resumes were tendered for positions and the resumes of the men were favoured over those of the women when the positions were thought to be male typed and vice versa if it was female typed (Davidson & Burke 2000). However, if the position was considered to be gender neutral the man was the preferred candidate (Eagly & Carli 2007, p. 77).

### 2.1.3.3 *Workplace progression and gender*

In terms of workplace progression, surely merit principles apply and take precedence over gender? Climbing the job ladder can be more difficult for women than men as women's jobs generally produce less advancement than men's (Barnett et al. 2000). More women are in support roles than in line management roles. A lack of line or operational management experience is a barrier affecting women's advancement to the highest levels (Tharenou 1999; Still 2006; Hoobler et al. 2014). Male dominated jobs are more likely to lead to upper management positions and it is easier to become a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) if you work in line positions such as sales or finance, as opposed to a support type of position such as Human Resources.

The *Glass Ceiling* metaphor was popularised in the 1980s and has become a common term used to describe the invisible barrier for women who are attempting to move into top leadership positions in organisations (Morrison & Von Glinow 1990; Powell et al. 2002). The notion of the glass-ceiling relates to a *'barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy'* (Morrison & Von Glinow 1990, p. 200).

A recent study investigating the glass ceiling effect and its consequences on selection-promotion and female effectiveness in Asia, found that it is *'evident that the glass ceiling has been a global phenomenon'* (Saleem et al. 2017, p. 313). The research suggests that organisations should change their stereotype attitude

towards women and ensure that they give opportunities to equally qualified and experienced women when choosing and deciding on candidates for promotional selection processes. If organisations do not do this they will miss out on the abilities and competencies that women leaders offer (Saleem et al. 2017, p. 310).

Women fill almost a third of management positions however most are in relatively low paid jobs with no authority and women have to work harder to exceed expectations (Tharenou 1999). There is much debate around the glass ceiling concept. Some believe that success and leadership are connected to an individual having the '*right stuff*' (Wolfe 2008). Others suggest that attributing gender differences for the presence of glass ceilings in companies indicates that women are made of the '*wrong stuff*' for leadership positions (Eagly & Carli 2007, p. 83). There continues to be a presumption that women do not make good managers and leaders, and that '*real*' leaders have male characteristics (Heilman & Alcott 2001; Eagly & Carli 2007). Bias against women leaders is in the workplace and it is real and when women and men perform to the same level, competent women are not able to attain promotion similar to competent men (Heilman 2012). Heilman suggests that women are:

> the recipients of multiple reactions rooted in bias – serious and trivial, subtle and obvious, intentional and unintentional – the total of which are dispiriting for their ambitions and detrimental to their advancement (Heilman 2012, p. 131).

The fact that women are women and not men, leads to them not being perceived as possessing the attributes required of leadership. There further exists a belief that women are a major cause of the glass ceiling perception because of their self-agency and '*blame‑the‑victim*' attitudes (Barnett & Rivers 2004). Bias against women in leadership exists because they are not expected to act as men and therefore not expected to act as leaders and consequentially are not given leadership positions (Eagly & Carli 2007; Kark & Eagly 2010).

Another example of non-meritorious selection is that when exploring internal promotions in large organisations it was found that higher levels of authority intensify the biases that gender evokes for women (Gorman & Kmec 2009). Trying to act like a man does not seem to have a positive effect on promotion prospects either. Women can be seen as competent but limited emotionally, or

able to do their job but not having the killer instinct required for top management positions (Heilman & Parks-Stamm 2007). When women express emotions of anger in the workplace, they are awarded lower status than their angry male counterparts (Brescoll & Uhlmann 2008). This is regardless of their job titles, positions or rank within organisations. Their emotions are attributed to their internal characteristics, whereas their male counterparts' emotions are attributed to external circumstances. It would seem that women are defeated whatever approach they take.

Scholars have identified that when organisations face a crisis, women can become more likely to achieve opportunities to gain promotion to the top of such organisations rather than men who are more appointable to successful organisations (Cook & Glass 2014). When women fail at these high-risk times, having usually received little support, they are perceived to have failed to scale the *glass cliff* (Ryan & Alexander Haslam 2009). This reinforces the stereotypes that women are not as able as men to manage at the top.

When testing three theories in Fortune 500 companies based on the glass cliff, the saviour effect and decision maker diversity, Cook & Glass (2014)'s main finding was that diversity among decision makers assisted women to be promoted and attain senior leadership and CEO positions. They also found that women's performance is scrutinised more than their male counterparts (Glass & Cook 2016).

A U.S. study determined the possible differences in causes between women and men in attaining CEO positions in large public companies (Hurley & Choudhary 2016). The research results indicate that the higher the number of children she has and the longer the number of years she spends in education both lower the probability of the woman attaining CEO status (2016, p. 256). The number of children she has impacts the most according to this study, in deterring women leaders from becoming CEOs.

Recent research mapping blockages to women in leadership in business, healthcare and academia identified twenty-six major barriers faced by women leaders (Stavroula et al. 2017). The predominant barriers identified across all three sectors are 'gender gap', 'lack of career opportunities and advancement',

'stereotypes', 'work/life balance', 'lack of mentoring' and 'lack of flexible working conditions' (2017, p. 465). These barriers are felt to greater or lesser percentages across the different sectors but taken together they make up the top six barriers. A large occurrence of 'culture' was identified in the area of business which supports the contention that strongly resisting women leaders is being enabled by culturally driven competitions between men and women leaders (Ely et al. 2011). Further, the high prevalence of 'glass ceiling', 'gender bias', 'lack of networking', 'gender pay gap' and 'lack of social support' found in the study, aligns with the assertion that women leaders continually tackle a double standard in the workplace (Eagly & Chin 2010).

Executive search agencies have been identified as reproducing male dominance in top management through how they and their clients head hunt individuals for the top positions (Tienari et al. 2013). Assumptions about women and men are made in determining the search criteria. The research found that an ideal candidate is defined as male and practices of executive search continue to be gendered. This maintains the belief that a particular type of male is best to take the positions at the top of organisations. How clients and agents want those people at the top to look and perform is constantly reproduced perpetuating the dominant positions of men at the top (Tienari et al. 2013, p. 58).

Much research exists describing why men dominate the power-prestige order in the workplace and relates to management being a male paradigm (Koenig et al. 2011). In 1996, Swim and Sanna's research found that biases which attribute success to ability as opposed to effort, favour men for tasks culturally associated with men but disappear for female typed tasks (Swim & Sanna 1996). Once these expectations are created, they tend to be complied with and carried over into future events. Extant research by Dovidio et al. (1988) found that when undertaking leadership tasks, where men have the edge because they are seen as more agentic than women, there is an expectation that men will have a greater advantage than women.

Women are continuing to meet the challenges of bias. Bias that they are not as accomplished in leadership ability as men and bias that when they do display leadership abilities and other 'male' characteristics that they are viewed as less

able than their often less competent male counterparts (Joshi et al. 2015). There is a suggestion that when women do attain more top management positions and are proven to be effective that people's experiences of men and women may eventually change, cracking open the glass ceiling and ultimately pressurising gender stereotypes to change (Ridgeway 2011, p. 117). Unfortunately, Ridgeway gives no timeline for such an optimistic and bright future.

### 2.1.3.4 Australian women's workplace progression

Australian research also indicates that women's progression into leadership positions has been significantly impacted by assumptions and prejudices about their leadership ability (Fox 2010; Sanders et al. 2011). Within the context of Australian banks, gender discrimination has been clearly identified as a barrier for women to progress into managerial positions and discriminatory work practices have also been identified (Metz & Tharenou 2001; Metz 2011). With similarity to their international counterparts, when Australian women imitate men in leadership by demonstrating similar behaviours, they are not looked upon favourably. They may lose their authentication by not acting like a woman. The stereotype bias exists for men as prototypical leaders and women are evaluated against this masculine leadership norm.

The statistics regarding women in leadership positions in Australia (Chief Executive Women Senior Executive Census 2017) identify the following facts. In 2017 women made up 21% of ASX200 executive leadership teams. However, women held just 12% of line roles and 30% of functional roles in those teams. Some industries had a higher representation of women in their executive teams than others. However, Telecommunications, which had the highest representation, was made up of 17% of women in the executive followed by Real Estate with 16% and Healthcare with 15%. Other industries such as Energy and Utilities had 5% women on their executive teams and Materials had 3% (CEWSEC 2017). The study found that one-hundred-and-twenty-six of the two-hundred ASX200 companies had no women in line roles in their executive teams and forty-one (21%) companies had no women at all in their executive teams.

The most recent figures are those of the WGEA 2018 report which indicate that sixteen and a half per-cent (16.5%) of women now hold CEO positions and 29.7%

of key management positions in organisations which report to the Agency are held by women. Over seventy per-cent (70.9%) of organisations which report to the Agency have no key management personnel who are women (WGEA 2018). In March 2018, there are twelve women CEOs in AXS companies (Liveris 2018).

There are some factors that would assist a man in progressing in their role but would thwart a woman in the same context (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014). Australian women are looked upon as atypical if they display leadership characteristics, are atypical as leaders and are therefore perceived as less effective than their male counterparts. When women perform in ways deemed to be consistent with their stereotype they are deemed '*soft*' but if they are inconsistent they are deemed '*tough*'. Women have to perform to a higher standard of leadership capability than men before being accepted as good leaders and women leaders are either perceived as competent or as liked but seldom both thus yet again facing a no-win situation (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014).

Bias against employing women in Australia is further demonstrated by research (Recruitment 2014) which asked recruiting managers to review identical resumes with either the name Simon or Susan, taking a similar approach to the previously mentioned (Davidson & Burke 2000) research. Sixty-two per-cent of managers recruiting within large companies indicated a preference for interviewing Simon and only fifty-six per-cent said they would interview Susan. Experienced managers who hire over 20 people per year also preferred Simon (sixty-five per-cent) over Susan (fifty-one per-cent) respectively. The results of the survey suggest that there was a greater chance of both men and women interviewing and hiring Simon.

Australian research indicates that male homosocial reproduction remains a barrier to women's progression (Beck & Davis 2005). There are suggestions that male cultures continue to persist (Metz 2011) and women are leaving, not for family reasons, but because unfriendly and discriminatory work practices occur amid continuing masculine work cultures. Research in the Australian Finance industry found that women leave senior roles because they are either frustrated, seeking a change or simply choose to go (Neck 2015). These women were also frustrated by elements of organisational culture. Women left senior positions due to the

interaction of two events, one being a trigger for leaving (which is a combination of frustrations within the workplace and personal triggers) and the other related to choice, or having the ability to leave (Neck 2015). Frustrations within the workplace are common and important and include issues including frustrations with the company culture such as long work hours, lack of work/life balance, lack of flexibility, working in a male dominated culture, issues with leadership and lack of opportunities (Murray and Syed 2010). Personal triggers for leaving were rarely solely about family responsibilities. Many women were seeking change in terms of a change of culture, a change of pace or a change allowing more work/life balance. Choice is being able to leave, either taking some time out or choosing to do something different, changing career or pursuing a new opportunity (Neck 2015).

In encapsulating much of the discussion thus far, woman have to cope with two types of prejudgment, 1) that they do not have what it takes to be a leader, and 2) when demonstrating male leadership characteristics, women are less likely to be a leader than their male colleagues (Eagly & Carli 2007; Kark & Eagly 2010).

### 2.1.3.5 Hours of work

Long work hours tend to be an expectation of senior executives in many organisations. There tends to be a requirement to work long hours, as time in the workplace is viewed, sometimes quite incorrectly, as productive time. Of particular interest is a study by Reid (2015) where it is demonstrated that women tend to be more upfront with employers about their inability to comply with the expectation of eighty-hour work weeks. This often leads to them reducing their work hours and working part-time which reveals their inability to be '*true ideal workers*' (Reid 2015) and as a consequence these women are marginalised within the organisation. Many of the males in the study found ways to seem to be working the long hours when not actually doing so. Males who pretended to work long hours were afforded opportunities for promotion. Thus, company myths were perpetuated that it is necessary to work long hours to obtain high quality work. This is a myth, as the outputs required were achieved as well by those who pretended to work the long hours as by those who actually did work the long hours. As many women do not '*play the game*' of pretending to work the long

hours, they are perceived to not pass the desired company profile (Reid 2015) and this not '*playing the game*' is another reason why women are less able to advance at the rate of their male counterparts.

### 2.1.3.6 *Networking and mentoring*

There is little doubt that networking and mentoring is extremely important if women are interested in progressing to senior leadership positions. This is often not highlighted to those wishing to gain promotion (Smith et al. 2012). Women experience difficulties in accessing and cultivating networks (Groysberg & Bell 2013) yet networking is now considered to be crucial for managers to progress (Mohd Rasdi et al. 2013). Burt (1998) studied the links between early promotion and networks and discovered that women's exclusions from the networks or very limited ability to gain entry to those influential male-dominated networks, detrimentally affects women's promotion prospects.

A mentor-centric longitudinal analysis of formal mentoring programs (Weinberg & Lankau 2011, p. 1548) posits that the level of commitment of mentors to their organisations positively correlates to the level of effort they put into their mentoring roles. Scholars have also found that managers can achieve higher salary levels through being members of networks which enable their presence to be noticed (Forret & Dougherty 2004; Wolff & Moser 2009; Mohd Rasdi et al. 2013). Who you network with and which network you belong to is highly significant in assisting managers to reach the top in organisations (Kogut et al. 2014).

Women are frequently excluded and also self-exclude themselves from informal meetings and events such as after work drinks and attending male dominated sporting events (Wright 2016). Similarly, they rarely frequent discussions pertaining to male dominated sports. In workplaces informal '*boys' clubs*' are created which can communicate pieces of informal organisational information that would be beneficial for everyone to know (Liff & Ward 2001; Searby et al. 2015).

Extant research further indicates that friendship assists in the workplace, enhancing outcomes and potentially positively affecting workplace structures and cultures (Rumens 2017). The dearth of women at the top of organisations renders

friendships more difficult for women than for men to forge as women are frequently the only woman at their level in their organisation. Boys' clubs frequently exclude women who find it almost impossible to gain access to those informal and often covert networks of influential men (Gamba & Kleiner 2001; Groysberg & Bell 2013). Boys' clubs can be described as social structures where relationships of gendered power are replicated and preserved (Acker 2006). They are places where power and resources are maintained as the prerogative of the club's predominately male members.

McPherson et al. (2001) propose that boys' clubs thrive due to what they call '*homophily*', choosing to network with those individuals whom they believe to be in many ways similar to themselves. It can be difficult for women to fit into the male dominated culture and they may have to change how they approach working relationships to gain acceptance and promotion within such companies, if indeed it is possible at all in some organisations to permeate the boys' club. Boys' clubs can be regarded as pathways which allow members to gain control of resources (Durbin 2011). Research within the context of British universities has identified that boys' clubs are very much at play there and attaining and retaining membership of these clubs positively affects member's job selection and promotion prospects (Fisher & Kinsey 2014).

There are an increasing number of women only networks forming both inside companies and externally as independent enterprises (Durbin 2011). These networks offer women opportunities to meet and support one another, sometimes sharing workplace problems and assisting one another to formulate workable solutions. Friendships can be forged, similar to those forged in boys' clubs which can ultimately assist in promotional opportunities. Within these networks, mentors and sponsors can be identified, such relationships created, and junior managers can receive support from their female superiors (Singh et al. 2006; Susan 2016).

Gaining promotion and increasing advancement opportunities are enhanced by networking and seeking out and using good role models and mentors (Broadbridge et al. 2006). Hence, building work-based relationships, networks, sponsors and mentors is an important element for workplace progression. Having

a mentor is of immense assistance in identifying the current internal important political issues within organisations (McDonald & Westphal 2013). Identification of such issues and the various circumstances relating to those issues advantages those who have that awareness.

The lack of women presently in the most senior positions in organisations may be a detrimental factor to women finding suitable sponsors and mentors as mentoring relationships tend to generally be made male to male or female to female (Kark & Eagly 2010) and women's progress within organisations can be slow because of their dearth of work-based networks (Reinhold 2005; Kark & Eagly 2010). Networking can be difficult for women (Searby et al. 2015). Men are generally better at networking and informal networking is often how the internal organisational politics are discussed and important information exchanged (Reinhold 2005; Kark & Eagly 2010).

A study of women leaders in Cyprus identifies the importance of networking in the workplace and the impact of its absence on women's careers (Socratous 2018). These women are excluded from networking due to the culture of their environment and due to the existence of boys' club (2018, p.174). This represents a reinforced structural hole, an abstract hole in social structure reinforced by the social organisation around it (Burt 2015), which is observable in the workplace and in society. The barriers faced by being excluded from networking are similar to those identified in the UK (Tonge 2008).

However, it would seem that while mentoring is necessary, it is insufficient for promotion to the top. Catalyst (2016) is following a group of MBA graduates from leading universities. Catalyst (2016) finds that women having a mentor before their first post graduate position results in greater compensation for women, but the results are greater for men than for women. The mentor's level, not gender, impacts most on career advancement and the mentors of men are found to be more senior and in better positions to provide real sponsorship than women's mentors. Mentors help men to gain more upper level positions than women do through their mentors. Males with a mentor receive US $9,260 more in their first post graduate year than their female counterparts with mentors (Catalyst 2016).

Perhaps if women were more successful at obtaining male sponsors this would improve their chances of gaining promotion within the male dominated work culture? There are major differences between mentors and sponsors. A mentor is generally someone experienced in the organisation or industry who offers helpful advice and support. A sponsor is someone in the organisation who is placed higher than the person seeking sponsorship and who would recommend others for projects or for positions that develop their skills (Charras et al. 2015). A sponsor actively promotes rather than quietly advises. It may be that men are more successful at securing sponsors than women especially as in most organisations, the majority of senior positions are held by men. The Australian context is consistent with the world-wide research and workplace relationships and networks are recorded as being very important for women's progression into higher managerial roles (Metz & Tharenou 2001).

### 2.1.3.7    *Women's self - perceptions*

The way that organisations react towards women has been investigated; so how do women assist themselves? How women perceive themselves within male dominated work cultures is interesting as men and women do not differ overall in perceived leadership effectiveness (Koenig & Eagly 2006). Women tend to under-rate while men tend to over-rate their leadership performance (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014). When self-ratings are examined, men rate themselves as more effective and when the ratings of others are examined, women are rated as more effective (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014).

Women's personal ambition is also relevant and it has been found that women who have two years or less of work experience are more ambitious than men who have two years or less of work experience (Gadiesh & Coffman 2015). However, confidence and ambition decline in women with more than two year's work experience regardless of whether the women are married and regardless of whether or not they have children. By contrast men with over two years' experience have double the confidence level of women about their ability to progress to the top of an organisation. Thus, women would seem to be drained of ambition after only two years in an organisation. Investigating why this occurs, women state that they face more negative experiences because there are too few

role models in senior positions. There is a lack of supervisory support and they are experiencing a clash with the stereotype of the ideal worker (Gadiesh & Coffman 2015).

### 2.1.3.8    *Women opt out*

There is an increasing trend of women in management opting out of the formal workplace.  While there is an issue of not enough women being able to reach management ranks, there is also an issue of keeping them there once they arrive. If organisations wish to keep good women managers, research suggests that succession planning, opportunities for personal development, company culture and retaining women managers '*goes beyond simple counting and celebrating increased numbers*' (Acker 2014, p. 83). Organisation's cultural and institutional approaches may influence women's decision to opt out. Acker (2006) describes organisations as having '*inequality regimes*' which are described as interlinked organising processes producing patterns of complex inequalities, which vary across organisations. Most organisations have two characteristics: 1) class inequality '*inflected through gendered and radicalized beliefs and practice*s' (Acker 2006, p. 451) and 2) white men are the normal top leaders. Here, embedded organisational inequality is unattractive to women. Women frequently have a desire to be '*making a difference to the public good, whatever the untoward circumstances under which they had to operate*' (Acker 2014, p. 83). Thus, organisations have an unquestionable responsibility in this regard.

Extant research exists in the area of company culture and the part organisational values and beliefs play in women's progression or in their decision to opt out.  For example, Barsh & Yee (2012) found that fifty-nine per-cent (59%) of successful women executives in their research had no desire to attain top management and CEO levels.  Reasons that they gave included poor company culture with the women executives not wishing to entertain the game playing at the top and questioning the motives and values of the top individuals.

Stone's (2007) research into why well-qualified and successful women leaders opt out infers that women are more *shut out* than opt out because of the inflexibility and toxicity of many workplaces (Stone 2007, p.215). It suggests that workplaces, with cultures which resist women's efforts to change working conditions, are

paying the cost of losing professionals who could be making significant economic and social contributions. Stone (2007) also found that one of the main reasons American women opt out is because of home duties. Stone's participants were all executive women who had opted out.

Fine (2009) explored what leadership represents to American women leaders which informs why women opt out. Two major themes emerged in her studies, the theme of behaving ethically and the theme of making a positive contribution to the world. Many were looking to help others through their leadership roles and styles. None of the women indicated that they left leadership positions because of family care commitments which had been a theory commonly espoused by Belkin (2003) and others in the early 2000s. Women generally left because they tended not to play the power game embedded in organisational life.

Belkin's 'opt out revolution' attracted a lot of media attention and was named as the reason why women do not seek powerful positions (Boushey 2008). It was further contended that gender inequality within the home, when partners are not willing to take a more active part in the home duties, is the main reason for women's departure (Stone 2007). However, attributions related to the primary child carer role for women do not adequately explain why women do not progress into higher managerial positions (Kark & Eagly 2010; Barsh & Yee 2012) and do not fully account for the small numbers of women leaders (Kark & Eagly 2010). There is little doubt that organisations have responsibility to make workplaces less unattractive to women.

The findings in the Australian finance industry are that women leave senior roles because of elements of company culture (Neck 2015).

### 2.1.3.9    Summation – workplace gender inequalities

In summary, homosocial reproduction influences men to favour employing other men in the workplace (Beck & Davis 2005) and women who work in male dominated industries are more likely to resign, regardless of their skills. Although women leaders tend to employ transformational leadership techniques which have been proven to be superior to other leadership techniques, they are still perceived not to have what it takes to be a leader. If they demonstrate male leadership

characteristics this goes against them.

Men are better at networking than women and have more opportunities to do so yet women can be the victims of '*boys' clubs*' which do not allow them entry. When women do enter management, it is more likely that they will be in a managerial support role than a line management role which would be the type of role more likely to gain them promotion. Many corporate organisations retain a predominantly male culture and both men and women generally believe that men are more suitable than women for high level positions.

An increasing number of women in senior management positions are deciding to opt out of the large organisations frequently frustrated with company culture and unable to fulfil their need to make a positive contribution to society. Bias against women in the workplace, and particularly against working mothers, is a significant issue. It seems that women are generally destined not to gain the top jobs. A possible way forward is 1) when more women are in senior positions, the number of women being hired will increase; and 2) when there are more available senior women to act as sponsors then networking and developing sponsors will enhance promotion prospects (Reinhold 2005; Kark & Eagly 2010). Men and women, through shaping social relations, continue to be subtly pointed towards unequal positions in the workplace and this generates further cultural beliefs that reinforce gender as a status inequality.

### 2.1.4    *Gender diversity within boardrooms*

Gender diversity within boardrooms is central in extant research prompting the question whether there is gender equality in the boardroom? This section deals with legislation for board representation, quotas on boards and other contemporary issues.

### 2.1.4.1    *Pros of gender diversity in the boardroom*

In 2011, the Lord Davies Report in the UK found that including women on boards increases beneficial outcomes in terms of corporate governance and company performance. The report highlighted that European organisations whose top management teams consist of higher proportions of women, have a higher likelihood of outperforming their rivals as well as growing faster than their rivals.

In terms of financial performance, including women on the board results in a forty-two per-cent (42%) higher return on sales, a sixty-six per-cent (66%) higher return on invested capital and a fifty-three per-cent (53%) higher return on equity (Davies 2011).

When exploring the differences in financial performance of Chinese automotive companies it was found that companies which have women on their boards perform better in regard to asset growth, sales growth and risk behaviour (Horak & Cui 2017). They also analysed return on equity and that was found to be steady whether women were represented on the boards or not (2017, p. 847). It has further been claimed that heterogeneous boards can help with widening the number of contacts in terms of individuals and organisations the board has access to. It can enhance image management and innovation. It was also found that mixed sex boards also achieve investor endorsement and overall can strengthen opinions about the organisation's authenticity and acceptability (HRMID 2017, p. 36).

A UK study into women working in the life-sciences industry who are board members, found that there exist three major obstacles to change, those being the different work-life choices which women face, the prevailing masculine boardroom culture and the amount of capable and experienced women executives represented on the range of represented board functions (Stephens 2013). The research explains that there are benefits to organisations, women and to society as a whole of having more women on boards. It further argues that executive searchers should try harder to promote women's talents (2013, p. 43) in line with research into executive search agencies (Tienari et al. 2013).

A recent Colombian study explored how gender diversity in the boardroom as well as in the top management teams affects business performance (Moreno-Gómez et al. 2018). Its findings are that gender diversity does positively correlate with subsequent business performance. This is evidenced by business operations (return on assets) data in the case of CEOs and top management teams, and by shareholder-oriented metrics (return on equity) data in the case of women in the boardroom (2018, p.113). These findings are consistent with earlier studies which

indicate that gender diversity positively contributes to business performance (Adams & Ferreira 2009; Carter et al. 2010; Kılıç & Kuzey 2016).

It can be argued that women on boards will improve the overall performance because of the diverse perspectives offered. Diverse boards introduce a broader knowledge base and access to wider experiences (Robinson & Dechant 1997; Fondas 2000). Also, it is suggested that as the number of women increase on boards, the cognitive resources available will increase (Jackson et al. 1995; McLeod et al. 1996). By using extended cognitive resources, group-think can be avoided, and wider and broader perspectives can be introduced to problem solving through new perspectives (Watson et al. 1993). This leads to a wider and more critical analysis of problems, creating new and innovative solutions, as well as reducing premature decision making (Milliken & Martins 1996).

As well as a business perspective, workplace diversity is important from an ethical and sociological perspective (Pletzer et al. 2015). According to some scholars, women bring female leadership qualities and skills to the board such as good risk management practices as women are usually more risk averse and offer sound decision making (Gong & Yang 2012). Increasing the number of women will also give the organisation access to a wider network of suppliers, companies and consumers which in turn lessens market uncertainties and reliance (Miller & del Carmen Triana 2009). Women tend generally to place a higher value on their board positions and on their fiduciary responsibilities which can increase effective corporate governance (Terjesen et al. 2009). Women are likely to be more transformational in their leadership style and are often more supportive and encouraging towards those who report to them and to their colleagues (Eagly et al. 2003). More women at the top will in itself lead to more women at the top because '*diversity among decision makers. ...significantly increases women's likelihood of being promoted to top leadership positions*' (Cook & Glass 2014b, p. 99).

It is deemed to be more beneficial to have senior executive women leaders not only in the boardroom but also in the executive suite (Robinson & Dechant 1997). More women on boards will improve organisational financial performance because of the diversity of perspectives available (Adams & Ferreira 2009).

Similarly, according to some scholars, companies with the highest representation of females on their top management team experience better financial performance than companies with the lowest numbers of women in the top management teams (Krishnan & Park 2005). Across five industries it was identified that the Total Return to Shareholders and the Return on Equity were 34 per-cent and 35 per-cent higher respectively when women were part of the top management team (Krishnan & Park 2005). Women typically also introduce sustainable investment strategies to the board (Charness & Gneezy 2012). It can be argued that overall, women, potentially at least, enhance organisational performance.

### 2.1.4.2      Cons of gender diversity in the boardroom

However, other scholars disagree. For example, male board members see themselves and others as being in that salient social category that creates a preference towards men as the in-group (Tajfel 1978). If women enter the male board domain and are perceived as not one of the in-group, there is the potential for impaired co-operation and conflict (Milliken & Martins 1996). Introducing new perspectives may not go as planned (Charness & Gneezy 2012) especially if the men identify strongly with their male board colleagues and less with the new female board members. Conflicts could slow the board's effectiveness, especially as effective performance relies on timely decision making (Richard et al. 2004) which is rarely possible if conflict and communication issues exist.

Women may be regarded as '*tokens*' in the boardroom where some representation is encouraged through EEO principles. If women are not given equal status by their male board counterparts, they could feel marginalised and this could negatively affect the board's performance (Tubre & Collins 2000). Recent research examined the effect on the stock market when female CEOs were appointed to public American companies. Gaughan & Smith (2016) found that such appointments led to the stock prices decreasing but only if the appointments were highly publicised in the media. If there was no media hype the stock did not drop. The reasons for this are probably related to belief systems which are discussed in more detail in Section 2.2.4.1.

### 2.1.4.3    *Australian boardroom diversity*

Investigating the current Australian situation is best accomplished in the context of explaining recent history. Due to the relatively low numbers of women on Australian boards as noted in the Women in Leadership Census (2008), a number of groups such as *Women on Boards, Chief Executive Women* and the *Sex Discrimination Commissioner* called for increasing change. The Australian Securities Exchange's Corporate Governance Council amended its Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations in July 2010 to incorporate new recommendations which suggested that all companies: 1) establish a diversity policy and disclose a summary of that policy; 2) set and disclose measurable objectives for achieving gender diversity and report on progress in achieving them; and 3) measure and disclose the number of women on the board, in the senior executive team and throughout the whole organisation.   These recommendations currently apply to companies with over 100 employees on a 'comply or explain' basis. Based on these recommendations, organisations are encouraged to embrace the recommendations or explain why it is inappropriate for the organisation to adopt them. These regulations allow companies to set their own targets for gender diversity. Moreover, they have the potential to increase the numbers of senior executive women leaders.

Subsequently, the 2012 Census found that seven ASX200 companies had more than three female board members; there were thirty companies where women made up twenty-five per-cent (25%) or more of the whole board; and three boards where women made up fifty per-cent (50%) or more of the board (Klettner et al. 2016). According to the WGEA's August 2016 report, women held 14.2% of chair positions, and 23.6% of directorships.  By 2017, there was a decrease in the number of women in key leadership positions and by March 2017, out of a possible 200, there were ten women chairing boards in the ASX200 (Liveris 2017).

According to the latest data available (WGEA 2018) women hold 13.7% of chair positions and 24.9% of directorships.  The AICD report that 28.5% of ASX companies have women directors in 2018 and that only eighty-five of the ASX200 boards have reached the AICD set target of 30% women on boards

(AICD 2018). Accordingly, there is little equal representation of men and women in Australian boardrooms.

### 2.1.4.4    *Quotas in the boardroom*

Increasing quotas to address the under representation of women at board level in Australia is an ongoing debate.   Twenty-two countries across the world have introduced quota systems to increase the number of women on boards to between 30 and 40 percent (Fox 2014). Setting quota targets is growing in European countries. An analysis of quota legislation of female top leaders in Norway (Wang & Kelan 2013) found that the quota system had some effect on the gender gap with respect to independence status, age and education in the compliance stages and that the average number of qualifications held as well as board independence were positively associated with the appointment and existence of a female CEO.

An Australian survey (Richards & Feenstra 2015) found that 50% of Australians were supportive of introducing leadership quotas, but 50% were either not supportive or neutral.  The many reasons for not supporting quotas included the perceptions that gender discrimination does not exist, that this is a problem perpetuated by women rather than men, and that a negative perception of women exists in the workplace. There is a belief for instance that the status quo is working and that it should not be interfered with commensurate with the belief that Australia is a meritocracy.  However, it is the status quo, rather than quotas, which is anti-meritocratic, as women are being given lower evaluations of performance than identically qualified men (Moss-Racusin et al. 2012). The Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) has set a target of thirty per-cent women directors by 2018.   This is considered a critical mass to enable women to perform as directors. The AICD website is tracking the numbers in real time and in October 2018 it is retaining its target of achieving thirty per-cent by the end of 2018 (AICD 2018). The figures indicate that achieving this is highly unlikely.

When quotas have been introduced, both men and women perceive that women entering under an affirmative action system are less qualified, less competent, and less productive than men (Caleo & Heilman 2013). Women who believe that they have been given positions based on their gender report lower organisational

commitment, less perceived competence and less job satisfaction (Heilman & Alcott 2001). Thus, on the one hand it is known that introducing quotas will definitely attain the sought-after goal of increasing the amount of women board members, but on the other, those women are likely to be perceived as less qualified, competent and productive and attaining the goal by other means may be preferable.

### 2.1.4.5    Summation – gender diversity within the boardroom

In summary, although research suggests that increasing the number of women on boards and in executive roles will increase the effectiveness of organisations, Australia continues to persist with very low quantities of women on boards and in CEO positions. Allowing organisations to determine their own policies and gender diversity targets does not seem to have achieved the effect hoped for. Well over a quarter of Agency reporting organisations have no key female management employees and the number of women in key leadership positions remains low. This would suggest that slow progress is being made. Of the 200 companies in the ASX200, by the end of October 2018, eighty-five (85) companies have achieved the target of thirty per-cent (30%) women on boards, which suggests that companies pay lip service and probably practise tokenism to board representation for senior women leaders.

### 2.1.5    The pay gap

This section explores the answer to the question:  Does a gender pay gap exist within Australian organisations?  *'There are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies and statistics',* is a phrase which was used by Mark Twain which he attributed to the British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. International pay gap statistics bring that phrase to mind as the veracity of data is frequently challenged in the press (McGee 2017).  The Australian Bureau of Statistics provides consistent and credible data which is used by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

Recent history apprises that gender pay inequality was identified in Australia as a reality (Toohey et al. 2009) and in 2009, a federal parliamentary inquiry into pay parity provided sixty-three recommendations for improving gender pay equality. The report investigated the degree of gender pay inequity and its causes. A key

recommendation was the formation under the *Fair Work Act 2009,* of an equal remuneration principle. However, when scrutinising later data, it was acknowledged that a gender pay gap continued to exist and that the Australian gender wage ratio was not improving (Preston & Todd 2012).

A study of how companies were complying with the ASX regulation on gender diversity focussed on three areas, the volume of diversity disclosures, the considerations expressed within the disclosures at the corporate level and female board representation across the years 2009-2012 (Sonia et al. 2017). There was a significant increase in diversity disclosures since the regulation was introduced, from 2.5 per-cent to 48.33 per-cent. However, there was a lack of diversity disclosure beyond gender and some companies chose not to report at all in 2012 on gender indicating that not all were complying with the regulation. There were still relatively few women CEOs and board members and it is likely that the organisational culture which is supposedly the key change driver (Brammer et al. 2007) requires to be altered to encourage an increase towards more diverse senior executives and to include women on boards (Sonia et al. 2017, p.349).

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) was subsequently established in 2012 as a result of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012.* The WGEA is discussed in more detail in section 2.1.5. The figures published by the WGEA in March 2018 reveal that:

- the full-time average weekly ordinary earnings for women are 15.3% less than for men;
- among public sector organisations with 100 or more employees, the gender pay gap for full-time annualised base salary is 17.3% and for full-time annualised total remuneration is 22.4%;
- the full-time average hourly earnings for non-managerial women are 11.1% less than men's full-time average hourly earnings; and
- the average graduate salaries for women are 1.8% less than for men and this increases to 16.5% for postgraduate (coursework) graduates.

(*Source*: WGEA 2018)

These figures reinforce the view that there is a gender bias in favour of men in the workplace in terms of pay, emboldening a gender pay gap reality which has

existed for some time (Fox 2010). It has been suggested that one of the major reasons for the Australian gender pay gap may have been the '*WorkChoices*' legislation (Kramar et al. 2011), however this would seem questionable given that the gap seems to have increased in the years since that legislation was removed.

As this thesis focuses on senior executive women leaders (SEWLs), it is worth investigating whether the gap in Australia decreases or declines relative to their male counterparts by the time women reach senior management roles. This would seem to be a realistic expectation. However, when analysing management pay rates, data indicates that senior women are paid less than their male colleagues with the *largest* pay gaps associated with executives (WGEA 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018). The most recent (2018) figures available indicate that female key management personnel earn on average $89,516 less than their male counterparts in total salary. This indicates an average gender pay gap of twenty-four per-cent (24%) (WGEA 2018).

The WGEA 2018 report emphasises the importance of organisations undertaking pay gap analysis audits then taking action based on those audits. Companies that did not undertake such audits found that their gender pay gap increased by one percentage point on both base and total salaries of executives. Those companies that did undertake such audits found that this resulted in a decrease of 0.8 percentage points on total salary of executives. The WGEA report (2018) states:

> The persistent gender pay gap in Australia remains an issue of concern, and one that needs to be addressed to ensure that the contributions of all employees are recognised and rewarded, and that Australian businesses capitalise on the full potential of its workforce. The findings in this report offer some encouragement that Australian businesses are taking the issue of gender pay equity seriously, with far more seeking to measure pay differences and review remuneration policies and processes throughout their organisations. But measurement alone is not enough to break the inertia. What this report proves most is that Australian companies need not only to commit to pay audits to address potential gender bias in remuneration policies, but to follow through with actions around such policies to make a real difference to pay equity outcomes
> (WGEA 2018).

One would assume that one logical way to lessen the pay gap, especially at the senior executive level where many individuals negotiate their pay rates, would be for women to negotiate higher salaries. However, Australian women are less willing to initiate pay negotiations than men, set lower targets and do not favour

using their available power bases (Kulik & Olekalns 2012). In pay negotiations generally, competent women face the challenge of being perceived as likeable (Heilman & Okimoto 2007). As previously noted, competent women are frequently disliked (Heilman 2001) and perceived as more hostile, selfish, devious and quarrelsome, less helpful, less trustworthy, less sincere, less moral and less friendly (Heilman et al. 1995). Women face the dilemma that if they toughen up in negotiations, they are likely to incur social costs which may adversely affect their internal organisational relationships (O'Connor et al. 2005; Thompson 2017) overall worsening their prospects for progression.

One method which has been shown to have a positive effect on narrowing the gender pay gap is to have female board membership (Cassells 2016). As women progress in their careers, leadership training also helps them to increase their earnings, but such training is more beneficial to men. Although women frequently find mentors and role models, they benefit most in salary increases by gaining sponsors. Men benefit more in terms of salary when they have role models and sponsors and for women, resuming work after a break typically incurs a wage penalty (Shandy & Moe 2009).

A study by Bailey et al (2016) on academic pay loading and gender in Australian universities found that equal pay and loading discrepancies are apparent and that the universities should reduce the gendered differences in the negotiated outcomes for market loadings, stating:

> as part of their gender equity strategies, universities should review their loadings data with respect to gender and work to reduce gender differences in negotiated outcomes (Bailey et al 2016, p.663).

A 2015 study identifying the pay gap differences when men and women prioritise family over work offers other insights (Payscale 2015). The findings are illustrated in Table 2.1. The more frequently a woman, irrespective of whether or not she has a child, prioritises home/family over work, the larger the controlled gender pay gap compared to men. Single men and single women who never prioritise home and family over work experience no pay gap when control factors are in place. Mothers who prioritise family at least between one to four times a year, experience the largest gender pay gap (-4.4%) when compared to men who are fathers who act similarly (Table 2.1). Thus, it would seem that major

inequalities exist when men and women ask for time for family or work commitments.

**Table 2. 1** *Pay gap differences when men and women prioritise family over work*

| Pay Gap Differences When Men and Women Prioritise Family Over Work | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Single people without kids are paid similarly but married women with kids are paid less than men who prioritise family at the same frequency | | | | | |
| | | | CONTROLLED PAY GAP | | |
| How often do you prioritise home or family obligations over professional obligations or opportunities? | Overall<br><br>(female<br><br>vs. male) | Married<br><br>with kids<br><br>(female<br><br>vs. male) | Single<br><br>with kids<br><br>(female<br><br>vs. male) | Single<br><br>without kids<br><br>(female<br><br>vs. male) | Married<br>without<br>kids<br><br>(female<br>vs.<br>male) |
| Never | -1.1% | -2.2% | -1.0% | 0.0% | -1.6% |
| One to four times a year | -2.4% | -4.4% | -1.5% | -0.5% | -0.7% |
| One to two times a month | -3.0% | -4.2% | -1.6% | -0.9% | -2.4% |
| One time or more a week | -3.4% | -4.3% | -2.4% | -0.9% | -2.7% |

(*Source:* 'Inside the Gender Pay Gap', Payscale 2015)

### 2.1.5.1    *Can women close the gap?*

Extant research indicates that women frequently close the gap in performance but they do not close the gap in rewards (Joshi et al. 2015, p. 1532). An analysis across a vast range of occupations and industries, including jobs from repetitive to demanding, found that gender differences in rewards are almost 14 times larger than gender differences in performance assessments. Performance differences did not explain reward differences between women and men. The higher the number of men in an occupation and the more complex the job, the greater the increase in the male-female gap in rewards and performance. Women were found to perform equally in the most respected and esteemed occupations however they received significantly lower rewards in those occupations. The only way that the gap in rewards and performance assessments was found to be reversed is in industries with a higher proportion of women executives (Joshi et al. 2015a).

### 2.1.5.2    Summation – the pay gap

In summary, a gender pay gap is widely practised in Australian organisations. Having been recognised as a National problem, the *Fair Work Act 2009* followed by the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* were designed to address issues of gender pay inequality. Subsequently, this has not been fully effective as the gap continues to exist and is in some cases widening, particularly among managers. Women also experience stereotypical gender status-related difficulties in pay negotiations. Major inequities in pay have been demonstrated to exist when men and women ask for time to prioritise family over work, even if women never ask for time off for family obligations. Similarly, women appear to be penalised by virtue of the fact that they have children or are married. Women's rewards remain significantly less than men's unless they are in occupations with a high number of women executives.

### 2.1.6    Policies for equal pay and equal employment opportunity

In pursuit of an institutional approach as noted by Lucas (2003), governments and organisations can put in place legislation and policies to overcome gendered inequalities and to help create equality opportunity by attempting to embed such policies in the workplace. These differ from informal actions and strategies employed and practised by individuals which rely on each individual's own abilities. Exploring those individual practices aid in determining which policies, processes and systems assist and which ones hamper the progression of women in the workplace (Cook and Glass, 2014, p. 92). Putting in place national legislation and organisational policies have been shown to assist women's equality (Bao et al. 2014; Murray & Southey 2017). For example, introducing quota systems for women on boards in Norway has resulted in positive effects (Wang & Kelan 2013).

In this section, equal pay and equal employment opportunities are examined within the Australian context where the industrial relations system determines decisions on equal pay. Equity in employment in Australian organisations is governed by legislated requirements through two major strands of law, those being anti-discrimination legislation and equal opportunity legislation.

### 2.1.6.1 *Australian anti-discrimination legislation*

The anti-discrimination legislation has two-fold obligations of ensuring equality of outcomes and prohibiting discrimination; it aims to conquer discrimination by ensuring equal rights for all individuals. The legislation addresses instances of individual discrimination and provides remedy for serious breaches. It has an emphasis on conciliation and employers are jointly and severally liable for the discriminatory acts of their employees or agents through vicarious liability. This entails employers not only ensuring that they do not cause, instruct, induce, aid or permit another person to commit an act that is unlawful, but also ensuring that the potential for discrimination is removed from all workplace practices and that employees are informed of their responsibilities to remove discriminatory behaviour or practices.

### 2.1.6.2 *Australian equity in employment legislation*

Equity in employment is addressed through an assortment of legislation at both federal and state government levels and demands a systematic organisational approach to identify and eliminate the barriers which women encounter at work. It is implemented generally by using a business case-by-case approach rather than a particular enforced legislative approach. In addition, many organisations have their own non-legislated frameworks that address diversity in employment (Burgess et al. 2009). The *Workplace Gender Equality Act. 2012* places a focus on promoting and improving gender equality outcomes for both men and women in Australian workplaces. The Act recognises that caring responsibilities of both women and men as well as specifically referring to equal pay as keystones in achieving gender equality. It identifies gender equality indicators and encourages the development of performance benchmarks in consultation with industry experts. It targets strengthening the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA)'s capacity to scrutinise improvements in gender equality.

### 2.1.6.3 *Australian gender equality in the workplace*

EEO legislation requires selection on merit and defines merit as the best person for the job, matching the requirements of the job to the qualities of the candidate. Merit is identified by many as a value laden and subjective term (Ronalds 1991; Strachan et al. 2014). According to the WGEA the aim of gender equality in the workplace is to achieve broadly equal outcomes for women and men, not necessarily outcomes that are exactly the same for all. This requires:

- Workplaces to provide equal pay for work of equal or comparable value;
- Removal of barriers to the full and equal participation of women in the workforce;
- Access to all occupations and industries, including leadership roles, regardless of gender; and
- Elimination of discrimination on the basis of gender, particularly in relation to family and caring responsibilities. (*Source:* WGEA 2018)

Australian organisations who employ more than 100 people are required to report to the WGEA annually. Companies must report against six gender equality indicators (GEI)s which relate to areas deemed critical to gender equality. They are:

- GEI 1 - gender composition of the workforce;
- GEI 2 - gender composition of governing bodies of relevant employers;
- GEI 3 - equal remuneration between women and men;
- GEI 4 - availability and utility of employment terms, conditions and practices relating to flexible working arrangements for employees and to working arrangements supporting employees with family or caring responsibilities;
- GEI 5 - consultation with employees on issues concerning gender equality in the workplace; and
- GEI 6 - any other matters specified by the Minister: sex-based harassment and discrimination. (*Source:* WGEA 2018)

Organisations who do not comply are named in Parliament. This system is not based on any legislated standards and assumes that companies will show good corporate citizenship when participating, which may be a weakness. Part-time workers are included in the reporting however casual workers are not required to be included in the reporting which effectively hides the overall pattern in relation to women, as in Australia women account for two-thirds of casual employees. Even where female casual employees are included within the domain of the legislation the opportunities available and accessible are very dependent on the incorporation of EEO programmes into the organisation's operations (Strachan et

al. 2010). The discussion in section 2.1.4 identifies the current situation and figures (2018) relating to equal pay in Australia.

### 2.1.6.4 *Australian family support mechanisms*

Historically in Australia there has been a lack of formal support mechanisms for families including access to childcare facilities and a national paid maternity leave scheme which finally commenced in 2011. In 2012, eighteen (18) weeks of *'Parental Leave Pay'* was introduced at the national minimum wage level. Some companies, including companies such as banks and public-sector organisations, choose to 'top up' the government provided minimum wage level, some to as much as full pay. In 2013 *'Dad and Partner Pay'* was introduced providing eligible partners with up to two weeks' pay on the birth or adoption of a child.

### 2.1.6.5 *Diversity management mechanisms*

There is no mandatory diversity management legislation in Australia. Bacchi (2000) suggests that the public sector diversity program endeavours to hide inequalities under the aegis of *'difference'* and it circumvents essential programs promoting equality and social policy objectives. The ability to overview and scrutinise organisational equality programs and employment practises is diluted within the current EEO legislation.

Workplace policies that support gender equality are very helpful in retaining talented employees who are more likely to stay with a company which values workplace diversity (Kaplan et al. 2011). Kaplan et al. (2011) found that employees in such companies feel that they are gaining by staying in organisations which they view as non-discriminatory and fair.

In order to comply with EEO legislation and to minimise their vicarious liability, most companies instigate internal policies and procedures. These include policies ensuring that gender and other biases do not interfere with selection processes or day to day business. Most companies mandate merit-based selection processes and espouse gender diversity. Studies indicate that it is common for these policies to have little effect on the diversity of the organisations (Edelman & Petterson 1999; Kalev et al. 2006). There are positives, however, in introducing effective workplace structures. A recent study indicates that women who achieve leadership

in organisations which introduce fully effective workplace structures, realise higher levels of influence than women who achieve leadership positions based on ability alone (Murray & Southey 2017).

Workplace policies designed to enhance equal opportunities have been found to work against women. In a study of gender discrimination cases in the Ohio Civil Rights Commission, it was found that managers selectively use policies to discriminate against women (Bobbitt-Zeher 2011). Gender stereotyping combines with the sex composition of workplaces where inequality regimes related to loosely arranged company policies and procedures lead to workplace discrimination (Bobbitt-Zeher 2011). In this respect, implementing equal opportunity workplace policies does not always lead to increased equality. Rather such policies can be treated by employees as another set of imposed rules that can be selectively observed.

> ...policies which consist of a set of formal rules governing behaviour can be counter-productive. They may be treated as "just a formality" and therefore adhered to only in a nominal way. Alternatively, they can come to be seen as something to be actively "got around" and hence subverted. (Liff 1989, p. 31).

This begs the question about the value of EEO policies and procedures. While workforce participation rates have risen, the gender wage gap and expected numbers of women in leadership roles have not (French & Sheridan 2010).

### 2.1.6.6 *Summation - policies for equal pay and equal employment opportunities*

In summary, while there is no workplace diversity legislation in Australia, government does legislate on anti-discrimination and equal opportunity. Most organisations have workplace policies in place, particularly concerning EEO and merit-based selection. It would appear however that having EEO policies and procedures give the impression of being of questionable value as these policies seem to have little effect on the diversity of the organisations. Even with, or perhaps in some instances because of, legislative and organisational policies and processes which are put in place to destabilise it, gender inequality continues in contemporary organisations.

### 2.1.7    *Developing a career environment for women*

Women generally do not receive the same opportunities for professional development and breadth of experiences as men (Lyness & Thompson 2000; Chuang 2015). Empirical research into how best to develop a career environment for women has developed proposals for organisations and for individuals (Holton & Dent 2016). The proposals for individuals include that women should develop self-awareness (Holton & Dent 2016, p. 551) which will assist in building self-confidence and self-belief which are seen by Holton & Dent (2016) as crucial contributors to career success. A recent study at RMIT has questioned the idea that women leaders should build their self-confidence in order to succeed (Risse et al. 2018). The study finds that for men, the likelihood of gaining promotion increases slightly in line with their self-confidence. However, this is not the case for women. Highly confident men boost their chances of promotion on average by 6% while highly confident women remain as likely to be promoted as they would be without high levels of confidence. Thus, women displaying confidence would seem to be treated in a similar fashion to women who display other male stereotypical traits, which can work against them.

Developing a career plan identifying career goals and ambitions is also important for individuals (Holton & Dent 2016, p. 552) as is understanding the role of others. It has been identified that there could be benefits in women receiving educational and developmental programs separately to men as their experiences and interests tend to be dissimilar to men's (Kark 2004). There may be some benefits in designing programs for women whose experiences are shaped by management as a male domain (Kark 2004, p. 166). It is important to gain support from colleagues and bosses (Holton & Dent 2016, p. 552). Networking, both in the virtual and real worlds, is viewed as of significance in career development, and should be undertaken strategically (Holton & Dent 2016, p. 553). The final individual proposal by Holton & Dent (2016) is that women should make and take opportunities as they arise as most successful women are strategic and plan out their career paths to the extent that they can (Holton & Dent 2016, p. 553).

Despite the contention that educators do not have a suitable framework (Ely et al. 2011) for creating leadership programs which are suitable for women, Holton &

Dent (2016) demonstrate various ways that organisations can affect support for women. It has been found that for women to be perceived as equal to men in the workplace, it is important for the CEO and the top management team to support and model behaviours that show commitment to women employees (Holton & Dent 2016). The organisational culture and attitude is seen as an important factor and the culture can be overtly displayed by the organisations having diversity champions, offering flexible working conditions, offering job sharing and other diverse opportunities (Holton & Dent 2016, p. 555).

Implementation of legislation, such as *The Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* has been found to benefit working women. Implementing and embedding organisational policies promoting equal opportunities within the workplace is an effective method of equalising and supporting women (Ahl & Nelson 2015; Sanchez-Apellaniz & Triguero-Sánchez 2016; Murray & Southey 2017). Introducing internal and external programs for both men and women promoting equal opportunity within the workplace assist in generating gender-neutral experiences that confront gender stereotypes (WGEA 2018; Murray & Southey 2017).

Organisations are encouraged to ensure that the gender mix is considered, not simply in terms of numbers of women employed, but in terms of women at all levels within the organisation. The numbers of women being offered developmental activities, leadership courses and special projects to ensure a gender mix is worthy of consideration (Holton & Dent 2016). For instance, if a company wishes to alter a number of selected management behaviours, executive coaching seems to provide the most effective method of achieving such behavioural changes (Rekalde et al. 2017). However, the cost of executive coaching, the time required and the specificity which entails in recruiting coaches with relevant experience, limit the extent to which executive coaching can be utilised in management training (Rekalde 2017, p.2158).

Organisations can further improve conditions for women by offering development, mentoring and coaching opportunities and by ensuring that they manage the female talent pipeline effectively (Holton & Dent 2016) or they are in danger of losing some of the best talent in the organisation. There is evidence that

personal development activities are beneficial yet women are often deterred from attending (Chuang 2015). Professional development activities can lessen status inequality effects by increasing the abilities of individuals through blurring status assessments (Cohen & Lotan 1995; Troyer et al. 2001; Ridgeway & Correll 2006; Walker et al. 2014) therefore are to be encouraged to assist women.

### 2.1.8    Conclusion of section 2.1 on inequality regimes

Gender inequalities persist regardless of modern technical and social innovations, regardless of legislative policies and political intent, and irrespective of increasing egalitarian resolve within relationships both inside the home and the workplace. The issues surrounding gender do not seem to capitulate to the ideals of equality. Gender inequality continues to trail behind societal changes.  As discussed, the most probable reason for the lag is due to the continual reinforcement in the home where men are considered to be of higher status than women.  Suggestions have been made regarding how to develop a career environment for women, encouraging professional development activities for them. Ridgeway's potential solutions to speed up the change toward equality are worthy of consideration and are twofold.  Firstly, for men to take up more family care responsibilities and secondly, for workplaces to become significantly more family friendly (Ridgeway 2011).

## 2.2    Status characteristics theory

### 2.2.1    Introduction

This thesis uses status characteristics theory (SCT) to explore the effects of informal workplace status evaluations on SEWLs in Australian workplaces. In Chapter 1 this thesis also set out to explore the behavioural manifestations of status evaluations and attitudes that occur subconsciously in informal workgroups. The thesis explores how senior executive women leaders (SEWL)s find ways to overcome or obfuscate lower-status female gender status beliefs in every-day mixed sex task situations.  SCT is used as a basis to examine and explore the research problem and research questions related to the latter and is chosen because it focusses on beliefs and behaviours surrounding status. Studying status beliefs

and expectations may be the key to unlocking strategies to overcome gender status assessments that work against SEWLs.

As early as 1918, Weber identified status as one of the three bases for inequality in industrial societies, the other two being resources and power (Gerth & Mills 1946; Ridgeway 2014). Status characteristics theory (SCT) was introduced by Berger, Cohen & Zelditch (1966). In early investigations, Bales (1950) explored expectation states by looking at how influence and prestige gradients arise in small groups. Bales found when homogenous individuals were working in groups on work group tasks, stable interactional differences arose rapidly. These expectations states influenced the development of status characteristics theory, the idea that performance expectations are beliefs about how individuals might perform in future tasks. SCT attempts to explain why interpersonal hierarchies occur when people interact in group tasks, where different people are attributed with differing levels of influence and esteem. The following section describes how SCT can be used as an underlying theory to explore the research problem.

## 2.2.2    Status characteristics theory

In determining why inequalities exist in the workplace and society in general, SCT is described as the principal means for how interpersonal status processes function. This theory is premised on the understanding that when people work together on a task, a status hierarchy usually develops among the group in which some individuals have more influence and esteem that others (Bales 1970). These status hierarchies are ordered by the expectations which participants form of their own ability to contribute to the group goal of completing the task compared with the ability of each other member. In this way, the amount of influence and esteem given to individuals within the group by themselves and others, is dependent upon the assumptions about each member's competence to complete that task relative to the other group members. SCT explores how these interpersonal status hierarchies work (Wagner & Berger 1997; Correll et al. 2007; Ridgeway & Correll 2006).

Status characteristics theory states that members of a group form expectations about each other's competence to contribute to group goals based on their status characteristics with individuals who are expected to make greater contributions to

the task at hand and are thus more highly valued by the group (Berger et al. 1980). In group settings, individuals instantaneously form stereotypes of the other members of the group through social interactions. These stereotypes are characteristics that members of the group attach to one another based on prior beliefs. The basis of the characteristics can be age, sex, ethnicity, race, education, occupation, reading ability, intelligence or some other belief (Berger et al. 1980, p. 479). Status characteristics theory further determines how the hierarchies are created (Ridgeway 2014) and altered (Ridgeway et al. 1994). Status characteristics theory relates the characteristics of an individual to that individual's rank in a status hierarchy based on the height of the esteem in which the person is held not only by others within the group, but also by self.

A status characteristic is defined as a characteristic of an individual that has two or more states that are differentially evaluated. The differentiation can be in terms of honour, esteem, or desirability. Every status characteristic is associated with a distinct performance expectation. For example, gender is a status characteristic with higher (male) and lower (female) states (Pugh & Wahrman 1983). The application of SCT relates to the cognitive status assessments of others in relation to categorical differences such as gender, age, race, ethnicity and perceived ability to successfully or not complete a task.

When performing a task, a status organising process takes place. Individuals within a group performing a group work task may possess characteristics that are directly or indirectly related to the nature of the task. When indirect relationships exist, it is presumed that group members search among the characteristics of the situation for connections between the status characteristics of those present and what is required of the task. These linkages are called the *'paths of relevance'*. The *'path of relevance'* is the cognitive link between a group member and the task that links the status characteristic possessed by the group member to the result of the task performance (Berger et al. 1980, p. 485). The shorter the path of relevance, the stronger it is, which in turn produces higher expectations of performance (Berger et al. 1977). When it is shorter there is a stronger cognitive link between status and the perceived performance of individuals to compete a group work task. The task can be any task that any employees undertake in the course of their work. Conversely, the longer the path, the weaker it is. Then the

cognitive link between status and perceived performance is weaker producing lower expectations of performance. For instance, if gender is used for ranking, the subliminal status ranking of 'female' might lead to a longer path of relevance linking status to expectations of performance to complete a task (either success or failure). In the workplace, higher status groups and their members are thought to be more highly competent that lower status groups and their members (Russell & Fiske 2008). Lower status groups have longer paths of relevance and higher status groups have shorter paths of relevance.

### 2.2.2.1 *Specific and diffuse characteristics*

SCT connects beliefs to performance expectations and social influence. The theory defines two kinds of status characteristics: *'specific'* and *'diffuse'*. Specific status characteristics produce expectations for competence in limited settings, while diffuse status characteristics create expectations that are unbounded in range. A specific status characteristic involves two or more states that are differentially evaluated, and each characteristic is associated with a distinct and specific expectation state (Berger et al. 1980). Diffuse status characteristics involve two or more characteristics that are differentially valued. There are discrete sets of certain expectations linked to each characteristic, each characteristic evaluated, and there exists a similarly evaluated general expectation of performance (Phelan et al. 2014, p. 16). For example, functions operate as a *diffuse* status characteristic if and only if (A) one characteristic (e.g., male) is more esteemed than the other characteristic (female); (B) an expectation exists that men are more competent at certain tasks, such as managerial ability; and (C) men are assumed to be more competent than women in general (Pugh & Wahrman 1983).

A *specific* status characteristic is one that fulfils situations (A) and (B) but not (C). As an example, being skilled at mathematics is a specific status characteristic when being skilled at mathematics is more desirable than being poor at mathematics and when the expectations would be that a mathematics expert would be competent at other tasks involving numbers (Berger et al. 1977; Kalkhoff et al. 2011).

Initially SCT covered the status organising process of two people with one diffuse status characteristic. Berger & Fisek (1970) expanded the theory to include situations where two people possess any number of salient diffuse or specific characteristics. In practical workplace terms, in order to complete a group work task, it is frequently important to have a specific characteristic e.g., technical excellence as well as a set of diffused characteristics that lead to multiple abilities that are assessed in places of work (Berger et al. 1980; Lucas 2003; Ridgeway 2006).

### 2.2.2.2    *Task and collective orientations*

Two *'conditions'* limit the area of status characteristics theory, these are *task orientation* and *collective orientation* (Berger et al. 1977, p. 95). *Task orientation* denotes that there is a particular task or problem which has to be solved and the group has been formed to solve that problem or achieve that task. Group members are determined to fulfil and complete the task and successfully solve the problem; individuals believe there is a contributory characteristic which is necessary to attain successful task completion and the task is clearly evaluated in that results are clearly defined in terms of success or failure.

*Collective orientation* denotes that all members of the group think that it is essential to consider the input of every member of the group in solving the task. For all groups that meet these two conditions, SCT makes predictions about the process through which status characteristics which can be observed, leading to inequalities in status evaluation.

The two conditions, collective orientation and task orientation, have been frequently researched as collective tasks are frequently performed in a wide variety of workplace situations such as work groups, committees, teams and task forces. SCT refers only to behavioural outcome expectations in *'collective task'* situations.  It does not make predictions or form expectations about how individuals form expectations for others in any work situations.

### 2.2.2.3    *Four conditions of SCT*

There are four SCT assumptions of how status characteristics translate into how rank is determined in a status hierarchy. Firstly, there is the assumption that any

characteristic will become *'salient'*, or activated, to members of the group if it is known to be, or believed to be related to the task at hand, or if it differentiates among group members of the task group (Berger et al. 1980). Note that the characteristic does not actually have to be related to the task at hand, only believed to be related to it.

Secondly, there is the *'burden of proof'* assumption. This assumes that all salient characteristics (e.g. gender) will be treated as relevant by group members unless gender is explicitly disassociated from the task (Berger et al. 1980; Ridgeway 2006; Ridgeway & Correll 2006). The burden of proof process suggests that the initial or original status assessment of an individual's ability to complete a task (either successfully or not) will be stable over time, from one task situation to the next, unless the original assessment is disproven (Berger & Conner 1969; Berger et al. 1980; Berger et al. 2002). Women can challenge the burden of proof effect by overcoming gender related impediments which restrict opportunities to exert influence (Berger et al. 1980; Ridgeway & Correll 2006).

Thirdly, there is the *'aggregated expectation states'* assumption. This postulates that when group members are challenged with more than one relevant characteristic, they combine the expectations associated with each characteristic (Berger et al. 1980; Webster Jr & Rashotte 2010). Group members add together positive and negative characteristics to form a conglomerated set of overall performance expectations for self and others in the group.

Fourthly, there is the *'basic expectation'* assumption. This postulates that the rank of an individual in the group status hierarchy will depend entirely on the group's expectations for that member's performance (Berger et al. 1980; Webster Jr & Rashotte 2010). Therefore, the status order with the group will be determined by the aggregated expectation states that each individual within the group has for self, and for other members of the group (Phelan et al. 2014, p. 16).

These aggregated performance expectations determine observable differences in social interaction. It is predicted that those with relatively higher performance expectations will be evaluated more positively, have greater influence over the group's decisions, perform more often, receive more opportunities to perform and have their ideas more readily adopted by the group (Berger et al. 1980). External

evaluations of status characteristics are imported into task related group settings (Berger & Zelditch 2002). The status characteristics assigned to a person determine a power-prestige order and status rank within the group (Webster Jr & Rashotte 2010). Individuals who are expected to contribute more to task success on the basis of their status rank are more highly valued by the group than those who have been ranked lower (Huffman et al. 2012). A high-status person might be considered a better performer (Lynn et al. 2009).

The assertions of SCT have been tested and replications have supported the basic claims of the theory (Wagner & Berger 2002). Status differences appear because individual characteristics of others are assessed based on the valuation by group members of their ability to complete a task. They either succeed or they fail. Performance expectations relating to future performance arise from these interactions, as well as from prior beliefs about group members (Berger et al. 1980). Status signals the particular category that an individual occupies within a well-defined social hierarchy (Sauder et al. 2012).

Research suggests that power and prestige orders can be destabilised dependent upon the structure of tasks given. Ill-structured tasks can improve groups' evaluations of lower status members and encourage higher participation rates among the lower status members (Chizhik et al. 2003). Well-structured tasks are those where the problem is clearly identified and there is only one solution. Ill-structured tasks are those that can have a number of possible solutions. Well-structured tasks tend to require individuals with specific characteristics to determine the solutions. Ill-structured tasks can be better and more quickly solved by people with multiple diffused characteristics. Thus, it can be possible for those with multiple diffused characteristics to create shorter paths of relevance to the task, as well as those individuals with specific status characteristics. SCT further indicates that a cognitive connection exists between status rankings and power-prestige orders (Berger et al. 1980; Webster & Rashotte 2010).

It is unclear how much conscious thought, if any, is involved in the formation of expectations and it is generally assumed that there is no conscious thought involved (Berger et al. 1980) therefore giving instructions in the workplace to eliminate this would be futile. By exploring the processes that individuals use to

arrive at their expectations, individuals can give researchers information on the processes they used to arrive at those expectations. Thus, in research situations, people give their individual subjective impressions of their experiment 'partners' and the circumstances, in terms of SCT generated expectations. This is measurable and a scale to measure the general performance expectations has been developed by Zeller and Warnecke (1973). Later studies have provided proof of validity and reliability and subsequently the Zeller and Warnecke index has been developed further (Driskell & Mullen 1988). Nevertheless, it is still believed that the overall process of status attribution occurs subconsciously (Berger et al. 1980).

### *2.2.2.4    SCT contentions*

Status characteristics theory's main contention is that when performing a group task, the differences in individuals' behaviours and evaluations will be a direct function of the degree to which performance expectations are held by self and others, and whether these expectations advantage or disadvantage individuals compared with one another (Berger et al 1977). Biases which attribute success to ability as opposed to effort, favour men for tasks culturally associated with men but disappear for female typed tasks (Swim & Sanna 1996). After expectations are formed, they tend to be complied with.

Individuals within groups behave to conform to the behaviours that they expect for themselves and for others. For example, in a group of men and women undertaking a stereotypical male task such as changing a flat tyre, men will have a great advantage and when undertaking a stereotypical female task such as child care, women will be slightly advantaged. The assumption that men have overall greater competence than women gives men the edge. If a task is not sex-typed there will be no differences in the behaviours of men and women. Another example is that when discussion in a mixed sex group changes from a gender-neutral matter to one that is stereotypically male oriented, there is an increase in men's agentic behaviours. However, when the discussion changes to one that is stereotypically female oriented, the interpersonal hierarchy reverses and women display higher rates of agentic behaviours than men (Dovidio et al. 1988).

Research further indicates that interaction between individuals of unequal status conveys a characteristic structure. The person with higher status often talks more, sticks to their opinions, sets the agenda and has more influence. The lower status person reacts to the high-status person offering comments of support, paying close attention to their concerns and defers when there are any disputes (Wagner & Berger 1997). Thus, due to expectations held, groups fairly rapidly determine power and prestige hierarchies. These hierarchies result in inequalities existing among individual members of the group by way of performance outputs, opportunities for action, reward actions, and overall influence within the group (Berger et al. 1977). Those individuals who are allocated higher ratings in the power and prestige orders, are given more opportunities to contribute to the tasks and are very likely to be positively accepted by the workgroup. Those individuals lower in the power and prestige orders, who are not expected to perform as highly, tend not to have their contributions positively accepted by the group. The interest in this thesis relates to gender differences in the workplace. SCT is not specifically a theory of gender, it is a theory of status and influence in interpersonal relations. It has been widely used to study how status beliefs about gender affect social relations (Dovidio et al. 1988; Carli 1991; Wagner & Berger 1997; Ridgeway & Bourg 2004; Correll et al. 2007) as well as about other significant social differences.

SCT posits that gender status beliefs bias the performance expectations that individuals form, if and only if gender is salient, that is, in gender relevant or mixed sex contexts. It further posits using the previously mentioned *'aggregated expectation'* that individuals aggregate the positive and the negative competence implications of all salient identities to form performance expectations of all individuals in the situation relative to one another. This is all done subliminally, with individuals using their subconscious minds to determine the levels of esteem, ability and influence of all participants, while busily undertaking the tasks in hand. Not only do individuals aggregate the positives and negatives of the salient characteristics, but also they give a weighting for each of the characteristics by its relevance to the task at hand before aggregating and determining the relative performance expectations for all individuals in the situation, including themselves (Berger et al. 1981; Wagner & Berger 2002). Thus, as long as gender is salient in

a situation, even if it is a background identity in a task, gender status beliefs moderately bias performance expectations of men over women; and in tasks which are linked to gender culturally, they more powerfully bias performance beliefs (Ridgeway 2011).

### 2.2.2.5    *SCT is empirically tested and proven*

The predictions made by Berger's theory of SCT have been statistically tested and empirically proven in graphs and equations (Berger et al. 1992). It has been subsequently proven that the logic of SCT can be described by one equation (Whitmeyer 2003).  The equation below can be used to predict one member's expectation advantage over another in an interaction between two people. Basically, the equation, which has been tested and replicated by others (Kalkhoff & Thye 2006) predicts that, in two-person situations, the greater the first person's expectations advantage over the second person is, the higher the probability is that the first person will resist influence from the second.

$$\Phi_i = \exp\left[-a\sum_r l_r g(r)\right] - \exp\left[-a\sum_r h_r g(r)\right]$$

[$\Phi_i$ represents the aggregate performance expectation for group member $i$, who possesses any number of status characteristics of relevance, $r$.[2]
$l_r$ refers to the total number of status characteristics of relevance $r$ on which an actor possesses the disadvantaged state, and the term $h_r$ is the total number of status elements of relevance $r$ on which the actor possesses the advantaged state.
$a$ is a constant in the equation, and $g(r)$ is a function] (Dippong et al. 2017).

In groups of more than two people an alternative equation fits whereby the expectation advantage is calculated separately for each pair of group members. This equation was developed by Fişek et al. (1991).

$$s_i = 1 + \Phi_i \sum_{j=1} N(1 + \Phi_j),$$

[$s_i$ is the overall expectation standing of actor $i$ in the group
$\Phi_i$ and $\Phi_j$ are the performance expectations for group members $i$ and $j$ (calculated using equation 1)
$N$ is the number of group members in the encounter. (Dippong et al. 2017).

The above equation represents one group member's proportional share of the total performance expectations available in the group task situation.

Thus, SCT has been empirically tested and proven as repeated experimental tests have shown that the equations predict and uphold the theory. Using the equations, it can be shown that the highest status members in a group remain the most influential even when the status characteristics they possess are not relevant to the task at hand. It is only when there is a convincing reason to believe that an individual's carried-over status should not be relevant that the burden of proof process comes into play and initially seemingly non-explicitly relevant status characteristics affect behaviours and expectations.

### 2.2.2.6    Summation - SCT

In summary, specific and diffused characteristics are both important. People with a specific characteristic will be valued by the team as being competent to achieve the task at hand or to achieve the team work goals. SCT research consistently demonstrates that members of collectively goal-oriented groups use status characteristics to form expectations about each other's competence to contribute to group goals. Individuals with higher status are expected to contribute more. Those who are expected to make greater contributions are more highly valued by the group, are held in higher esteem, have more opportunities to perform, have more influence in the group, and have their performances evaluated more highly than individuals with positions lower in the status order. Even when the diffuse status characteristics by which their positions are determined have no relevance at all to the task at hand, those with higher status tend to speak more, have their ideas accepted by others, and are more likely to be elected group leader (Berger et al. 1980). Both high and low status group members expect lower status group members to have lower competence, and all members act in ways to make that expectation more likely to come true. These processes often take place outside of the conscious awareness of group members (Berger et al. 1980). Berger's theory has also been statistically confirmed (Fişek et al. 1991; Whitmeyer 2003; Kalkhoff & Thye 2006; Dippong et al. 2017).

SCT explains how behavioural patterns, reward structures and beliefs about social categories produce effects on how status hierarchies are organised and how ultimately society is stratified. SCT posits that gender status beliefs bias the evaluation of performance and the inference of ability. This is one way of

comprehending why inequalities exist in workplaces and in society in general. If these beliefs happen subconsciously what hope is there for altering them and how do status beliefs turn in to accepted societal inequalities? Why do workplace gender inequalities persist? How do cultural beliefs about gender differences become beliefs about gender status inequalities? Status construction theory helps to answer some of these questions.

### 2.2.3    *Cultural beliefs and status theories*

*Status construction theory* identifies how status beliefs develop and are spread throughout a population of people.  It is a model favoured by Ridgeway (2006). Being in many ways similar to SCT and conceptually related to SCT, it is not a theory about gender, yet it does assist in explaining how cultural beliefs about gender differences frequently become beliefs about gender status inequalities and that is what is focussed on here. It posits that in organising behaviour, for example, undertaking a task, there have to be particular historical circumstances already established to create diffuse status beliefs giving one group advantage over another. Status construction theory posits that processes that happen in the regular organisation of interpersonal meetings are among the processes that can expedite the development of status beliefs about group differences under particular conditions (Ridgeway 2006). As so many daily and workplace tasks involve both sexes who are dependent upon one another to complete the tasks, these processes are most probably involved in the creation and maintenance of gender status beliefs.

After general status beliefs giving men higher status than women are formed within the culture of a society, they embed male advantage by the fact that men are male. Thus, when men are completing tasks in groups with women who are equally intellectual or with women who are equally as strong, the diffuse gender status beliefs will disadvantage women and give men the lead. Inequality therefore becomes embedded in the group through the existence of the gender status beliefs and gender becomes a clear-cut organising principle of inequality. Therefore, *cultural* beliefs about difference are changed into beliefs about inequality and this then ensures that *future* relations between men and women are on unequal terms.

Status beliefs based on gender are present in many societies (Williams & Best 1990; Fiske et al. 2002; Glick et al. 2004) and they ensure that gender is a method of determining difference and inequality in those societies. Thus Ridgeway (2011; 2015) postulates that status is based on cultural beliefs and affects people at the individual level within organisations rather than at the larger structural level. This leads to the conclusion that society should more thoroughly incorporate the effects of status, that is, inequality based on differences of respect and esteem, together with those deemed by Weber (1918) to be important, that is, those based on resources and power (Ridgeway 2014).

A second theory that can help to explain why cultural beliefs about gender inequalities exist is *role congruity theory* which was developed by Eagly and Karau (2002). It is a theory of prejudice towards female leaders and it posits that the perceived incongruity between being a leader and being female can lead to two forms of prejudice. Firstly, it can lead to perceiving females less favourably than men as potential owners of leadership roles, and secondly, evaluating the behaviour that fulfils the prescriptions of a leadership role less favourably when the role is held by a woman. This results in people having less positive attitudes towards female as opposed to male leaders and potential leaders. It also results in it becoming more difficult for women than for men to attain leadership positions and to be successful in leadership roles. These results are most likely to occur when there are situations which amplify the perceptions of incongruity between the female gender and the leadership role.

In summary, status beliefs emerge in groups advantaging one group over another given particular historical circumstances. Gender becomes a method of determining inequality and difference in many societies because of this process. This takes the explanation of workplace gender inequality one step further with the question then becoming, can these inequalities be altered? Can status beliefs be changed?

### 2.2.4 Role congruence theory

This thesis will be cognisant of role congruence theory and its possible effects in the workplaces identified in this thesis. This theory is quite separate to SCT. Different types of decision-making groups are involved in status decisions.

Perceived roles and role congruence are pertinent to what is occurring within an organisation. Because of the strong influence of role congruence theory in the groups to be interviewed in this thesis, it is important to be cognisant of that influence. Role congruence theory contributes to our understanding of actions and behaviours in groups making status evaluations.

Structural functionalism (Merton 1957) shaped the beginnings of role congruence theory. Social systems can be viewed as a series of building blocks and role congruence theory posits that roles represent those building blocks that produce behavioural expectations that go beyond the occupants of the roles. For example, how someone in a supervisory role would behave relative to how supervisors are expected to behave in the system in which they are working. Their behaviours are moulded by the system expectations (Katz & Kahn 1978). Research suggests that roles and practices that become entrenched in companies give meaning to action via role congruence. Some roles and routines become institutionally expected and this includes requiring certain behaviours while condemning other behaviours. Individuals in organisations act out complementary roles, such as that of manager and employee, which are part of the overall system of roles. The overall intent is to meet the needs and goals of the system. Individuals can define themselves through work relationships, their relational identity integrating their personal and role-based identities (Sluss & Ashforth 2007).

### 2.2.5    *Status beliefs*

Status beliefs are also strongly related to SCT. What are status beliefs and can they be altered? The belief systems that people have in society are very pertinent to status and to gender status inequalities. Status rankings between individuals and between groups are linked by society's status beliefs. How are status beliefs formed and what is their function? A status belief gives larger social esteem and competence to the things that society values, and less to those it values less (Berger et al. 1977). When societies are achievement oriented, associating difference with competence is meaningful and important because it validates an inequality in esteem (Ridgeway & Correll 2006). Status beliefs are assumptions about the beliefs or perspectives of the '*generalized other*' (Ridgeway & Correll 2006, p. 433) in society. They are about what '*most people*' would do or think

about how competent or status worthy one category or group is compared to another.

Beliefs can be given the titles first, second or third order. *'First order'* beliefs are what someone actually thinks and *'second order'* beliefs are what someone thinks that specific others in the situation think (Troyer & Younts 1997; Webster Jr & Whitmeyer 1999). *'Third order beliefs'* are about what *'most people'* think in society. Scholars have found that complying with the beliefs of others who are of higher status is very strong. Even in group situations where the views of members are highly valued, there is a stronger inducement to conform to the views of those with higher status because an individual's sense of self develops from impressions that others have (Troyer et al. 2001; Kalkhoff et al. 2011).

When undertaking a structured work task which is assumed to have a clearly communicated problem and an expected straightforward solution, those actors who possess higher status are more likely to be given the opportunity to perform within the group with more highly valued characteristics (Troyer et al. 2001).

Ridgeway (2011; 2014; 2015) postulates that status is based on cultural beliefs and can be viewed as a central mechanism behind social inequality. The effects of cultural status beliefs about who is *'better'*, meaning esteemed and competent, lead *'direct members of higher status groups toward positions of resources and power while holding back lower status group members'* (Ridgeway 2014, p. 12).

Can status beliefs be altered? If they can be easily altered, then perhaps this would be a possible partial solution to confronting gender inequalities in the workplace. In exploring this question, it is pertinent to begin by looking at the requirements that have to be in place in order for status levels to be formed. To justify differing status levels between groups, status beliefs need agreed assumptions about differences in competence differences. Group status beliefs have three distinctive qualities (Ridgeway & Correll 2006). Firstly, they differ from in-group favouritism and result in people in one group being rendered higher social respect than those in another group. This distinction is agreed by both those advantaged and by those disadvantaged by the status belief. Secondly, when status beliefs are formed a generalisation is formed about the worth, status and competence of whole groups of people who share a salient distinguishing characteristic. Thirdly,

status beliefs are a form of social standing about which group is more respected in society. It has been demonstrated that it is possible to interfere with how status beliefs are formed and spread by introducing resistance (Ridgeway & Correll 2006).

Changing how the shared local reality is constructed can interfere with and reduce the formation of new status beliefs. It is suggested that acts of resistance can change the power and the character of what contexts can teach and, by interfering with resistance, the formation and spread of new status beliefs can be interrupted. Thus, local contexts can nurture status beliefs about social difference. Changes can occur in the rise of new status beliefs by interfering and using acts of resistance causing some differences to become axes of status inequality, yet other differences not doing so. Further, in more open structured tasks which are not rigid in their setting, the larger the number of inconsistencies within a task function, the less will be the amount of easily differentiated characteristics. Such tasks often necessitate divergent thinking by all members of the task group. Less easily differentiated characteristics give opportunities for new status assessments based on the performance on the task at hand rather than carry-over assessments. Thus, opportunities arise for those who may have been viewed as lower status e.g. those with the diffuse lower status characteristic of being women, to exhibit their talents relative to the task at hand (Berger et al. 1980; Chizhik et al. 2003).

Not all differences develop into status differences. The best conditions for differences to develop are described by scholars as *'when structural conditions not only advantage people in one group but constrain those in another, that the group difference is most likely to be transformed into a status distinction that forms a significant axis of inequality'* (Ridgeway & Correll 2006, p. 450). In informal group settings which examined training and development that increased the ability of individuals, it was found that status inequality effects can be reduced by increasing the abilities of women and men in ways that confound status evaluations (Troyer et al. 2001; Ridgeway & Correll 2004; Ridgeway & Correll 2006; Walker et al. 2014). It was also found that changing group members' relative influence is achievable when other group members understand and value an individual's expertise relative to the task at hand (Chizhik et al. 2003). Consequently, changing the local context and giving power to change status

beliefs is highly dependent upon the social structural conditions. The issue of changing beliefs is further explored in section 2.2.5.1 below on the Third Order Influence model.

Beliefs about gender, class and race which are widely shared are hegemonic because they are believed not only by individuals but also by organisations and institutions. They are held by the media and in law and in public generally (Acker 2006; Ridgeway 2011). These beliefs are very powerful because individuals sense that they are beliefs that *most people* hold and regardless if those individuals do not personally endorse the beliefs, they still abide by the behaviours and take actions expected by such beliefs (Ridgeway & Kricheli-Katz 2013, p. 302). Extant research further indicates that generally intersections among the gender, class and systems in social relations are inclined to replicate the stereotypes and the cultural beliefs that comprise all of them. However, there are times when *'off diagonal'* people (people such as successful black women) gain freedoms which allow them to be regarded differently and those ingrained stereotypes and cultural beliefs can be and may be transformed (Ridgeway & Kricheli-Katz 2013, p. 314).

### 2.2.5.1 *Interrelation of status beliefs and SCT*

Status beliefs are interrelated with SCT for three reasons, Firstly, inequality only becomes stable when control over power and resources is cemented by third order beliefs about differences between individuals such as lifestyle, gender or ethnicity. When inequality is built only on organisational influence and regulation of power and resources, it is intrinsically unstable (Tilly 1998). People believe that one type of people, e.g. white people who have more power and resources, are *'better'* than those types of people who have less power and resources, in this case non-white people. The situational control over power and resources has been changed into a status difference between types of people who are ranked in terms of how better or worse they are. Because both groups, the disadvantaged and the advantaged, experience the perceived superiority of the type, e.g. the superiority of white people, they all share the same status beliefs and this reinforces and legitimises the inequality (Ridgeway & Correll 2006). These third order status beliefs contend that people of a particular type e.g. white people, are not only more respected, but are also assumed to be more competent than people of other types,

at what counts most (Fiske et al. 2002; Cuddy et al. 2007). This assumption of competence accounts for the widely-held assumptions that higher status people have won senior positions based on merit legitimising the belief that we live in a meritocracy.

Secondly, third order status beliefs based on differences between types enhance and reinforce the inequality. For example, elites indicate their superior class status by emphasising differences between them and other types and by acting out those differences in ways such as wearing designer clothing, by displaying their tastes in art and by their refined use of language (Bourdieu 1984).

Thirdly, and most importantly, when a belief changes into a status difference, it in itself converts into an independent factor that '*generates material inequalities between people above and beyond their personal control of resources*' (Ridgeway 2014, p. 4). It is probable, then, that third order beliefs will influence first order beliefs in a given situation.

As described in section 2.1, most workplaces have policies regarding merit-based selection yet employment statistics suggest that males are still favoured for the top positions. What beliefs are interfering with merit selection processes? Why, for example, do higher status males gain the advantage where the selection makers are supposedly justifying their selection based on skills and experience? One probable answer to this was given above in relation to one type being perceived as *'better'* than another. A further answer lies in the *Socially Endogenous Inferences* (SEI) theory (Lynn et al. 2009; Lynn et al. 2016; Correll et al. 2017). This approach suggests that those judging a performance deduce the worth of that performance based on the selections of previous judges where there is an openly visible status hierarchy. So, for example, when assessing James for a position the panel relies on previous assessments of James if they are publicly observable and those previous assessments may have relied on assessments before that and so on. Thus, it is ultimately not the quality of James' work that is assessed but earlier factors, which may or may not directly link to the quality of his work, that have given him an early status lead over the other candidates. There is only a threat to James' advantage if the gap between James and the lower status candidate(s) is big enough to overcome the weight that the panel place on James' status in

determining their estimation of his quality. Higher status individuals frequently utilise the superior resources which they attract to acquire larger competencies over periods of time (Ridgeway & Correll 2006; Simcoe & Waguespack 2011) and this will add to ensuring that status hierarchies remain stable in the long run.

Another theory which may be at work is the *Third Order Inference* (TOI) model (Correll et al. 2017). This theory states that decision makers make decisions based on *'third order'* beliefs, that is on what they believe that *'most people'* would believe. As with SEI, TOI is based on publicly observable beliefs. Therefore, once again, the initial status advantages are very valuable and will continually be reinforced unless there is some sort of substantial shock. Without a substantial shock to the status-based judgements about underlying quality, the existing status hierarchies will remain and be almost impossible to change. Judges may have direct knowledge that refutes the status hierarchy, but if this knowledge remains private and they continue to favour the higher status individual in public, this will not impact the existing status hierarchy (Ridgeway 2011). This once more reinforces the stability of status hierarchies. They can be erased however by a significant public shock, such as a public event which demonstrates that there is a substantial quality gap between what was previously believed about an individual and what is now known. Once dissent is wide-spread, decision makers will then re-evaluate, drawing on the new public views. Whether SEI to TOI is used is situation dependent. So, for example, making a decision about what type of new lounge chair to buy would probably invoke the TOI model as what '*most people'* prefer is important in this decision.

In section 2.1, Gaughan and Smith (2016)'s research in relation to the appointment of female CEOs bringing down the stock prices of companies was discussed. It was found that this occurred if and only if the appointments were publicised by the media. This is a good example of TOI at work. Because of the increased hype in the media about the appointment of a female CEO, gender status beliefs become salient as a focus for predicting the reactions of other shareholders. Thus, the future stock value is progressively more dependent on the beliefs that existing and potential shareholder hold about the abilities of the new CEO. As most people are unaware of what others believe, they take the rational path of reverting to conventional beliefs that women hold the status of lower-

quality leaders. This leads them to sell their stocks and shares, reducing the prices. If people held and acted on first-order beliefs that women are lower-quality leaders, it would have been expected that stock prices would have fallen upon the appointment of all new female CEOs, not just those who received media attention.

### 2.2.5.2    *Summation – status beliefs*

In summary, status beliefs are strong and need all groups, including the high and low status level groups, to accept and agree that most people distinguish those differences in competence among the groups as a matter of societal reality. If either or both of these conditions is not present, then the status beliefs will not endure. Many actions that decision-makers take reinforce status beliefs, giving status beliefs preference over quality when making judgements. Supposedly merit based decisions are particularly prone to the effects of TOI and SEI which often work in tandem with one another and are used dependent upon the situation involved (Correll et al. 2017). Answering the question posed earlier, status beliefs are not easily altered but they can be, particularly when the instigation factor is wide spread public knowledge.

### 2.2.6    *Influence*

According to scholars, men are more agentic and women more communal in their behaviours (Eagly & Mladinic 1989; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt 2001; Eagly & Karau 2002). Men have higher status and because of this they have more respect as agents of influence and gain more opportunities than women to exert influence. Women who possess the diffuse gender characteristic are lower status and wield little influence when behaving in an agentic manner. Women's agentic behaviour can be viewed as them trying to usurp influence and their attempts at influencing behaviour will most likely be met with resistance (Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neill 1977; Ridgeway & Berger 1986) and result in them being ignored or punished. One way to overcome this is for women to behave as though they have little interest in leading or in any personal gain, but instead demonstrate that they are behaving in an agentic manner for the collective good of the group or the organisation (Ridgeway 2001). This places women, and not men, in a double bind situation (Carli 2017, p. 38) in that their ability to exert influence is compromised

because to exert influence they need to be simultaneously both agentic and communal.

Women also experience difficulties in exerting influence through their task contributions as is evidenced in research by Brescoll (2011) into US Senators which found a positive correlation between influence and the male Senators' verbal contributions but no correlation between influence and the female Senators' verbal contributions. Further, a meta-analysis of mock employment studies found that people prefer to employ men over women with the same paper qualifications (Davidson & Burke 2000; Koch et al. 2015). Research into the acceptance of publications for a biology journal found that the acceptance rate for women's first authored articles was increased significantly when the journal modified its approach from single reviews to double blind reviews (Budden et al. 2008). Likewise, female musicians' rate of hire significantly increased when blind auditions for an orchestra were made behind a screen so that the panel could hear but not see the musician (Goldin & Rouse 2000).

Women who are believed to desire power lack influence compared to their male counterparts. In research experiments, subjects stated that they were less motivated to vote for a female political candidate than a male as the woman's believed wish for power undermined her influence (Okimoto & Brescoll 2010). Women who self-promote are looked on differently to men who self-promote. Self-promotion in women lessens their influence yet it does the opposite in men (Carli 2006). Displaying transformational leadership techniques (Smith 2012) which entail a mix of agentic and communal behaviours is one way of women overcoming their perceived disadvantage as agents of influence (Eagly et al. 2014). Mitigating language to discourses including phrases such as "*I may be wrong, but...*" which is often described as being associated with a reduction in women's perceived ability, is another method that women can use to increase their influence with men because it makes the women more likeable (Lewin Loyd et al. 2010).

Overall, when women attempt to exert influence they are less likely to be successful than men who attempt to exert influence (Carli 2017). Men resist female influence, especially if the women are highly competent. When women are

in the minority or are tokens their influence decreases further (Hultin 2003; Smith 2012), unlike male influence which increases when they are tokens.

## 2.3    Status, power and resources

Expanding the search for the reasons that gender inequalities exist and persist, status power and resources are examined as '*gender inequality is an ordinal hierarchy between the average man and woman in valued resources, in power and in status*' (Ridgeway 2011, p. 10). In examining the links between power and status, early sociological studies indicate that paradoxical points of view existed. Weber states that power does not always bestow honour, one facet of status (Gerth & Mills 1958, p. 180) yet he also states that economic power represented by property eventually becomes recognised as possessing status (Gerth & Mills 1958, p. 189).   Weber puts more emphasis on resources and power than he does on status.

The dependence of one person on another person for resources that matter creates a power dynamic between those two people according to research based on the theory of power dependence (Cook et al. 2006).  Access to resources and power over other people grows from the relative positions which individuals hold in organisations and social networks. Within a company for example, the organisation consists of a structure of related social positions such as managers and employees.  Some of these positions have more access to resources than others and through this access to resources those positions with greater access have more power. The positions, rather than the individuals in the positions, bear the power and resources, producing inequalities in the amount of power and resources vested in certain positions within the company. This factor is independent of the individuals who hold these positions.

Company CEO positions have power and resources that are clearly a necessary part of the position rather than the person. It is not only CEOs who gain unequal power and resources, there are often a number of positions within companies, some relatively lowly, who, through the positions they hold, possess unequal amounts of power and resources. An example of such a position is a storekeeper or inventory manager. Because the resources and power are attached to the position, inequalities in organisational positions individuals occupy result in

inequalities in resources and power between the individuals holding the positions (Tilly 1998). Thus, power can be determined by the individual's position in the organisation or social structure and an individual with power can have the capacity to acquire resources. Power does not include the concepts of influence, resistance or conflict (Fiske & Berdahl 2007) which are consequences of power rather than power itself. While, as SCT indicates, status comes from group expectations, power can be externally conferred and does not necessarily involve group consensus.

Status and power can reinforce one another and are related (Lovaglia 1995; Glick & Fiske 1999; Acker 2006; Cook et al. 2006; Huffman et al. 2012). Status can produce power and power can produce status. However, they are not mutually exclusive (Lovaglia 1995; Lucas & Baxter 2012). There are occasions where an individual can have status without power or power without status. Individuals in power generally have control of resources. For power to produce status, the additional element of respect must be present (Lovaglia 1995; Magee & Galinsky 2008). There are two major ways that status can produce power. Firstly, those with status are given respect and are frequently trusted with prized resources which leads to power. Secondly, being affiliated with an esteemed individual can increase the status of an individual and increase the value of the resources of the individual, thus increasing power. Individuals with high status can gain power by increasing their resources and by increasing the value of the resources under their control (Thye 2000; Acker 2006b).

An example of an individual who possesses power without status is an individual who is perceived to have been appointed by nepotism and does not know their craft. The staff reporting to them may feel that they do not deserve the position of power over the resources and have no respect for them and may judge them as low status. An example of an individual possessing status without power is where there exists much group respect for an individual who is low in the job hierarchy but the individual acquires status because of their particular skillset that others in the group lack when the group feels that the group benefits from the skillset. The individual may have little power over resources, but they do have status in the group. Status and power can not only be gained but also be lost (Thye 2000; Cook

et al. 2006). If respect is lost, so is status; if an individual loses control over important resources, their respect and thus their status may contract.

SCT links status to expectations of competent performance with these expectations producing a status hierarchy conferred on an individual by a group. Achievements of individuals are translated into status through subjective group interpretations (Ridgeway 1991; Ridgeway 1997; Wagner & Berger 2002). An individual has status if they are given status by group members. Much of the research into status power and resources, focuses primarily on power and resources and the interplay between which of those two is the more dominant in individual situations. Ridgeway (2014) argues that the effects of status need to be more comprehensively investigated and incorporated into mainstream research. The reasoning for this, is that there is an accumulation and reinforcement of the multiple effects of everyday subconscious cultural status beliefs and status assessments. This accumulation and reinforcement ensures that people with membership of high status groups are given positions with power and resources and members of lower status groups are prevented from attaining such positions. This establishes inequalities which endure in society at large. In terms of importance, where Weber would argue that power and resources are more important, Ridgeway would argue that status is of prime importance. Status is a key factor in determining and cementing group differences such as differences in race, class or gender into organisational structures of power and resources. It is a keystone in determining persistent societal inequalities based on social differences.

### 2.3.1    Summation – status power and resources

In summary, an individual has power if their formal position allows them have dominance over resources which are cared about by others (Magee & Galinsky 2008).  Power, resources and status are often closely related but not always. Status must come through group expectations and cannot be bestowed by superiors or organisations like power and resources can be. Status assessments based on status beliefs, remembering that beliefs are frequently not factually based, cumulatively cement group differences into organisational structures of power and resources.  Gender inequality is a status inequality which exists

between individuals simply because of their gender, reliant on gender beliefs about the nature of men over women. The effects of status should be further researched and more comprehensively investigated (Ridgeway 2014). Additionally, in regard to much of the general content of this chapter, the following quote would seem to be a worthy challenge, and still valid today:

> 'We do believe that if we can understand theoretically the general social processes by which status characteristics are constructed, we may also understand how such characteristics, with their invidious beliefs and status evaluations, can be modified and fundamentally changed. We think this is a theoretical challenge to which it is worth responding' (Berger & Fişek 2006, p. 1065).

## 2.4 Emerging themes: developing the research questions

### 2.4.1 Introduction

This thesis explores the limitations imposed on senior executive women leaders' (SEWL) agency in Australian workplaces. This thesis investigates the behavioural manifestations of stereotypical evaluations and attitudes that occur subconsciously in informal workgroups. Following these broad aims, the lens of SCT is used and it is expected that this will strengthen the link between SCT and its practical application in Australia.

Conventional wisdom dictates that most large Australian workplaces have policies in place to ensure that progression is based on merit. It further asserts that we live in a meritocracy which is shored up by legislation and organisational policies that ensure that meritocracy prevails. Much of the emphasis in this chapter thus far has been in explaining how workplace inequality regimes are embedded and reinforced leading to status differences which are further reinforced through resource and power differentials. Thus, it is difficult for women to progress and rise to the top at the very senior levels in the organisation. Accordingly, there are many cultural, stereotypical, belief-system and organisational barriers to overcome. Yet some women manage to overcome these barriers.

It is of interest to ascertain, given specific consideration to SCT's unconscious, informal, group status evaluations, how senior women leaders are able to overcome workplace barriers as well as how they thwart status inequalities related to the subliminal gender status. For SEWLs, achieving equality at work would

have to be in the knowledge that they have overcome the lower-status gender characteristic, lower-status female gender beliefs and gender related societal assessments that are transferred in to workplace situations. If women cannot overcome lower-status assessments associated with being female, then women are destined to be assessed as continually lower in the power-prestige rankings as generally the acts motivated by unconscious informal status evaluations thwart women's progression. The major factor in women attaining workplace progression lies in mitigating against lower status gender evaluations. Questions relating to how this mitigation is achieved will be explored in subsequent chapters.

The following section examines the emerging themes identified from the literature. It also identifies related research areas where little or no research has been undertaken particularly within the Australian context. It further relates and positions the emerging themes within the context of the research questions developed. The next section also sets the scene for the research construct and methodology which is discussed in Chapter 3 and explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

### 2.4.2   Emerging themes of relevance

According to SCT predictions, SEWLs attaining senior positions necessitates that SEWLs develop methods and strategies to overcome or obfuscate lower-status assessments related to the subliminal female gender. As discussed, these status beliefs occur in every-day mixed-sex workplace task situations. The reality of these situations does not always lead to women being able to discharge the burden of proof, shorten the path of relevance or increase their power-prestige rankings. In workplace situations where this could be reversed, women may be able to attain higher workplace status irrespective of the gender status characteristic. Accordingly, a number of emerging themes can be identified from the foregoing literature review:

- Theme 1 Gender inequality: Gender inequality is a reality in the modern workplace. It is pervasive at all levels of the workplace and is very difficult to shift (Ridgeway 2011). It is based on an embedded set of gender status beliefs that have survived many centuries and are continuing today (Ridgeway 2011). Gender status beliefs are linked to gender status

assessments; women are disadvantaged in these material struggles and assumed to be less able than men when gender is salient particularly in mixed-sex workplace task groups.

- Theme 2 Opting out: It is important to explore why an increasing number of women are deciding to opt out of senior positions (Stone 2007; Barsh & Yee 2012) and the extent to which belief systems embodied at the cultural, structural, and societal level are contributing to this reality.

- Theme 3 Skills and opportunities: The female gender is a diffuse lower-status characteristic in the workplace.  For women to enhance their chances of promotion and increase their power-prestige ranking, they need skills that help them to confound existing stereotypes and inequality regimes. They also require equal opportunities within places of work that enable them to discharge the burden of proof (Berger et al. 1980) and to shorten the path of relevance. These skills would be particularly valuable within mixed-sex workplaces involving informal problem-solving groups.

- Theme 4 Cultural status beliefs: The diffuse lower-status characteristic of the female gender affects cultural assessments limiting women's agency (Ridgeway 2008). Ridgeway (2014) calls for more research and a greater understanding of how cultural status beliefs relate to resources and power.

- Theme 5 Support mechanisms: It is important to explore the role played by internal and external influences e.g., personal support arrangements such as mentors and sponsors (Reinhold 2005; Kark & Eagly 2010). Also, the influence of legislation and policies that institutionalise equality practices (Bao et al. 2014), and how these institutionalised policies contribute to and alter the experience of women leaders for career progression.

An additional theme relating to equal pay has emerged. This is very factual in nature and the figures which are available are being updated frequently by the WGEA. It has been decided not to focus further on this theme in isolation in this thesis for a number of reasons.  Firstly, it is companies and organisations rather than individuals who can best comment on equal pay. This thesis uses qualitative research methods, particularly one-on-one in-depth interviews.  SEWLs may not be aware of their remuneration relative to others within their organisations. While they may be aware of the base pay of their colleagues, many may be unaware of

negotiated bonus elements for their peers and colleagues. Asking questions about their relative pay levels could prove fruitless. Secondly, the issue of equal pay is already encompassed within Theme 1, inequality regimes, as it is an existing inequality, given the most up to date figures (WGEA 2018). Exploring inequality regimes in general will embrace the issue of equal pay. Thirdly, equal pay is addressed within Theme 3, skills and opportunities where SEWLs ability to negotiate is addressed. This is important as at the SEWL level, most have to negotiate bonuses and conditions of employment. Lastly, equal pay is addressed within Theme 4, where cultural assessments are strongly affected by belief systems. Such assessments affect women's pay levels as well as their agency.

### 2.4.3    Previous research

There is a paucity of existing research empirically addressing how senior women leaders are able to develop strategies to overcome the subliminal gender status assessment. There is no research that addresses this gap in group-task situations to the researcher's knowledge from a gender perspective and particularly within the context of SCT and within Australian. This is confirmed in a meta-analysis of expectation states research of social influence by (Kalkhoff & Thye 2006) and in summaries of the literature related to power status and influence (Huffman et al. 2012). An overview of five decades of empirical gender research in the 2015 Academy of Management Journal (Joshi et al. 2015) similarly reported little evidence of these gaps. A more recent study by Murray and Southey (forthcoming) explores a cross-theory approach between institutional theory and SCT theory finding that embedded institutional policies related to embedding gender equal practices significantly benefits senior women leaders in workplace progression strategies. A number of quasi-related studies including one on gender and ethnic minority CEOs found that minority CEOs generally challenged the expected higher status perceptions surrounding the male CEO in relation to monetary compensation (Hill et al. 2015). However, this study looked at the overall result of minority versus non-minority CEOs from 1996-2006; it did not examine the factors that led to the women becoming CEOs.

Other studies have explored group members' status and relative participation during problem solving and tasks related skills (Walker & Doerer 2014; Cohen &

Lotan 1995; Troyer 2001; Alexander et al. 2009) but these do not relate directly to the topic. There has also been a study in relation to the status of leaders in entrepreneurial teams and women's access to power (Yang & Aldrich 2014). All of these studies are not gender specific, although they do measure differing components of gender, status and task-structure relationships. Studies that examine strategies to overcome gender specific status evaluations are scarce, as are studies that examine how women overcome or obfuscate these evaluations through the lens of SCT. Ridgeway (2014) suggested that more research is required to elevate status alongside power and resources and this thesis will expressly examine how women try to overcome the subliminal gender status characteristic. There are no studies to date that link the effects on women leaders of gender status beliefs and status assessments within the Australian context.

Given a shortage of empirical research, the outcomes of this thesis are expected to make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge related to SCT, status beliefs, and gendered outcomes in group-task situations for senior women leaders. Very little is known about the practices of senior women leaders in respect of addressing a range of status inconsistencies, status assessments associated with being female, and how they respond to gendered stereotypes in workplace situations in Australia.

### 2.4.4    Research questions

Given the emerging themes, and the previous research, the research questions can now be proposed. Status characteristics theory will be used as a basis to explore how senior executive Australian women reach the top and the barriers that prevent them from excelling in their careers. Chapters 4 and 5 explore how women develop strategies to overcome or obfuscate the subliminal lower-status female gender status in every-day mixed-sex workplace task situations. The research questions will also explore how SEWLs tackle the burden of proof problem, shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings. Following this review and the emerging themes, the research questions as introduced in Chapter 1, are re-stated here.

<u>RQ 1:</u>

1.1 How do senior executive women leaders shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings? (Themes 1, 3)

1.2 Why do some senior executive women leaders decide not to strive for the top positions? (Theme 2)

1.3 Are senior executive women leaders excluded from opportunities that will shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings? (Theme 1, 3)

<u>RQ 2:</u>

To what extent do status and cultural assessments limit senior executive women leaders' agency? (Theme 4)

<u>RQ 3:</u>

3.1 To what extent are senior executive women leaders supported by personal support mechanisms such as networks, mentors and sponsors? (Theme 5)

3.2 To what extent are senior executive women leaders supported by legislative and organisational support mechanisms? (Theme 5)

These questions will be explored by interviewing Australian SEWLs. The results of this thesis may further understanding in relation to gender and to the interrelationships between power, status and resources.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

# CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY

### 3.0    Introduction

In this chapter, the use of a qualitative methodology is explained and justified. The thematic analysis technique utilises the research questions and core themes from the literature discussed in Chapter 2. Similarly, an exploratory approach related to the interpretivist paradigm is discussed and outlined (Geertz 1973). The interpretivist and critical realist approach (Bhaskar 2016) allow the participants to reflect on how their values, beliefs, experiences and interests influence the data set related to the research questions.

Data collection is explained and information pertaining to the sampling technique is justified. Examples are cited from participant interviews to highlight important aspects of the data set related to the broad research question. Details pertaining to the administration of the data are described and discussed. The chapter highlights the use of MAX-QDA as the principal means to analyse, explore and tabulate the data according to recognised qualitative research techniques. This enabled the researcher to explore several iterations of data sorting and analysis related to the research questions until saturation was reached. Matters of validity and generalisability are discussed.

Finally, the research is reviewed in terms of the ethical compliance with Australian and international research standards that relate to identifying the actions and processes adopted throughout the research

### 3.1    Terminology and the inductive process used in the methodology

Some of the terminology used in this and the following chapters of this research derives from the MAX-QDA program and has specific meaning in the context of this research rather than the common meaning. The term *'memo'* is the initial method of coding, it is a typed extract from a voice recording and it is deemed to be of significance in relation to the research questions. Some of the voice recordings were in two or three parts e.g. labelled Rita 1 and Rita 2. This was due to the fact that some interviews were interrupted and later resumed. Interruptions were for various reasons such as work emergencies and communication

difficulties. '*RQ-selected responses*' refer to responses selected because they fit the same particular research question. The term senior executive women leaders (SEWLs) refers to the women interviewed for this thesis. They are all women in top management teams of Australian companies with over 200 employees and/or are board members and/or board Chairs.

### 3.1.1    *The inductive process*

Traditionally, a deductive approach is aimed at testing an existing theory and an inductive approach is used when little is known about the topic and the data gather process is the mechanism used for building information. In contrast the inductive and iterative approach used in this thesis refers to the researcher allowing various theories, together with hunches, to be the precursors from which she builds, sorts and analyses the data to formulate informed views. The difference is that existing theories, together with hunches, are used as base information yet no specific hypotheses are tested as the information is built. Under applicable circumstances, such as in this research, this approach utilises the malleability of method and enhances the process that can lead to enriched outcomes (Yom 2015; Netolicky & Barnes 2018).
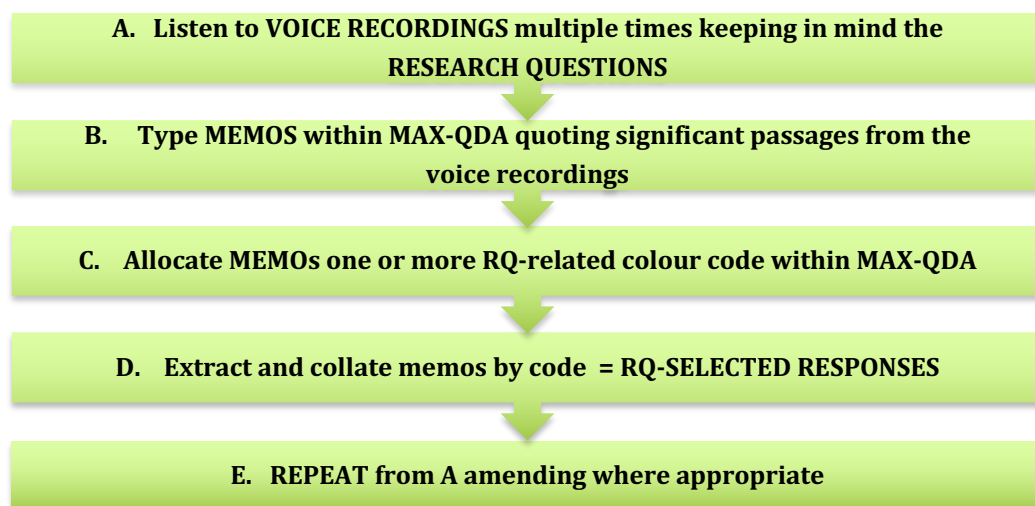


**Figure 3. 1**  *Inductive process*

Figure 3.1 identifies the process used. Identifying the important phrases from within the raw data was an iterative as well as inductive process, initially using trial and error (Lewins 2007). Extracting the memos was the initial coding

process. Not all parts of each voice recording were extracted into memos, only those portions where women vocalised sentences or phrases of interest relating to the research questions. These extracts were sometimes very descriptive and others were included because the researcher analysed and interpreted the words and phrases used (Rohleder & Lyons 2014, p. 101). Figure 3.2 illustrates how the data flowed from the initial coding by extracting memos from the voice recordings through to identifying sets of RQ-selected responses.



**Figure 3. 2** *Data flow*

## 3.2 The research paradigm – qualitative and interpretivist

The research paradigm for this study draws from the interpretivist view - the epistemological position that promotes essential understanding of the differences between humans in their role as social actors (Saunders et al. 2012). Interpretivism stems from two intellectual traditions, those of phenomenology or the way we understand the world around us, and symbolic interactionism whereby we interpret others' actions to determine our own meanings. The researcher's view is that reality is subjective, socially constructed and may change.

Phenomenology is based on the philosophical writings of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. As an approach to data collection and analysis, its roots lie in humanistic psychology (Wertz 2005). In phenomenological research, it is the participants' experiences, feelings and perceptions that are of the highest importance in addressing the research questions. Giving voice to '*the other*' is a feature of humanism and humanistic anthropology, and this convention has translated into qualitative research in general. The use of open-ended questions and conversational inquiry in qualitative research is founded on this principle as it allows research participants to talk about a topic in their own words, uninhibited of the restrictions imposed by the kind of fixed-response questions in quantitative studies. Allowing the research participant a voice is part of the anthropological

tradition and this stems from its phenomenological roots (Guest 2012). The researcher learns from the participants' statements and probes further in response to what is being learned. One of the greatest strengths of qualitative research is the ability to ask questions that are meaningful to participants and to receive responses in participants' own words utilising their own cognitive constructs. Of additional benefit is the use of inductive probing which allows the researcher to clarify expressions or meaning and further permits participants to tell their story (Guest et al. 2012).

The epistemology is that the research focuses on the details of situations and what is really behind those details where subjective meanings are motivating actions. The axiology is that research of this type is value bound and the researcher is a part of what is being researched and so will be subjective (Guba & Lincoln 1994). The ontology is relativism, the nature of reality is from the perspective of the participants, '*if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences*' (Merton 1995, p. 380).

Within the interpretivist paradigm an empathetic stance is adopted, understanding the social world of our subjects from their viewpoint. Business situations tend to be complex and are frequently unique. Each can vary, dependent upon the individuals concerned and the particular set of circumstances. Advocates of interpretivism which was popularised by scholars such as Clifford Geertz (1973), argue that the scientific method is reductionist and often misconstrues qualitative research (Mayo 1996). Interpretivism sets out to interpret more profound meaning in discourse and understanding multiple realities rather than proving one objective reality. To an interpretivist, the most important part of the research is the personal narrative and its effect on the audience (Neuman 2000). The researcher also adopts a critical realism approach. Critical realism enquires into what affects human action and interaction. It combines interpretation and explanation and it approaches causation, critically using the reality of what is encountered in the social world to assist understanding of the causes of events (Bhaskar 2016). It is a pursuit of ontology and not an attempt to only explore current beliefs and experiences, but to delve deeper and try to understand '*the things themselves*' (Archer 2016).

## 3.3 Justification for this qualitative approach

Qualitative techniques deal with different types of data in different ways. For example, the numerous usage of participants' dialogue indicates a concern to build understandings in terms of their own natural language. As Bryman et al. (1988) contend, emphasising subjects' interpretations together with the delineation of context provides the researcher with a backcloth that greatly facilitates understanding of what is going on within an organisation (Bryman et al. 1988, p. 137). Rich data can be collected utilising a qualitative approach.

In the past, quantitative research was the measurement of choice in research. These techniques can be restrictive, containing the choices of the participants to those beliefs ordained and believed by the researcher. In leadership research, quantitative research can fail to capture the richness of leadership phenomena and leads to sets of highly generalised descriptors (Conger 1998). Conger advocates that qualitative research methods are highly suited to exposing leadership's many dimensions. Qualitative research offers opportunities to explore the unexpected and to intently question at depth. Bryman draws attention to the utility of qualitative research to the leadership researcher as much can be learned from the contextual influences in effectual leadership (Bryman et al. 1996). The emphasis on context can allow the construction of evidence across different domains and invites researchers to question organisational imperatives and values.

The definition used of qualitative research influences how qualitative data analysis is conducted, including the type of data and the type of analysis used. Denzin and Lincoln suggest that:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 3).

A much simpler and more outcome-oriented approach with a functional definition is *'Qualitative research involves any research that uses data that do not indicate*

*ordinal values'* (Nkwi et al. 2001, p. 1). Here, the researchers are focussing on the data. In this thesis, the raw data are the voice recordings of the interviews and data derived from feedback groups. The data generated in qualitative research is not numeric and is less structured than the data generated in quantitative research. Qualitative research is more flexible and more inductive. The simpler definition above is preferred by the researcher because it can include many different types of data collection strategies, data analysis techniques and theoretical frameworks.

This qualitative research is an exploratory study, as opposed to a confirmatory qualitative study, whereby the researcher listens and re-listens to the voice recordings, the data, listening for key words, phrases, themes, or ideas in the data that will help explain the data before any analysis takes place. The researcher formulates research questions rather than hypotheses. A non-probabilistic sample of participants is interviewed, and the primary data is generated.

A thematic analysis approach is undertaken. Thematic analyses require a significant amount of involvement and interpretation on the part of the researcher. Thematic analyses focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data normally coded into themes. Codes are developed to represent the identified themes and linked to the raw data as summary markers for later analysis. Thematic analysis is the most useful in capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set (Guest 2012, p. 4).

### 3.4    The explorative nature of this research

This research is exploratory in nature. A deductive and critical realist approach was utilised making use of existing theory to formulate the research questions. A thematic analysis technique was employed (Guest 2012) where domains of enquiry related to the research questions were identified. The research questions had been derived from the core themes from the literature discussed in chapter two. The research questions which were developed in Chapter 1 are restated below.

1.1 How do senior executive women leaders shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings?

1.2 Why do some senior executive women leaders decide not to strive for the top positions?

1.3 Are senior executive women leaders excluded from opportunities that will shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings?

RQ 2:

To what extent do status and cultural assessments limit senior executive women leaders' agency?

RQ 3:

3.1 To what extent are senior executive women leaders supported by personal support mechanisms such as networks, mentors and sponsors?

3.2 To what extent are senior executive women leaders supported by legislative and organisational support mechanisms?

Research questions 1 and 2 focus on SEWLs' thoughts, beliefs, actions and strategies. Research question 3 focuses on how external influences assist SEWLs to increase their power-prestige rankings. It is considered that first, second and third order beliefs influence SEWLs' capacity to respond because of the diffuse female gender characteristic. It is further acknowledged that because of their gender, SEWLs hold a lower status ranking than men (Joshi et al. 2015a).

It is proposed that SEWLs develop workplace strategies to shorten the path of relevance in order to raise their status ranking within the group. The '*path of relevance*' is the cognitive connection between the individual and the task that links the status characteristic possessed by the individual to an outcome state of the task, either success or failure (Berger et al. 1980, p. 485). When a path of relevance is shorter, individual or group status is assessed as higher meaning a stronger cognitive link between status and perceived performance to complete a

task. When a path of relevance is longer, individual or group status is assessed as lower, meaning a weaker cognitive link between status and perceived performance to complete a task (Murray & Southey 2017).

The burden of proof (Berger et al. 1980) implies that SEWLs must continually prove their capability across a range of tasks. If not, a status evaluation is made that they are less capable than their male counterparts. Shortening the path of relevance can be achieved by challenging the burden of proof. The contention is that SEWLs identify a range of successful strategies to challenge the burden of proof, shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige ranking. Taken together, they either strive for the top (RQ 1.1), decide not to strive for the top (RQ 1.2), or are excluded from the opportunity to participate in tasks that are perceived to be representative of senior management (RQ 1.3).

RQ 2 proposes that cultural assessments affect SEWLs' agency. Ridgeway (2008) asserts that the diffuse lower status characteristic of the female gender affects cultural assessments which limit SEWLs' agency. The contention is that perceptions are made through cultural assessments and these perceptions limit SEWLs' progression into CEO and Board Chair roles (French & Strachan 2007).

RQ 3 proposes that internal and external influences assist SEWLs to challenge the burden of proof in order to improve status ranking. These influences can derive from personal supportive arrangements such as SEWLs developing networks, mentors, sponsors and business coaches. Support can also emanate from legislative and organisational policies. The contention is that the successful standing of SEWLs to perform their task is likely to occur in the face of personal, internal and external support structures.

## 3.5 The data collection method - interviews

The data collection techniques consistent with an interpretivist philosophy were qualitative by design. The research included small sample sizes and in-depth investigations and follows the plan outlined in Table 3.1.

**Table 3. 1** *Research methodology framework*

| Initiation | . Conceptual . | . Expert interviews – three women leaders . ↙ |
|---|---|---|
| **Integration** | . Develop interview themes and develop material to be supplied to interviewees before the interview ↘ | |
| **Implementation** | | Interview appropriate sample size of SEWLs ↙ |
| **Interpretation** | Organise and analyse the data collected ↘ | |
| | | Interview feedback group ↙ |
| | Further analyse the data collected Inform and infer | |

### 3.5.1 The influence of reflexivity in the data collection phase

Reflexivity is the process through which the researcher reflects on how their values, beliefs, experiences, interests and political orientation may affect the research. It is described as the process through which researchers recognise, understand and examine how their own social background and assumptions can intervene in the process of research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011, p. 120). Others emphasise the importance of theoretical reflexivity (Alvesson & Kärreman 2007). They promote the idea that researchers should extend their 'theoretical repertoire' and question the assumptions of their original framework.

The researcher designed the initial expert interview materials, conducted the expert interviews and developed the guided structure, themes and materials/questions which were sent to the participants before each interview was conducted. All interviews were one-on-one, in-depth, and semi-structured and were conducted by the researcher. The researcher was the point of contact and undertook all data gathering, coding and data analysis. The researcher is a woman who has been in leadership positions in large Australian companies for over 20 years. She has also been a member of various Australian Boards. She has been a

wife and mother during her working career. She has been a member of the top management team and has worked closely with senior executive men and women leaders and CEOs. She identifies with the SEWLs participants on a professional level, and to some extent, personal level. This could be construed as being an 'insider' and could be criticised as being too much of an insider rather than a more subjective outsider. However, these beliefs are countered by the view that '*the authentic understandings of group life can be achieved only by those who are directly engaged as members in the life of the group*' (Merton 1972, p. 32) and that insider and outsider researchers can both equally undertake research; and that truth will transcend all other loyalties (Merton 1972).

The researcher had worked with and personally knew two of the expert interviewees. One had extensive single sector management and board experience and the other, extensive management experience across a range of industries. The third expert interviewee was sourced from a professional association which the researcher belonged to, as a professional board member with much expertise and experience in that field. All expert interviewees were supportive of the project. Before agreeing to be interviewed, all the participants were sent links to websites of the researcher. The websites indicated that the researcher was a qualified, mature aged woman who had Australian and international experience in business and senior management.

The researcher observed that all SEWL participants were highly candid about their experiences. Similarly, all SEWLs were very happy to share their own personal journeys. Since the researcher had a strong background in senior management, this engendered trust between the researcher and the interviewees such that the latter were comfortable in discussing and raising actual work experiences. It is questionable if the same level of candour could have been achieved by a male or a young research student. The researcher did not engage to the point that the researcher's stories were shared during the interviews, although some were shared post interview. The researcher did not share her feelings when she disagreed with the points being made by the interviewees, consistent with qualitative research techniques. The assurance that confidentiality would be maintained and the names of the participants and their companies would remain anonymous was an incentive for open and honest discussion.

### 3.5.2   Initial expert interviews

The researcher conducted expert interviews to validate the initial theoretical construct.  The researcher interviewed three SEWLs to assist in developing the actual questions to be asked, as well as to further develop the materials to be sent to participants prior to the interview. The three experts possessed different types of expertise, one was a career board member, one a career executive, and the third had both board and senior executive/CEO experience. The expert interviewees were sent copies of the questions in advance. All interviews were recorded with permission from the participants. Similarly, as each interview was conducted, participants were asked to offer suggestions about how to structure the questions and how they could be improved and clarified. Some suggestions and ideas are noted in Exhibit 3.1.

**Exhibit 3. 1**   *Samples of narrative about the research questions*

> *Researcher: In terms of the questions were any over-repetitive or not really adding any value?*
> *Angela: I would explain what you mean by status.... just going through them now....mmm..yes, question 2 you talk about status and in question 6 you talk about status in a different way it would be good to clarify that*
> *Researcher: Thankyou*
>
> *Researcher: ...any other suggestions as to how I alter the questions?*
> *Christie: I noticed that some of the questions you asked did not align with those you sent me.*
> *Researcher: I actually did alter a few of the questions to try to improve them that is why they did not align*
> *Christie: It threw me a little bit*
> *Researcher: Thanks, I will make sure that the questions I ask align with what I send*

After the expert interviews, more emphasis was placed on explaining what was meant by the term 'status' in the questions.  The explanation given reflected Anderson et al.'s definition of status as '*the amount of respect, influence, and prominence people enjoy in the eyes of others*' (Anderson et al. 2001, p. 117). The term status is used, not in terms of job title and position, rather status pertaining to status ranking.  Status ranking is altered as a result of informal cultural assessments made by others based on factors such as race, gender and perceived ability. Similarly, the interviewer became aware to be careful to address and reiterate this difference during verbal questioning. She also ensured, as a

result of feedback from the expert interviews, that the written questions sent to participants aligned with the questions asked at interview, although additional questions to probe and clarify were added as required. As result of the expert interviews, an interview protocol was developed for the main body of interviews.

### 3.5.3    *The research participants*

The sample size of those being interviewed taking a non-probability heterogeneous population approach was 12-30 people (Saunders et al. 2012). Twenty-five SEWLs in total were interviewed.  In determining samples for this qualitative research, it was not so much whether the sample size was small or large but the representativeness (Neuman 2000) and relevance to the research topic that determined how participants were selected. This research is restricted to Australian SEWLs. Women leaders within small to medium enterprises (SMEs) are outside the scope of this research. This research sought out women in senior management positions, women in board positions and SEWLs aspiring to be in board positions. The researcher's criteria restricted interviews to SEWLs working in the top management teams of Australian companies with over 200 employees and/or SEWLs with significant experience on Australian board(s). The interview participants were selected for their potential to generate rich data.

For qualitative studies, a non-probabilistic sampling approach is the norm and a purposive sample is generally recommended (Giacomini et al. 2000). SEWLs were sourced through the significant networks held by the researcher, through referred contacts from within professional organisations to which the researcher belongs, and by the use of snowballing techniques (Coleman 1958) whereby potential participants were asked to provide the names of other potential participants who might provide useful insights for this research. The sample of SEWLs was selected across a wide range of different industries in order to capture a diversity of experience and to provide the maximum variation of responses possible within the data set (Patton 2003). The potential participants within the sampling frame were categorised by job title, industry, and location. During the interviews, they were further categorised by age, years of experience on boards and years of experience in management positions.

Using a sampling frame was useful as it gave indications of the spread of expertise and, for example, led the researcher to seek out contacts in locations and in industries not yet included within the frame. The goal was to select for the maximum variation of responses in the data (Gobo 2004) to achieve balance yet examine differing perspectives. The researcher suspected that there may not be as many board members and potential board members in the initial sample to generate rich data. To find more potential participants with board experience, the researcher contacted the *Women on Boards* association and was granted permission to place an advertisement on their weekly jobs board asking for volunteers. This advertisement did generate more potential participants, many of whom were board members, or potential board members, as well as senior managers. Subsequently, the sampling frame contained a large range of potential participants. Determination of which potential participants on the sampling frame not to interview was achieved by searching for probable duplicates. The researcher was seeking a diverse spread of industry, location and job title. It became clear that holding numbers of potential participants in excess of the sample size required was beneficial for the research. The potential participants were busy SEWLs and finding interview times to suit became impossible for some because of work and life commitments. To this extent, the researcher was flexible and responsive.

All interviews were conducted from November 2015 through to April 2016. Participants were asked to identify by 10-year age timeframes, however, some gave their actual age with an average age of forty-eight years old. Of the women who stated their age, the ages are 36, 36, 46, 47, 47, 50, 56 and 65. Furthermore, of those who provided the requested ten-year age range, there are an additional seven in the age range 35-45; five in the age range 45-55 and five in the age range 55-65.

The total number of years in management positions ranged from 4 years to forty years, with an average of 17 years. The number of years on boards ranged from 0 to 20 years, with an average of 6 years. Some had served on multiple boards however this data was collected but not collated. Each State and Territory in Australia was represented and the distribution can be viewed in Table 3.2.

**Table 3. 2**  Representation of participants by Australian state

| State | Number of SEWLs |
|---|---|
| Australian Capital Territory | 2 |
| New South Wales | 6 |
| Queensland | 7 |
| South Australia | 4 |
| SA and Northern Territory* | 2 |
| Victoria | 2 |
| Western Australia | 1 |
| Tasmania | 1 |
| **TOTAL** | **25** |

*Two participants worked across both South Australia and Northern Territory*

All women were at senior executive level or board level or both. They were not middle managers, they were senior managers, mostly they were in the top management teams of their companies or/and they were professional board members. They were not chosen because of the length of their experience. Had the choice been made primarily on the length of service criterion, only older women would have been interviewed rather than the sought for spread of age groups with experience at the senior executive leadership and board levels.

The women's job titles can be confusing. There is no real progression from Manager to Director to CEO as could be logically reasoned. For example, Connie's title is that of Senior Manager, yet she has greater overall responsibilities than that of the person whose job title is Assistant Director General. While Connie is employed by an international firm, the Assistant Director General is in a State Government Department. The SEWLs job titles are listed in Table 3.3.

Participants represented a wide range of industry and government. The employment sectors included IT and Security, Telecommunications, Tourism, Defence, Aerospace, Education and Training, Mining, Retail, Social Services, Property Development, Tertiary Education, Insurance and Finance, Local Government, Manufacturing, Sport and Recreation, and Professional and Business Services. Industries were not specifically targeted; rather, the researcher was looking for a wide range of industries in order to inform the data (Richards 2009).

All participants in this research are identified in Table 3.3 but names are aliases for the purposes of confidentiality.

**Table 3. 3** *Participants*

| Alias | Age | Job Title | Date of Interview | Years in mgt | Years on boards |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Christie | 55-65 | CEO | 3/11/2015 | 30 | 20 |
| Yvonne | 55-65 | General Manager | 5/02/2016 | 15 | 4 |
| Anna | 36 | Manager | 10/02/2016 | 4 | 3 |
| Gail | 50 | Program Manager | 13/05/2016 | 12 | 10 |
| Edna | 35-45 | CEO | 16/11/2015 | 17 | 7 |
| Angela | 45-55 | Executive Director | 27/10/2015 | 20 | 10 |
| Beth | 55-65 | Executive Chair | 30/10/2015 | 20 | 15 |
| Connie | 36 | Manager | 16/02/2016 | 9 | 0 |
| Veronica | 35-45 | Manager | 3/02/2016 | 8 | 1 |
| Helen | 45-55 | CEO | 28/11/2015 | 7 | 5 |
| Jane | 55-65 | CEO | 15/12/2015 | 40 | 13 |
| Irene | 35-45 | Assistant Dir General | 14/12/2015 | 12 | 1 |
| Teresa | 46 | Manager | 3/11/2015 | 21 | 7 |
| Ursula | 35-45 | CEO | 2/02/2016 | 25 | 12 |
| Louise | 45-55 | General Manager | 17/01/2016 | 12 | 2 |
| Queenie | 45-55 | General Manager | 28/01/2016 | 25 | 4 |
| Oonah | 55-65 | Director | 27/01/2016 | 12 | 0 |
| Pat | 35-45 | Senior Manager | 27/01/2016 | 17 | 0 |
| Shona | 45-55 | Group Manager | 28/01/2016 | 28 | 10 |
| Norah | 47 | General Manager | 27/01/2016 | 20 | 2 |
| Rita | 35-45 | Manager | 28/01/2016 | 7 | 6 |
| Mary | 35-45 | Senior Director | 27/01/2016 | 15 | 0 |
| Donna | 56 | CEO | 20/04/2016 | 26 | 20 |
| Zena | 47 | Network Planning Manager | 9/02/2016 | 15 | 2 |
| Deb | 65 | Executive Officer | 15/11/2015 | 8 | 5 |

### 3.5.4 *Interview protocols*

The interview protocol was sent to interviewees prior to the interview. Consequently, this led the researcher to conduct one-on-one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The initial plan had been to conduct all interviews face-to-face however the logistics of such an approach proved impractical. It had been planned that the researcher would travel to each state and arrange a series of interviews within a few days in each state. This proved impossible. Interviews, therefore,

were conducted face-to-face or over the phone or by Skype. Some were conducted at the workplace of the participants, others at neutral offices or at alternative locations. Interviews generally lasted between 60-90 minutes. In-depth interviews are one-on-one interviews designed to probe and elicit detailed answers to questions (McDaniel & Gates 2004). Questions were emailed with written or verbal advice from the researcher that preparation was not required as all instructions were included.

All interviews were recorded with permission from the participants. The interviewer did not discern differences in the responses of those interviewed by phone from those interviewed face-to-face (Sturges & Hanrahan 2004). The researcher adopted non-evaluative listening techniques to ensure that discussions flowed. Probing questions such as, '*Why do you say that?*' or '*Can you give me an example of that*?' (Zikmund 2000, p. 118) are illustrations of the unstructured format of follow-on questions.

When undertaking face-to-face interviews, the researcher adhered to an appropriate dress and behaviour code. Each interview was constructed according to a standard procedure for opening each interview and reducing the scope for bias by clearly phrasing questions asked with a neutral voice tone. Emotional language was generally avoided. Open and unstructured questions were mostly used. Specific questions were used to confirm facts or opinions. At all times the researcher strove to demonstrate attentive listening skills.

## 3.6    The data analysis method – thematic analysis

Taking a thematic analysis approach with an interpretive epistemological leaning, key themes are identified in the voice recordings using the inductive process described earlier in Figure 1. Thematic analysis is deemed to be a creative process resulting from the relationship between the researcher's analytical and interpretive skills and the data itself (Rohleder & Lyons 2014). The literature in relation to thematic analysis generally indicates that there is no one correct method to employ when using the approach. The focus in taking a content driven, thematic analysis approach is primarily inductive (Guest 2012, p. 12). The important factor is to take a systemic approach throughout, with the system, although inductive, being clear to the researcher. Using thematic analysis to answer a research

question requires the researcher to have a description of what is expected to be achieved by the data, sometimes referred to as *'the view'* (Guest et al. 2012, p. 13). The view determines the amount of detail to be explored within the data and brings structure to decisions made within the analysis process. In the case of this research, the parameters of the view are determined by the research questions. The quality of the data is also very important and there should be a fit between the view and the data used. The quality of the data used has been in many ways determined by the use of consistent and well thought through open-ended questions which generated the rich data acquired. Additional probing questions were asked dependent upon the initial responses. Examples of open-ended probing questions and text is illustrated in Exhibit 3.2.

**Exhibit 3. 2**  *Samples of probing questions in the narrative*

> *Norah: ....they see it as reward even though there are highlighted deficiencies and*
> *a bit of carnage on the way but they sure come up trumps.*
> **Researcher: So, more so than the women?**
> *Nora: Yes*
> **Researcher: Why do you think that is?**
> *Norah: I don't know, it's a mate-ship unconscious thing...*
>
> Deb: .....they relate to the guys and see females as a threat and foreign species
> **Researcher: In what ways would females be threatening?**
>
> *Edna:....be part of the technology wave and understand what technology is doing.*
> **Researcher: Why do you say that?**
> *Edna: Technology is changing the face of businesses...*
>
> **Researcher: That was a great outcome and I am very interested in the bit at the beginning**
> *Jane: Where's the man.*
> **Researcher: Yes, the where's the man**
> *Jane: That was absolutely normal behaviour and would be the norm for me for the next ten years where I was the only woman in the boardroom who wasn't*

Using this technique, the researcher is better able to clarify the meaning of phrases used. For example, asking questions such as, *"Why do you think that is?"* and *"Why do you say that?"* elicit clarifying responses which add depth to the data, when the participant may incorrectly assume the researcher is aware of the answer's context and meaning. Researcher questions are also used to clarify assumptions that the researcher may be making about the answers. For example,

asking, *"in what ways would females be threatening?"* invites the participant to elucidate further, contributing additional information to the research.

### 3.6.1   The data analysis tool: MAX-QDA

MAX-QDA is a software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods data, text and multimedia analysis.  MAX-QDA allows the entry of voice recordings directly into the system.  This ordained that none of the voice recordings had to be transcribed. The researcher used a voice recorder which recorded voice files in a MP3 format compatible with MAX-QDA. MAX-QDA's versatility enables reports to be generated on the data and includes sophisticated coding functions.  Data can be easily extrapolated from MAX-QDA using many different enquiry functions such as sorting participant comments into excel worksheets, or extrapolating counts of coded segments that exist in each RQ-selected response group.

### 3.6.2   The RQ–selected responses

All raw data was transferred to MAX-QDA which enabled the organisation of tracts of audio into qualitative, thematic tabulated data. Subsequently, thematic analysis was used to organise that data and relationships were identified between the themes and the research questions (Rohleder & Lyons 2014; Braun 2015). On initial coding, six-hundred-and-fifty-four memos were transcribed into MAX-QDA from the audio recordings of the twenty-five interviews.  Eight-hundred-and-twenty RQ-selected responses were developed as illustrated in Figure 3.3.  If a memo fitted into two RQs, it counted as two RQ-selected responses.



**654 memos**          **820 RQ-selected responses**

***Figure 3. 3***   Frequency of data flow

### 3.6.3    *Data triangulation*

The literature recommends that to further enhance validity, feedback should be sought on the researcher's interpretation of the data from within the original participant group (Giacomini et al. 2000). To achieve this, a focus group of the population was established where ten of the twenty-five SEWLs participants were asked to participate (Miles 1994, pp. 309-10). A focus group is a form of '*member checking*' which adds to the research trustworthiness, credibility and dependability (Creswell 1994) and assists in determining the validity of the researcher's data interpretation (Byrne 2004) and triangulation.

To enable the researcher to choose participants in a non-biased manner, the names of the twenty-five participants were written on pieces of paper and placed in a hat. The researcher chose ten names and invited each person to participate in providing feedback on the themes identified from the data. Of the ten who were invited, eight agreed to participate. Responses were received between November 2016 and January 2017.  Due to the geographical spread of the participants and the requirement of anonymity, it was determined that managing a focus group at one moment in time would likely inhibit the quantity and quality of the feedback. The triangulation of the data was subsequently achieved not so much in traditional focus group expectations but initially by seeking asynchronous feedback via email correspondence.  For one participant, a follow-up was undertaken via a telephone conversation.  In this circumstance, the researcher recorded the session with the participant's permission and then transcribed the participant's comments.

Feedback participants were given the broad themes established from the data and asked about their opinions of those themes. This helped to clarify, extend, qualify and challenge the data collected. It allowed participants the opportunity to correct errors and alert the researcher to what the participants perceived as incorrect interpretations of the data. The feedback group participants were invited to comment on a document which contained the themes identified. Their comments varied from a few overall sentences to in-depth paragraphs on certain sections. The participant responses and analysis of this additional round of data is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

## 3.7    Matters of validity and reliability

In qualitative research, validity is far more important to establish than reliability. If the data is valid each time then the data is reliable, as a demonstration of validity is sufficient to establish reliability of data (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 316). This research took place at one point in time.  The findings of the interviews reflect the perceived reality of the individuals interviewed and are unique to this set of interviews and are not meant to be repeatable (Marshall & Rossman 2006). Some argue that the terms validity and reliability are terms solely for use in quantitative research and should be replaced by other terms (Corbin & Strauss 2008). Some of the alternative terms suggested include trustworthiness, worthy, relevant, plausible, confirmable, credible, and representative (Winter 2000). The most commonly used current term to replace validity in qualitative research is credibility or truth value (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Credibility takes account of the findings being truthful, accurate and correct, as well as giving a true understanding of the context within which the data lies. While reliability is clearly not required in the way it is in quantitative research, dependability (Lincoln & Guba 1985) is seen as an additional (Creswell 1994) quality of merit. Dependability implies that the research has been carried out with care and attention to the rules and conventions of qualitative research methodologies.

The researcher uses the term *'validity'* to indicate the accuracy and credibility of the processes and outcomes of this research.  She used a process which is rigorous, credible and transparent. High levels of validity were achieved as interviews were conducted carefully due to the scope to clarify questions and having the ability to explore responses and themes from different angles.  On listening to the participants' answers during the interviews, responses were further clarified and explored on many occasions. Probing questions to ensure clarity of understanding further increased the validity of the approach. In terms of internal validity, as many relationships as possible were considered during the design stage to assist in the adoption of valid conclusions. External validity was further upheld as, in undertaking analytical generalisation within the context of in-depth interview qualitative research, the researcher was striving to generalise particular sets of results to some broader theory (Yin 1994).

In qualitative research confirmability is the extent to which the findings reflect the focus of the enquiry (Lincoln & Guba 1985) and not the bias of the researcher (Guba 1981). The way in which the researcher formulated interpretations, implications and conclusions has been made explicit by ensuring that a clear audit trail exists of the research. This includes details of when and why decisions were made and conclusions reached. The effects of research bias and participation bias were minimised by ensuring that data analysis was undertaken with care and precision and decisions made were recorded in detail. Dependability was further addressed by using standardised questions and procedures (Yin 1994). The feedback group added to the research trustworthiness, credibility and dependability (Creswell 1994). It gave the participants the ability to correct errors and alert the researcher to what information, if any, was incorrect.

## 3.8 Limitations with the research methodology employed in this study

Generalisability or generalisation represents the extent to which the research results and conclusions can be extended to be applicable to other individuals or settings other than those directly studied (Polit & Beck 2010). The literature describes three main types of generalisation in qualitative research: statistical generalisation, analytic generalisation and case-to-case transferability. Statistical generalisation occurs when '*an inference is made about a population on the basis of empirical data collected about a sample*' (Yin 2003, p. 32). This does not require that statistical methods are used or that probability sampling is utilised as the terminology may imply. It is dependent upon the descriptive representativeness of the sample, the participants and the settings in terms of the distribution of the properties of the individuals, to the larger population to which the researcher wants to generalise. This research relies heavily on statistical generalisation.

Analytic generalisation occurs when *'a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study. If two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed*' (Yin 2003, pp. 32-3). This is used more frequently within case study research methods. Case-to-case transferability does not require the discovery of the general conditions under which a finding or theory is valid, it necessitates a transfer of

knowledge from a study to a specific new situation. This transfers the onus for making generalisations from the researcher to the reader or potential user of the findings. Misco (2007) has labelled this '*reader generalizability*.' The researcher should provide enough details to the reader so that the reader can judge for themselves if the results and conclusions of the research are applicable in other situations (Guba & Lincoln 1989). Additionally, there are issues of internal and external generalisability that can be considered. Internal generalisability refers to generalising within the case studied, to persons, events, times, and settings that were not directly observed, interviewed or otherwise represented in the data collected (Maxwell 1992). For interview studies, this can also be seen as generalisation to other aspects of the experiences, perspectives, actions, or relationships of the individuals interviewed to those that were addressed in the interview, that is, treating the individual as the 'case.' External generalisability, in contrast, refers to generalisation beyond the case or cases specifically studied, to other persons or settings.

The validity of the results and conclusions in qualitative data analysis depends on internal generalisability. That is why sampling and using sampling frames is very important and were included in this research. It is not only the participants who are being sampled, but their locations, industries and jobs. A systemic review of participants to check for representativeness '*can sharpen early and later choices*' (Miles & Huberman 1984, p. 41) and enhance internal generalisation and validity that does not fit prior expectations (Maxwell 2012). In this research, a search for variability led to sharpening the focus of the research being conducted in an iterative and inductive process. For instance, additional probing related to new subthemes being established such as SEWLs limiting their agency. Thus, variability in the data and researcher bias was avoided by using this process.

An additional strategy for reinforcing internal generalisation is analysing the data to provide numerical results about the frequency of observations, or the number of instances of a particular type of event or statement (Maxwell 2010). This approach confirms the use of code frequencies in this research. Overall, internal generalisability relies on the representativeness of the data, results and conclusions. It relies largely on statistical generalisation and to some extent on reader transfer. It depends significantly on how the participants were selected and

the utilisation of sample frames. Issues of potential bias have been addressed by including a deliberate search for data inconsistent with the emerging interpretation.  The use of frequency codes to evaluate the variability and distribution of data has further improved internal generalisability.

This research is limited to SEWLs in Australia and it is unclear whether the findings will translate directly to other countries with variegated workplace cultures. Executive women within SMEs are outside the scope of this research and as such, the research findings may have some applicability to this group, however this would need to be tested as there are very different dynamics in small companies, particularly small family companies (Boxer et al. 2014).

## 3.9    Human research ethics

This research was conducted ensuring that codes of ethics were adhered to. The rights, anonymity and welfare of the subjects was promoted and protected (Joungtrakul & Allen 2012).  The University and Australia National Statement on Ethical Conduct guidelines were adopted as human subjects were interviewed. This was adopting a utilitarianism approach to ethical issues. Informed consent protocol was employed to ensure that all subjects were aware of the research intentions and were comfortable with taking part in the research. The researcher was involved in all stages of the research from defining the concept to research design, all interviews, memo writing, coding, analysis, verification and reporting the concepts and themes.

In accordance with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007, this research did not commence until ethical approval was granted by the University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee. The approval number is HR15REA81. The Committee scrutinised the objectives of the research and the research questions, as well as reviewing existing literature, to establish the need for the research. The selected research design was examined to ensure that the design would enable the research objectives to be achieved. Section 1.1(b) and (c) of the National Statement (2007) establishes that these matters are an important ethical consideration for proposed research.  The committee also took into serious consideration what participants would actually experience. The risks identified

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with this research were low and the potential benefits to diversity management policies and practices as well as adding to the body of research of SCT, outweighed those risk factors.

The principle of informed consent emphasises the researcher's responsibility to wholly inform participants of different aspects of the research in clear and coherent language. Clarifications should include matters such as the nature of the study, the participants' potential role, the identity of the researcher, the objective of the research, and how the results will be published and used. Potential participants were sent email links to information on the background of the researcher. Participant Information Sheets were prepared for expert interview participants, interview participants and feedback group participants. The sheets had to be read by participants before they signed their consent to participate. The sheets explained the nature of the research and the voluntary nature of the participation was advised. Researchers have the responsibility of protecting all participants in a study from potentially harmful consequences that might affect them as a result of their participation. Researchers should hold the information as strictly confidential (King et al. 1999). The participation sheets contained messages about confidentiality. Participants were assured that their names and the names of any companies they mentioned in the interviews would not appear in the published research. The issue of confidentiality was a very large issue and one that the researcher reiterated to participants before and during interviews. Participants felt the need to ensure that people and companies identified during interview would be highly confidential.

Interviewees were sent copies of the questions that they would be asked. Copies of the questions are available on request. Participants were aware that they could ask questions of the researcher after participating in the research and that a summary of the results of the research would be made available to them on request.

There are several effective strategies to protect personal information, for instance utilising secure data storage methods and removing identifier components such as individual names, places and organisations (Ensign 2003). The voice recordings collected are identifiable by the researcher however the information that is

reported in this research is non-identifiable. Storage of the voice recordings in this research is digital.  Copies of the recordings and the data collected are held within the MAX-QDA program accessible only to the researcher.  Additional copies of the recordings and data are on the password protected computer of the researcher, on her digital voice recorder, and on the backup hard drive, all of which are stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. The University of Southern Queensland also securely holds copies of the audio files. The data collected will be retained for at least fifteen years in accordance with university policy.

# CHAPTER 4

# RESULTS

# CHAPTER 4

## RESULTS

**4.0    Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the research data collected utilising the methodology described in Chapter 3.  Following Chapter 2, five research themes emerged for investigation which led to three research questions. Chapter 3 then described how the research questions relating to the aims of the thesis would be explored. Here, the results are presented in relation to the three research questions. Sample extracts are included from participant interview recordings as a means to analyse various data items. Feedback group comments on the themes are also discussed.

**4.1    Themes developed**

The five themes developed in Chapter 2 are as follows:

- Theme 1 Gender inequality: Gender inequality is a reality in the modern workplace.  It is pervasive at all levels of the workplace and is very difficult to shift (Ridgeway 2011).  It is based on an embedded set of gender status beliefs that have survived many centuries and are continuing today (Ridgeway 2011). Gender status beliefs are linked to gender status assessments; women are disadvantaged in these material struggles and assumed to be less able than men when gender is salient particularly in mixed-sex workplace task groups;

- Theme 2 Opting out: It is important to explore why an increasing number of women are deciding to opt out of senior positions (Stone 2007; Barsh & Yee 2012) and the extent to which belief systems embodied at the cultural, structural, and societal level are contributing to this reality;

- Theme 3 Skills and opportunities: The female gender is a diffuse lower-status characteristic in the workplace.  For women to enhance their chances of promotion and increase their power-prestige ranking, they need skills that help them to confound existing stereotypes and inequality regimes. They also require equal opportunities within places of work that enable them to discharge the burden of proof (Berger et al. 1980) and to shorten

the path of relevance. These skills would be particularly valuable within mixed-sex workplaces involving informal problem-solving groups;

- Theme 4 Cultural status beliefs: The diffuse lower-status characteristic of the female gender affects cultural assessments limiting women's agency (Ridgeway 2008). Ridgeway (2014) calls for more research and a greater understanding of how cultural status beliefs relate to resources and power;

- Theme 5 Support mechanisms: It is important to explore the role played by internal and external influences e.g., personal support arrangements such as mentors and sponsors (Reinhold 2005; Kark & Eagly 2010). Also, the influence of legislation and policies that institutionalise equality practices (Bao et al. 2014), and how these institutionalised policies contribute to and alter the experience of women leaders for career progression.

For the purposes of analysing how each theme relates to each research question, Table 4.1 explains how each theme relates to each research question as identified from the literature. It also lists each of the emerging (sub)themes identified in the data related to each research question. These (sub)themes are discussed in detail in this chapter.

**Table 4. 1** *Research questions and their emerging themes in the literature and data*

| Research question | Emerging themes from the literature | Emerging themes identified in the data |
|---|---|---|
| 1.1 | Theme 1: Gender inequality<br><br>Theme 3: Skills and opportunity | Subtheme A: Influencing – being politically savvy in using networks<br><br>Subtheme B: Enhancing performance – personal attributes<br><br>Subtheme C: Delivering and performing<br><br>Subtheme D: Adaptive practices to enhance status |
| 1.2 | Theme 2: Opting out | Subtheme A: Values and game playing<br><br>Subtheme B: Being valued and having flexibility<br><br>Subtheme C: Lack of camaraderie |
| 1.3 | Theme 1: Gender inequality<br><br>Theme 3: Skills and opportunity | Subtheme A: Boy's clubs<br><br>Subtheme B: Men are favoured and have the power |
| 2 | Theme 4: Cultural status beliefs | Subtheme A: Organisations favour men over women<br><br>Subtheme B: Women are judged because they have family commitments<br><br>Subtheme C: Men and women are perceived differently at work<br><br>Subtheme D: Women self-limit their agency<br><br>Subtheme E: Entitlements and working arrangements |
| 3.1 | Theme 5: Support mechanisms - personal | Subtheme A: Align with the right people and use networks<br><br>Subtheme B: Sponsors, coaches, mentors and supportive partners |
| 3.2 | Theme 5: Support mechanisms - organisational | Subtheme A: Presence of organisational and legislative support mechanisms<br><br>Subtheme B: Shortfalls in organisational and legislative support |

## 4.2    Descriptive statistics drawn from qualitative data

Some researchers who believe in an interpretivist approach to qualitative research consider the use of any quantification of qualitative data as a desecration of the aims and underpinnings of qualitative research (Suddaby 2006). They believe that quantifying the data can invalidate the results. Others believe that quantifying the data can enhance the result as it can reinforce issues of validity (Miles & Huberman 1994).   Quantification can provide evidence of a thorough and objective analysis (Cuyler 2014).   The researcher believes that the use of code frequencies enhances the analysis and increases the internal generalisability and validity of the research.

Counting the code frequencies does not explain what the data means, however it does assist in data summation and describes the patterning in the data in an unambiguous way. Code frequencies are helpful in a variety of analyses and can be the foundation of more advanced quantitatively oriented qualitative data reduction techniques (Namey et al. 2008, p. 138).   An example of a frequency table is illustrated in Table 4.2 which indicates that there were eighty-nine individual quotes from respondents that related to RQ 3.1. Thirty-five responses advised that connecting with the right people was important while thirty noted the importance of developing networks.

**Table 4. 2** *Frequency of responses to RQ 3.1*

| Frequency | Responses to RQ 3.1 |
|-----------|---------------------|
| 35 | Align yourself with the right people |
| 30 | Develop networks |
| 8 | Obtain sponsors |
| 7 | Hire a coach |
| 7 | Have a supportive partner |
| 2 | Miscellaneous |
| **89** | **Total** |

*Note: 'Miscellaneous' relates to statements made that fit into the overall RQ-selected response group and do not fit with other responses within that group.*

Code frequencies are metadata rather than raw data.  They are not the voice recordings but rather the quotes or voice bites identified from the voice recordings which have been transcribed into memos and coded accordingly. The fact that they are metadata is one of the reasons that some researchers do not believe in

quantifying the data. However, the researcher makes it clear throughout the thesis that direct references to the voice recordings or the raw data are important. Voice recordings and memo direct references have been frequently checked when interpreting code frequencies. This is part of the iterative process of analysis undertaken throughout the research.

In the analysis, the researcher identifies not only the absolute number of code frequencies in each group, but also the relative number of code frequencies pertinent to the number of individual interviewees who mentioned a particular theme. The overall results are reviewed to test whether, for example, one individual increased the overall frequency of a code by mentioning the words and phrases associated with that code more times than others who mentioned similar words and phrases (Namey et al. 2008). The researcher found that utilising code frequencies assisted in checking against researcher bias.  When making preliminary and subsequent notes as part of the iterative process, the researcher noticed that some issues were more relevant than the data frequency indicated. These initial oversights were probably an indication of researcher bias and were overcome during the iterative process. The researcher, during the first determination of codes, also initially missed some issues that the data frequency indicated were important. The code frequency was a useful tool in determining which codes could and could not be included in the final analysis, keeping researcher bias in check.

### 4.2.1    Frequency of comments by research question and by participant

As part of the validity methodology, the data is reviewed in alternative ways. One method is identifying how many senior executive women leaders (SEWL)s responded to each of the themes.  Table 4.3 below indicates that 20 or more of the participants commented on all of the themes. There is a large spread of the number of themed responses made by the participants, the lowest being Pat and Donna with 13 and 18 comments respectively; the highest Angela with fifty-four (54) and Gail with fifty-two (52).  As a non-probabilistic approach is being taken there is no need to omit the outliers. An important factor from Table 4.3 is that all twenty-five women are responding. By tabling the data in this format (Table 4.3) it is clear that the data indicate that there is no area where one participant overly

influences the results (Namey et al. 2008). Where there are names with numerals attached in Table 4.3, this indicates that there was more than one recording. For example, Christie's interview was undertaken by Skype as she was overseas at the time of interview. Christie 1 is the first recording which was interrupted because of Skype failure and Christie 2 is the continuation of the interview.

**Table 4. 3** *Frequency of responses by participant by research question*

| RQ | 1.1 | 1.2 | 1.3 | 2 | 3.1 | 3.2 | SUM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Angela | 12 | 6 | 10 | 16 | 3 | 7 | 54 |
| Beth | 14 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 30 |
| Deb | 2 | 6 | 7 | 18 | 0 | 1 | 34 |
| Edna | 4 | 0 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 21 |
| Christie 2 | 10 | 7 | 10 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 39 |
| Christie 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Helen | 1 | 0 | 1 | 20 | 4 | 4 | 30 |
| Irene | 4 | 0 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 19 |
| Jane | 6 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 21 |
| Louise | 6 | 3 | 14 | 16 | 2 | 5 | 46 |
| Mary | 15 | 2 | 1 | 10 | 0 | 2 | 30 |
| Norah | 5 | 2 | 4 | 9 | 2 | 3 | 25 |
| Oonah | 14 | 7 | 5 | 13 | 8 | 2 | 49 |
| Pat | 6 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 13 |
| Queenie | 10 | 7 | 6 | 14 | 2 | 7 | 46 |
| Rita 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Rita 2 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 0 | 22 |
| Shona | 7 | 6 | 2 | 14 | 2 | 0 | 31 |
| Teresa | 7 | 2 | 2 | 12 | 7 | 2 | 32 |
| Ursula | 11 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 0 | 32 |
| Veronica | 18 | 3 | 3 | 9 | 8 | 2 | 43 |
| Yvonne | 13 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 32 |
| Zena | 8 | 1 | 9 | 13 | 8 | 0 | 39 |
| Connie | 5 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 24 |
| Anna 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 9 |
| Anna 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Anna 3 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 16 |
| Gail | 12 | 8 | 14 | 17 | 0 | 1 | 52 |
| Donna | 4 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 18 |
| **SUM** | **206** | **79** | **126** | **264** | **89** | **56** | **820** |
| **Tally** | 25 | 20 | 25 | 25 | 21 | 20 | |

*Note: the last row is the number of the 25 SEWLs who commented on the RQ*

### 4.3    Research question one

Research question 1 is in three parts. Part one investigates how SEWLs shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings; part two examines why some SEWLs decide not to strive for the top positions; and part three questions whether SEWLs are excluded from opportunities that allow them to increase their power-prestige rankings.

#### 4.3.1    *Research question 1.1*

RQ 1.1: How do senior executive women leaders shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings?

This research question developed in Chapter 1, relates to Themes 1 and 3, *Gender inequality* and *Skills and opportunities.* All twenty-five SEWLs interviewed offer comments relative to this question. These comments are received within the context that, in all cases, the SEWLs are either part of a board which is heavily dominated by men or are part of a management team where the CEO (when that position is not held by the SEWL being interviewed) and the majority of the team are men.  When the SEWLs refer to their superiors, they are, for the most part, men. Some of those interviewed are CEOs themselves, and in those instances the SEWLs are sometimes answering in the light of their recent journey to those top positions. Attaining positions in the top teams of organisations is an indicator of achieving an increased power-prestige ranking and SEWLs comment on how this is achieved. Four subthemes were developed from Themes 1 and 3 which related to RQ 1.1: a) Influencing - being politically savvy in using networks, b) Enhancing performance - personal attributes, c) Delivering and performing and d) Adaptive practices to enhance status. These subthemes will now be discussed.

#### 4.3.1.1    *Influencing - being politically savvy in using networks*

The largest number of responses relevant to how to increase power-prestige rankings, relate to the importance of using influence through being politically savvy in using networks. For example, Christie states, *'be affiliate with the right group / the powerful group / the in group.'* By affiliating with high status individuals Christie is hoping to be culturally judged to be closer to the power-prestige rankings of the senior affiliates (Ridgeway 2011) rather than being

assessed on her stereotypical low gender status. Individuals hold first order beliefs (what they think) and also have second order beliefs systems (what specific others think) (Troyer & Younts 1997; Webster Jr & Whitmeyer 1999). Third order beliefs are what most people think in society. Most individuals view themselves dependent upon how they are perceived by others (Troyer et al. 2001). Self-image frequently arises from the views that others hold of you and individuals usually adhere to the views of those with higher status. When opportunities arise to work with a group of high-status individuals it is highly probable that those opportunities will be offered to high status individuals (Troyer et al. 2001). Christie is hoping to increase her status with those high status or *right* individuals and therefore gain work opportunities when they arise. Similarly, Shona advises that managers should, *'build networks and relationships and gain status vicariously through knowing seniors'* which reinforces this notion of aligning with the right people as this will increase her status in the group. Extant research clearly indicates that networking and mentoring are very important factors for women to gain promotion and increase advancement opportunities (Broadbridge et al. 2006).

Thus, SEWLs find ways to increase their power-prestige rankings by associating with influential others in the organisation. Mary advises to have, *'political savviness and knowing what is appropriate to say to whom.'* Yvonne's advice is to, *'make sure you do your homework politically as well as professionally.'* This advice indicates that networking and affiliating with seniors may not be enough; SEWLS must carefully identify which seniors are appropriate to be affiliated with. There is an inference that affiliating with the *wrong* seniors will not benefit the women's progression. Ursula states that, *'to become a Board Chair you need to put in a lot of time socialising and networking.'* Teresa states, *'connections give status; being careful with LinkedIn connections gives status; don't include friends or people beneath you, include good networks and connections to raise your profile.'* During her interview, Teresa made it very clear that she rejects social media requests from family and friends who are not in senior management or positions which she considers to be influential in some way. She is very aware of her social media profile and uses it in a similar way to real life networking, being careful to affiliate only with those she feels are the *right* people. This is reinforced

by Ursula who states, '*align with certain people to get to the top position; if you do not align with the right group you will not get the position.*' She indicates that not only should individuals align with influential people, but she further warns that if you do not align with the *right* people you will not gain the promoted position. Therefore, status is not only gained by linking with the *right* people, but it may also be lost by linking with the *wrong* people.

Zena offers practical advice indicating that in her experience, gaining promotion is not based on merit but on politics. There is an underlying inference, stated elsewhere within the interview, that women tend to believe that they are not good enough when they miss out on promotion whereas the reality may be that they miss out simply because of internal politics at work. Zena advises managers not to, '*be upset if you miss out; don't be fooled it is based on merit; be aware that there is usually a lot of politics going on.*' Thus, status is not gained for some women because of machinations beyond their sphere of influence.

Teresa comments:

> '*most opportunities are not advertised on Seek; or they are only advertised because it's the law; they are given to someone because they are personally known or recommended by someone they are networked with.*'

Gaining the senior positions will increase the power-prestige rankings of the women. However, it would seem that in order for that to occur, in Teresa's opinion, networking and becoming individually familiar with the decision makers at the top, are required. Teresa's statement reinforces how status is gained through interacting with and impressing the *right* people, the higher status people. This interaction with the *right* people need not be task related, it may be through social interaction.

In addition to internal politics and networking, SEWLs are also cognisant of *game playing*. Queenie identifies this when she advises, '*find out what the game is; where the informal power networks lie; find the game; play it; don't shy away from it.*' Illustrations of playing the game are noted in extant research that while men play the game, women generally do not play the game and prefer to be

upfront with their bosses which can result in women being incorrectly labelled as not having the ability to be *'true ideal workers'* (Reid 2015). Status is lost through either not being aware of the game, or not playing the game; and status is gained through identifying the game and playing along.

Beth clearly states that completing your work well is not enough. It is important to understand how you are judged and what further characteristics, affiliations or actions are required to be perceived to be excelling in your position. She advises to:

> *'get to know the people in the top positions and make sure you understand how they are judged and what characteristics are required; don't just sit at your desk and complete your work in half the time a man takes, ensure you find out what else is required, for example networking, communication or internal marketing.'*

Beth is reinforcing the notion that influential affiliations are important in overcoming the effects of common stereotypes. SEWLs' responses indicate that merit may not be the number one reason for promotion to the top positions. The researcher assumes that asserting influence is required for both men and women in order for them to increase their power prestige rankings. However, the diffuse gender characteristic (Ridgeway 2008) puts women at a disadvantage as it affects cultural assessments that limit women's agency. Men's agentic nature is a given whereas women are challenged with having to overcome stereotypes related to women being caring and less agentic (Eagly 2013). SEWLs suggest that performance is less important than being politically savvy and using networks. The idea of focusing on performance and being competent is therefore placed into context.

### 4.3.1.2    *Enhancing performance – personal attributes*

SEWLs suggest that being emotionally healthy, resilient and authentic enhances women's performance. They advocate that in order to tackle all that will be thrown at them at the top that SEWLs require stronger than average levels of resilience and fighting spirit.  Jane advises that women should be, *'healthy enough*

*in all ways to work – emotionally and physically.'* Louise states that women will benefit by being, *'true to yourself, work hard and don't ever think you can't do it.'* Pat draws attention to the importance of, *'resilience and ability to bounce back regardless of what goes wrong,'* while Norah advises that SEWLs display, *'self-belief, get the head in the right space, resilience, look after energy levels, be present when you are at home.* Gail states that, '*self-awareness is important,'* and that SEWLs should not, '*underestimate unconscious bias; it took me a long time to realise that the daily bias I experienced was not me, but my gender.'* Similarly, Yvonne advocates that women should believe in themselves and women, *'who act like men cannot be authentic and if you are not authentic you don't have a hope in hell; those women make terrible bosses.'* Yvonne's comment is supported by extant research which indicates that women who display male types of behaviour are regarded as less effective than men who display similar behaviours yet are often less capable to do the job (Joshi et al. 2015, p. 1519). The data suggest that SEWLs are fighters. Deb suggests that SEWLs *'develop a skin like a rhinoceros, you will need it.'* Veronica urges that women prepare themselves, *'to have inappropriate comments put to you,'* and *'don't take it personally; be tough.'* Angela states that, '*you have to fight harder than the men to be heard'* indicating that SEWLs find it necessary to discover ways to lessen the burden of proof effect to overcome gender status bias. These women are facing common stereotypes, which are transferred from one situation to the next and the comments above indicate methods and actions they use to lessen this effect. Women having to fight to be heard is supported by the status characteristics theory (SCT) suggestion that cognitive status assessments based on the diffuse status characteristic of gender will allocate lower status to women, thus resulting in their having to fight harder than men (Murray & Southey 2017).

Additional SEWL responses suggest that self-promotion, preparation and using male language will assist in increasing SEWLs' power-prestige ranking. Beth states that, *'people being put on certain projects give you workplace status,'* and that *'always being willing to take on a new challenge,'* will assist in attaining promotion. Mary suggests that women:

> *'ask for a special project – speak up – it is not merit based and*
> *they won't come to you unless you speak up........ask for it, use*

> *male language, stand up for yourself, promote yourself…. when reporting to a male it is very important to use language that men view as appropriate; language use is important or you will not be heard.'*

Mary's emphasis on speaking up and on the need to use male language to do so, reinforces common gender status beliefs. Women in the senior workforce are fighting to overcome gender status bias consistent with research which indicates that discourses can reinforce the belief that men are more suitable for high-level positions than women (Acker 2006; Bevan & Learmonth 2013; Bao et al. 2014). Oonah advises that women need to, *'let your leader know who you are and what you want,'* and Jane states that, *'women have to find ways to be heard without being subservient.'* All of the above indicate that in order to increase their power-prestige rankings and boost status, women should be assertive and take control rather than maintaining a stereotypical subservient role. Women can be adversely perceived when displaying leadership characteristics (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014) therefore they have a very difficult path to navigate.

While impediments influence power-prestige rankings in a negative way, SEWLs are finding ways to overcome them and lessen the burden of proof effect. Scholars indicate that there are major challenges for women in management as they encounter two major biases related to their ability, those being that women are assumed to have less leadership and agentic ability than men and that women's behaviours are viewed as less effective than similar behaviours in men (Joshi et al. 2015). The SEWL responses indicate that they are trying to overcome this by using an *influence* strategy to increase their power-prestige rankings.

### 4.3.1.3    Delivering and performing

Participants suggest that by delivering and being solutions focussed SEWLs will increase their power-prestige rankings. Beth suggests that, *'technical excellence will give you status.'* Norah states that there will be benefits to SEWLs who hold the qualities of, *'commercial acumen, conduct yourself well, on time delivery, innovation.'* Veronica highlights the importance of having, *'conviction and passion for work and success at work,'* and Rita urges SEWLs to attain, *'great financial results.'* Deb discusses the importance of, *'a combination of intelligence*

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*and pre-emptive action as well as whatever the job describes.'* These comments point to the importance of a specific characteristic e.g., technical excellence, but also acquiring a set of diffused characteristics that lead to multiple abilities that are assessed in places of work (Berger et al. 1980; Lucas 2003; Ridgeway 2014). At the SEWL level, it is assumed that women are competent in their fields or as Jane suggests, they *'know their craft',* as the above comments illustrate. It is important that SEWLs can perform and deliver however that is very much a given. In view of the earlier overwhelming responses identifying the need for influence, such as the statement made by Beth indicating that SEWLS need to do much more than perform (section 4.3.1.1), completing your work well is not enough. Gaining status for these SEWLs is not competence based, but rather, how they are judged by others and how they are differentiated from other similarly situated managers who strive for the top positions. SEWLs adopt practices that increase their power-prestige rankings with the most frequent of these practices related to *influence* rather than *delivery* or being *performance* based. Influence, which can lead to power and probably resources, ranks higher in status than performance or delivery for these women, which is consistent with the findings of extant theory (Cook & Glass 2014; Joshi et al. 2015).

### 4.3.1.4    *Adaptive practices to enhance status*

SEWLs adopt adaptive practices related to shortening the path of relevance and increasing their power-prestige rankings.  They subconsciously, and perhaps unknowingly, work to restrict or lessen the burden of proof because they are able to generate greater competence in earlier work situations. The burden of proof is an effect or a process or a phenomenon that suggests women face common stereotypes transferred from one situation to the next unless they can find ways to lessen the effect, the process or the phenomenon. Challenging the burden of proof effect is achieved by overcoming gender related impediments that restrict the opportunities to exert influence (Berger et al. 1980; Ridgeway & Correll 2006). The data generated in response to RQ 1.1 generally supports the contention that SEWLs make opportunities to challenge the burden of proof effect, adopting practices that shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings. SEWLs take actions to erode gender as a status assessment. They instinctively work on the basis that the subliminal gender characteristic is an

unconscious factor that must be initially overcome to re-establish their ability and demonstrate their competence to excel in the task at hand. While it is important to do a good job in terms of delivering on performance, being solutions focussed and gaining a breadth of experience, these attributes are often taken-for-granted at the senior level. The difference between gaining the top positions and not gaining them is perceived by the SEWLs as being largely due to being politically savvy and nurturing the correct networks. Ensuring progression at the senior level is more about *influence* and *who* you know rather than *what* you know. While it is probable that all executives, both male and female, use influence to reach the top positions, women have the additional requirement to overcome their low status gender. The responses indicate that women are aware of ways to enhance their status rankings through the use of influence. This begs the question therefore, given the low rates of SEWLs in CEO positions, as to whether opportunities exist for SEWLs to exert such influence or whether impediments exist which inhibit their techniques and opportunities to influence.

### *4.3.1.5 Summary of research question 1.1*

Research question 1.1 asked 'How do senior executive women leaders shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings?' Four subthemes were developed. In subtheme a) Influencing - being politically savvy in using networks, it is clear that influential affiliations, playing the game and political savviness are important in overcoming the effects of common stereotypes. Merit and performance delivery are not considered the primary reasons for promotion to the top positions. Developing the right networks and cultivating influential affiliations are considered to result in gaining superior outcomes for SEWLs.

In subtheme b) Enhancing performance – personal attributes, it is identified that women have to be tough to survive the corporate ladder. They show qualities of being physically and emotionally healthy, resilience and having belief in their own abilities. They try to overcome the assumption that they are less agentic and possess less leadership ability than men (Eagly 2013) by using influencing strategies. They fight a difficult battle as they can be negatively perceived when displaying behaviours which are valued and respected in their male counterparts (Joshi et al. 2015).

In subtheme c) Delivering and performing, women list a number of areas where they should perform well, however, it is recognised that at the SEWL level they should all display excellence in their respective fields. They are aware of the importance of developing a suite of diffused characteristics that lead to multiple proficiencies that are evaluated in places of work (Berger et al. 1980; Lucas 2003; Ridgeway 2014). The importance of influence over performance delivery is acknowledged.

In subtheme d) Adaptive practices to enhance status, SEWLs subliminally restrict or lessen the burden of proof because they are able to generate greater proficiency of ability in earlier work task situations. They work to overcome gender related obstructions which restrict the opportunities to use influence (Berger et al. 1980; Ridgeway & Correll 2006). These practices assist them to shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings. The most successful practices are those related to influence rather than performance.

### 4.3.2    Research question 1.2

RQ 1.2: Why do some senior executive women leaders decide not to strive for the top positions?

This research question developed in Chapter 1, relates to Theme 2, *Opting out*. There are seventy-nine responses related to this question.  Twenty of the twenty-five SEWLs interviewed responded relative to this question. The *'opt-out revolution'* (Belkin 2003) is a reality within the Australian context and is of interest in participant responses to this question. All SEWLs interviewed were in the workforce at the time of interview. The responses are given in reply to, in this instance, a fairly direct question that was put to the participants.  Five had no experience to draw from in answering this question and declined to offer any response on this topic. Those who did respond, gave answers relative to either their previous experiences, experiences of friends and colleagues which they had witnessed, or their thoughts on why women opt out.  Three subthemes were developed from Theme 2 which related to RQ 1.2: a) Values and game playing, b) Being valued and having flexibility and c) Lack of camaraderie. These subthemes will now be discussed.

### 4.3.2.1    Values and game playing

SEWLs comment that women opt out because their values are not being met, they are not willing to play the game and it is not worth their time.  For example, it is clear from Teresa's response that she finds the conduct that occurs at the CEO level to be unendurable because she believes that some women do not strive for the top, not because of how difficult the work may be, but because of the behaviours and values which are demonstrated at that level. Teresa believes women will not suffer or take lightly such behaviours. She states, '*it's distasteful and women don't tolerate the behaviours that go on up there (CEO level).*' Gail poses the question, '*women don't want to play the game, so why would they take that when they can set up their own business?*' Deb says, '*women are not prepared to put up with the bullshit that a lot of men come up with.*' Similarly, Connie states, '*it's exciting climbing the corporate ladder at first but after a while when you see all the games happening its sort of neauuuugh.*' As well as highlighting values and behaviours this reinforces the findings of RQ 1.1 that game playing is essential to reach the top indicating that SEWLs find such game playing disenchanting.

Veronica states:

> '*it's the hairstyle and the outfits you wear if you are CEO or Chair*
> *- the public will scrutinise you in regard to these things whereas*
> *they won't a male, so women have to decide do they want to put up*
> *with that or not; it is part of being a high-profile woman whether*
> *we like it or not.*'

This scrutiny accompanies the role and is not applicable to men (Mavin et al. 2016).  While male executives are expected to look neat and tidy, much more is expected of women executives in a fashion sense. Christie pontificates further on scrutiny, from a different perspective, she comments that, '*the scrutiny of women's performance is excruciating... why would you (women) put yourself up for such scrutiny of performance.*'  Christie further comments that she has encountered this throughout her forty years in management, and that it has not changed. Christie's experience aligns with extant research findings that women manager's performance is scrutinised more than their male counterparts (Glass &

Cook 2016). This scrutiny is an illustration of how women are constantly having to overcome stereotypes that they are less agentic than men (Eagly 2013). It further illuminates that the idea that the diffuse gender characteristic (Ridgeway 2008) affects cultural assessments which limits women's agency, disadvantaging them in places of work and more broadly in society.

Gail's experience has been that, *'a woman wants to feel her energies and path are respected and accepted but your less confident male colleagues get through and you just get fed up.'* Contrary to Belkin's (2003) view that child or family issues may be high on the list of reasons why women do not strive for the top, the SEWLs focus is on being respected and having their values met. Research indicates that there is a cultural conflict between the *good* mother who sees to her children's needs (Sharon 1996) and the loyal worker dedicated to work (Williams 2000) however none of the SEWLs alluded to this dilemma in their responses. There are only a few responses concerning a preference to spend time with family out of the seventy-nine related to RQ 2. Thus, not striving to attain the top positions is more related to SEWLs' *values* and their unwillingness to *play the game* than it is to family commitments.

### 4.3.2.2 *Being valued and having flexibility*

Responses indicate that SEWLs experience unfulfilled needs for purpose, respect, and the opportunity to be flexible in how and when they work. Zena disagrees with her workplace adage that, *'the hours spent in the workplace equals presence which equals productivity.'* Queenie comments that she, *'made $1m profit last year but you still want me to sit at my desk from 9 to 5; I used to work one day a week from home but that was stopped; HR indicate that presence equals output.'* Queenie and Zena, like others who were interviewed, are disappointed that the organisations do not seem to value their overall performance. It is more important to the organisation that they are seen to be sitting at their desks rather than producing valuable outcomes for the organisation. This topic was raised by a number of women. This effects more women than men because women still have the highest share of child and home care duties (Thomas et al. 2018). Flexibility to undertake home and work duties outside of rigid work hours, from many of the

SEWL's perspectives, enhances their accomplishments on both fronts, neither diminishing their work outcomes nor those they accomplish in the home.

More examples of why women decide not to strive for the top positions include comments by Ursula stating that, *'I don't need the big salary and the title; I want something that is important to me and flexibility.'* Gail begs the question:

> *'if women know their value, and their value is not being accepted in a particular workplace then why would you stay? Women being collaborative and seeing relationship importance is insufficiently appreciated therefore women do not want to take on those roles.'*

Shona raises the issue that, *'women are shadow voices; they give an idea which is ignored; then men give it later and it is their idea.'* This reinforces the requirement on women to fight harder to overcome the diffuse status characteristic of gender. SCT posits that there is a cognitive link between status rankings and power-prestige orders (Webster Jr & Rashotte 2010). The shadow voice phenomenon is mentioned by a few SEWLs supporting the view that gender-based status assessments assign lower status and therefore lower power-prestige rankings to women (Berger et al. 1980).

Some SEWLs explain that women opt out because the top is not attractive to women. Oonah says, *'drinking and attending sporting events after work for networking and camaraderie are not attractive to women,'* Norah finds work can be unattractive because of the, '*lack of role modelling; lack of progressive thinking,'* and Queenie says, *'I want someone to care about me; I care about my staff; I've created that culture and value it but the company does not care about me. I will opt out for sense of purpose.'* Research indicates that women have a desire to be '*making a difference... to the public good'* (Acker 2014, p. 83). Acker would further argue that companies have an obligation to create and maintain socially and ethically responsible cultures for their workforce.

In line with findings which suggest that women leaders opt out because they wish to behave ethically and make a positive contribution to the world (Fine 2009), it would seem from these responses that the SEWLs do not wish to compromise their values. Research within the Australian Finance industry found that women

leave senior roles because they are frustrated by elements of organisational culture (Neck 2015). Shona's response that, *'women have a lower tolerance for bullshit; I don't want to sit in a room where people are pontificating [some boards],'* tends to reinforce this finding.

The desire for work/life balance is commented on in responses. The expectation that SEWLs will be available 24/7 is a major factor that women find prohibitive. Many of the SEWLs indicate that they prefer to strive for a work life balance rather than being tied to work twenty-four hours a day. Deb states that women, *'decide [they] do not want the career goal, [they] want time for a balanced life.'* Angela relates a story in which her boss had a demanding expectation when saying, *'some organisations put unreasonable demands on employees such as being expected to be on call 24 hrs every day.'* Angela makes a point of stating that the 24-hour call is unreasonable. She gives an example of being on a work engagement in a location that had little or no phone coverage yet she was chastised for being unavailable to respond to what she ultimately considered a relatively minor issue. Comments indicate that SEWLs feel that while there are times when it would be essential to work extremely long hours, flexibility in the hours worked would be the optimum method of achieving maximum outcomes for the organisation.

Some SEWLs indicate that there is a need to work exceedingly long hours at the top. For example, Norah says, *' if … got to be there 24/7; don't see your kids, then forget it.'* Yvonne advises that, *'women don't want to work the long hours and talk the male kind of talk,'* and Shona responds that, *'the time commitment to be on boards is too much for women who have the bigger burden at home.'* Others express the opinion, reinforced by earlier statements in regard to being in the office as opposed to achieving outcomes from anywhere, that it is a male dominated management construct that requires excessively long hours. Christie explains that there is:

> *'not enough flexibility, anachronistic roles, still old-fashioned male dominated management practices. A radical shift in management and governance practices is required to make positions attractive to women.'*

Christie's statement indicates that management is still entrenched in male gender based stereotypical belief systems. The embodiment of such belief systems at the structural level in the workplace, together with societal and cultural levels, contribute to women finding it unattractive to remain at the top.

### 4.3.2.3    Lack of camaraderie

Other reasons given for women opting out are an expression of loneliness which is experienced at the top, particularly as the only female; they prefer to work for themselves; they prefer to be with family; and they do not value salary as highly as men do. Angela suggests that the, *'difference in getting $0.5m per annum and $1m per annum may not be worth it in terms of what you have to sacrifice. Men are more motivated by status and the money.'* These findings are in line with gender role expectation theory that suggests that men and women place very different values on work. Men value higher salary levels and promotion while women's values are around issues such as colleague support and the quality of the work undertaken (Eagly 1987; Huang & Gamble 2015). Deb comments that, *'women prefer to go into private practice than stay in the corporate world because it has more flexible working arrangements,'* and Connie states that:

> *'men don't opt out at the top because of the camaraderie around them and their mates; they stick around because they are with their mates; women are usually fewer in number and don't have that camaraderie as an incentive to stick around.'*

Extant research indicates that friendship assists in the workplace, enhancing outcomes and potentially positively affecting workplace structures and cultures (Rumens 2017). Connie's statement reinforces the cultural stereotypical norms of men supporting fellow men. The dearth of women at the top offers less in terms of friendship for women and leads to less support, less personal outcomes and less organisational outcomes.

### 4.3.2.4    Summary of research question 1.2

Research question 1.2 asked, 'Why do some senior executive women leaders decide not to strive for the top positions?' Three subthemes were developed. In subtheme a) Values and game playing, it is clear that SEWLs find the games

which are played and the values which are displayed at the top of organisations to be disenchanting. They dislike the fact that women's performance is scrutinised more than their male peers (Glass & Cook 2016).

In subtheme b) Being valued and having flexibility, it is evident that the SEWLs possess unfulfilled needs for respect and for purpose. Many would prefer to have more flexibility in the hours and the way they work. The SEWLs want to be '*making a difference... to the public good*' (Acker 2014, p. 83), effecting a positive contribution to the world. They become frustrated by parts of organisational culture (Neck 2015).

In subtheme c) Lack of camaraderie, SEWLs state that some prefer to work for themselves and some find the lack of camaraderie being the only woman at the top of an organisation, causes loneliness. They do not value high salary levels and promotion as much as their male counterparts and do highly value colleague support and quality of the work they complete (Eagly 1987; Huang & Gamble 2015).

**Table 4. 4** *Frequency of responses to RQ 1.2*

| Frequency | Responses to RQ 1.2 |
|-----------|---------------------|
| 22 | Not willing to play the game/not worth the time |
| 16 | Need for purpose/respect/valued/flexibility |
| 10 | It is not attractive to women |
| 9 | Need time for work/life balance |
| 5 | Prefer to work for themselves |
| 4 | The salary is not highly enough valued |
| 4 | Prefer to be with family |
| 4 | Loneliness at the top |
| 5 | Miscellaneous |
| **79** | **Total** |

*Note: 'Miscellaneous' relates to statements made that fit into the overall RQ-selected response group and do not directly fit with other responses within that group.*

SEWLs are cognisant of existing power structures and are devalued by status assessments, some of which may be based on gender. There is an implicit emphasis in their responses which indicates that much of their resistance to strive for the top is because their values are not male values, although it is not clear from the data exactly what they deem male values to be. The requirement to exert the

burden of proof effect is acknowledged yet SEWLs are deciding consciously not to strive for the top. While the SEWLs could adopt practices to tackle the gender bias they are experiencing, they are opting not to do so, mostly because of reasons related to their personal value sets. These women are fully cognisant of what is expected in order to reach the top but their personal beliefs and values prohibit them from competing for the top positions. The data, as illustrated in Table 4.3, suggest that if the *game* at the top was different and the *values* were different then more SEWLs would be attracted to top positions. These findings are in line with research which found that confidence and ambition decline in women with more than two years of corporate experience (Gadiesh & Coffman 2015). Responses such as those given by Connie ('*it's exciting climbing the corporate ladder at first but after a while when you see all the games happening its sort of neauuuugh.*') reinforce the idea that these women stop striving for the top positions because after experiencing corporate life, they feel disappointed by the values and behaviours which are an acceptable part of life at the top.

### 4.3.3 Research question 1.3

RQ 1.3: Are senior executive women leaders excluded from opportunities that will shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings?

This research question, developed in Chapter 1, relates to Themes 1 and 3, *Gender inequality* and *Skills and opportunities.* In this question, all of the twenty-five SEWL participants responded. Responses tended to focus on those practices and experiences at work which often lengthened the path of relevance which then inevitably decreased their status and power prestige ranking in places of work. This led the researcher to use the negative bias in answers to derive an overall assessment for RQ 1.3 noted below. Two subthemes were developed from Themes 1 and 3 which related to RQ 1.3: a) Boys' clubs and b) Men are favoured and have the power. These subthemes will now be discussed.

#### 4.3.3.1 *Boys' clubs*

The most commented on exclusion factor is the phenomenon of boys' clubs in the workplace. Queenie gives examples currently occurring in her workplace:

> *'every Friday the boys and CEO went out and had lunch together*
> *and I sat there waiting to be invited but never was; I tried but they*
> *said they did not have lunch those days............the boys ran with*
> *the CEO at lunchtimes and I am a runner but they never invited*
> *me to run with them.'*

Oonah amplifies the boys club environment by reinforcing the notion of exclusion, stating that, *'on the executive team of three men and two women, just recently, we have noticed that the guys are getting together and doing things that the women have not been invited to,'* and Jane comments, *'it is still culturally the norm for corporate box invites to be to footie, racing, cricket.'* Yvonne, like many other SEWLs, attests however to the reality that, *'I am not a fan of sport. I cannot contribute to those conversations with the CEO.'* All of the above examples make it clear that boys' clubs exist in many workplaces, reinforcing existing stereotypes of the *man's man*, and that women are excluded because of their gender. While the activities are generally social rather than work based, the women are excluded from these important social activities which emanate from the workplace and lead to examples of women not being able to demonstrate their social competence in opportunities that may assist in shortening the path of relevance.

Boys' clubs are a method of preserving the male dominance by exclusion. Helen describes boys' clubs as, *'a brotherhood; they talk differently to each other than they do to women.'* Christie quite forthrightly states that, '*not being part of the drinking, spitting, screwing, boys' club was the reason I was not successful in getting the job,'* and further, when looking back on her ultimately very successful career, that boys' clubs, *'held me back from progression when I really should have attained that job.'* These responses indicate that assessments on the basis of status (Anderson et al. 2001; Alexander et al. 2009) are being made in the workplace about promotions as though these boys' club interactions are task-based situations. Zena discusses a current situation in her workplace where:

> **'***there's a boys' club of managers who all play golf together; they*
> *have started to invite a few younger guys so they will be in the*
> *pipeline for the next promotions as you tend to pick someone you*
> *have played golf with.'*

Through these social interactions, judgements are being made about abilities, as if they were being judged on work-based tasks. Men are experiencing group status assessments which women, by exclusion, cannot experience. These experiences are confirmed by extant research that finds that boys' clubs which exclude women are powerful in British universities where the covert clubs promote and maintain the interests of the men. This includes selection and promotion to work positions of the male club members (Fisher & Kinsey 2014).

Norah says, *'mate-ship means that male bosses are more lenient towards males' faults than towards women's faults,'* Teresa comments, *'when a board position came up the boys would all be talking to one another and deciding who could go when.'* Mary's experiences are that, *'relaxed rapport building with the MD and the board comes with the ability to have chit chat about footie,'* and Angela states, *'men are treated with the camaraderie of the old school tie; women are not treated like that.'* Current research concurs with Norah's comments and finds that women are not assisted as men are, who reap the benefits of workplace boys' clubs (Waldron et al. 2018). When discussing boys' clubs, Norah comments that, *'when a man's performance is lacking, when they have a like-minded rapport with the boss, the boss wants to focus on what they are doing well and ignore their faults.'* Thus, when the CEO is familiar with the employee on a more personal level, the employee is judged at work more favourably than if they were unknown at that level (Murray & Syed 2010). This disadvantages those who are excluded from boys' clubs. The statements above indicate that the status assessments made during boys' club activities carry over into the workplace and the status allocated to the men remains with them in work-based problem-solving group situations. Here, the burden of proof process works against the subliminal gender characteristic since various competences related to a lack of opportunities for social interaction will be remembered from one work experience to the next, accounting for why women are excluded in subsequent opportunities (Murray & Southey 2017).

In analysing the total responses to this question, the researcher notes that the majority of boys' clubs are closed shops and women are not allowed entry. If members of boys' clubs are given priority for promotion with no entry for women, this strongly indicates that boys' clubs are a major prohibiting factor in

women's progression in to the senior roles. As highlighted in section *4.3.1.4* the data clearly indicates that women have the knowledge of how to use *influence* to gain the top positions, yet recent statistics do not show equal numbers of women at the top (WGEA 2018). This may be due to SEWLs exclusion, with a major marginalisation factor being the existence of boys' clubs.

Instances of boys' clubs are prodigious with all twenty-five of the women raising the topic although the terminology had not been raised in the interview questions. It is clearly a major concern for SEWLs. This is in line with extant research which states that women are frequently excluded and also self-exclude themselves from informal meetings and events such as after work drinks and attending male dominated sporting events (Wright 2016). Liff & Ward (2001) suggest that these boys' clubs communicate pieces of information that it would be beneficial for everyone to know. Due to the existence of boys' clubs, where status assessments carry over from the social interactions to workplaces status assessments, SEWLs, through exclusion, have no equal opportunity to discharge the burden of proof effect which is required for them to overcome their lower status diffuse gender characteristic.

### *4.3.3.2 Men are favoured and have the power*

While boys' clubs are a major exclusion factor for women's progression in to the top roles, further responses illustrate that men are favoured in the workplace. Extant research indicates that when the dominance of men is endangered within the workplace, women leaders will receive hostile responses from those men (Joshi et al. 2015). Some of the following examples reinforce this position. Jane states, *'men find it offensive for women of the same rank or above questioning them,'* and Deb says, *'some men find hard working women threatening.'* Louise has witnessed that, *'women outperform but are held back because men feel threatened.'* The lower gender characteristic is affecting status assessments, as illustrated when Gail comments, *'men feel entitled; they ignore women in meetings; they feel they can get away with it: men get listened to, they are taken seriously, they have a level of respect that females do not have.'* Louise discloses that:

> *'in our executive team, men are not expected to produce reports in a timely manner, whereas women are; women have to outperform and outstrip everything to reach the glass ceiling, men just have to have [to be men].'*

Angela says that in her workplace, *'promotions were given to guys who were mates who have no experience or qualifications in the area.'* When explaining why men are favoured over women, Gail's impression is that the reactions of men towards women are not all subliminal actions and that some are deliberate as she states, '*people will not say conscious bias they will find other words for it such as lack of experience of lack of background or some such thing.'* Angela notes that women are not given the same training opportunities as men since, '*it's men who they would put forward first for development activities.'* In Louise's company, *'although it's nearly all women employees, the top echelon is all male.'* Participant responses align with the concept of gender inequality being prevalent in modern workplaces. Gender status beliefs are associated with gender status assessments. Gender is salient in the mixed-sex task groups, and SEWLS attain lower status as they are denied equal opportunity to discharge the burden of proof process and shorten the path of relevance.

The following responses, together with earlier comments related to boys' clubs, illustrate women's perceived lower status. Gail says, *'they have breakfasts, lunches, dinners together; they have meetings and don't tell anyone else what has happened at those meetings.'* Oonah discusses that in her company, *'men in our executive team (are) going off on a fishing trip or playing golf and women team members are not invited or included.* Additional responses relating to this research question relate to masculinity. Decisions appear to be dominated by males while women are being excluded because they are pregnant or because of fear of family needs. SEWLs feel devalued on return from maternity leave. Christie explains that, at the senior level, it can be, *'difficult for women to even participate in some regional areas.'* She also states that *'there has been no economic imperative to date to need diversity.'* Beth states, *'women take career breaks and many organisations do not cater for that, in fact it can be detrimental to their progression.'* Gail remarks, *'the patriarchal systems of management that we currently have are not keeping up with the times.'* Yvonne comments that the,

*'environment around the board table is still very masculine,'* and adds that, *'women having babies works against them.'* Rita comments:

*'males still make most of the decisions; decisions are still made with biases in mind; unconscious bias is very much alive; men cannot see the decisions which benefit women.'*

The responses indicate that SEWLs are excluded because men prefer men, and women are rejected simply because of their gender. Extant research suggests that because women are women, they are perceived as not possessing the required attributes of leadership (Heilman 2012). There is a belief that women do not make good managers and that real leaders have male characteristics (Eagly & Carli 2007). SCT posits that when a belief becomes a status difference, the belief becomes an independent factor which generates material inequalities between people above and beyond their personal control of resources (Ridgeway 2014, p. 4). All SEWLs are aware of existing power structures and feel devalued by status assessments based on gender. SEWLs suggest that men have the power to dominate and to hold on to power. Participants describe how men appear to have greater access to resources and power affording them higher status in power-prestige rankings (Fitzsimmons et al. 2014; Joshi 2014).

While SEWLs, as indicated by their responses to RQ 1.1, are cognisant of which practices to adopt that challenge the subconscious gender bias, they are frequently excluded from certain workplace activities that enable them to express their agency. While SEWLs are fearful of being excluded because of family priorities including feeling devaluated on return from maternity leave, these are not as prevalent as responses relating to management being a male paradigm (Koenig et al. 2011). According to the majority of SEWLs responses, a masculine orientation is the dominant belief system in places of work. The data support the contention for RQ 1 that SEWLs are excluded from activities that will allow them to shorten the path of relevance.

### 4.3.3.3 *Summary of research question 1.3*

Research question 1.3 asked 'Are senior executive women leaders excluded from opportunities that will shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-

prestige rankings?' Two subthemes were developed. In subtheme a) Boys' clubs, it is clear that women are regularly prohibited and also self-exclude themselves from attending informal meetings and events such as after work drinks and sporting events which are attended mostly by men (Wright 2016). Boys' clubs promote and maintain the interests of the men and can lead to selection and promotion of the members (Fisher & Kinsey 2014). The informal and often covert clubs also convey pieces of information that it would be beneficial for everyone to know. Boys' clubs preserve male dominance by exclusion.

In subtheme b) Men are favoured and have the power, SEWLs advise that in general, men have the power to dominate and to hold on to power. Men experience greater access to resources and power resulting in their higher status in power-prestige rankings (Fitzsimmons et al. 2014; Joshi 2014). If this power is endangered, SEWLs will feel threatened by, or receive hostile responses from, their male counterparts in the workplace (Joshi et al. 2015).

### 4.3.4    Summary of responses related to research question one

The analysis of the themed responses in Table 4.5 indicates that *influence* rather than *performance* enables progression at the senior level with a high number (78%) of responses indicating the importance of *influence*. There is conjecture related to whether SEWLs have similar opportunities to men to become a member of and maintain the correct networks. The SEWLs are cognisant of what is expected to reach the top but for some of them, their personal beliefs and values prohibit them from competing for the top positions. Sixty-six per-cent (66%) of responses to RQ 1.2 suggest that various workplace norms and how they are enacted, do not align well with their own values as they strive for the top role; a much smaller number indicated that work/life balance and family issues prevent them from striving for the top (14%).

**Table 4. 5**  *RQ 1 summation of response frequencies*

| RQ1 | RESPONSES | % | RESPONSES | % | RESPS | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.1 SEWLs adopt practises which shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings | *Practices focussing on Influence* | | *Practices focussing on Performance Delivery* | | *Other* | |
| Total responses = 206 | 161 responses | 78% | 26 responses | 13% | 19 resps | 9 % |
| 1.2 SEWLs provide reasons why they decide not to strive for the top positions | *Non-compatible with SEWLs value systems* | | *Family/ Work/Life Balance* | | *Other* | |
| Total responses = 79 | 52 responses | 66% | 11 responses | 14% | 16 resps | 20% |
| 1.3 SEWLs discuss why they are excluded from opportunities that allow them to shorten the path of relevance | *Males dominate the power-prestige order* | | *Organisation fears women will have family needs* | | *Other* | |
| Total responses = 126 | 102 responses | 81% | 7 responses | 6 % | 17 resps | 13% |

The data suggest that if the *game* at the top was different and the *values* were different then more SEWLs would be attracted to top positions.  Furthermore, SEWLs indicate strongly that although they use strategies to counter the gender bias they feel excluded from opportunities to participate in the crucial tasks and activities that allow them to challenge the burden of proof and reach the top.  One of the major exclusion factors is the existence of boys' clubs. The results confirm the predictions of SCT that males dominate the power-prestige order (81%) with women's status assessed as lower because of the diffused gender status characteristic.  For RQ 1 more generally, the burden of proof process is difficult to discount and consequently, the path of relevance between task and performance is longer.

The data support the contention of research question one that SEWLs identify a range of successful strategies that enable them to increase their power-prestige rankings.  SEWLs are aware of existing power structures and feel devalued by

status assessments based on gender. There is a sense that men dominate and influence the power-prestige order, holding on to the power. While SEWLs identify successful strategies to challenge the burden of proof effect and shorten the path of relevance, they are frequently excluded from opportunities that enable them to lessen or diminish the burden of proof process. Some SEWLs decide to opt out of the top positions, mainly because their values are not compatible with those displayed within the organisation. The data more generally indicate that SEWLs have to continuously demonstrate behaviours from one task situation to the next that they are competent for the task at hand.

## 4.4 Research question two

RQ 2: To what extent do status and cultural assessments limit women's agency?

This research question, developed in Chapter 1, relates to Theme 4, *Cultural status beliefs.* All twenty-five SEWLs responded relative to this question. There are two-hundred-and-sixty-four individual responses related to this question. The majority of the responses indicate that women are being limited from advancing their agency due to cultural and status assessments. A minority of responses indicate that women are self-limiting their agency. Five subthemes were developed from Theme 4 which related to RQ 2 a) Organisations favour men over women, b) Women are judged because they have family commitments, c) Men and women are perceived differently at work, d) Women self-limit their agency, and e) Entitlements and working arrangements. These subthemes will now be discussed.

### 4.4.1 Organisations favour men over women

Many SEWL responses indicate that organisations favour men over women. For example, Norah describes how the, *'board dismissed the idea of having a female on the panel and of having a female candidate when recruiting for the CEO post.'* Thus, Norah's organisation, by reinforcing out-dated traditional old-school management cultural and social norms, has ensured the power stays with men. Anna's statement which follows, reinforces stereotypes and cultural beliefs that women are better at home tasks such as tea-making. These societal beliefs carry over into the workplace, even at the most senior level. Anna states that her *'boss*

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*is a man who likes the blokes and the men suck up to him and talk to him and drink with him; women are looked on as the people who make the tea.'* Zena's comment reinforces that this continues to happen in modern boardrooms and relates an incidence of a:

> *'high flying 30-year-old woman invited to attend a presentation at the Board meeting; she was told to take tea, coffee and cake orders and deliver them to the meeting.'*

The subordinate's low status role of the traditional tea-lady, would seem to further lessen the already low status that the female gender has within the workplace, increasing men's power and decreasing the starting base from which women have to climb. Apart from the cultural stereotypical low status tea-making woman, there is also a presumption that women will undertake particular stereotypical roles when in meetings. Teresa states, *'it was presumed that I would be the secretary of committees.'* Traditionally the low paid and low status secretary or administrative assistant would take the minutes which was viewed as a low status role. Again, by assuming that women are the minute takers this is power-play over the women.

Helen, a highly qualified and experienced mining engineer, describes a different type of power-resource control whereby essential resources are denied women thus making women's emergence among the workforce extremely difficult. She describes some workplace conditions by suggesting that *'although technically by law they are supposed to provide washhouse facilities on site, they only provide male wash-house facilities.'*

Many responses indicate that it is a socially and culturally acceptable norm in the modern Australian workplace to overtly treat women as having lower status than men. Veronica states, *'I work with some defence people and the army in particular is really bad in not regarding me highly or taking me seriously because of my gender.'* Donna says, *'those in power do treat women in a slightly more off hand way.'* Queenie, whose CEO has been ill for a long time, comments, *'I run half the entire business and I never get asked to run the exec meetings but the men in support roles do get asked to run them.'* Queenie states that she finds this very frustrating and views this as one method of reinforcing that her organisation

favours men over women. Chairing the executive meetings gives power and, in particular, power over resources. Chairs tend to be afforded high status by the workforce, by virtue of being Chair. Beth comments that, *'there is a natural bias that they think that the men will be better than the girls.'* Another example describing how the organisation diminishes women's status is described by Irene in a situation where:

> *'the director retired, and the next most senior person was a woman, but the workforce informally deferred to the next male in line, not the woman.'*

When management allow the workforce to defer to the next male in line, and do not intervene to ensure that the next person in line, in this case the woman, is given the control, then management is covertly favouring the men and giving the power to the men over the women.

There is a cultural expectation within many organisations that SEWLs will work harder and do more work than men. Jane says, *'in this industry women are expected to do more; they move more slowly through the hierarchy - mainly because people hold onto them.'* This situation appears to apply to women but not to men. Women's low status gender characteristic contributes to them not only working harder but also gaining promotion more slowly because they are hard workers. Reinforcing this point, Angela states, *'men can do less in terms of delivery but if they are liked they will get more leeway than women in similar situations.'* Jane comments, '*women do more than men at work and they go into rescuer mode and do work for the men too and are viewed as not taking the helicopter view when they are fully aware of the big picture.'* By acting the way they do, women are adhering to social and cultural norms by deferring the credit to the men in society. This is similar to Ridgeway's assertion that such beliefs are culturally hegemonic because 1) they are institutionalised in a wide variety of taken-for-granted organisational practices and 2) they represent most closely the experiences and understandings of gender by dominant groups *particularly* those who most powerfully shape our institutions (2009, p. 150) *emphasis added*. Such beliefs similarly act as 'default rules of gender' (Ridgeway & Correll 2004; Ridgeway 2008; Ridgeway 2011). While the male status is enhanced, such

behaviours simultaneously lessen the status of women. Deb's statement reinforces this argument when she says, *'women allow men to pinch their ideas as their own.'*

The belief in men's agentic nature is clear when Christie comments, *'men's weaknesses are gleaned over whereas women are expected to constantly perform higher.* Louise says, *'there is still that stigma in society that a man can do a better job than a woman.'* Shona states, *'men see the senior roles as their domain and they don't give women equal standing.'* Thus, men being favoured over women is a result of workplaces adhering to cultural and social norms. These provide men with the power and resources which are denied to women.

SEWLs suggest that the male gender is dominant within the workplace, with power arrangements favouring males, as illustrated. Extant research indicates that it is not gender, but status beliefs about gender which generate predictable patterns of bias in task-oriented behaviours (Ridgeway 2014) and that many organisations retain a masculine work culture (Kark & Eagly 2010). Power, unlike status, is bestowed on individuals by the organisation. SEWLs appear to be unequal in power-status events.

### 4.4.2   *Women are judged because they have family commitments*

Some responses describe women being subjected to cultural assessments based on cultural beliefs that women's primary role is in the home and raising children (Chalmers & Hill 2007). Women feel that they are judged because they either do have children, or they are of an age where they are thinking about having children. In either case, there is an assumption by management that the women will have to take time off work and that will be inconvenient to the organisation. None of the participants mentioned that there were any similar feelings towards men who were fathers or potential fathers. Edna states that it was known to the board that she previously had a hysterectomy and therefore she would not be having time off to bear children. Edna feels that this was a major factor in her being appointed to her current CEO position. Mary states, *'although I did not think so, the organisation incorrectly perceived that after maternity leave my focus was no longer on my career.'* Jane says, *'senior men are still wary of employing women in the familial age group in case they get pregnant.'* Deb comments that, *'until women get to*

*their 50s they are regarded with a certain amount of suspicion; you will take time off to have families; because kids are sick or whatever.'* Yvonne states, *'women having babies works against them.'* All of the above comments are reinforcing the fact that because of cultural beliefs about women's non-agentic nature, and because of social beliefs that women are best at child raising, workplaces assess women of certain ages as a liability and therefore of lower status during child bearing years.

As a SEWL, Anna had the experience that, *'comments were made to me that some woman had gone and got themselves pregnant; then I was told don't you \*\*\*ing dare get pregnant now,'* and after she did have a baby she noted that:

> *'since I returned from maternity leave I have been left to rot; I haven't been offered any training opportunities; I haven't been offered any sort of advancement. The day I returned from maternity leave I was offered a demotion to "help" with flexibility with my family.'*

Thirty-five-year-old Anna's experience occurred in 2015. Despite all of the current legislation and organisational policy development, SEWLs experience not only cultural assessments based on cultural beliefs but continue to be treated in a discriminatory manner that contradicts policy.

Donna, currently a CEO, recalls a situation that happened to her a few years earlier when she didn't attain a job she was best qualified for because she informed the interview panel that she was pregnant and states, *'I was officially told I was taking too strategic an approach.'* As she reflects on her now very successful position, she is convinced that because of her unique qualifications and experience at the time, she had most probably been the best person for the position. She feels that had she not been upfront and told the selection panel that she was pregnant, that the position would have been offered to her. This is another indication that within the Australian workplace, cultural assessments are limiting women and restricting their access to resources and power.

### 4.4.3    Men and women are perceived differently at work

The differentiation of how assertive men and women are perceived in the workplace clearly indicates imbedded cultural bias at play (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014). SEWLs describe instances of this differentiation. Shona describes, *'a very capable senior woman was seen as aggressive, pig headed and a bit of a bitch; but those actions in a man would have been seen as assertive; backed his own judgement; tough.'* Donna says, *'girls are not expected to be out there, brash and confident, so it's an ingrained cultural thing.'* Entrenched cultural bias is clearly at play here. Veronica states, *'I've been told many times that I am too harsh and need to soften my language but if I was a man I think I would be seen as a go-getter and a doer.'* Oonah comments, *'if men get drunk and behave badly at a function it is sometimes admired, if women do the same it is always viewed very negatively,'* clearly enunciating the idea that there are very different cultural standards applied to men and women.  Jane states, *'men find it offensive for women of the same rank or above questioning them.'* Gail says, *'men would be appreciated for their straight-talking behaviour whereas I have been told I need to be a bit more 'gentle' in my delivery.'* The above examples indicate that deep-rooted biases are affecting cultural assessments in modern Australian workplaces and are limiting women's agency in much the same way that Acker (1990) outlines how managerial jobs in the banking industry favour males while women are partitioned towards support and lower administrative roles.

Zena discusses a SEWL colleague as being described in terms of her emotional state, *'she's too emotional, was the comment - because her voice shakes for the first few moments when she is nervous.'* Zena makes the point that her colleague is not emotional, and her colleague's language is not emotional, but the cultural and social assessment made by the men because her voice is shaking, is that she is emotional. This assessment occurs because of her gender, as being over emotional is seen by society as a female characteristic (Brescoll & Uhlmann 2008). Gender stereotypes of emotion lead to biased evaluations of women leaders (Brescoll 2016). For instance, Brescoll notes that when women are in high status work positions, gender stereotypes of emotion block women's progression ability. Executive women can neither display too much nor too little emotion. Furthermore, the kind of emotion they display will be penalised if they are

perceived as displaying the male characteristic of being dominant, or perceived as cold if they do not display emotions befitting the female nurturing characteristic (Brescoll 2016).

As cited above, SEWLs are being judged because they have family commitments and are aware that women are frequently perceived as aggressive whereas men would be perceived as assertive. This finding is reinforced by studies which indicate that when women express emotions of anger in the workplace, this invokes a lower status assessment compared to their male counterparts (Brescoll & Uhlmann 2008). While SEWLs are able to adopt strategies that challenge the gender bias, cultural biases are much more deep-seated and appear more difficult to alter. A number of responses indicate, however, that there are other factors at play. Taken together, women appear to be 'doing' gender differently to men. That is, gender is a social interactional accomplishment performed at a micro-institutional level; it is a performance of difference that one 'does' rather than 'is' as noted by extant research (West & Zimmerman 1987; Fenstermaker et al. 2002; Ridgeway 2008).

### 4.4.4    Women self-limit their agency

Some women admit to having suffered from a lack of confidence during their career which can be a form of career self-sabotage.  For example, Queenie states that on reflection she stayed too long in a previous position.  She had seen lesser qualified and experienced men being offered promotion and had received feedback that she was performing well.  She was continually waiting to be told that she was next in line for promotion but that never happened. She now says:

> *'I would have told my younger self to have more confidence; don't wait to be tapped like the men are tapped because it doesn't happen in my industry; move quickly, go to bosses and force promotions and stop being overlooked.'*

Queenie is convinced that she was overlooked for promotion for two main reasons. Firstly, because she is a woman, and secondly because she was not confident enough to approach senior management and push for promotion. Historically, in the division of the entertainment industry, which she was a part of

in that position, men receive promotions over women. Men culturally and socially attain higher status than women in that industry and are remunerated at a higher level. Queenie had overlooked these very real issues and expected that she would gain promotion based on her meritorious efforts. While her under-confidence and naivety are factors, it is extremely difficult to overcome ingrained cultural and social biases.

SEWLs discuss how their lack of confidence has limited them. For example, Anna states, *'women lack confidence to put themselves forward for board positions and Chairs.'* Yvonne comments, *'my own mind held me back: we tell ourselves we are not going to get the CEO position, then do not give ourselves a chance to get it.'* Rita, who works in HR for a global company comments, *'we did talent presentations; without fail every female thought they could do a GM role; without doubt every male thought they could do a CEO role.'* Cultural status belief systems are at play here. The cultural norms would defer to men as CEOs and third order beliefs abound about men being better suited to being CEOs than women (Eagly & Carli 2007). The majority of individuals perceive themselves dependent upon how they are viewed by others (Troyer et al. 2001) and individuals usually adhere to the views of those with higher status. Thus, women believe that they are not capable of achieving CEO roles, yet men believe that they can. These belief systems are at play when Shona notes that, *'women say I haven't had the experience in that yet; they like to nail what they are doing; they lack the confidence.'*

The above responses indicate that SEWLs self-limit their agency. This finding concurs with extant research which indicates that women tend to underestimate their leadership performance (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014). While the SEWLs are aware of strategies that challenge the gender bias, perceptions about first, second and third order beliefs (Troyer & Younts 1997; Webster Jr & Whitmeyer 1999) contribute to their lack of confidence and self-limited agency. Ridgeway (2015) suggests that status is based on cultural beliefs at the individual rather than the organisational level. Individuals gain status in groups subconsciously through the status assessment process as described in Chapter 2. The SEWL responses indicate that self-limited agency relates mainly to women *lacking confidence*.

### 4.4.5    *Entitlements and working arrangements*

Among the other responses relating to this research question are descriptions of women who work part-time having to produce full-time outputs, women suffering from the gender pay gap, and women feeling that they should not put themselves forward for promotion unless they feel one hundred percent ready. For example, Norah comments, *'men will be 70% ready for a job and apply but women will be 110% ready.'* Similarly, Irene, when talking about skills and experience in applying for positions, states:

> '*women want to have 100% because they don't want to be a failure whereas men will have 10% and they will just make the rest up.'*

Most individuals are influenced by how they are viewed by others (Troyer et al. 2001). Men and women are being influenced by societal third order beliefs about their respective agentic and non-agentic natures.

Women are frequently the major family carers in the home.  Some seek flexibility of employment so that they can work in caring arrangements around their workload.  Many workplaces do not allow for such flexibilities for SEWLs.  If women are required to be out of the office for home care duties at specific times, some have to resort to working part-time, especially after having children.  The researcher noted instances where women are remunerated for part-time work but do work from home and are expected to achieve full-time outputs and outcomes. Yvonne states that in her workplace, *'here women work 4 days per week and do 5 day's work but are paid for 4 days after maternity leave; presence does not equal productivity.'* Similarly, Angela comments, '*women working 4 days are expected to give full-time output and are given no leeway.'*  Women made these points both from a personal and organisational point of view.  In many instances the SEWLs interviewed are working full-time and are explaining in the interviews how they manage women who are working part-time.

Beliefs and experiences about the workplace are clearly cultural assessments which are limiting the ability of women who return to work after a break, to gain fair compensation for outputs comparable to others. These assessments seem to be based on acceptable norms within those organisations and most probably within

society as a whole. For instance, little flexibility in working arrangements and the role that women play in the family are similar to gender role expectation theory (Eagly 1987) which posits that men place different value on the work role with greater emphasis on pay and promotion while women identify more strongly to family roles, co-worker support, and the quality of the work itself including the work environment and job security (Huang & Gamble 2015). For example, Mary states that in her company, women working 0.8 equivalent full time have the same expected outcomes as those working 1.0 full time. Yet they are paid only for four days per week. In her senior role in managing across two states of Australia, she works in the office 4 days per week. Mary notes that she is expected to compete against other state managers in achieving targets and outcomes. She is afforded no leeway in terms of meeting targets, although she is paid less than her interstate colleagues who attend their workplaces five days per week. Mary has fought a long battle to finally increase her remuneration to a 0.9 level. She points out that the fixed salary components affect all benefits and entitlements. This is an often-forgotten detail.

When women are paid for part-time work for delivering full-time outcomes, they not only receive less immediate remuneration, but they also accrue fewer benefits in terms of leave entitlements and superannuation benefits. This lends support to a more recent study of Australian universities by Bailey et al. (2016), which found that vertical segregation between men and women was substantial with a much lower representation of women in higher level roles (2016, p. 661).

Rita says that in her organisation, the male executives stated that they would expect to be paid full-time rates if they worked part-time but delivered full-time productivity; yet those same male executives recognised that part-time payments were being made for full-time productivity for the women they were managing. On further investigation of the data set as to why women allow this to occur, SEWLs' general comments support the view that women are happy to be able to re-enter the workforce after a maternity leave break and accept these conditions as a means of re-entry.

Most SEWLs interviewed are in situations where they have to negotiate at least part of their remuneration components. Many state that they do not fare as well as

their male counterparts. Gail states, '*if I ask for 5% more salary I might get 2%, but if a guy asks for 5% more, he gets 5% more.*' Norah notes that, '*men are rewarded more than women despite having more deficiencies.*' The gender pay gap has been shown to exist (WGEA 2016; 2017, 2018) and it is commonly accepted that when women toughen up in pay negotiations, they will probably encounter social costs which will negatively impact their overall progression prospects (Thompson 2017). While there are numerous organisations which can display equality of pay scales for men and women, the bonuses and additional negotiated pay and other extras are rarely published. These additional extras are where many of the SEWLs encounter the assessments made with cultural and social biases in mind, which ultimately result in less overall remuneration for SEWLs compared to their male counterparts.

When SEWLs are applying for positions, Beth comments:

> '*men are judged on potential and women are judged on what they have done to date.*'

Beth says that she has observed this on several occasions during her working life. This is reinforcing societal beliefs in men's agentic nature as opposed to women's non-agentic nature. Therefore, women have to prove themselves whereas is it a given and expectation that men will succeed. Similar ideas are at play when Teresa suggests that, '*non-promotion was always about not having done my time, not about my skills.*' The expectation is that Teresa will have to prove herself over and over again throughout an extended period whereas men are assumed to have the skills quickly because of their gender. The notion of 'proving' oneself repeatedly from one work situation to the next supports the burden of proof notion that the initial or original status assessment of an individual's ability to complete a task (either successfully or not) will be stable over time, from one task situation to the next, unless the original assessment is disproven (Berger et al. 1980).

Christie's observation is that, '*men in management teams clone themselves; women value diversity more.*' This is an example of homosocial reproduction (Kanter 1977) swaying men to favour employing duplicates of themselves. Twenty-two countries world-wide have publicly displayed that they value diversity and have instituted quota systems to increase the number of women on

boards (Fox 2014). Australia has resisted the quota system approach. Another difference between the modus operandi of men and women is highlighted by Mary who states:

> '*more men tend to operate at an outcome at any cost point of view and more women tend to invest in people.*'

This generalisation would concur with societal norms about women being nurturers.

As societal beliefs reinforce the notion that women maintain a more nurturing disposition while men a more agentic one, cognitive dissonance occurs when contradictory behaviours are encountered that have profound effects on people. Ridgeway (2009, p. 149) notes that such differences mandate status inequality in which a higher status group is perceived as more proactive and agentically competent than the lower status group which is seen as more reactive and emotionally expressive (Wagner & Berger 1997; Glick & Fiske 1999). These gender effects suggest the SEWLs may have to do gender differently if they are to maintain their social status within a group. This effect is displayed by Jane who reflects on experiences between senior man and women leaders: '*where men have difficulty dealing with senior women.*' Connie encountered this dissonance too when her partner failed to understand that as an executive who wishes to climb the corporate ladder she is required to network and socialise after work. While this is an accepted part of life for promotion-hungry men, it is a relatively new societal phenomenon for similar women, where such actions are not as yet a cultural norm. Connie suggests for instance that:

> '*my partner found it difficult to understand my after-hours attendance; for him I was having this fantastic time when really it was work.*'

Connie described to the researcher that it took her many hours of conversations with her partner to convince him that her regular attendance at such events was crucial if she wanted to maintain her high-ranking status position in the company.

### 4.4.6　Summary of research question 2

Research question 2 asked 'To what extent do status and cultural assessments limit women's agency?' Five subthemes emerged from the data set including a) Organisations favour men over women, where numerous examples are given by the SEWLs indicating that the male gender is dominant within their organisations with power arrangements favouring men. Their workplaces generally retain a masculine work culture (Kark & Eagly 2010) giving men the edge in power-status events.

b) Women are judged because they have family commitments, and many responses describe women being subjected to cultural assessments based on cultural beliefs that women's primary role is in the home and raising children (Chalmers & Hill 2007). While women still have the highest share of child and home care duties (Thomas et al. 2018), the SEWLs are being judged because they either do have children, or they are of an age where they are thinking about having children. Their workplaces assume that the women will have to take time off work and that will be inconvenient to the organisation.

c) Men and women are perceived differently at work and the SEWLs offer examples of how assertive men and women are perceived differently in the workplace (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014). The women give examples of being judged based on gender stereotypes of emotion which lead to biased evaluations of the women (Brescoll 2016). Women seem to be 'doing' gender in a different way to men. Gender is a social interactional achievement which is performed at a micro-institutional level. It is a performance of difference that is 'done' rather than just 'is' (West & Zimmerman 1987; Fenstermaker et al. 2002; Ridgeway 2008).

d) Women self-limit their agency in a number of ways. They can lack confidence and tend to underestimate their leadership abilities (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014). While the SEWLs are aware of approaches they can utilise to confront gender bias, their perceptions about first, second and third order beliefs (Troyer & Younts 1997; Webster Jr & Whitmeyer 1999) contribute to their lack of confidence and self-limited agency.

e) Entitlements and working arrangements include SEWLs who work part-time having to produce full-time outputs, women not achieving flexible working conditions, and women not seeking promotion unless they feel one hundred percent ready. Women are also subjected to the gender pay gap, yet if they toughen up when negotiating salary, they are likely to encounter social costs which will damage their overall likelihood of progression (Thompson 2017).

### 4.4.7 *Summary of responses related to research question two*

An analysis of the data set to research question 2 found that there is a highly pervasive negative effect of status and cultural assessments on women's agency. The status effect relates to the extent to which individuals can progress to a senior role without being influenced by cultural assessments. The contention is that cultural assessments are made about women because of their gender (Ridgeway 2008; Ridgeway 2008) which limits SEWLs' agency in progressing into CEO and Board Chair roles.

**Table 4. 6** *RQ 2 summation of response frequencies*

| Cultural assessments limit SEWLs' agency | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| *Organisations favour men* | 92 | 35% |
| *Entitlements and working arrangements* | 67 | 25% |
| *Women self-limit their agency* | 55 | 21% |
| *Men and women are perceived differently at work* | 30 | 11% |
| *Women are judged because they have family commitments* | 20 | 8% |

The percentage of responses is indicated in Table 4.6, supporting the idea that cultural assessments do limit SEWLs' agency. The most often reported concern relates to organisations favouring men over women (35%). The results are consistent with Ridgeway's (2011) status construction theory as outlined in Chapter 2. The data confirm that SEWLs are bound by cultural and societal norms which ensure that cultural assessments placed upon them rank them lower in status than men. The deep-seated cultural biases and beliefs held by society

reinforce that women are not suitable for management. Cultural assessments determine the power and therefore the resources within organisations that favour the prerogative of men.

The data suggest that women have to prove themselves over and over again to be worthy of gaining this power before power is shared, providing of course that SEWLs are able to challenge the burden of proof process that they are suitable for the task at hand e.g., increasing their social interaction after work when this is not normally something women would be perceived as doing. Once power is conferred, SEWLs have to continue to prove themselves worthy of the status gained by persistently overcoming ingrained societal and workplace prejudices. As previously discussed and noted in Table 4.6, women also self-limit their agency (21%) through lack of confidence and adhering to cultural norms and behavioural norms expected of them. Further, SEWLs state that they are perceived differently to men in the workplace (11%) and are judged because they have family commitments (8%).

The SEWL statements above reinforce beliefs about the control of men over women (Ridgeway 2014). Ridgeway's (2014) call for more research and a greater understanding of how cultural status beliefs relate to resources and power. Here, the data convincingly supports the research question that cultural assessments limit SEWLs' agency. SEWLs are cognisant of existing power structures and feel devalued by status assessments of performance based on gender. They are cognisant of having to do gender in certain ways in order to be accepted and that this behaviour reinforces cultural norms related to male hegemony and micro-institutional expectations about how work is (re)produced. Similarly, they feel confined to lower status groups which are seen as more reactive and emotionally expressive. This conflicts with their perceptions and their ability to complete tasks successfully. Moreover, lower pay and less flexibility within the structure of work reinforces gender inequality regimes (Acker 2006; Bailey et al. 2016) at the micro-institutional level that a SEWL 'does' gender in a certain way in order to be accepted by their peers (West & Zimmerman 1987; Ridgeway 2008). Senior women appear to be frustrated by not being able to diminish or challenge the burden of proof process as there is a sense that men dominate and influence the

power-prestige order and the structure of work in ways that see them holding on to the power.

## 4.5    Research question three

This research question is in two parts. The first part explores how SEWLs are supported by personal support mechanisms. The second part explores how SEWLs are supported by external and organisational support mechanisms.

### 4.5.1    *Research Question 3.1*

RQ 3.1: To what extent are senior executive women leaders supported by personal support mechanisms such as networks, mentors and sponsors?

This research question developed in Chapter 1, relates to Theme 5, *Support mechanisms*. The proposition is that internal influences alter the experience of SEWLs in their careers.   These influences emanate from personal supportive arrangements such as developing networks, mentors and sponsors. The basis of the research question is that the successful standing of SEWLs to perform their task is more likely to occur because of personal support structures rather than demonstrated ability alone. All of the twenty-five SEWLs interviewed responded relative to this question. Two subthemes were developed from Theme 5 which related to RQ 3.1: a) Align with the right people and use networks; and b) Sponsors, coaches, mentors and supportive partners. These subthemes will now be discussed.

#### 4.5.1.1    *Align with the right people and use networks*

SEWLs comment on the importance of aligning themselves with the right people and the importance of developing and using networks. For example, Veronica states, *'I don't think it's what you know, I think it's who you know.'* Having attained SEWL level, most women are fully equipped with the skills and experience required of them. Veronica is indicating that the skills and experience alone are not enough and that women will not only benefit from affiliating with the right people but must do so in order to progress. Reinforcing this notion, Louise suggests that SEWLs should, *'work hard and make friends with the right*

*people,'* and Ursula advises to, *'build good relationships with senior leaders inside and outside the company to assist progression.'* These ideas are supported by Pat who states, *'networking is important for exposure; unless people know who you are you will not be considered.'* This supports the idea that SEWLs feel that unless one networks with the correct people one has little chance of progressing. Thus, in exploring the role of support networks, it would seem that some SEWLs find them not only helpful, but essential for progression. This finding is more extreme than the researcher expected. Demonstrated support for networking is explained by Connie who comments that if, *'you can build relationships and get in with the in-crowd, your chances of promotion are much better,'….* and that…., *'relationship-building and networking is definitely important.'* Oonah notes that *'lots of people are doing a good job but often what gets you in is your reputation and your networks'.* These comments reinforce the results of RQ 1.1 regarding the importance of influencing and affiliating as opposed to the traditional management focus on competence and performance.

Many SEWLs comment that especially with their home commitments, they experience difficulty finding the time to attend networking events. However, most see that networking is a necessity if they wish to progress. They recognise that in informal networking situations, friendships are forged, information is exchanged, and decisions are made that are unknown inside the workplace. They further acknowledge that men are better at networking than women. Shona suggests that:

> *'women notoriously do not spend enough time networking; men are always out there finding out who knows what and what has happened….in this city it's the same few women who are on boards; they network well.'*

Thus, these few women grasp the immense benefits of networking and use it to their advantage, reaping the rewards. Ursula states, *'I belong to a lot of networking groups and about 80% are men and 20% women.'* Ursula expressed her disappointment to the researcher that few women are prepared to make time to network as she definitely sees the benefits. She has a family yet finds it vitally important to make time to network. Similarly, Veronica realises the importance of attendance when she states that she makes it, *'an absolute priority to network as*

*much as possible,'* and adds, *'I have a young family now so I am not as willing to attend informal get-togethers, but I try my best to go.'*

Aligning oneself with the right people and developing networks are actions that SEWLs determine are important for progression to the top jobs. This reaffirms the findings for research question one, where being politically savvy and using networks are identified as assertive behaviours which assist in increasing women's power-prestige rankings. The responses uphold the contention that SEWLs are supported by personal support mechanisms. This is agreed by scholars who have found that formal workplace mentoring is important for women's progression into higher managerial roles (Haggard et al. 2011; Searby et al. 2015) and women's progress can be slow because of a lack of work-based networks (Kark & Eagly 2010). For instance, Chen et al. (2014) suggest that employee attitudes and work outcomes can be enhanced by mentoring relationships that are assisted by formal programs consistent with prior studies (Bozionelos & Wang 2006). These scholars found that formal mentoring in Chinese organisations was related positively to protégés affective commitment levels and associated negatively with turnover intentions (2014, p. 1124).

SEWLs are aware of existing power structures and there is an understanding that using personal networks and aligning with the right people is critical in SEWLs' progression. Data items related to this theme indicate that although many SEWLs understand the pressures to align with the right people and networks, some have not networked enough, nor have they invested in mentoring relationships. This reality is partly related to having little interest in spending time outside of working hours building networks especially if they have family commitments.

### 4.5.1.2    *Sponsors, coaches, mentors and supportive partners*

Other comments in answering this research question include advising women to obtain sponsors, hire coaches and have supportive partners. For example, Norah states, *'women should get the sponsors; ask for coffees with men.'* Beth's advice is to, *'get a sponsor who can push you in the right direction and give you good advice.'* Zena continues *'sponsoring makes a difference - as opposed to mentoring.'* As discussed in Chapter 2, sponsors are much more than mentors. Sponsors are advocates of your abilities at meetings of more senior managers or

board members.  Sponsors actively promote the strengths, experiences and abilities of those they sponsor.

A number of the SEWLs indicated that they employ a personal business coach, for example, Rita states, *'I have a coach and she is invaluable.'* Queenie advises SEWLs to, *'get a business coach and get a mentor.'*

Ursula suggests that, *'I could never have achieved [what I have] without my supportive husband,'* and continues saying that, *'you either have to be a single woman or a woman with a supportive husband to survive the trip to the top.'* Zena comments that a SEWL's *'choice of partner is very important - they need to be supportive of you in a senior role,'* and Jane comments, *'women don't go to the pub every night but they need support networks too.'* Taken together, SEWLs benefit from personal support through networks and sponsors, and there is much to be gained by having a supportive partner or coach or alternative personal support network.

Zena makes an interesting comment about 'artificial' internal company sponsorship programs not being as authentic and not delivering the beneficial outcomes that a true sponsor would deliver.  She comments:

> *'my company has set up a sponsoring program that I am part of; having an artificial connection does not necessarily work; having a label sponsor is not the same as truly having a sponsor..........real sponsorship comes when there are opportunities to really connect such as golf and drinks and footie; not through artificial sponsorship programs.'*

Zena also indicates that true sponsors are attracted to your abilities and genuinely sponsor you within top management circles.  If there is a mismatch of personalities within a formal corporate sponsor program, an 'artificial' corporately allocated sponsor can potentially do more harm than good. Zena's experience is in contradiction of extant research (Chen et al. 2014) which suggests that mentoring connections which result in positive outcomes for women can be built by using formal organisational programs. Australian research posits that embedding formal mentoring systems within HR policies of organisations positively prepares leaders

for future roles (Murray & Syed 2010). Overall SEWLs saw many benefits for women in utilising genuine support through sponsorship, mentors, partners and coaches. This confirms extant research (Weinberg & Lankau 2011, p. 1548) regarding the level of commitment of mentors. They found that mentors with higher levels of commitment to the organization are more likely to place greater effort in serving as role models to their protégés than mentors with lower levels of organizational commitment.

### 4.5.1.3 *Summary of research question 3.1*

Research question 3.1 asked 'To what extent are senior executive women leaders supported by personal support mechanisms such as networks, mentors and sponsors?' Two subthemes were developed. In subtheme a) Aligning with the right people and using networks, it is evident that women will not only benefit from affiliating with the right people but most probably should do so to gain promotion. Many women experience difficulty finding the time to attend networking events. However, most see that networking is a necessity if they wish to progress. Formal workplace mentoring is important for women's progression in management (Haggard et al. 2011; Searby et al. 2015) and women's advancement can be slow because of a lack of workplace networks (Kark & Eagly 2010).

In subtheme b) sponsors, coaches, mentors and supportive partners, the SEWLs advise women to find sponsors, hire coaches and have supportive partners as these support systems are crucial in assisting women in their top management roles. There is a warning about sponsors which are corporately allocated potentially being harmful to progression if there is a mismatch in the person allocation. However, it is acknowledged that formal company mentoring programs can be beneficial to women (Chen et al. 2014).

### 4.5.2 *Research question 3.2*

RQ 3.2: To what extent are senior executive women leaders supported by legislative and organisational support mechanisms?

This research question developed in Chapter 1, relates to Theme 5, *Support mechanisms*. The proposition is that external influences alter the experience of SEWLs in their careers. These influences emanate from legislation and organisational policies which benefit SEWLs. The basis of the research question is that the successful standing of SEWLs to perform their task is more likely to occur because of external support structures rather than demonstrated ability alone. All of the twenty-five SEWLs interviewed responded relative to this question. Two subthemes were developed from Theme 5 which related to RQ 3.2: a) Presence of organisational and legislative support mechanisms, and b) Shortfalls in organisational and legislative support mechanisms. These subthemes will now be discussed.

### 4.5.2.1    *Presence of organisational and legislative support mechanisms*

Three women (Queenie, Pat and Beth) gave responses indicating that they had benefitted from organisational or legislative support mechanisms. Queenie notes that:

> *'the Champions of Change program CEOs are making a difference; I was headhunted to be on a shortlist because the original shortlist was all men and the CEO was one of the Champions of Change...you have got to get to the men; behind closed doors women's programs are OK for support but for real change you have to get to the men.'*

This is evidence of the benefits that an Australian nation-wide Champions of Change program can achieve when it is created at the senior management level. The 'Behind Closed Doors' program referred to in the quote is a privately run and expensive program where SEWLs across various industries and organisations meet to confidentially share and discuss workplace issues. Queenie suggests that the benefits of the program allow women to share their thoughts and feelings as well as their workplace predicaments.

Pat comments, *'we started our flexible working schemes and others because of the 2012 ASX requirements around Women in Leadership.'* Pat is extremely proud of the flexible work practices that have been introduced by her company. She finds

that they work well and that other companies could benefit from allowing similar flexible working conditions. Shona, however commented that when her company introduced flexible working conditions, the flexible working time was abused, and the company had to revert to more rigid working conditions.

Beth clearly sees the benefits of companies which offer programs which ensure that women are rotated through a variety of roles in companies. She states, *'women are in support roles through their choice; unless companies have a policy of shuffling women into a line they will not progress.'* Research indicates that women in management are frequently placed in support rather than profit and loss roles (French & Strachan 2007) thereby reducing women's chances of obtaining CEO type roles because of lack of profit and loss experience. Zena's statement supports this: *'women suffer from stereotyping and are put in support rather than profit and loss roles.'* The issue that Beth refers to is that some companies have clear policies which ensure that such rotation and breadth of experience occurs, and these policies are positive developments.

It is unclear why so few women gave positive responses in this category. One reason could be that SEWLs may be accepting that legislative and organisational support mechanisms are a given and feel less inclined to note such mechanisms. Another could be that at the senior executive level, executives frequently work very long hours, outside of any union negotiated hours of work, and are unable to benefit from assistance such as organisational child-care facilities. While many legislated support mechanisms exist e.g., 18 weeks legislated maternity leave, further support is provided through the Australian Government's *Workplace Gender Equality Act, 2012*, which aims to strengthen the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) capacity to monitor organisational improvements in gender equality. Legislation has limited compliance, however, at the organisational level (Murray & Southey 2017) which is perhaps evident in participant responses. There is also a concerted effort to increase Government legislated programs related to increasing workplace equity. Australian employers are required for instance to report against a number of gender equality indicators including workforce gender composition, equal remuneration, practices relating to flexible working arrangements, consultation of gender equality and other matters such as sex-based harassment and discrimination (WGEA 2018) with non-

compliant organisations named in Parliament. While this may be the case, and consistent with fewer participants responding to this question, many organisations pay lip service to gender equality programs. Many organisations are not advanced in implementing such programs despite appearing to espouse such values on company websites. The values they espouse do not match their realised practices (Cording et al. 2014).

The very low but positive response from SEWLs could be in part due to the open questions framed by the researcher so as not to objectify the data related to RQ 3.2. It is possible that the researcher did not frame the questions well enough to elicit answers in response to this research question. The questions were deliberately open to allow the women to explore numerous gendered workplace experiences that were important to them (Marshall & Rossman 2006). However, the responses do generally support the question that SEWLs are supported by organisational support mechanisms while much less support was noted by the participants related to Government legislated programs institutionalised at the organisation level. On the whole, participants responding to this question felt that internal and external programs do assist and influence the power-prestige order and do challenge gender stereotypes.

### 4.5.2.2 Shortfalls in organisational and legislative support mechanisms

When looking for further evidence of legislative and organisational support, little was found, and the researcher identified that twenty of the women contend that some legislative and organisational policies and procedures are not implemented at the top level within their organisation. For example, Mary comments, *'policies do not reflect the realities in the organisation.'* A number of women discussed the need to increase their workplace equality results but that organisations often turn a blind eye in conforming to legislated requirements, highlighted by poor behaviours within the top management team.

Participant data has implications regarding the gender pay gap being a reality in modern workplaces suggesting that legislation is one thing, reality another. For instance, Gail states that in her company, *'for the same job, a man's salary was twice the woman's.'* Anna similarly notes that, *'my company pays one week paternity leave but does not pay maternity leave; their justification is that the*

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*government provides maternity; the reality is that government pay for minimum wage and I am far from minimum wage.'* Anna is benefitting from the legislated government policy of providing 18 weeks maternity pay at the rate of the minimum basic wage.  This is approximately fourteen per-cent (14%) of what her normal weekly earnings would be. Her company is not contributing to or topping up the amount the government has allocated. On the other hand, her male colleagues receive one week's full pay at their normal earnings rate (100%) from the company.

Some organisational EEO and workplace bullying policies are poorly implemented as noted by Connie: *'decisions about progression were made very informally despite procedures being in place which were never followed,'* …she noted that …. *'we had training on workplace bullying every three months but it did not stop it happening; people were bullied regularly.'* Louise comments, *'the policy says EEO but we have been told to give preference to people who come through our [specific organisation].'*  Queenie suggests that, *'we know people are bullies or others not performing but despite having the policies nothing is done about it.'* Helen states that, *'policies are ignored even regarding safety and workplace bullying.'*

Norah infers that many workplace policies are written down and discussed but not 'lived' within the workplace suggesting that what is espoused is not what is truly believed. She says, *'CEOs talk about someone's poor performance to others but do not tackle it with the individual.'*  Norah states, *'despite it coming from the top, flexible work practices and work life balance are conceptual only.'*

SEWLs note that despite organisational policies that promote diversity and equity, women are discriminated against within the workplace.  Louise states that it is company policy where she works that if, *'on interview panel, two with equal marks, choose the man because the woman may get pregnant.'* Yvonne states, *'we have policies but they do not translate into action and reality, there are lots of biases in the workplace affecting women and other minorities.'* Teresa recalled how she was part of a special fast track executive program which adhered to a, *'diversity policy to accelerate women but half way through it was made clear the*

*women would not be accelerated.'* As one of the women on this program, Teresa was given no explanation as to why the program had been axed.

This does not imply that organisations do not embrace equal opportunity and other organisational and legislative policies. Rather, the implication is that some policies and procedures are not complied with in some organisations at the most senior level. Given the context of SEWLs, this is a surprising finding in this thesis. A push for results at all costs, irrespective of adhering to policies, was noted on several occasions. Some policies that are loosely complied with include *Equal Employment Opportunity*, *Workplace Health and Safety,* and *Bullying.* Thus, while positive comments support the idea that SEWLs are supported by legislative and organisational support mechanisms, other comments note a disconnection between compliance and actual workplace policies. Here, informal status evaluations hold sway including for example the unwritten working policy for jobs of preferring male over equally qualified female candidates. The findings of a recent study (Murray & Southey 2017) indicate that

> as organisations move to legitimise senior women leaders through institutionalised workplace structures of equal status, the cognitive link between the subliminal status assessment of gender and task performance is weaker and inconsequential. This means the path of relevance is shorter and the link between task and performance stronger (Murray & Southey 2017, p. 18).

Accordingly, SEWLs benefit if institutions are able to institutionalise legislated practices of equality because these challenge traditional cultural norms related to the subliminal gender characteristic under question. Unfortunately, there is not significant evidence in the data set related to this research nor consistent instances where the path of relevance is shortened as a result of institutionalised organisational policies and mandated Government legislation. In many instances, the data suggest that while organisational policies related to equality exist; they are clearly not being adhered to. There is a distinct lack of further evidence of organisational support at the SEWL level. The organisations do seem to have the policies in place, however they are not 'lived' at the top levels in the organisations.

### 4.5.2.3    Summary of research question 3.2

Research question 3.2 asked 'To what extent are senior executive women leaders supported by legislative and organisational support mechanisms?' Two subthemes were developed. In subtheme a) Organisational and legislative support mechanisms, the SEWLs' responses identify that they are supported by organisational support mechanisms. Less support is stated by the participants in relation to Government legislated programs institutionalised at the organisation level than to organisational programs. Some companies have not progressed as much as others in implementing such programs regardless of appearing to espouse the 'right' values on company websites (Cording et al. 2014). Scholars identify large gaps between espoused values and realised practices (Cording et al. 2014, p.50).

In subtheme b) Shortfalls in organisational and legislative support mechanisms, very little evidence of organisational and legislative support is forthcoming.  In contrast to finding such evidence, policies relating to *Equal Employment Opportunity*, *Workplace Health and Safety,* and *Bullying* would seem to be loosely complied with at the SEWL level. There appears to be a disconnect between workplace policies and compliance of those policies at the top of some organisations.

### 4.5.3    Summary of responses related to research question three

The contention of this question is that the successful standing of SEWLs to perform their task is likely to occur within the face of personal, internal and external support structures. The analysis of the themed responses supports the contention that personal support mechanisms assist SEWLs in improving their power-prestige ranking. As indicated in Table 4.7, thirty-nine per-cent of responses discuss the importance of aligning with the right people (39%) and thirty-four per-cent indicated that developing networks for support is important (34%). Using personal networks and aligning oneself with the right people influences the power-prestige order and possibly shortens the path of relevance between task and performance; networking increases the likelihood that women can be perceived as equal and as influential as men.

**Table 4. 7**  *RQ 3 summation of response frequencies*

| RQ3 | RESPONSES | % | RESPONSES | % | RESPS | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3.1 Are SEWLs supported by personal networks and mentors? | *Align with the right people* | | *Develop networks* | | *Other* | |
| **Total responses = 89** | 35 | 39% | 30 | 34% | 24 | 27% |
| 3.2 Are SEWLs supported by legislative and organisational support mechanisms? | *Organisation does not comply with policies at the top level* | | *Organisational/legislative support mechanisms assist* | | | |
| **Total responses = 56** | 47 | 89% | 6 | 11% | | |

While many SEWLs suggest that it is important to associate with the right people, others suggest that they do not network enough. They have little interest in spending time outside of working hours undertaking networking activities.

Table 4.7 indicates that there is only minor evidence of support for RQ 3.2. Eleven percent of SEWLs talked positively about organisational support (11%). Eighty-nine percent, in forty-seven different responses, gave instances of the organisation not complying with policies at the top level (89%). Therefore, there is limited evidence that legislative and organisational policies assist in supporting SEWLs. This is surprising given much recent research (Ahl & Nelson 2015; Sanchez-Apellaniz & Triguero-Sánchez 2016) and as noted by the Equal Opportunity in the Workplace Agency (WGEA 2017) that internal and external programs promote equal opportunity within the workplace for both women and men by helping to create gender-neutral experiences that challenge gender stereotypes. Further extant research posits that when organisational policies are in place to ensure that women are given opportunities to attain leadership positions, they are assessed as being equal to male leaders (Lucas 2003). The data suggest that at the top echelon, organisations sometimes pay lip service to some legislative and organisational policies.

## 4.6  Summary of category data frequency by research question

The categories which have the highest frequency of responses (over twenty responses in any category) are shown below by research question in Tables 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10. While it is recognised that counting the code frequencies does not explain what the data means, it does assist in describing the patterning in the data in an unambiguous way as well as in data summation. The frequencies support the issues raised by the SEWLs. An issue raised only once may be a very important issue.  However, an issue raised seventy-four times, and an issue raised by all of the twenty-five SEWLs, provides an indication of its importance.

Each of the Tables 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10 below contain summaries by the frequency of responses, for those categories where there were more than twenty responses identified.

**Table 4. 8** *Research question one - summary of data*

| No of responses | Category |
|---|---|
| 74 | Be politically savvy; use networks |
| 47 | Boys' Clubs |
| 43 | Be emotionally healthy; resilient; authentic |
| 24 | Deliver and be solutions focused |
| 22 | Self-promote; prepare; use male language |
| 22 | Not willing to play the game/ not worth the time |
| 20 | Men prefer to choose men |

**Table 4. 9** *Research question two - summary of data*

| No of responses | Category |
|---|---|
| 92 | The organisation favours men over women |
| 67 | Entitlements and working conditions |
| 55 | Women self-limit their agency |
| 30 | Men and women are perceived differently at work |
| 20 | Women are judged because they have family commitments |

**Table 4. 10** *Research question three - summary of data*

| No of responses | Category |
|---|---|
| 47 | Non-application (non-compliance) of policies |
| 35 | Align yourself with the right people |
| 30 | Develop networks |

In summary, in referring to Tables 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10, the highest response categories are ninety-two (92) responses asserting that *organisations favour men over women*; followed by seventy-four (74) responses asserting that women should *be politically savvy and use networks* in order to progress within the organisation; sixty-seven (67) responses refer to women's *entitlements and working conditions* being less favourable than those of men; fifty-five (55) comments refer to *women self-limiting their agency*; forty-seven (47) responses alluded to the existence of *boys' clubs*, and forty-seven (47) responses asserted that organisations did *not comply with their own policies*. There was a high response rate to all research questions. Also, SEWLs are less concerned about performance delivery than finding ways to influence and diminish the burden of proof process that they are capable for the job at hand in comparison to their male

counterparts. The foregoing discussion points to the difficulties SEWLs experience in places of work.

## 4.7 Feedback group comments on the responses and findings

Overall, the feedback group participants agree with the results presented. The feedback group give further examples, many of which are already in the primary interviews. There are a small percentage of disagreements, most of which are of the type that a certain member of the feedback group has not personally experienced a situation described; or that the organisation that the feedback person works for does not exhibit a particular trait described by others. Overall there is positive support that the responses and the findings identified are valid. The results of all three research questions, and sub-questions therein, are positively validated by the feedback group.

The feedback group participants received précises of the responses in categories and were invited to respond relative to those categories, as well as to respond with any other responses, disagreements or overall comments they wished to make. The categories that they received related to each research question and are identified below by research question. Examples of the responses are presented.

### *4.7.1 Research question 1.1*

Category: Women identify ways to reach the top

The feedback group agree with the summation of responses in this category. Veronica adds that*, 'you have to put up with feeling uncomfortable in a male-dominated environment. This comes down to not only how you look and what you wear (which needs to be mostly conservative), but to your ability to interrupt your counterparts to be heard. You can't just sit there and expect to be given a turn to speak, you have to barge in.'* This reinforces findings in 4.3.1.2 and 4.3.2.1 of women striving to overcome gender status bias. Discourses are important (Bevan & Learmonth 2013; Bao et al. 2014) as is the way women dress and present themselves (Mavin et al. 2016).

Gail adds to the responses by stating:

> '*Weaknesses in women are seen as warranting total dismissal, whereas weaknesses in men are dealt with much more gently. Therefore, women have to be far more vigilant, as they are going to be judged much more harshly than a man in the same position. And don't show weakness. One way to get close to the top is to show how helpful, loyal and supportive you can be to the boss. But for women who have for generations been men's 'helpmeet', it is behaviour that is taken for granted from a woman rather than reciprocated from the boss as it would be from a man. Moving companies helps – it is often easier to get that jump in pay and status by moving companies instead of waiting for an opening when management have found sexist reasons to dismiss you.'*

These comments reinforce the overall findings that women are surrounded by inequality regimes (Acker 2006). They are enmeshed within male dominated management in companies (Eagly & Carli 2007) and are judged more harshly, and struggle to have equal opportunities to overcome the burden of proof effect. The idea of moving companies is suggested as one way to speed up the process of increasing SEWLs power-prestige order.

### 4.7.2    Research question 1.2

Category: Reasons why women decide not to stay at the top

The feedback group agrees with the summation of responses they received in relation to this research question. Helen adds that, *'men put the time in to play the game, why should women who want to be in the same place not do the same. The point is that the women need to do markedly more to 'play the game' to get to the same place.'* This point has been alluded to in section 4.3.1.1 as an essential for women who are striving for the top to be cognisant of. Failure to take this on-board, risks being considered by others as not having the ability to be true ideal workers (Reid 2015).

Angela responds by stating:

> *'It's very difficult to be 'one of the boys' and manage a family life. Those that play the game seem to win but at what cost? I suspect most women have a very different value set to most men. It would be interesting to cut the data, if possible, between the attitudes of women with husbands bringing in money and those that do not.'*

Angela is probably alluding to the fact that she is the primary earner in her household. A number of the SEWLs are. She makes an interesting suggestion about the possibility of analysing the data using two groups – those SEWLs who are the primary or sole earners in their high-income household, and those who are equal or secondary earners in their high-income household. Would there be any differences in attitudes, values and behaviours of those two groups of women? The researcher could not find any extant studies into high income households which have taken this approach. Unfortunately, the researcher did not gather this data on all SEWLs.

### 4.7.3    Research question 1.3

Category: How women are excluded from opportunities to progress to the top

Most of the feedback group agree with the summation they received of responses in this category. Norah disagrees with one area of response. She comments, *'I don't necessarily agree with the comment about suspicion under 50. Men can take more air time over women if the women are not assertive and confident to hold their own.'* While a number of women mentioned the suspicions held in some workplaces towards women of child bearing age, Norah has not encountered this. She does endorse however that women will benefit from finding ways to be more confident and assertive to overcome gender stereotypes (Eagly 2013) or the male dominated management world will take advantage of this perceived weakness.

In response to the findings that some women feel that they are talked over, Angela advises that, '*women who are talked over need to learn the skills to not be talked over. Sometime this means you need to be courageous but always need to know what you are talking about. Prepare/don't bluff.'* Angela is indicating that women can undertake personal development to enhance their skills in dealing

with people who try to talk over them thus increasing the opportunity to overcome the burden of proof effect. Personal development is also something which Jane feels will be beneficial if women feel that they are under-confident, as she states, *'Agree with the confidence issue. If you think it is too tough you are not ready yet and should develop a strategy of how to become ready and get there.'* This reinforces the need for women to be tough at the top. There is evidence that personal development activities are beneficial yet women are often deterred from attending (Chuang 2015). Professional development activities can lessen status inequality effects by increasing the abilities of individuals through blurring status assessments (Cohen & Lotan 1995; Troyer et al. 2001; Ridgeway & Correll 2006; Walker et al. 2014).

Category: Boys' clubs

All of the women in the feedback group agree that boys' clubs exist and are powerful. Jane comments, *'Very powerful.'* On the issue of boys' clubs, Norah comments, *'Yes, boys' clubs exist. The guys enjoy their own banter. Men will go to lunch together. A man will rarely take a female colleague out for a work-related lunch.'* These statements reinforce the responses and findings that women are excluded from equal opportunities to enhance their opportunities of workplace promotion through gaining membership of these male domains (Fisher & Kinsey 2014).

### 4.7.4    Research question 2

Category: Cultural assessments can limit women

Most of the feedback group agreed with the summation they received of responses in this category. Norah disagrees with some of the responses, particularly that management is generally seen as a male paradigm. Helen states that:

> *'This can be seen in organisations. Unless a female is aware of the nuances in the organisation and who are the decision makers makes moving forward hard. Most of the decision makers are middle aged to older men. Most of these men grew up in a time when women were expected to give up work when they got married. Women need to work longer and think more into strategy*

*to satisfy the progression requirements to remove the gender considerations. Men build their networks starting in school with sports that are predominantly male. Females do not do this.'*

Helen's response is reinforcing those found in the general interview responses found in section 4.3.1.1 in relation to being politically savvy, finding out who the influential people are and affiliating with them. Her response advises women to build more networks. This comment agrees with the SEWL responses in sections 4.3.1.1 and 4.5.1.2.

Category: Ways that women limit themselves

All of the feedback group agree with the summations of responses in this category. Commenting on the responses which indicate that women feel that they and others had experienced a lack of confidence which self-limited their agency, Gail states:

> *'I don't believe it is lack of confidence. It's just a man's world and women are judging themselves with different criteria than they would if we had full equality. Just because you're not a man, that doesn't mean you are less worthy or less capable. The criteria need to change to include women's approaches not just men's. Women take their work seriously and can often see the complexity of their roles and the work required to ensure success clearer than men do. As a woman, building those 'perceptions and relationships and networks' is different to how men build them with men, and different to how women build them with women. Women building them with men are just many decades behind, and most men don't really care enough to figure out how to build those relationships with women. The onus should be on men here as much as it is on women but men don't need to try, they can just continue, with no downside.'*

These comments reinforce the paradigm that management continues to be a male construct, with cultural and social norms as well as management norms, determining that women are facing inequalities of opportunity (Ridgeway 2011;

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Eagly 2013). Until men, as well as women, clearly identify these inequalities and display willingness and imperatives to change, then women will continue to face discrimination in the workplace.

### 4.7.5    Research question 3.1

Category:  Personal support systems that women adopt

All of the women in the feedback group agree with the need for, and the benefits of personal support systems as identified in the SEWL responses. Gail alludes to the fact that she has had no personal support and wonders how she would perform with such support. Jane states that,

> *'Some organisations will pay for you to study and develop support networks through study and other ways.   Women who have external networks of friends across differing industries whom they can totally trust can be a great place to have support networks. Independent mentors are very useful. High level trust is very important. Be cautious with social media or do a course.'*

Jane has identified a method of gaining trusty networks that the general responses did not make explicit.  That of undertaking professional development and linking up during those development courses with others facing similar challenges to oneself. While it can sometimes be difficult for women to gain access to such courses (Chuang 2015), it is worth persevering as the contacts made can be beneficial in career progression.

### 4.7.6    Research question 3.2

Category: Organisations have policies in place but some policies are ignored at the top level.

All of the women agree with a response about companies inventing creative redundancies in order to dismiss people from organisations. Most of the feedback group women, except Norah, agree with the overall responses of the SEWLs. Gail comments:

> *'the world needs for managers to be ethical and moral. That's not a gendered stance, but if it takes women at the top to make this happen then we must do so immediately to address the world's problems.'*

This comment, to a certain extent, concurs with Acker's (2014) work in which she states that women frequently have a desire to be *"making a difference" to the public good, whatever the untoward circumstances under which they had to operate'* (Acker 2014, p. 83).

### 4.7.7   Additional /general comments

There was an opportunity in the general comments section, for the feedback group women to voice any concerns about the responses and no general comments of concern are made. This is taken as a positive that the responses data set has validity. Some additional general comments are made, such as this one by Veronica who states:

> *'I wish there wasn't so much emphasis on women getting into senior roles. It's disappointing that we have all the legislation we do supporting women getting into CEO or Board roles. Nothing really happens to change the stats even though there's legislation and a general social push for more equality. Getting top roles should be because you're good with people and you understand company strategy and communication. These top roles are all about being a good leader, not being good at the work you used to do. It might be worthwhile exploring metrics on hiring practices for senior executive roles. For very successful companies that report incoming and outgoing CEOs and Board members, we (the public) should know who applied for the job. Might go a little way to putting a bit more pressure on selecting the right person for the role, not just another man who was groomed for the position. It should be on merit, not gender.'*

Veronica is probably enunciating what many women believe and hope for. A system based on merit. However, this research and others (Acker 2006;

Ridgeway 2011; Fox 2012) indicate strongly that the present system is not merit based and there is no imminent horizon indicating that this will change soon.

Gail adds one word only, '*Quotas.*' One word but it alludes to the discussion in chapter 2, regarding the success of quota systems to increase the number of women board members as introduced in Norway and other nations (Fox 2014).

### 4.7.8    *Outcome of the feedback group*

In general, the feedback group participants agree with the results presented in relation to every research question. This assisted in triangulation of the data and further confirmed the data's validity.

# CHAPTER 5. 0

# CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

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## 5.0    Introduction

The major topic discussed in this chapter is the contribution that this thesis makes to the body of knowledge in relation to the research problem identified in Chapter 1. This thesis explores the status-imposed limitations on senior executive women's agency in Australian workplaces through the lens of status characteristics theory (SCT). The thesis identifies a range of strategies and support mechanisms which will assist women to excel in leadership positions.

The literature review in Chapter 2 encompassed a large range of issues under the umbrella terms of *Inequality Regimes, Status Characteristics Theory* and issues surrounding *Status, Power and Resources*. The section on inequality regimes highlighted the disparities between the number of women compared to men in leadership positions (WGEA 2018). Chapter 2 explored topics such as gender stereotypes, Kanter's (1977) homosocial reproduction theory, gender and workplace progression, hours of work, the pay gap (WGEA 2018), and the lack of women in Australian boardrooms (Klettner et al. 2016). The researcher described status characteristics theory and provided clarification of the conditions under which SCT can be applied. The researcher provided an explanation of SCT terminology and outlined the relationship between status belief systems and SCT. A discussion followed of the interrelationships between status, power and resources. Five themes emerged from the literature review. From these themes, the researcher developed three research questions to explore the research problem in this thesis. The research questions are restated below.

RQ 1:

1.1 How do senior executive women leaders shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings?

1.2 Why do some senior executive women leaders decide not to strive for the top positions?

1.3 Are senior executive women leaders excluded from opportunities that will shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings?

RQ 2:

To what extent do status and cultural assessments limit senior executive women leaders' agency?

RQ 3:

3.1 To what extent are senior executive women leaders supported by personal support mechanisms such as networks, mentors and sponsors?

3.2 To what extent are senior executive women leaders supported by legislative and organisational support mechanisms?

Chapter 3 explained that the methodology was appropriate for the research at hand and tested for issues such as internal generalisability. It clearly described reasons for the methodology selection and how, when, and where the researcher performed the research and selected the population sample of senior women in leadership. Chapter 4 presented the results in a research question by research question order. In the light of the results presented in Chapter 4, this chapter reaches conclusions about the research questions posed and the themes developed in Chapter 2. The following section summarises the extent to which the results of this thesis will identify research contributions within the context of each theme.

In relation to Theme 1, gender inequality, the findings are generally consistent with previous extant research which addresses the theme. There are few senior executive women leaders (SEWL)s relative to men on boards and in top management teams in Australia (WGEA 2018). There is little evidence of any similar research of Australian SEWLs that particularly explores how various status effects influence women's success in striving for top management roles. The findings of this thesis are contributions, as they enhance scholarly and practitioner understanding of inequality regimes, and women's gender disadvantage in material workplace struggles (Ridgeway 2011) within the Australian context.

Theme 2 explores the phenomenon of women opting-out (Stone 2007; Barsh & Yee 2012) and not striving for top positions. The SEWLs' responses lend support to the body of research in this field, contributing to scholarly understanding of this phenomenon in the Australian context.

The question of whether the SEWLs gain an equal opportunity to discharge the burden of proof in order to increase their power-prestige rankings, partly addresses both Themes 3 (skills and opportunities) and 4 (cultural status beliefs). On the one hand the SEWLs possess skills to assist them to confound existing stereotypes, yet on the other hand, organisations frequently deny them equal opportunities to discharge the burden of proof (Berger et al. 1980). Many of the impediments that women face are cultural assessments based on cultural status beliefs. There exists little research in this regard in Australia, thus the findings in relation to Themes 3 and 4 contribute to the overall body of knowledge.

Theme 5 explores the role played by internal and external influences e.g., personal support arrangements such as mentors and sponsors (Reinhold 2005; Kark & Eagly 2010) and the influence of legislation and policies that institutionalise equality practices (Bao et al. 2014; Murray & Southey 2017) within the Australian context. The thesis identifies how these institutionalised policies contribute to and alter the experience of women leaders for career progression. The findings in terms of personal support mechanisms lend support to extant research. The findings in terms of organisational support mechanisms disconfirm the expectations from some extant research. In all regards, and particularly in regard to this disconfirmation in the Australian context, this thesis provides a contribution in respect to Theme 5.

This chapter draws on the previous chapters for information. The thesis identifies contributions based on extant research. It reaches conclusions about the research questions and themes, as well as the overall research problem. It develops a conceptual model and a practical model based on the results. It discusses theoretical implications of the findings of this thesis as well as implications for practice and policy. Further, it discusses limitations and implications for further research.

## 5.1 Conclusions about research issues

The primary aim of this section is to identify how the findings of Chapter 4 fit into the body of knowledge and the findings of extant research identified in Chapter 2. Considering the overall research problem, the themes, the research questions, the results and the extant research all together, the thesis identifies relevant and common fields of extant research which emerge for consideration as well as strategies and solutions to the research problem.

Different findings consistent with extant research are of particular importance in considering the overall research problem in Chapter 1. Arising from the findings in Chapter 4, these relate to the following:

1) Influence in the workplace;
2) Gender as status;
3) Company culture, values and beliefs;
4) Women's personal values;
5) The scrutiny of women's performance;
6) Status beliefs about leadership;
7) Blockages to equal opportunities to discharge the burden of proof;
8) Belief systems;
9) Status power and resources;
10) Cultural assessments;
11) Personal support systems; and
12) Legislative and organisational support systems.

As this thesis is qualitative in nature, it is not possible to use the frequencies of responses as a means of stating the degree of evidence of contribution to extant research. As discussed in Chapter 4, the frequencies assist in the analysis of results, however the thesis cannot use them for relative precision purposes. One response alone in qualitative research can be as important as many responses in quantitative research (Saunders et al. 2012).

For the purposes of analysing how each theme relates to each research question, Chapter 4 explained how each of the emerging subthemes identified in the data relates to each research question. The series of tables and discussion within this chapter flow on from the discussion in Chapter 4, identifying key findings from each of the subthemes identified in the data relative to each research question. The sections that accompany these tables clarify how the findings in Chapter 4 fit with the extant research identified in Chapter 2 and contribute to the body of

knowledge. The flow continues into identifying strategies to address those key findings at the meso, or organisational level barriers to diversity and micro, or individual level barriers to diversity (Syed & Özbilgin 2009). Rather than introducing strategies at the macro or societal level, once introduced at the micro and meso levels, cultural objectives can become established in a larger population (Berger et al. 2002; Berger & Zelditch 2002).

The strategies introduced in Chapter 5 consist of two types: Strategy type-A and Strategy type-B. The thesis details both solutions from extant research and SEWL-identified solutions. Strategy type-A solutions focus on meso level approaches which may take time to implement, introduce and embed. Strategy type-B solutions focus on micro level practical quick fixes that can enhance women's career prospects. The thesis adds to existing workplace diversity policy by collapsing longer-term meso level Strategy type-A solutions with shorter-term micro level Strategy type-B solutions.

### 5.1.1 Conclusions about RQ 1

**Table 5.1** *Key findings identified in RQ 1*

| Research question | Emerging theme identified in the data | Key findings identified |
|---|---|---|
| 1.1 | Subtheme A: Influencing, being politically savvy in using networks<br><br>Subtheme B: Enhancing performance – personal attributes<br><br>Subtheme C: Delivering and performing<br><br>Subtheme D: Adaptive practices to enhance status | *Influence in the workplace* – SEWLs effectively use influence to increase their power-prestige rankings. It is more effective than performing and delivering. They utilise the power of second order beliefs (Troyer & Younts 1997; Webster Jr & Whitmeyer 1999)<br><br>*Gender as status* – SEWLs are perceived as less agentic than men (Eagly 2013) and experience the phenomenon that the female gender as status is of a lower ranking than the male gender. SEWLs obfuscate the gender signals to increase their power-prestige rankings |
| 1.2 | Subtheme A: Values and game playing<br><br>Subtheme B: Being valued and having flexibility<br><br>Subtheme C: Lack of camaraderie | *Company culture including organisational values and beliefs* – the main reason SEWLs opt out is due to the corporate culture and a disenchantment with corporate life. The organisational values and beliefs portrayed at the top do not align with SEWLs' personal values and beliefs<br><br>*Women's personal values* – SEWLs personal values are not being met in corporate life therefore they opt out (Huang & Gamble 2015)<br><br>*The scrutiny of women's performance* – SEWLs performance is scrutinised more than men's (Cook & Glass 2016)<br><br>*Home and family duties* – organisations have different expectations on women who have a family |
| 1.3 | Subtheme A: Boy's clubs<br><br>Subtheme B: Men are favoured and have the power | *Status beliefs on leadership* – males dominate the power-prestige order in the workplaces of the SEWLs and workplaces exclude them from opportunities to increase their power-prestige rankings. Barriers to women in leadership exist at the macro, meso and micro levels (Syed & Özbilgin 2009)<br><br>*Blockages to equal opportunties to discharge the burden of proof* - women are not gaining equal opportunities to display their skills and discharge the burden of proof (Berger et al. 1980) |

The key findings are listed in Table 5.1 above and are described in more detail below exemplifying how the participant interview results fit into the body of knowledge and the findings of extant research identified in Chapter 2.

*Influence in the workplace* – While delivering and performing is essential the most important techniques for SEWLs to increase their power-prestige rankings are those that incorporate exerting influence. Competence or merit does not lead to status gains for these women. Instead, status gains relate to the judgement of others. SEWLs are aligning with influential others by moving closer to the power-prestige rankings of the senior affiliates, lending support to similar cultural assertions by Ridgeway (2011). Participant responses in the data set from Chapter 4 indicate that influence, which can lead to power and resources, ranks higher in status than performance, consistent with extant research (Cook & Glass 2014; Joshi et al. 2015). SEWLs affiliate with influential others to gain influence. This is an example of the power of second order belief systems (Troyer & Younts 1997; Webster Jr & Whitmeyer 1999) discussed in Section 5.1.2.

Senior executive women experience resistance in the workplace similar to the level of resistance described in existing research (Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neill 1977; Ridgeway & Berger 1986) when using influencing behaviours. These executives experience that companies favour men for promotion, lending support to the findings in extant research (Davidson & Burke 2000; Koch et al. 2015). On some occasions, senior executive women's attempts to exert influence are less successful than men's attempts, consistent with Carli (2017) and using mitigating language increases their influence as noted by Lewin Loyd et al. (2010).

Networking is one of the main influential methods that SEWLs use as it assists with their promotion, lending support to similar findings by Metz & Tharenou (2001) and Kogut et al. (2014). Networking can be essential for them to progress, as noted by Mohd Rasdi et al. (2013). By seeking out and using good role models and mentors, as described by Broadbridge et al. (2006), the SEWLs can achieve higher salary levels through being members of networks, which results in the members drawing attention to themselves and their abilities, consistent with extant research (Forret & Dougherty 2004; Wolff & Moser 2009; Mohd Rasdi et

al. 2013). Many executives however, in accessing and cultivating networks, experienced similar difficulties to those described by Groysberg & Bell (2013) and Searby et al. (2015). Some use 'women only' networks as discussed by Durbin (2011), while others use their female colleagues and superiors (Singh et al. 2006; Susan 2016) for support. A lack of network support means progress can be slow (Reinhold 2005; Kark & Eagly 2010) and men tend to be better at networking than women, especially informal networking where individuals often discuss the internal organisational politics and exchange important information, lending support to prior research in this area (Reinhold, 2005; Kark & Eagly, 2010).

*Gender as status* – The results in Chapter 4 indicate that stereotyping in the workplace is a contributing factor towards slow progression into senior positions. This is consistent with extant research (e.g. Agars 2004; Koenig et al. 2011; Sanders et al. 2011; Eberhard et al. 2015). Disrupting gender prescriptions results in a negative backlash, lending support to the findings of Rudman & Glick (2001). Ridgeway (2011) explains that people use gender stereotypes to organise their social relations because they feel compelled to hold onto them. The assumption that gender stereotypes are widely shared has a major influence on people's inclination to act in accordance with those stereotypes (Sechrist & Stangor 2001); there is generally compliance and people react negatively if individuals make statements which defy these stereotypes (Rudman et al. 2009). Senior executives sometimes do not conform to societal norms and because they do not, they receive a backlash for their non-compliance. This experience is consistent with extant research that finds that individuals generally try to avoid any negative public reaction and conform to the use of the existing gender stereotype (Rudman & Fairchild 2004; Brescoll 2016) to ensure they avoid negative reactions.

In society there exist clear and agreed gender stereotypes (Diekman & Eagly 2000; Koenig & Eagly 2006; Cuddy et al. 2007; Connell 2014), which describe that men are agentic or influential and women are communal or expressive (Eagly 2013). Experiences exemplified in Chapter 4 identify multiple instances of the dissonance of their expected behaviours predicted by extant research of stereotypes. While men aspire to achieve or display assertiveness or dominance, according to the stereotype literature, women should not (Heilman & Okimoto

2007; Heilman 2012). Such behaviours are unattractive to women (Prentice & Carranza 2002; Rudman et al. 2009; Bono et al. 2017). Overall, women's stereotypical traits are gauged to be more positive or *'good'* than men's (Eagly & Mladinic 1989; Glick et al. 2004) and men's stereotypical traits are deemed to be of higher status and more powerful than those of women (Glick et al. 2004; Rudman et al. 2009). The findings in Chapter 4 generally lend support to this prior literature that these leaders display behaviours more aligned to stereotypical findings.

SEWL behaviours, such as aligning with influential male superiors, lend support to the findings of expectation states theory (EST) research on personal hierarchies (Wagner & Berger 1997; Correll & Ridgeway 2003; Ridgeway & Bourg 2004). Here, gender is a status characteristic with higher (male) and lower (female) states (Pugh & Wahrman 1983). Perceptions in the workplace hold sway since higher status groups are thought to be more highly competent that lower status groups; lower status groups have longer paths of relevance and higher status groups have shorter paths of relevance (Russell & Fiske 2008). The experiences noted in Chapter 4 are consistent with the findings that cognitive status assessments based on the diffuse status characteristic of gender will allocate lower status to women (Murray & Southey 2017). The responses identified in Chapter 4 indicate that SEWLs work to overcome gender related obstructions that restrict the opportunities to use influence. This action assists them in shortening the path of relevance and increases their power-prestige rankings consistent with previous research in this area (Berger et al. 1980; Ridgeway & Correll 2006).

Chapter 4 highlights participant awareness that organisations and society remain masculine in their approaches to management and leadership. Scholars have found that society generally widely shares powerful beliefs which most people hold about gender, class and race (Acker 2006; Ridgeway 2011). These beliefs hold even if individuals do not personally endorse them and those individuals act according to society's expectations rather than their individual beliefs (Ridgeway & Kricheli-Katz 2013, p. 302). Society, for instance, negatively views women who display stereotypical male behaviours (Joshi et al. 2015). The SEWL experiences align with these research findings. Senior executive women's responses and actions demonstrate how they fight to overcome gender status bias

that is in conflict with strongly held beliefs that men are more suitable for high-level positions (Acker 2006; Bevan & Learmonth 2013; Bao et al. 2014). Their experiences are also consistent with Ridgeway's (2011) contentions that society embeds cultural beliefs about gender as status, resulting in them being difficult to overcome.

*Company culture including organisational values and beliefs* – SEWLs explain that existing organisational culture and corporate life leads to disenchantment. These women are not willing to play the games at the top and the organisational values and beliefs portrayed do not align with their personal values and beliefs, similar to the findings of extant research (Barsh & Yee 2012). Findings related to the lack of flexibility in the workplaces lend support to Stone's (2007) findings that women are more *'shut out'* as distinct from opting out because of the inflexibility and toxicity of many workplaces (Stone 2007, p.215). Conversely, Stone (2007) also found that one of the main reasons American women opt out is because of home duties. The great majority of SEWLs in this thesis did not refer to home duties as a limiting factor, preferring to limit their responses to the *'shut out'* phenomena.

The findings that SEWLs have an unfulfilled need related to the purpose of their roles lends support to Acker's (2014) findings that women want to make a difference. The thesis found that there was a need for respect and a need to feel valued, and that company culture should change, consistent with being ethically and socially responsible. Similar to recent research by Acker (2014) and Neck (2015), such observations reflect the importance of attracting and retaining executive women.

*Women's personal values* – The need to create collegiate teams and work with colleagues who share common values and those who focus on high quality valued work, demonstrates similarities to the findings of Huang & Gamble (2015) and Fine (2009). Men's values include gaining higher salary levels and promotion, according to previous research (Eagly 1987). While men earn more than women in Australia there is little evidence in this thesis that women value promotion any less than men, although their statements infer that they value the salary less.

Thus, there is no evidence that women value promotion any less than men, as identified in Eagly's (1987) research.

*The scrutiny of women's performance* – Consistent with research by Mavin et al. (2016), the thesis identifies that women are more scrutinised and assessed differently to men. Compared to males, workplace performance is scrutinised more for senior women, as noted by Cook & Glass (2016). The scrutiny supports further evidence from the findings that women have to work harder to overcome stereotypes that they are less agentic than men, similar to Eagly's (2013) work on gender and social congruence theory noted in Chapter 2.

*Home and family duties* – Some participants discussed their employers' negative reactions in relation to starting a family. The employer actions support the findings of extant research (Heilman & Okimoto 2008; Fuegen & Endicott 2010) that women who are mothers add to the saliency of their gender in a negative sense. Nevertheless, the reasons for opting out and the dearth of family-related responses in this thesis suggests this is not a high priority for executives. This contradicts Belkin's (2003) proposition that high on the list of reasons for women not striving for the top, is family responsibilities.

Extant research reveals that women shoulder the responsibilities of home duties (Chalmers & Hill 2007; Charlesworth & Macdonald 2015; Thomas et al. 2018). However, there is little indication that household duties influence executive roles, suggesting the findings neither confirm nor disconfirm prior research. However, senior executives provide many examples of experiencing workplace gender inequality that may partially support Ridgeway's (2011) argument that the continual sex typing of housework and home duties reinforces gender inequality.

*Status beliefs on leadership* – SEWLs' comments in relation to men being favoured, men ignoring women in meetings and men being expected to under-perform compared to women, indicate that women are being disadvantaged consistent with Ridgeway's (2011) research findings that as long as gender is salient in a situation, gender status beliefs bias performance expectations of men over women. When a belief becomes a status difference, the belief becomes an independent factor generating material inequalities outside the individual's personal control of resources (Ridgeway 2014, p. 4).

SEWL responses, together with the overall Australian workplace statistics (WGEA 2018), support the findings that men dominate the power-prestige order in the workplace and that management is a male paradigm (Koenig et al. 2011). The SEWLs indicate that when undertaking leadership tasks, where men have the edge because they are seen as more agentic, there is an expectation that men will have a greater advantage than women which is similar to the findings of Davidio et al. (1988). Research into how women leaders perceive themselves within male dominated work cultures found that men and women do not differ overall in perceived leadership effectiveness (Koenig & Eagly 2006), although there are beliefs that women do not make good managers and that real leaders have male characteristics (Eagly & Carli 2007). The results in Chapter 4 indicate that senior women are experiencing situations where such beliefs are salient.

There is evidence that participants perceive that women are not as good at leadership as men, consistent with role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau 2002). There is less evidence however to support this theory that posits that when the SEWLs do acquire leadership roles, the behaviours required for those roles are influenced by role expectations related to how a person should or should not act.

Women tend to under-rate their performance while men tend to over-rate their leadership performance (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014). Participant comments are consistent with the findings of this research, that executive women often self-limit their agency. Women are frequently negatively perceived when displaying leadership characteristics (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014). Simply because women are women, and because of workplace bias, status perceptions suggest that they do not possess the required attributes of leadership (Heilman 2012), thus diminishing their status.

This thesis finds that, as identified in extant research, men leaders experience greater access to resources and power resulting in their higher status in power-prestige rankings (Fitzsimmons et al. 2014; Joshi 2014). If this power is endangered, senior executives give examples of feeling threatened by, or receiving hostile responses from, their male counterparts lending support to the findings of a previous study by Joshi et al. (2015).

*Blockages to equal opportunities to discharge the burden of proof* - According to the theory of status organising processes (Berger et al. 1980), women require skills to assist them to confound existing stereotypes. They require access to equal opportunities enable them to discharge the burden of proof. Chapter 4 offers examples indicating that challenging the burden of proof and overcoming gender related impediments that restrict the opportunities to exert influence, are important. This is consistent with extant research (Berger et al. 1980; Ridgeway & Correll 2006).

The senior executives concur with findings that climbing the job ladder can be more difficult for women than men, as women's jobs generally produce less advancement (Barnett et al. 2000). SEWL responses also allude to the fact that there are not enough women in line management positions. A lack of line or operational management experience is a barrier affecting women's advancement to the highest levels, similar to findings in extant research (Tharenou 1999; Still 2006; Hoobler et al. 2014).

The low numbers of SEWLs at the top of Australian organisations, despite the high numbers of suitably qualified women (WGEA 2018), lends support to studies investigating the glass-ceiling phenomenon (Morrison & Von Glinow 1990; Powell et al. 2002; Sharjeel et al. 2017). Cultural expectations suggest that women should behave in a similar manner to their male counterparts in places of work. When they do not, the consequences mean that the same opportunities for leadership roles are not available, aligning with prior research (Eagly & Carli 2007; Kark & Eagly 2010). The thesis results illustrate that there continues to be a presumption that women do not make good managers and leaders, as found by Heilman & Alcott (2001) and that assumptions and prejudices about their ability negatively impact women's progression into leadership positions, as revealed in extant research (Fox 2010; Sanders et al. 2011). While participants in this thesis worked in many types of organisations, their experiences reinforce Australian research in the banking sector where gender discrimination is a barrier for women's progression into managerial positions (Metz & Tharenou 2001; Metz 2011).

Some managers describe their experiences of cloning at interviews where homosocial reproduction (Kanter 1977) suggests men favour employing other men in the workplace. Participants recognise that differential treatment in the workplace supports the notion that women who work in male dominated industries are more likely to resign regardless of their skills (Beck & Davis 2005).

A major impediment to equal opportunity to discharge the burden of proof relates to boys' clubs. The participants concur with research indicating that informal boys' clubs can communicate pieces of informal organisational information that would be of benefit to everyone in the organisation (Liff & Ward 2001; Searby et al. 2015). Here, judging employee's as part of an informal work process leads to favourable outcomes. Chief executive officer (CEO) or higher-level management familiarity with an employee on a personal level, benefits a person more than someone unknown (Murray & Syed 2010). Participant responses suggest that attaining and retaining membership of boys' clubs enhances member's probabilities of promotion (Tonge 2008; Fisher & Kinsey 2014). Treating boys' club interactions as though they are task-based situations adversely affects women's promotion opportunities (Anderson et al. 2001; Alexander et al. 2009). Many senior executive women agree that men are generally better at networking that often ties in to boys' clubs. For instance, informal networking relates to how the internal organisational politics and important information exchange occurs, consistent with prior research (Reinhold 2005; Kark & Eagly 2010). Networking however, as noted in this thesis, can be difficult for women (Searby et al. 2015).

**Table 5.2** *Strategies to address key findings for RQ 1*

| Research question | Key findings identified | Recommendations/strategies to address the key findings |
|---|---|---|
| 1.1 | Influence in the workplace<br><br>Gender as status | Strategy type-A. Meso level – HR within organisations to structure work differently to confuse stereotypical expectations and beliefs (Troyer et al. 2001; Ridgeway & Correll 2004; Ridgeway & Correll 2006; Walker et al. 2014); carefully consider the makeup of problem solving teams; actively and overtly promote the proven accomplishments and skill sets of individuals<br><br>Strategy type-B. Micro level - be fully aware that gaining the Chair, board, CEO or C-suite positions is not based on merit (Ridgeway 2014); be cognisant that it is who you know rather than what you know that is more important in your quest for the top positions |
| 1.2 | Company culture including organisational values and beliefs<br><br>Women's personal values<br><br>The scrutiny of women's performance<br><br>Home and family duties | Strategy type-A. Meso level - organisations undertake cultural audits conducted by external operators, that focus of values and behaviours to determine the health of the organisation as viewed from the employees' perspective, to identify dissonance of espoused values and beliefs (Barsh and Yee 2012); organisations create ethically and socially responsible cultures for their workforce (Acker 2014); organisations offer true flexibility of working conditions<br><br>Strategy type-B. Micro level - ascertain what the internal political issues are in your organisation, learn which issues are important and which are paid lip service to by the top management team and play the game accordingly; encourage your partner, if you have one, to share home duties with you including child, elderly and infant care (Ridgeway 2011); be resilient and do not wear your heart on your sleeve |
| 1.3 | Status beliefs on leadership<br><br>Blockages to equal opportunties to discharge the burden of proof | Strategy type-A. Meso level – organisations offer carefully structured and sensitively facilitated development courses on women's performance ratings and the influence of boys' clubs (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014; Heilman 2012)<br><br>Strategy type-B. Micro level - ascertain which of the top team are the 'in crowd', those whose opinions matter; align yourself with the 'in crowd' and, where appropriate to your personal values, with the opinions of the 'in crowd; be authentic in your management style, e.g. if you are a woman, do not try to act like a man |

The strategies listed in Table 5.2 above are now described in more detail. Extant research indicates that opportunities arise in non-rigid tasks for those who may have been viewed as lower status e.g. those with the diffuse lower status characteristic of being women, to exhibit their talents relative to the task at hand (Berger et al. 1980; Chizhik et al. 2003). It is possible to interfere with the formation and spread of status beliefs by introducing resistance (Ridgeway & Correll 2006). Increasing the abilities of women and men in ways that confound status evaluations reduces status inequality effects (Troyer et al. 2001; Ridgeway & Correll 2004; Ridgeway & Correll 2006; Walker et al. 2014). Changing group members' relative influence is achievable when other group members understand and value an individual's expertise relative to the task at hand (Chizhik et al. 2003). Organisations can improve workplace diversity through human resource management initiatives (Sanchez-Apellaniz & Triguero-Sánchez 2016). Given the foregoing discussion, if HR departments strive to structure work differently, many stereotypical expectations and beliefs will be confused and challenged. This requires careful consideration of the makeup of problem solving groups, as well as actively and overtly promoting the proven accomplishments and skill sets of individuals.

Senior women overcome their gender characteristic to gain promotion by being aware that they are not living in a meritocracy (Ridgeway 2014). According to the participants, this is probably the most important fact that ambitious women should comprehend and believe. Third order status beliefs contend that people of a particular type are not only more respected but society generally assumes that they are also more competent at what counts most than people of other types (Fiske et al. 2002; Cuddy et al. 2007). This assumption of competence can legitimise non-objective selection practices and the belief that we live in a meritocracy. Therefore, competent senior women should put a little less effort into task delivery and more into aligning themselves with the people they identify as being of the most assistance to their progression, as influencing the right people is a critical first step.

Values and beliefs play a large role in opt-out decisions (Barsh & Yee 2012). Organisations should undertake cultural audits focussing on values and behaviours, led by external operators to determine the health of the organisations,

as viewed from their employees' perspectives. While personal values are important, senior executives noted that women should be resilient and not wear their 'heart on their sleeve' as this will be detrimental to the status achieved in a managerial role.

Noted by scholars is the importance of flexible working conditions (Stone, 2007; Acker, 2006). Here, work structures are less about total hours spent at work and more about flexible work arrangements, sharing parental arrangements, and modelling workplace behaviour from the CEO and other managers. According to Ridgeway (2011), cultural beliefs originate in society and the home, and lead to many engrained stereotypical beliefs (Ridgeway 2011). Similarly, companies can work at creating ethically and socially responsible cultures for their workforce (Acker 2014). Where cultural dissonance continues to exist however, the demonstrated values and behaviours displayed are often at odds with those espoused by companies (Cording et al. 2014, p.52).

Management is a male paradigm (Koenig et al. 2011) and beliefs abound that men make better managers than women (Davidio et al. 1988; Eagly & Carli 2007). As women and men tend to under-rate women's leadership performance (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014; Heilman 2012), it would be beneficial for organisations to offer carefully structured and sensitively facilitated development courses (Holton & Dent 2016) where individuals can come to the self-realisation that women's performance is under-rated. Training could also relate to the adverse effects of informal boys' clubs. Here, this thesis notes that SEWLs are not gaining equal opportunities to display their skills in ways that assist them to discharge the burden of proof process (Berger et al. 1980). Thus, the boy's club conception is a significant impediment to workplace progression for women (Tonge 2008; Fisher & Kinsey 2014), and other minorities as well (Murray & Ali 2017).

According to SEWLs, they can compensate for non-membership of boys' clubs through identifying which of the top team are the 'in crowd', those whose opinions matter, and aligning themselves with members of the 'in crowd'. SEWLs can further gain favour by ascertaining the values and opinions of the 'in crowd' and ensuring that they do not publicly espouse disagreement with those values and opinions. Further, while acknowledging that management is a male

paradigm, Chapter 4 noted that women should not to try to act like their male counterparts as that can be detrimental to the status perceptions of women. From their lived experiences, the senior women participants encourage women aspiring towards leadership roles to be authentic.

### 5.1.2 Conclusions about RQ 2

**Table 5.3** *Key findings identified in RQ 2*

| Research question | Emerging theme identified in the data | Key findings identified |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Subtheme A: Organisations favour men over women<br><br>Subtheme B: Women are judged because they have family commitments<br><br>Subtheme C: Men and women are perceived differently at work<br><br>Subtheme D: Women self-limt their agency<br><br>Subtheme E: Entitlements and working arrangements | *Belief systems* – SEWL experiences indicate that status is based on cultural beliefs and it works its effects at the individual level within organisations rather than the larger structural level (Ridgeway 2009). Because both groups, the disadvantaged and the advantaged, experience the perceived superiority of one type, they all share the same status beliefs and this reinforces and legitimises the inequality (Ridgeway & Correll 2006)<br><br>*Status, power and resources* – SEWLs comments indicate that workplaces generally retain a masculine work culture giving men the edge in power-status events (Kark & Eagly 2010). Men gain power, resources and status over women<br><br>*Cultural assessments* - status is based on cultural beliefs and affects people at the individual level within organisations (Ridgeway 2015). SEWLs experience multiple cultural assessments and stereotyping such as stereotypes of emotion leading to biased assessments of women leaders (Brescoll 2016) |

The key findings for RQ2 are listed in Table 5.3 above and are described in more detail below, exemplifying how the thesis interview results fit into the body of knowledge and the findings of extant research identified in Chapter 2.

*Belief systems* – Prior research related to first, second and third order belief systems (Troyer et al. 2001) indicates that second order beliefs (what specific others think) are highly powerful and significant. The majority of individuals perceive themselves dependent upon how they are viewed by others (Troyer et al. 2001) and individuals usually adhere to the views of those with higher status.

Even in group situations where the views of members are highly valued, there is a stronger inducement to conform to the views of those with higher status because an individual's sense of self develops from impressions that others hold (Troyer et al. 2001; Kalkhoff et al. 2011). Chapter 4 highlighted instances of men being tapped on the shoulder for promotion while women were not afforded the same privalege. To the extent to which women were cognisant of this practise without speaking up, points to the salience of second order beliefs. Women have acted in accordance with the expectations of their role, possibly conforming to a stereotype about how work is structured, organised and rewarded lending support to much extant research (Eagly 1987; Joshi et al 2015; Murray & Southey 2018; Lucas 2003).

Second-order beliefs about how one should act are culturally hegemonic (Ridgeway, 2014) as women recalled their experiences of serving tea and taking orders for cakes. Beliefs about behaviours in the boardroom and within the workplace are generally institutionalised and closely represent the experiences and understandings of gender by those in power (Glick & Fiske 2001; Ridgeway 2009). Such beliefs similarly act as default rules for gender (Ridgeway & Correll 2004; Ridgeway 2009; Ridgeway 2011). Behaviour from such beliefs works to enhance male and reduce female status.

Extant research notes that higher status groups are more highly competent that lower status groups (Russell & Fiske 2008). Because both the disadvantaged and the advantaged experience the perceived superiority of one type, they all share the same status beliefs and this reinforces and legitimises the inequality (Ridgeway & Correll 2006). These beliefs are evident by executive women responses in Chapter 4 that men frequently act as if they are superior. As highlighted in Chapter 4, women do not agree that men *are* superior in relation to performance outcomes, indicating a degree of dissonance with the extant research position.

Senior executive women leaders self-limit their agency. The data set in this thesis indicates that the cultural beliefs held reinforce the notion of self-limiting behaviour. This finding lends support to extant research of cultural and third order beliefs that men are better suited as CEOs than women (Joshi et al. 2015; Eagly & Carli 2007). In fact, the findings suggest that when SEWLs show less belief in

themselves in looking to the future, cultural norms defer to men as CEOs and as higher-level managers thus reinforcing the prevailing stereotype.

*Status power and resources* - Ridgeway (2014) describes gender inequality as a hierarchy between men and women measured in terms of status, power and resources. Weber (1918) puts more emphasis on resources and power than status. Senior executives acknowledge that CEOs have power and control over resources because of their position thus aligning with the theory of power dependence (Cook et al. 2006; Magee & Galinsky 2008). The results of the data in Chapter 4 indicate that executive women associate strongly to those in power because this helps them achiever higher status.

Frequently women found themselves ignored in meetings. With perceived higher status men set the agenda even while women offered ideas similar to their male counterparts (Wagner & Berger 1997). The researcher's reading of this suggested that when women behave in an agentic manner, this creates confusion. Here, they are not conforming to societal stereotypes, consistent with prior research (Ridgeway 2009). Their responses further support Berger et al.'s (1977) findings that hierarchies result in inequalities existing among individual members of the group. Their experiences are similar to how SCT links status to expectations of performance, producing a status hierarchy conferred on an individual by a group; achievements of individuals translate into status through subjective group interpretations, as highlighted in Chapter 2 (Ridgeway 1991; Ridgeway 1997; Wagner & Berger 2002). Behaviours determine status inequality in which a higher status group appears more proactive and competent than the lower status group, which seems more reactive and emotionally expressive (Wagner & Berger 1997; Glick & Fiske 1999). SEWL responses in Chapter 4 provide evidence that senior women's opinions seldom count and that people perceive a shaky voice to be emotional.

Workplaces generally retain a masculine work culture giving men the edge in power-status events (Kark & Eagly 2010). Men gain power, resources and status over women, evidenced by the data and the actions of men and women are very different in perceived status. SEWLs state that they have to work harder and achieve better results than men, lending support to the extant research.

In relation to the gender pay gap the data indicates that women ought to toughen up when negotiating salary, although they are likely to encounter social costs that will damage their overall likelihood of progression (Thompson 2017). SEWL experiences reflect extant research in that effort expended on paid work is more positively associated with promotion and advancement for men than women (Konrad et al. 1997; Evetts 2014) and there are many examples indicating that resuming work after a break typically incurs a wage penalty for women, supporting prior research (Shandy & Moe 2009). Lower pay for part time work in a study by Chalmers & Hill (2007) found that women are marginalised. Women are frequently the victims of lower pay (WGEA 2018) and obtain less flexibility within the structure of workplaces. Women accepting lower pay and benefits lends support to extant research on gender inequality regimes (Acker 2006; Bailey et al. 2016) at the micro-institutional level and 'doing' gender in a certain way for peer acceptance (West & Zimmerman 1987; Ridgeway 2009).

*Cultural assessments* – Cultural beliefs that women's primary role is in the home and raising children subjects women to lower status (Chalmers & Hill 2007). As a result, they are less valued and less competent employees. Observations of the data in Chapter 4 lend partial support to the idea that good mothers put their family and children first, seeing to their daily needs (Sharon 1996). Also, that ideal workers should be loyal and dedicated to their work (Acker 1990; Williams 2000). However, these beliefs reinforce the subliminal gender stereotype that the burden of proof is for women to prove their worth at work. Chapter 4 noted that women experience a cultural conflict at work because people view motherhood as a gender related status characteristic that is even more directly related to performance than just being either male or female (Ridgeway & Correll 2004; Correll et al. 2007).

This thesis suggests that the effects of persistent gendered instances in the workplace align with Ridgeway's (2015) position that gender is a cultural device for creating societal micro-order. As people continually use gender and status as micro-ordering processes, gender becomes a basis for social inequality. Almost guaranteed is the persistence of gender inequality; micro-ordering processes mean that as society changes it rewrites gender inequality into new social and economic arrangements.

**Table 5.4** *Strategies to address key findings for RQ 2*

| Research question | Key findings identified | Recommendations/strategies to address the key findings |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Belief systems | Strategy type-A. Meso level – offer personal development awareness sessions (Holton & Dent 2016) about belief systems, the effect of cultural assessments, and how status is subliminally attained in the workplace through subjective group interpretations to assist organisations in helping managers attain awareness of these phenomena; as part of the self-audit suggested in relation to the solutions of RQ1.2 above, organisations include monitoring flexibility and values along with the current mandatory monitoring (WGEA 2018) |
| | Status, power and resources | |
| | Cultural assessments | Strategy type-B. Micro level - if possible, try to work for an organisation which 'lives' its espoused values and whose values align with your values; be assertive, ask for special projects and put your hand up for promotion, do not wait until someone taps you on the shoulder, do this privately rather than telling the world that you are doing this (Rudman et al. 2008); be a master of your 'craft' whatever your business is; groom yourself appropriately for your position (Mavin et al 2016) |

The strategies listed in Table 5.4 above are now described in more detail. Organisations should consider offering personal development awareness sessions (Holton & Dent 2016) about belief systems. These should include how status and cultural assessment occurs instantaneously in groups (Ridgeway 1991; Ridgeway 1997; Wagner & Berger 2002). An awareness of group processes would assist managers, as well as training about unconscious bias. Managers ought to learn about how the path of relevance is influenced. They should also learn about the burden of proof process and its limiting effects on women's career trajectories.

Since women lack confidence, women should be assertive, ask for special projects and speak up for promotion rather than waiting for recognition. Researchers suggest acting privately avoids a backlash effect (Rudman & Fairchild 2004; Rudman et al. 2008). The data suggests that 'mastering-their-craft' is important otherwise executive women risk not gaining positive status outcomes. Similarly, women ought to groom themselves appropriately for their senior roles. This is to

avoid judgements related to their appearance (Mavin et al. 2016) that is pre-defined by the relationship between appearance and assumed roles (Eagly 1987).

Women are frequently the victims of inequality regimes (Acker 2006; Bailey et al. 2016), receiving lower pay and generally less flexibility. Thus, to overcome these cultural realities, senior executives suggest that women should work for organisations that 'live' their espoused values rather than feel disillusioned and leave the workplace. As part of the self-audit suggested in relation to the solutions of RQ1.2 above, organisations should monitor workplace flexibility and values, consistent with current mandatory legislated requirements as highlighted in Chapter 4.

### *5.1.3 Conclusions about RQ 3*

**Table 5.5** *Key findings identified in RQ 3*

| Research question | Emerging theme identified in the data | Key findings identified |
|---|---|---|
| 3.1 | Subtheme A: Align with the right people and use networks<br><br>Subtheme B: Sponsors, coaches, mentors and supportive partners | *Personal support mechanisms* – SEWLs align with the right people and use personal networks. They use mentors, sponsor and coaches as support mechanisms to enhance their promotion prospects (McDonald & Westphal 2013). |
| 3.2 | Subtheme A: Presence of organisational and legislative support mechanisms<br><br>Subtheme B: Shortfalls in organisational and legislative support | *Legislative and organisational support mechanisms* – Australia has legislation to support women (WGEA 2018). Organisations have policies in place to enhance diversity management and support women<br><br>SEWLs' organisations have policies to support them however there are large gaps between espoused values and realised practices (Cording et al. 2014). |

The key findings are listed in Table 5.5 above and are described in more detail below, exemplifying how the thesis interview results fit into the body of knowledge and the findings of extant research identified in Chapter 2.

*Personal support mechanisms* – The results support extant research in the field of networking described in this chapter relative to RQ1. Senior executives note the

importance of informal mentoring, workplace relationships and good role models (Broadbridge et al. 2006). Having a mentor, as well as a networking strategy helps to identify internal conflicts (McDonald & Westphal 2013) similar to the notion that workplace relationships are very important for women's progression (Metz & Tharenou 2001; Kark & Eagly 2010). The experiences as identified in Chapter 4 are mostly positive in relation to formal workplace programs lending partial support to research that indicates the benefits of mentoring relationships fostered within formal workplace programs (Chen et al. 2014; Bozionelos & Wang 2006; Murray & Southey forthcoming).

Senior executive women noted the importance of sponsors, consistent with research by Charras et al. (2015) which suggests that mentoring connections will result in positive outcomes for women and that these can develop by using formal organisational programs.

*Legislative and organisational support mechanisms* – National legislation and organisational policies, according to scholars, reduce women's equality outcomes (Murray & Southey 2017; WGEA 2018). Organisational policies help women to attain leadership positions by placing less emphasis on the female gender and more emphasis on skills (Lucas 2003). Workplace policies that support gender equality and that promote workplace diversity help to retain talented employees, according to research (Kaplan et al. 2011). However, some treat policies as a set of rules to be complied with or regard them as a challenge, offering them minimal support and others subvert policies (Liff 1989). Thus, if organisations use policy settings to embrace workplace equality, various practices will be evident in workplace procedures.

In this thesis, there is evidence of non-compliance of government and equal opportunity policy settings. Studies indicate that it is common for policies to have little effect on workplace equality and diversity (Edelman & Petterson 1999; Kalev et al. 2006), as experienced by some SEWLs. The gender wage gap and the number of women in leadership roles remain indifferent to policy (French & Sheridan 2010). Large gaps exist between espoused company values and realised practices (Cording et al. 2014). Chapter 4 for instance described situations where organisations pay lip service to what they promote. Workplace policies designed

to enhance equal opportunities can work against women (Bobbitt-Zeher 2011).
The results of this thesis confirm that some organisations ignore organisational
policies designed to assist with equal employment opportunities (EEO),
workplace bullying and workplace health and safety, at the senior management
level.

**Table 5.6** *Strategies to address key findings for RQ 3*

| Research question | Key findings identified | Recommendations/strategies to address the key findings |
|---|---|---|
| 3.1 | Personal support mechanisms | Strategy type-A. Meso level – organisations put in place formal mentoring and sponsoring that foster building networks (Holton & Dent 2016)<br><br>Strategy type-B. Micro level - spend a considerable amount of time networking (Chen et al. 2014), especially with those whom you feel are influential in your organisation and in your industry as a whole, as well as influential others; ensure you have a good personal support system in place, if you feel out of your depth, fake it till you make it and hire a good business coach |
| 3.2 | Legislative and organisational support mechanisms | Strategy type-A. Meso level – a quota system be incrementally introduced which allows exemptions, concessions and deferments by individual business case - organisations adhere to this quota system; as part of the organisational health self-audit suggested in relation to the solutions of RQ1.2 above, organisations to include monitoring of their policies designed to assist diversity management practices (Edelman & Petterson 1999; Kalev et al. 2006), and workplace bullying and workplace health and safety procedures<br><br>Strategy type-B. Micro level – seek out appropriate sponsors and mentors (McDonald & Westphal 2017) |

The solutions listed in Table 5.6 above are now described in more detail. As
mentoring and sponsoring is clearly beneficial to women's progress (Broadbridge
et al. 2006; Murray & Syed 2010; Chen et al. 2014; McDonald & Westphal 2017;
Murray & Southey 2017) organisations should encourage such relationships to
develop using whatever means they deem will be most effective within their
organisations, perhaps tailoring or modifying existing successful programs. Given
the SEWL experiences, this thesis does not encourage organisational-led

sponsorship arrangements. Organisations, however, could facilitate the mentoring relationship, financially subsidise, and allow time for employees to attend formal and informal networking events. As noted by scholars, formal mentoring systems positively prepare leaders for future roles (Murray & Syed 2010). The fact that women frequently attend to family home duties points to the value of flexible work arrangements rather than performing additional duties after work hours.

Putting in place national legislation and organisational policies assist equality outcomes (Bao et al. 2014; Murray & Southey 2017). Increased representation of women at the top of the organisation increases promotion opportunities into leadership positions (Cook & Glass 2014, p. 99). Not reached is the AICD target of achieving a thirty-per-cent increase of women in to leadership roles on all ASX200 boards by 2018. The AICD figures as of 31 August 2018 indicate that only eighty-three of the ASX200 companies have reached the thirty per-cent target (AICD 2018). A specific compulsory quota system to set targets for the number of women on boards is a potential initiative. For example, introducing the policy of quota systems for women on boards in Norway has resulted in positive effects (Wang & Kelan 2013). Australia could introduce a quota system for board membership which allows for exemptions, concessions and deferments on a case-by-case basis. This would force organisations to consider the make-up of their board membership while at the same time, give consideration to extenuating circumstances. A WGEA committee could consider each business case on its merits and accept or decline each business case. This may be in preference to a more easily challengeable set of black and white rules (Liff 1989).

Many organisations are paying lip service to their policies and espoused values (Cording et al. 2014). As part of the organisational health self-audit suggested in the solutions of RQ1.2 above, organisations could include monitoring of their policies, particularly those designed to assist diversity management practices (Edelman & Petterson 1999; Kalev et al. 2006), workplace bullying and workplace health and safety.

## 5.2    Findings relative to the conceptual model

Chapter 1 highlighted a conceptual model depicting the main variables. Figure 5.1 depicts a revised model that encapsulates the literature and research findings.  The addition of 'support systems' should be noted.  The original model did not highlight support systems. However, based on the SCT literature and the findings of this thesis, various support systems e.g. government legislation, personal support systems and institutional policies, are highly influential in assisting women to overcome the status evaluations of the diffuse gender status characteristic.
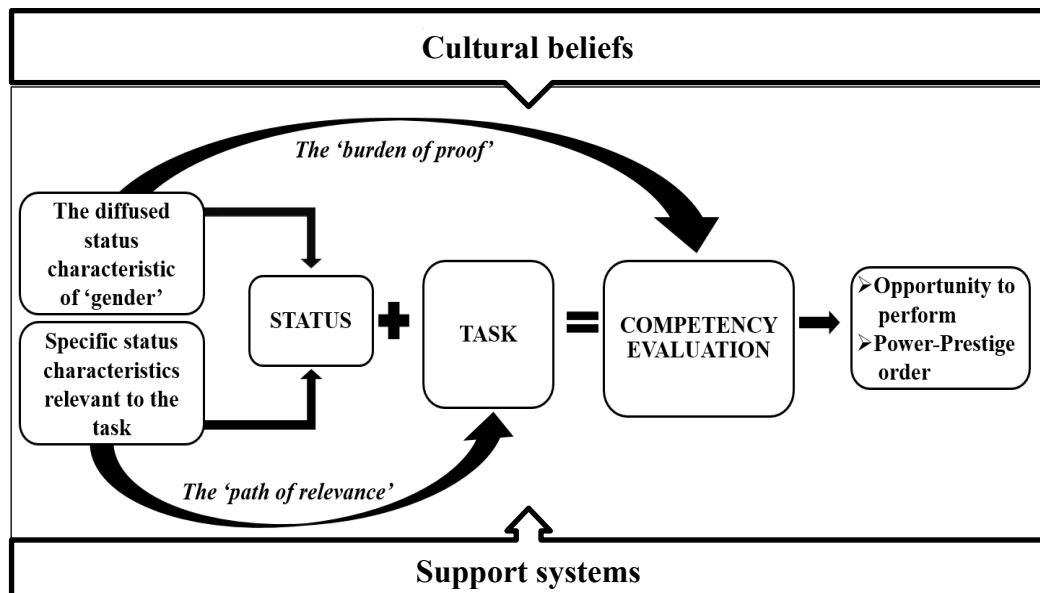
**Figure 5.1** *Conceptual model depicting the main variables*

Senior executive women's actions and the consequences of those actions, as identified in Chapters 4 and 5 adhere to illustrations within the model.

Diffuse and specific status characteristics - The model indicates that when undertaking a workplace group task SEWLs will possess diffuse and/or specific characteristics relative to the task at hand (Berger et al. 1977).  Gender is a diffuse characteristic in mixed sex group-task situations. The researcher noted earlier that the female gender is lower in status than the male gender.  The SEWL comments in Chapter 4 clearly identify the general undervaluing of women in the workplace, indicating that the female gender is a diffuse characteristic that is salient when undertaking status assessments of workplace tasks related to perceived

performance.

The burden of proof – There are many examples in Chapter 4 where SEWLs had to prove their worth within workplace settings, relative to pursuing a task. For example, when Beth noted she was a technical 'wiz', she gained higher status thus adhering to the model's predictions. However, when the burden of proof was no longer relevant, senior executives benefited by confusing the normal status evaluation made about their abilities. For instance, the data showed instances where women used 'male' language and where they associated with influential others that helped to confuse the subliminal status assessment. As the conceptual model indicates, performance expectations established in a previous task are relevant in the next task situation. The previous task assessment is irrelevant only if new evidence emerges that diffuse the original assessment. The assessment of competence related to one task situation is salient in the next. This often explains why women cannot partake of subsequent opportunities (Murray & Southey 2017) even in circumstances where they try hard (Ridgeway, 2014). The data in Chapter 4 indicate that challenging the burden of proof effect relates to overcoming a number of gender related impediments that limit women's agency (Berger et al. 1980; Ridgeway & Correll 2006).

The path of relevance – The path of relevance in Figure 5.1 is the cognitive connection between the individual and the task that links the status characteristic possessed by the individual to an outcome state of the task, either success or failure (Berger et al. 1980, p.485). Participant observations in Chapter 4 highlight how the path of relevance limits women's participation.

Power-prestige order and opportunities to perform – This thesis finds that males dominate the power-prestige order in the workplace and that organisations frequently exclude women from opportunities to increase their power-prestige rankings. In Figure 5.1, there is a cognitive link between status and the power-prestige order (Berger et al. 1980; Webster Jr & Rashotte 2010). For instance, as noted in Chapter 4, status is lower unless executive women can exert influence by confusing the original assessment with new opportunities to perform, as noted in the far right of Figure 5.1.

Support systems – Personal and organisational support systems are clearly

beneficial for senior executives and provide a basis for future leadership aspirations. The SEWLs offer numerous examples in Chapter 4 of personal support systems. Support systems at the organisational level are variegated however and not consistent. The researcher notes in this thesis that different support systems help to diffuse and challenge the gender assessment and that this is an important strategy for future reference.

## 5.3    Conclusion about the research problem stated in Chapter 1

The research problem developed in Chapter 1 is restated here:

> Using SCT as an underlying theory, to what extent can women's roles be better supported by understanding the links between power-prestige orders and the subliminal gender characteristic as a status cue?

Having identified five themes from the existing literature, three research questions formed the basis for a series of interview questions. The analysis of the data explored through the lens of SCT enabled the researcher to investigate the link between allocated power-prestige orders and gender.  It is clear that the diffuse female gender characteristic is a cue for the subliminal allocation of lower status and therefore lower ranking within the power-prestige order.

However, it is possible to diffuse, challenge and confuse gender assessments (Chizhik et al. 2003; Ridgeway & Correll 2006; Walker et al. 2014). Actions that the SEWLs employ indicate that they can substantially and successfully obfuscate the links between power-prestige orders and the subliminal gender characteristic. Organisations can better support women by facilitating activities such as those that women executives in this thesis undertake to weaken those links. For example, when organisations put in place programs to encourage and facilitate networking and the development of mentoring and sponsoring relationships, they are supporting women to align with powerful others.  This is a method that the SEWLs identified as obfuscating the links between gender and status and increasing their power-prestige order. Similarly, the links will weaken when organisations overtly promote the proven accomplishments and skill sets of women.

Furthermore, women executives will gain better support when they comprehend that unconscious status assessments based only on their gender have a negative effect on their power-prestige order. Knowing that actions can confuse gender assessments (Chizhik et al. 2003; Ridgeway & Correll 2006; Walker et al. 2014) will enable women to better support themselves. This will encourage women to take personal steps to confuse the signals related to gender and status. For example, when women ask for special projects and put their hands up for promotion, rather than wait until someone taps them on the shoulder, they are behaving in a role-incongruous manner (Eagly and Karau 2002) which will confuse the subliminal gender-based status assessments and increase their chances of a higher place in the power-prestige order.

In summary, women can better support themselves through knowing that their gender is a cue towards subliminal allocation of lower workplace status and that it is possible to obfuscate the gender signals. Similarly, managers, particularly HR managers, can support women by being aware of this phenomenon when managing work-based task situations. Organisations can support by striving to become 'supportive organisations', as described in section 5.5 below.

## 5.4    Implications for theory

Status characteristics theory focusses on beliefs and behaviours surrounding status. Throughout the findings for this thesis, the many lived experiences of women support the fundamental tenets of SCT. In particular, an interpretation of data using SCT principles confirms original study propositions related to the path of relevance, the burden of proof process, second order beliefs, groups status evaluation and role-congruence.

This thesis contributes to the notion of the emergence of status categories in different types of situations (Berger & Fişek 2006). Applying SCT within the context of the Australian workforce has not highlighted specific categories unique to Australia. Consistent with similar study parameters in other contexts, the findings here support much of this earlier work.

SCT explores how interpersonal status hierarchies work (Wagner & Berger 1997; Correll et al. 2007; Ridgeway & Correll 2006). Status hierarchies are ordered by

the *expectations* which participants form of their own ability to contribute to the group goal of completing the task compared with the ability of each other member. In this way, the amount of influence and esteem given to individuals within the group by themselves and others, is dependent upon the assumptions about each member's competence to complete that task relative to the other group members (Berger et al. 1977). This thesis proffers many lived examples of how SEWLs interfere with the expectation state.

Theory informs us that in most mixed group task situations the expectation would be that men will perform better than women because of men's higher status state (Pugh & Wahrman 1983). It further informs us that status beliefs can be altered when other group members understand and value an individual's expertise relative to the task at hand; and that task structure and task environment can be altered to change status beliefs (Chizhik et al. 2003; Alexander et al. 2009). The research undertaken by Chizhik, Alexander and co-researchers was completed using students in laboratory experiments. However, this thesis has shown, through the lived workplace experiences of women, that assessments which determine expected states can be challenged and confused by factors such as women being highlighted as being experts in their field, women aligning with higher status others, and women utilising sponsors, mentors and coaches. If systems are embedded into organisations which facilitate and assist women in these respects, then this confounds the expectation even more. Thus, this thesis, through the lived workplace experiences of senior women, contributes to expectation states theory.

An example which supports earlier SCT research is when scholars conducted three status studies where males and females viewed videotaped job interviews in which either a female or a male stated that they felt either anger or sadness (Brescoll & Uhlmann 2008). The results suggest that expressing anger is an effective means of attaining higher status for men, but not for women. Both male and female participants conferred lower status on women, regardless of their occupational rank. Participants attributed women's emotional reactions to internal characteristics *'she is out of control'* whereas they attributed men's emotional characteristics to external circumstances. The SEWL responses in Chapter 4 are workplace examples of this theory as they were subject to similar reactions.

Furthermore, the study of second order expectation states theory (Kalkhoff et al. 2004) confirmed the importance of second order expectations during initial interactions. The scholars conducted the research in laboratory experiments with first and second-year undergraduate students. They found that individuals adhere to second-tier expectations even when it will disadvantage them. The SEWL responses regarding limiting their own agency are workplace examples supporting this theory and contributing through actual workplace examples.

In general, there is a dearth of research empirically addressing how women leaders develop strategies to overcome the subliminal gender status assessment in group task situations within the context of SCT and within Australia. Much of the SCT research is experimentally, laboratory or purely theoretically based.  This research fills gaps by being based on lived experiences of Australian senior executive women leaders.

The quantum of evidence in this thesis relating to the power of *influence* has implications for theory. The use of influencing techniques is the most prevalent tool that the senior women executives apply to obfuscate the gender signals and increase their rankings in the work hierarchy.  While it is known that influence has a higher status ranking than performance (Cook & Glass 2014; Joshi et al. 2015), research indicates that when women use influencing behaviours they will probably face resistance, be punished or ignored (Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neill 1977; Ridgeway & Berger 1986). Women who exert influence are less successful than men and are subject to a double bind situation (Carli 2017). This thesis includes the *successful* application of a range of influencing behaviours, described in Chapter 4, by executive women across Australian workplaces.  This thesis is, to the researcher's knowledge, the first examination of the relationship between SCT and executive women's successful use of influence for workplace progression within lived workplace experiences, thus extending the application of the theory.

Similarly, to the researcher's knowledge, this is the first SCT research which explores whether workplaces exclude executive women from opportunities to shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings. The main cause of women's exclusion is boys' clubs.  The phenomenon of boys' clubs links in some ways to *influencing* above although it relates more to male

influencing behaviours.  While there has been significant research into boys' clubs in general (Alexander et al. 2009; Anderson et al. 2001; Fisher & Kinsey 2014; Liff & Ward 2001; Searby et al. 2015; Tonge 2008; Wright 2016) the researcher has found no SCT research indicating that boys' clubs are such a sizeable factor in exclusion from opportunities to shorten the path of relevance and increase power-prestige rankings.  This extends and applies SCT theory to the lived experiences of Australian senior executive women leaders.

Research question two concluded that status and cultural assessments significantly limit SEWLs agency. This thesis finds that gender is a cultural device and that it may be creating societal micro-order, aligning with Ridgeway's (2015) position. There is a gap in the literature in relation to SCT and Australian culture.  To the researcher's knowledge, this is the first illustration to date to demonstrate that the Australian culture will proffer similar insights to those portrayed by Ridgeway (2006; 2008; 2009; 2011; 2014; 2015). She refers to societal culture at large. The cultural similarities in this thesis begin to fill that gap.

Examining through the SCT lens, this thesis concludes that organisational and personal support mechanisms assist Australian women to overcome their low status rankings caused by their diffuse gender characteristic. This lends support to a recent Australian study (Murray & Southey 2017) of women middle managers across varying industries which found that institutionalising workplace structures results in unconscious status assessments based on gender being confused, thus benefiting women. Similar to the findings in this thesis, it was found that workplaces with embedded HR policies on equality and mentoring; those which ensure that women have opportunities to be promoted into high status roles; and those which expand opportunities for women to be involved in unstructured group tasks, all support women's progression. These institutionalized structures obfuscate the status effects of the lower female gender characteristic in workplace status assessments resulting in subsequent higher power-prestige rankings for these women. Thus, this thesis adds to the theoretical contribution.  Furthermore, the not insignificant volume of findings in the thesis in relation to some organisations at the top level not adhering to their own support-type policies is, to the researcher's knowledge, a new finding in the context of Australian companies. It is one that begs further exploration.
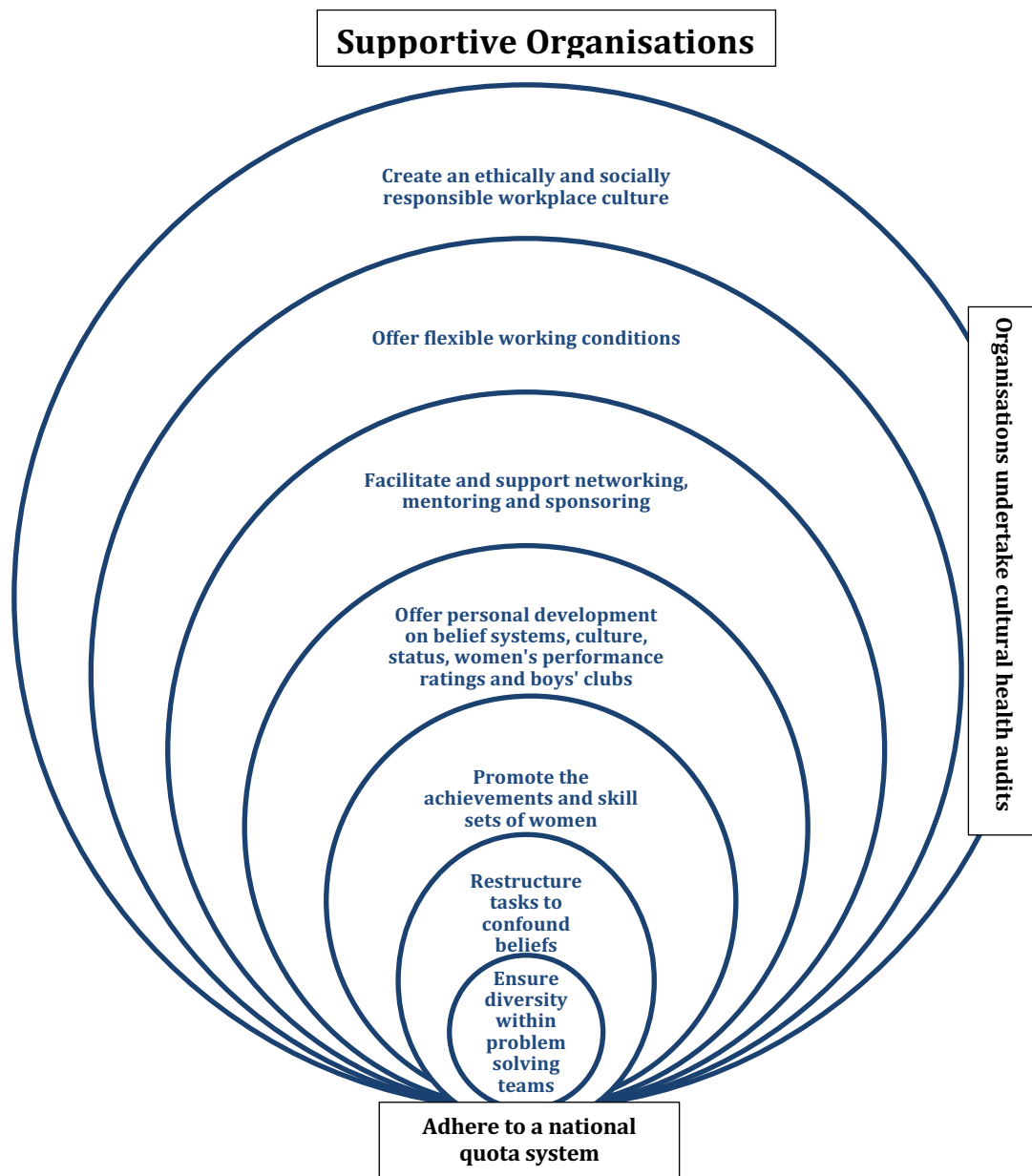
## 5.5   Implications for practice

Given that gender stereotyping has been occurring since the agrarian revolution (Ridgeway 2011), there is little chance of it disappearing in the near future. However, this thesis identifies practices and actions that organisations and individuals can undertake to improve their gender diversity management and support women in the workplace. The Strategy type-A solutions developed in Section 5.2 generate the following practical action list.

1) HR within organisations should experiment with approaches to structuring work differently, as stereotypical expectations and beliefs will be confounded by ill structured tasks which confuse the gender signals;

2) Managers and organisations should carefully consider the makeup of problem solving teams, ensuring diversity of opportunities;

3) Managers and organisations should actively and overtly promote the proven accomplishments and skill sets of individuals, particularly those of women;

4) Organisations should undertake cultural audits by external operators, to determine the health of the organisation, as viewed from their employees' perspectives, focussing on:

   (a) monitoring values, beliefs and behaviours to identify dissonance of espoused values, beliefs and behaviours;

   (b) monitoring the flexibility of their working conditions; and

   (c) monitoring the application of their policies, particularly in relation to policies designed to assist diversity management, workplace bullying and workplace health and safety;

5) Organisations should strive to create ethically and socially responsible cultures for their workforce;

6) Organisations should offer true flexibility of working conditions;

7) Organisations should offer carefully structured and sensitively facilitated development courses for all executives, creating self-awareness about women's performance ratings and the influence and consequences of boys' clubs;

8) Organisations should offer personal development awareness sessions about belief systems, the effects of cultural assessments, and how subjective group interpretations and unconscious bias subliminally allocate status in the workplace;

9) Organisations should put in place programs to encourage and facilitate networking and the development of mentoring and sponsoring relationships; and

10) At the national level, a quota system for women on boards should be incrementally introduced into organisations, which allows exemptions, concessions and deferments by individual business case. Organisations should adhere to this quota system.

The results of undertaking the audits (point 4 above) should assist organisations to create better continuous quality improvements and render them more attractive workplaces. It is of importance that organisations undertake an early initial cultural health audit in order to have a base line from which to measure progress. Subsequent audits should measure progress after implementation of the various steps. Lessons learned, and difficulties met and overcome should be clearly documented to assist in the building of further strategies. Too often those lessons are not recorded and as personnel change over time, organisations can repeat earlier mistakes.

The introduction of quotas will be highly controversial and will most probably meet with spurious arguments about allowing merit to prevail. The more politically acceptable approach may be 'hard targets', however utilising a target approach so far does not seem to be achieving the desired results (WGEA 2018). The use of a business case approach allowing deferments of the quota system is to acknowledge and allow inevitably required exceptions to occur.

Figure 5.2 (below) illustrates how organisations can best become 'supportive organisations' by taking the actions listed above. Unlike the conceptual model, this practical model does not enunciate the terminologies used within SCT. This is deliberate so that the practical model is easy to understand by those with no prior knowledge of SCT, as some of the SCT concepts can be complex and difficult to comprehend.

**Supportive Organisations**

Create an ethically and socially responsible workplace culture

Offer flexible working conditions

Facilitate and support networking, mentoring and sponsoring

Offer personal development on belief systems, culture, status, women's performance ratings and boys' clubs

Promote the achievements and skill sets of women

Restructure tasks to confound beliefs

Ensure diversity within problem solving teams

Adhere to a national quota system

Organisations undertake cultural health audits

**Figure 5.2** *Supportive Organisations – supporting senior women's workplace progression - a practical meso level model developed utilising the concepts of status characteristics theory* (*Source:* Developed for this thesis)

Research informs us that the best likelihood of gaining more women in top positions is to have more women in top positions (Cassells 2016). If this approach succeeds, it may escalate into additional positive effects because more women at the top may additionally influence organisational practices to become less masculine in nature.

Most current diversity management policies and proposals tend to weight their efforts towards Strategy type-A activities. For example, recent research by Joshi et al. (2015) proposes that diversity management practices focus on three issues:

1) using trained observers or advisers in companies to assist in scrutinising performance management and compensation practices, building accountability into these practices and formally checking for instances of stereotypical biases;
2) redesigning jobs so that there is greater interdependence and outcome interdependence among employees, including encouraging bonuses based on collective achievements; and
3) implementing industry-wide mentoring groups where women can be directed towards opportunities for further personal development

(Joshi et al. 2015).

The findings by Joshi et al. (2015) are consistent with some of the empirical findings of this thesis which lends support to the current research.

Some public-sector governments within Australia currently have highly creditable gender equality strategies. For example, the Australian Public Service (APS) takes a five-pronged approach to achieving gender equality:

1) driving a supportive and enabling workplace culture;
2) achieving gender equality in APS leadership;
3) working innovatively to embed gender equality in employment practices;
4) increasing take-up of flexible work arrangements by both men and women; and
5) measuring and evaluating actions

(Australian Public Service Commission 2018).

Again, there is overlap between these recommendations and those made in this thesis. All of these are commendable strategies and the APS has recently achieved the target of gender equality in leadership of government departments, at least in the numbers of men and women who hold Head of Department roles.

In addition to the practices that organisations can adopt to support women, there are speedier actions, the Strategy type-B solutions developed Section 5.2, which women can adopt as explained below.

1) Be fully aware that gaining the Chair, board, CEO or C-suite positions is NOT based on merit. This is probably the most important fact that ambitious women should understand and believe;
2) Be cognisant that it is who you know rather than what you know that is more important in your quest for the top positions;
3) Ascertain what the internal political issues are in your organisation, learn which issues are important and which are paid lip service to by the top management team, and play the game accordingly;
4) Ascertain which of the top team are the 'in crowd', those whose opinions matter;
5) Align yourself with the 'in crowd' and, where appropriate to your personal values, with the opinions of the 'in crowd';
6) Spend a considerable amount of time networking, especially with those whom you feel are influential in your organisation and in your industry as a whole, as well as influential others;
7) Seek out appropriate sponsors and mentors;
8) Ensure you have a good personal support system in place, if you feel out of your depth, fake it till you make it and hire a good business coach;
9) If possible, try to work for an organisation which 'lives' its espoused values and whose values align with your values;
10) Be assertive, ask for special projects, toughen up in salary negotiations and put your hand up for promotion; do not wait until someone taps you on the shoulder; do this privately rather than telling the world that you are doing this;
11) Be a master of your 'craft', whatever your business is;
12) Encourage your partner, if you have one, to share home duties with you including child, elderly and infant care;
13) Groom yourself appropriately for your position;
14) Be resilient and do not wear your heart on your sleeve; and
15) Be authentic in your management style, e.g. if you are a woman, do not try to act like a man.

Professional development programs for executive women should include the information on the above list. The assumption that SEWLs will gain top positions through merit alone, is incorrect. It is important that SEWLs believe and understand how the present systems of promotion and selection operate in reality. While they strive to perform and deliver, the organisation expects as a given that they can and will perform well; this will not gain them progression to the top positions. The SEWLs expect that they will have equal opportunities to perform and to discharge the burden of proof (Berger et al. 1980) in order to progress however organisations do not provide equal opportunities to discharge the burden of proof. Thus, organisations block SEWLs from attaining the top positions. The women resolve this by refocusing and utilising personal and organisational enablers and support systems.

## 5.6    Further contributions of this thesis

In addition to the contributions to SCT and delivering practical solutions and strategies, this thesis contributes to the wider environment through offering social and economic contributions to society as a whole.

### 5.6.1    Economic contribution

Encouraging women to stay in the workforce can contribute to broader economic development and is fundamental in enhancing innovation and productivity (IMF 2013; WGEA 2018).  Raising women's participation in the workforce to country specific male levels raises gross domestic product (GDP). In Australia a 6% increase in female participation rates would increase GDP by eleven per-cent (Sachs & Were 2009). Similarly, globally, it would raise GDP in Japan by 9 per-cent and in the United States by 5 per-cent (Aguirre et al. 2012). Further, in economies which are rapidly aging, higher workplace participation rates can mitigate the blow of the hastily declining workforce and thus enhance economic growth.

There is a significant amount of extant research relating to the economic positives of including women in the top echelon of organisations. Research into Fortune 500 companies shows that companies with the highest proportion of women on their boards performed significantly better than firms with the lowest proportion (Carter & Wagner 2011). Research which examined one-thousand-five-hundred organisations over fifteen years demonstrates that when women are in senior management in companies, there is an improvement in the organisational performance focussing on innovation (Dezsö & Ross 2012). Including women in the top management teams of such companies creates an additional market value for each company of circa US $44 million. Further research studying three-hundred-and-sixty-six companies across the US, Canada and UK determined that those organisations which fit into the top quartile for gender diversity have a fifteen per-cent greater probability of higher commercial returns than their national industry medians (Hunt et al. 2015).

A global analysis of data across ninety-one countries and twenty-one-thousand-nine-hundred-and-eighty companies found that having women in the top

leadership teams may improve company performance and that there is a strong correlation between female leaders and company financial profitability (Noland et al. 2016). Taking factors into consideration such as share price, a researcher has identified a link indicating increased financial outcomes for companies with at least one female director as opposed to those with no female directors (Suisse 2012).

Companies who do not embrace equality of opportunity can be the victims of high staff turnover, which can lead to the loss of specialist skills, knowledge and productivity. The additional costs of training new employees are high and research indicates that the total costs connected with employee turnover can be between ninety per-cent and two-hundred per-cent of the annual salary, dependent upon the type of position (Allen 2008). This illustrates an additional financial incentive for companies to embrace equal opportunities for all in the workplace.

However, it is not only introducing more women at the top of organisations which adds to company performance. Enhancing gender diversity across entire organisations also increases performance and thus strengthens overall economic performance according to research conducted across five hundred US companies when using indicators related to number of customers and sales revenue (Herring 2009).

### 5.6.2    *Social contribution*

Increasing the number of women in the workforce impacts positively on organisations in terms of company culture and on operations.  These in turn provide social and societal contributions, as a diverse workforce offers advantages to companies in terms of improvements in innovation, productivity, efficiency, creativity and employee commitment. More diversity in work teams links to companies having greater innovative capacities.  Extant research has found that greater gender diversity in workplaces provides enhanced environments where innovation can thrive (Gratton et al. 2007), as opposed to single sex workplaces where there is not the same support for innovation.

There can be a major social contribution by encouraging more women to stay in the workforce and to enter the higher echelons of management. Women are

frequently supporters of other women. The SEWLs talked of the lack of senior women whom they could ask to mentor or sponsor them. The more women that are in senior positions the more who will be available to help and champion other women. Women in senior positions act as role models and this in turn encourages other women to strive to obtain senior positions (Whelan & Wood 2012). When workplaces are attractive to both men and women, they attract a larger talent pool. The employees in such companies value the positive workplace cultures that such companies espouse and enact. There are additional reasons why company culture links to gender diversity. For example, well managed diversity creates a variety of perspectives, it encourages a more holistic analysis of the problems faced by organisations and generates more energy, which improves decision making (Curtis et al. 2012).

Employees value companies whose cultures espouse and enact gender equality through their policies and practices. Such policies are usually socially responsible, offering flexible working arrangements and support for employees with family, child and elderly responsibilities. This allows employees to meet personal and family needs. Offering flexible working conditions can be a major factor in attracting top talent across all industries as these conditions are important for women and men of all ages. One study of Australian companies found that ensuring that the retention and retainment of the company reputation can be a major motivator for companies to develop gender diversity strategies (Charlesworth et al. 2005).

Companies who have embedded gender equality policies and strategies which embrace family friendly workplaces and that tackle sexual harassment and workplace discriminations, encourage leadership aspirations for both men and women (Fritz & van Knippenberg 2018). Encouraging women to enter into leadership positions will beneficially redress the current imbalance of males vs females in top leadership roles (WGEA 2018).

If women are employed on an equal basis with men, this provides organisations with a larger overall talent pool, potentially increasing innovation, productivity and creativity, which will be of benefit to all of society. Introducing more women to boardrooms potentially will be a positive influence on company management.

Women's preference for a transformational management style (Eagly et al. 2003) can be a positive influence. Women can provide boards with different insights into issues such as consumer behaviour and can improve company brands and reputations for companies which target the female market. Introducing diversity into senior management teams and boardrooms will assist with ensuring that institutions consider the interests and needs of society as a whole, rather than those of predominately one group, and will be of benefit to society.

As Australia's population ages, the health and welfare systems are under greater pressure with limited funds. If women made a greater contribution to GDP, as discussed above, there would be additional funds which governments could potentially spend on the health and welfare systems.

## 5.7    Limitations and implications for further research

This research limits the participants to senior executive women leaders in Australia and it is unclear whether the findings will apply across other countries with variegated workplace cultures. Further, the company sizes sampled refer to those companies employing in excess of 200 workers therefore the research excluded small and medium enterprises (SME)s. It is unknown if the research findings have applicability to SEWLs within SMEs, particularly small family businesses as those types of operations are known to include dissimilar internal dynamics to large companies (Boxer et al. 2014).

An issue limiting the methodology is the subjectivity of the researcher in relation to the coding and analysis of the data. There is a large amount of rich data available from the participant interviews. This thesis exemplifies only a fraction of the data collected. Other researchers may analyse the same data with an altered focus, resulting in supplementary results dependent on their subjective viewpoint.

An early possibly limiting factor was being able to clearly identify the level of expertise of a SEWL. If it had been determined that the best sample of SEWLs, for example, was the number of years in management, this would have skewed the age group to those over fifty-five. The preferred method of identifying SEWLs was by the level of position currently held, however confusing the job titles may be preferable in determining that sample. The researcher cogitated alternative

questions to put to the potential participants to assist in this determination. At one point the researcher drafted a potential questionnaire including factors such as the number of direct reports, annual budget responsibilities, and salary and remuneration quantities. However, she rejected these methods for fear of potential participants rejecting the offer to participate because of the intrusiveness of completing a questionnaire requesting copious amounts of personal information.

This thesis explores only 5 themes and 3 research questions. However, this does not detract from the significance of the findings, rather it provides a platform for possibilities for future research. The data gained is very wide-ranging and provides food for thought about further research possibilities. There are a number of ways that scholars could widen the research, for example the current research topics can include varying cohorts such as:

- only CEO levels
- all manager levels
- only listed boards' members
- SEWLs from different countries and regions
- senior executive male leaders (SEMLs)
- SEWLs and SEMLs
- SEWLs in the public sector / in the private sector / in SMEs

Further, it could focus primarily and in-depth on one of the topics which emerged in the participant responses, such as:

- SEWLs identifying political savviness
- SEWLs aligning with the right people to progress
- SEWLs building resilience in the workplace
- value systems of SEWLs
- flexibility of work practices for SEWLs
- boys' clubs and other exclusion factors for SEWLs
- SEWLs' experiences of management as a male construct
- SEWLs self-limiting their agency
- Men find SEWLs threatening
- SEWLs assisted by networks, mentors, and coaches
- SEWLs assisted by institutionalised support mechanisms
- SEWLs' experiences of organisational non-compliance of policies
- SEWLs' experiences of organisational tick the box mentality

Additionally, it could focus on isolating certain themes, such as honing-in on:

- The subliminal nature of status assessments
- SEWLs and SEMLs' awareness of cultural status beliefs affecting and influencing them
- SEWLs and SEMLs' perceptions of how SEWLs and SEMLs are affected and influenced by cultural status beliefs

As the steps of the proposed practical actions can apply to men as well as women, it would be interesting in the future to undertake a study of men and women leaders to ascertain the extent to which they currently use the proposed Strategy type-B 15 steps, and the usefulness of each, as well as the extent to which their organisations currently undertake the Strategy-type-A 10 steps and the usefulness of each in terms of changing behaviours. This could entail an alternative methodological approach such as:

- Utilising a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods in the study. The study could encompass a questionnaire for the participants to complete, which could be statistically analysed, as well as explored taking a qualitative approach with a qualitative interview

This chapter offers explanations of how to overcome limitations. However, the limitations do not detract from the overall robustness and strength of the thesis. The researcher offers suggestions of ways in which those limitations can be further utilised as platforms for further research.

## 5.8 Conclusion

Australian data released in November 2018 identifies that a significant gender pay gap prevails for key management personnel, a gap of 24.3%, compared to 24.9% in 2017 (WGEA 2018), indicating that inequality continues within senior executive women roles. Similarly, by 31 October 2018, according to the AICD website viewed in late December 2018, only eighty-five of the ASX200 companies had reached the target of 30% women on boards (AICD 2018). The stagnancy of the gender pay gap at the senior level and the persistent lack of women on boards, exemplify the continued need for change.

Using empirically tested and proven SCT, the thesis has studied the status-imposed limitations on SEWLs' agency in Australian workplaces, recognising that the female gender is a lower status characteristic in organisational leadership

situations. It is a cue for the subliminal allocation of lower status and therefore lower ranking within the power-prestige order.

Employing the empirical lens of the SEWLs' lived workplace experiences has facilitated contributions to the extant research in the general areas of gender inequality, belief systems and SCT. The findings have elevated status to surpass power and resources in levels of importance in perceptions of workplace competence (Ridgeway 2014).

SEWLs in this thesis are cognisant of status-imposed limitations on their agency and they identify a range of successful behaviours and actions which shorten the path of relevance and increase their power-prestige rankings. Utilising SCT research concomitantly with SEWL responses allowed the researcher to develop a range of supportive organisational and individual strategies and actions.

This thesis has resulted in the design of a conceptual model related to SCT and a practical model depicting the strategies and support mechanisms that organisations can adopt. The results of this thesis offer a major contribution to diversity management policy in Australia.

The thesis contains suggestions for further research which can utilise this research as its foundation.

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