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Is international affairs too 'hard' for women? Explaining the missing women in Australia's international affairs[1]

Melissa H. Conley Tyler, Emily Blizzard and Bridget Crane*

Women are demonstrably under-represented at senior levels in Australia's international affairs. Empirical evidence shows a continuing gender imbalance in leadership positions, including in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Defence and academia. Two explanations commonly offered are that women are less motivated or lack interest in 'hard' international relations. These explanations are found to be unconvincing, given studies showing similar levels of ambition and interest at recruitment. Four alternative explanations are offered to account for the scarcity of female leaders in Australia's international affairs: the legacy of direct discrimination, continued indirect discrimination, inadequate support for women who balance work and family responsibilities, and socially constructed gender norms. Instead of the subject matter of international relations being too 'hard', or inherently masculine, it appears that it is the combined impact of these factors that has made it 'hard', or difficult, for women to progress to senior levels. In order to show how these barriers can be overcome, three case studies are presented of women who have achieved senior positions: Professor Emeritus Helen Hughes, Her Excellency Ms Penny Wensley and Professor Hilary Charlesworth. These examples suggest strategies that women can use to further their careers and measures that can be implemented in workplaces to improve the representation of senior women in Australia's international affairs.

Keywords: Australia; discrimination; feminist analysis; international affairs; women

Introduction

The issue of women in leadership positions remains a topic of current debate. In *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, Facebook Chief Operating

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Officer Sheryl Sandberg (2013, 5) argues that 'men still run the world', and proposes strategies that women can use to achieve leadership positions and other goals. In 2012, Anne-Marie Slaughter sparked debate on women in international affairs with an article in the *Atlantic* entitled 'Why Women Still Can't Have It All'. Slaughter spent two years as the first female Director of Policy Planning at the US Department of State before returning to a high-profile position at Princeton University because she thought her academic job allowed her greater flexibility to balance family and work responsibilities. Slaughter (2012) argues that women can have it all, 'but not today, not with the way America's economy and society are currently structured'. She calls for institutional change so that women can more effectively combine work and family; at present, she sees it as too wearing, as just too hard. Both Slaughter and Sandberg believe that having more women in leadership positions will lead to more gender-inclusive workplaces. Interestingly, both women also note that they were warned not to speak out about gender inequality in the workplace.

These issues have also surfaced in Australian public debate, most notably in the Lowy Institute for International Policy's blog *The Interpreter*, which deserves credit for hosting this discussion. In August 2011, Lowy Fellow Dr Rodger Shanahan created controversy with a post which described women as the 'forgotten sex' in international relations commentary, and theorised that women might prefer more 'intimate modes of communication'. This recalled an earlier heated debate on *The Interpreter* which was instigated when commenter Sally Wilkinson noted that out of 26 listed blog contributors, only four were female. Blog editor Sam Roggeveen responded to the ensuing debate as follows:

> On the question of gender imbalance in the international relations field, I don't think I did anything to 'end the discussion'. It's just that I happen to have only vaguely formed views on the subject, so decided not to air them. But for what it's worth, I doubt this imbalance has very much to do with sexism or discrimination. My guess is that it has more to do with a combination of divergent interests (relatively few women are interested in what Susan [Harris Rimmer] calls 'hard' international relations issues, so they don't enter the field) and family dynamics (many more women than men interrupt their careers to care for children).
>
> 'Aha, but don't both those reasons reveal how sexist our society continues to be?', I hear you ask. Well, perhaps. Maybe children's academic interests are socially constructed to keep women in their place. And maybe the societal demand that mothers be the primary carers of children is also a control mechanism to keep men in charge. All I can say is that I instinctively doubt it, but that it's a debate that goes well beyond my area of expertise. I'm open to argument and The Interpreter's readership is too, with the important caveat that this remains a blog about international policy, so I don't want to lurch too far into other fields (Roggeveen 2009).

These debates suggest that women, leadership and women's participation in international affairs are still hotly contested issues both domestically and

internationally, despite many years of debate (D'Amico and Beckman 1995; Enloe 1990; Stevens 2007).

Given this, it seems a good time to discuss the under-representation of women in Australia's international affairs. This article begins by assessing some of the explanations offered by commentators and concludes that these explanations are inadequate. Evidence shows that women are attracted to 'hard' issues of international relations and start their careers with similar ambitions to men. Instead, four more convincing explanations are offered for the scarcity of senior women in Australia's international affairs: the legacy of direct discrimination, ongoing indirect discrimination, family responsibilities and socially constructed notions of gender. Together, these have made it more difficult—have made it hard—for women to progress to senior positions. In the final section of this article, three case studies are provided of women who have overcome these barriers and achieved senior roles in order to illustrate strategies that can be used to improve workplaces and assist women in building careers in international affairs.

Are women under-represented at senior levels in Australian international affairs?

Empirical evidence demonstrates that women remain under-represented at senior levels of Australia's international affairs across multiple sectors. In June 2012, less than a third of Australia's ambassadors and high commissioners posted abroad were women, and women accounted for only 26 percent of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT's) Senior Executive Service. This is despite the fact that DFAT employs more women than men overall in ongoing and non-ongoing positions (DFAT 2012). Since 1946, only one woman has been appointed to the head post of Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations: Her Excellency Ms Penny Wensley AO.[2] Her Excellency Ms Caroline Millar was acting head of mission briefly in 2005. This means that, at the time of writing, Australia has only had a female ambassador to the United Nations for four years and two months in the 67 years since the position was created (Cotton and Lee 2012; see also Harris-Rimmer 2010).

As of April 2013, the organisational chart posted on the Australian Agency for International Development's website shows that its director general and all three deputy directors general are men. Similarly, all of the ministers associated with the Department of Defence are male, and the defence leaders section of its website lists one woman among 16 senior managers. That woman, Ms Carmel McGregor, is responsible for the Defence People Group.

To be fair, this is not just an issue in international affairs: the 2011–2012 *Australian Public Service Statistical Bulletin* showed that there is also a gender imbalance at senior levels in the public service more broadly. In ongoing positions, women outnumber men in all Australian Public Service (APS)

classifications up to APS 5; above that level, men outnumber women in all classifications. This is despite there being 22,473 more women than men in ongoing positions in the APS (APSC 2012). These numbers 'speak an inconvenient truth about a service that claims to be non-discriminatory, merit-based and values-led: the APS is not "ahead of the game" on issues of gender equity' (Evans, Edwards, and Burmester 2012; see also Edwards et al. 2013).

Outside of government there is a similar stark under-representation of women at senior levels in international affairs. As of May 2013, the website of the Lowy Institute shows that there are only two women on the organisation's 14-member board of directors and only one woman on its 9-member international advisory council. According to its website, only a quarter of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's council members are women. Both institutes have male executive directors and chairmen. The Australian Institute of International Affairs is slightly better, with women holding three of the organisation's seven national leadership positions, yet all seven branch presidents are male. These numbers reflect similar international trends regarding women leading think tanks (Moncada 2013). There are also similar cases across the not-for-profit sector. For example, the World Vision Australia website shows that the 10-member board has only three female members, although women account for 66 percent of the organisation's staff (excluding casuals). The Australian Red Cross website, meanwhile, shows that there are five women on its board of 16.

The under-representation of women at senior levels is also evident in academia. Although 56 percent of all academic staff in Australia are female, women represent only 28 percent of staff above senior lecturer level (Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education 2012). Evidence suggests that female academics receive a heavier teaching load than male academics, leaving them less time for research, which would improve their chances of promotion (Cowden et al. 2012). On average, women in political science departments account for only 28 percent of all staff. Given that 47 percent of political science PhD candidates are women, this shows that women's demonstrated interest in the field is not enough to ensure they make it to senior levels (ibid.).

While the numbers provide a clear indication of under-representation—and could be repeated for other sectors—there is no consensus on the cause. Given nearly three decades of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination activity, the statically low number of women at senior levels warrants investigation. Is the absence of women a reflection of their choices? Or are there obstacles that impede women's ability to participate in international affairs and advance to senior positions? Potential explanations are assessed below.

Traditional explanations

In the debate on *The Interpreter* blog, Roggeveen and Shanahan utilised two traditional arguments to explain the absence of women in Australian

international affairs. Roggeveen suggested that women are less interested in 'hard' issues of international relations, such as security issues, while Shanahan proposed that women might prefer more 'intimate modes of communication' than men (Roggeveen 2009; Shanahan 2011). These arguments are problematic insofar as they view women as a single homogenous group with shared characteristics, needs and traits. In contrast, this article takes the position that not all women share particular behavioural characteristics purely because of their sex; instead, social and cultural conditioning may influence how women act. Unfortunately, public dialogue on gender continues to make use of sweeping generalisations that have long been abandoned in other areas of public debate. For example, dialogue on race and ethnicity is much less essentialist than dialogue on women—consider how *The Interpreter* debate would have read if one substituted 'the Chinese' or 'the Indians' for 'women'.

There is clear evidence that women are interested in working in international relations, both now and in the past. For example, in 2009, the Lowy Institute's then deputy director, Martine Letts (2009), highlighted that '34 of the 63 Lowy interns we have had so far are women', demonstrating comparable levels of interest in international affairs. Additionally, in DFAT since 1985, the annual graduate intake has reflected roughly equal numbers of men and women (Truss 2007). It was documented as early as 1963—in now notorious advice against the recruitment of female diplomats—that 'many more applications are received from women than from men' (Taysom 1963, 2) for graduate positions. Consequently, the explanation that the under-representation of women at senior levels occurs because women are not interested in the field is unconvincing; rather, women's interest in international affairs has been demonstrable and consistent over time. The issue of what count as 'soft' and 'hard' issues in international affairs is discussed further below. With so much interest at junior levels, the puzzle is why more leadership positions are not held by women.

The argument that women as a group may be less motivated to have a public profile also proves false. For example, a survey by Bain & Company found men and women did 'not have materially different levels of ambition' (Evans, Edwards, and Burmester 2012). A recent study also found that, in the 18–34 age bracket, more women than men rated their career as a high priority (WGEA 2013, 1). Similarly, arguments that women are inherently peaceful, and therefore unsuited to leadership in international affairs, ignore the many women worldwide who, individually or in groups, are willing to pursue aggressive policies and actions (Davies 2013). While cultural and maternal feminists maintain that, in response to social conditioning and their corresponding experience as caregivers, some women may be more oriented to cooperation and compromise (Ruddick 2002), arguments that women are a homogenous group sharing innate characteristics are false and undermine women's legitimacy as international actors (Tickner 1999).

Any discussion of the under-representation of women at senior levels in international affairs risks being sidelined by the argument that senior female leaders are 'in the pipeline' (Castleman and Allen 1998). This insidious idea suggests that, within a few years, the multitude of intelligent young women currently entering the field of international affairs will begin to work their way up the ranks, providing gender equality at leadership levels. However, this claim discounts the fact that, for many years now, women have entered the field of international affairs in roughly equal numbers to men. For example, the DFAT graduate intake has had an approximate gender balance since 1985, and yet the proportion of female leaders is still well below this almost 30 years later. In 1998, a report by the Australian Political Studies Association showed that women accounted for 38 percent of political science PhD candidates, and yet in 2012 women still only accounted for 28 percent of staff in political science departments at Australian universities (Cowden et al. 2012). Although women are entering the field in equal or greater numbers to men, the career pipeline is 'leaky': women tend to disappear before they reach senior levels.

More accurate explanations

This article argues that there are four other factors which better explain the scarcity of senior women in Australia's international affairs: the legacy of direct discrimination, continuing indirect discrimination, family responsibilities and socially constructed gender norms. These factors may impact differently across the various sectors of international affairs.

Direct discrimination

One factor in explaining the under-representation of women at senior levels in Australian international affairs is the legacy of now abolished direct discrimination practices. Before it became unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of sex, marital status or pregnancy under the Sex Discrimination Act in 1984, women were officially and legally excluded from employment in a range of ways (Strachan, Burgess, and Henderson 2007). Until 1966, for example, women were prohibited from continuing to work in the APS once married (Dee and Volk 2007). It was assumed that women were unable to be effective in the workplace once they had commitments to a husband and family. Consequently, 'a domestic life for married women was not a matter of choice but enforced by law' (Manne 2005, 23). As a consequence of this policy, in 1965—the year before its removal—1732 women were required by law to resign from the APS (Summers 2003).

The historical direct discrimination against women means that women who today would have acquired the necessary seniority, experience and qualifications to occupy senior positions in international affairs were lost to the field.

The policy acted as a disincentive to the recruitment of women. In the 1963 memo mentioned previously, the trade official argued that a woman 'could marry at anytime and be lost to us. She could not be regarded as a long term investment in the same sense as we regard a man' (Taysom 1963, 2). The consequence was that fewer women were recruited than were suitable candidates for employment in Australia's international affairs, again reducing the number of potential contemporary female leaders. Furthermore, women who entered the APS workforce in subsequent years would have found themselves in a male-dominated sphere with very few senior female mentors or role models from whom to seek advice or assistance (Dee and Volk 2007).

Indirect discrimination

Another explanation for the limited number of women in senior positions in international affairs is indirect discrimination. According to General Recommendation 25 on Article 4 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women:

> Indirect discrimination against women may occur when laws, policies and programmes were based on seemingly gender-neutral criteria which in their actual effect have a detrimental impact on women. Gender-neutral laws, politics and programmes unintentionally may perpetuate the consequences of past discrimination. They may be inadvertently modelled on male lifestyles and thus fail to take into account aspects of women's life experiences which may differ from those of men. These differences may exist because of stereotypical expectations, attitudes and behaviour directed towards women which are based on the biological differences between women and men (Evatt 2004, 3).

Implementing 'equality as sameness' can mean that women are offered equality on traditional masculine terms and according to masculine norms in the workplace (Strachan, Burgess, and Henderson 2007). In this environment, women are forced to assimilate to a culture that may not suit their needs (Lee-Koo 2007). Thus, the under-representation of women in Australia's international affairs may persist because of a failure to recognise that men and women have different experiences in the workplace.

The clearest example of male-only networks of power and influence is the continuation of male clubs. In the past, these provided a rationale for direct discrimination—for example, in 1963 it was argued that: 'it is difficult to visualise [women] as Trade Commissioners, firstly because they could not mix nearly as freely with businessmen as men do. Most men's clubs, for instance, do not allow women members' (Taysom 1963, 1). This is an ongoing issue. In 2008, some of Melbourne's men's clubs refused to offer membership to several women in government and judiciary leadership positions, despite the fact that when men had held those same positions they had traditionally been offered

membership (Stewart 2008). The following year, the then deputy prime minister, Julia Gillard, joked that she had thought about inviting Governor General Quentin Bryce to go with her to 'jointly apply for membership … and see what happens next' (Brown 2009).

In *Lean In*, Sandberg (2013) highlights another difficulty facing women in relation to professional networks: men and women may feel uncomfortable having a mentoring relationship with a member of the opposite sex. For example, a close working relationship between an older man and a younger woman can often be misinterpreted, leading both individuals to avoid such situations. Interestingly, Sandberg argues that working relationships between younger men and older women are less likely to be construed as sexual. Senior individuals also tend to choose junior individuals for mentoring when they have similar personalities. This is problematic for women because senior men are more likely to identify with young men than with young women. If a young woman does gain a male mentor, he may lack the experience to help her with employment problems that are specific to her gender (Cowden et al. 2012). Consequently, young women are largely deprived of the expertise and advice of male mentors, who currently make up the majority of key leadership positions.

The so-called 'boys' club' of formal and informal networks among men in senior management is also problematic (see White 2003). Where senior managers and decision-makers share group characteristics—typically white, Anglo-Celtic, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class men—it can create an exclusionary culture. This can be doubly difficult for those who differ from the dominant ideal in more than one aspect, such as women from a minority background. Although 'boys' clubs' exist in many working environments, they pose a particular challenge for women in international affairs due to the historical dominance of masculine norms in this field.

If women continue to be excluded from the informal lines of communication that male-dominated networks offer, they will find it more difficult to access the opportunities and relationships offered therein. While anyone can pitch an idea to contribute to the Lowy Institute's *Interpreter* blog—so there is no direct or intentional discrimination (Roggeveen 2011)—it is possible that the 'tips and introductions' that the editor receives may be skewed by male-dominated networks. Similarly, in academia, inclusion in networks is essential because informal relationships provide avenues for invitations to participate in research projects, present guest lectures or join committees (Todd and Bird 2000). Male-dominated networks can mean that women struggle to gain promotions commensurate with their talents, qualifications, experience and seniority. This means that there can be a marked difference between the cultural and organisational barriers for women to progress depending on the proportion of senior women in the organisation (Edwards et al. 2013).

Family commitments

In his *Interpreter* blog post, Sam Roggeveen (2009) suggests that women are under-represented at senior levels of Australian international affairs in part because 'many more women than men interrupt their careers to care for children', although he 'instinctively doubts' that this is 'a control mechanism to keep men in charge'. He thus places women's decisions to care for children as a willing choice rather than potentially the result of indirect discrimination. Empirically, women 'have continued to carry the greater responsibility for caring and other unpaid work' (Goward et al. 2005, quoted in Strachan, Burgess, and Henderson 2007, 7). In addition to restricting the hours women are available for paid employment, having children also makes it more difficult for women to pursue jobs in other locations (Cowden et al. 2012). However, the circumstances surrounding women's choices about childcare and domestic work need to be considered. The current framework 'disadvantages women by ignoring the structural barriers which limit job opportunities and under-estimates the practical difficulties and cultural expectations which deter women from combining employment and domestic responsibilities' (Neave 1992, quoted in Strachan, Burgess, and Henderson 2007, 530).

The capacity of women to advance to senior positions in international affairs has been adversely affected by women's disproportionate share of family responsibilities and the lack of practical support to combine these with work. The absence of equal parental leave, affordable childcare and flexible working hours for senior positions, which are necessary in order for women to combine work and family responsibilities, disadvantages women in the workplace and acts as a form of indirect discrimination. Although childcare has recently improved in Australia (Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care 2010), for many years it was neither accessible nor affordable. In 2003, Australia was ranked twenty-sixth out of 28 countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on childcare spending (Summers 2003). Although the Australian government implemented paid parental leave in 2011, it has taken 30 years of strong advocacy and debate to create this key piece of social infrastructure. The absence of available and affordable childcare and, until recently, paid parental leave creates real barriers to women's participation in the workforce and advancement to senior positions. Women in the APS nominate this as the most salient—although not the only—barrier (Edwards et al. 2013).

In controversial research, UK researcher Catherine Hakim (2001) categorised women's attitudes to balancing work and family into three groups: work-centred, home-centred and adaptive. Crucially, she found that the percentage of women in each preference group depends on whether state policies support or hinder them, with work-centred women constituting 10 to 30 percent, home-centred women 10 to 30 percent and adaptive women, whose preference is to balance work and family life, 60 to 80 percent of the adult female population.

At the same time, the *What Women Want* Survey Report 2010–2011 shows that one in two women finds it difficult to balance her career with family responsibilities. Similarly, 40.5 percent believed that taking time out for family reasons would damage their future careers (Community and Public Sector Union 2011). A recent survey by Bain & Company found that 'only 15 per cent of women believed they had equal opportunity' (Evans, Edwards, and Burmester 2012). Given that the majority of women would chose to balance family and work if possible, their absence from senior levels of international affairs suggests that they are prevented from doing so.

Furthermore, women face challenges when returning from extended family-related absences such as maternity leave. The importance of networks to career progression has been noted earlier; after a long absence from the office, women often find that their professional networks have moved on, so re-establishing 'professional standing with new colleagues and potential gatekeepers to advancement is a significant challenge', and 'a real difficulty experienced by returning women is the negative attitudes they experience to taking leave' (ibid.). Negative attitudes towards working mothers can also create an unappealing working environment. Major General Elizabeth Cosson believes 'that not having children' and 'having been single for quite a few years' has contributed to her long career in the military (Sydney Morning Herald 2008). At the time of the interview, Major General Cosson was the only remaining female officer still serving of the 21 young women who graduated from her officer training course. Evidence suggests that women who 'choose' to prioritise their family over their career may not be making a decision from the same platform as their male colleagues.

Socially constructed gender norms

The low representation of women in Australian international affairs is also a consequence of the social construction of gender. Gender constructs are exclusionary norms, expectations and stereotypes that are deeply embedded within society. While sex refers to biological difference, gender is socially constructed. Societies often create dichotomies in identity, behaviour, responsibilities, norms and expectations that are constructed as masculine or feminine (Lee Koo 2007; see also Fine 2011). In international relations discourse, masculinity is conventionally associated with power, autonomy, rationality and the public space, while femininity is associated with weakness, dependence, emotionality, the private sphere and a nurturing role (Lee Koo 2007).

Societies find it challenging and confronting when individuals act contrary to the characteristics associated with their gender. Identical behaviour can be perceived differently when it is performed by a woman or a man. This is demonstrated by the Howard/Heidi study in the USA, where a résumé was distributed to two different groups. The résumés were identical except for the name: in one group, the résumé was attributed to a woman called Heidi and, in

the other, it was attributed to a man named Howard. While both groups decided that the owner of the résumé was competent, the group with 'Heidi's' résumé added that she seemed selfish and was not someone that they would want to work with (Sandberg 2013, 40). Even when women act decisively, they cannot win approval; a Bain & Company report observed that many women in the workforce were perceived as 'either being strong and therefore "too aggressive", or "too consultative" and therefore "soft or weak"—a no-win situation' (Evans, Edwards, and Burmester 2012). Using this perspective, it is easier to understand why the former prime minister, Julia Gillard, faced such a torrent of abuse and disrespect: Australia was not used to seeing a woman as a leader of government (Summers 2013). It also accounts for 'horizontal segregation' in the workforce, where a woman's choice of workplace is influenced by social norms and gender constructs (Bell 2010).

As the most public of all public spheres, the field of international affairs is dominated by a culture of masculinity that is most obviously expressed in realism. Realism is characterised by notions such as power, aggression and rationality, which have traditionally been considered masculine and associated with men. In this culture of masculinity, associating notions such as weakness, emotion and the private sphere with women undermines the legitimacy of women as powerful actors in international affairs. This attitude is evident in Francis Fukuyama's (1998, 27) argument that pursuing 'feminised' international politics will make states weaker: 'As women gain power in these countries, the latter should become less aggressive, adventurous, competitive, and violent'. Blanchard (2003, 1302) notes that: 'women's participation … continues to be seen as a security risk in the discourse of international relations'. According to Ann Tickner (1992, 4): 'international politics is such a thoroughly masculine sphere of activity that women's voices are considered inauthentic'; this is also true of global political economy (Griffin 2010). International relations can be characterised as a realm that privileges the male/masculine (True 1993) and has 'based its theorising on men, states and wars' (Pettman 1993, 51). A key response to this is to try to 'mainstream' women's voices and concerns (True 2003, 2009).

In *The Interpreter* debate, Alison Broinowski (Shanahan 2011) referred to this as two camps 'divided by a glass curtain', with more young women in 'human rights, development, peace and culture' on one side, and more men of all ages in 'wars and intelligence on the other'. In this construct, areas of international relations such as security are socially constructed as 'hard' masculine domains. This problem is not limited to Australia: few countries have chosen women to hold the portfolios of foreign policy, finance, trade or defence (UN 1997). These sectors remain pivotal to the security and advancement of the state in international affairs and, as such, are rarely 'entrusted' to women. In diplomacy, women have been encouraged to confine themselves to 'soft' policy areas and regularly precluded from serving in certain regions of the world—particularly Africa and the Middle East—despite many women's

requests to do so (Dee and Volk 2007). Major General Elizabeth Cosson, the first female major general in the Department of Defence, remembers being discouraged when:

> Rather than joining discussions with visiting officers, she would be asked to host their wives on shopping trips. '[The army] still had a little bit of the culture where people tried to put you in positions that were traditional female positions' (Sydney Morning Herald 2008)

Thus, it is evident that constructed gender roles create expectations about the work a woman should do and how she should behave, which may limit her career progression.

Strategies for overcoming these barriers

While the preceding sections have demonstrated that there are still significant barriers to female participation and advancement in international affairs, there are a number of women who have progressed to senior positions and made strong contributions to Australia's international affairs. The following three case studies will examine the careers of Professor Emeritus Helen Hughes AO FAIIA, Her Excellency Ms Penny Wensley AO and Professor Hilary Charlesworth FAIIA. These three were selected as case studies because of their levels of achievement, seniority in the field and diversity of background, as well as the availability of information. Other illuminating examples can be found, including Sue Boyd (Dee and Volk 2007), Coral Bell AO FAIIA (Taylor 2005), Elizabeth Evatt AC[3] FAIIA (Cooper 1995; Matheson 1973) and Major General Elizabeth Cosson (Sydney Morning Herald 2008).

These women have been pioneers in their field, often being the first Australian woman or sometimes even the first Australian to have occupied such a position. The case studies not only show the barriers these women encountered in their journey to the top positions in their field, but also the strategies the women implemented to overcome barriers to their advancement. This provides guidance for women in reaching their professional potential, as well as ideas for creating a more conducive professional environment.

Professor Emeritus Helen Hughes AO FAIIA

Professor Emeritus Helen Hughes AO FAIIA (1928–2013) was a distinguished Australian economist who contributed to Australia's international affairs in a number of senior positions in academia and the World Bank (Byrne 2005). However, Professor Hughes also confronted significant barriers and challenges as a result of her gender.

In the 2004 documentary *Six Somersaults*, Professor Hughes speaks of the direct discrimination she experienced when attempting to enter academia in

1955 (Tyrell and Hughes 2004). Although she had a PhD from the London School of Economics, she was unable to find a position when she returned to Australia because universities at that time were not hiring women with children. She recalls being very bitter and discouraged as men with inferior qualifications were awarded the jobs for which she was applying. She reflects that she 'enrolled for a PhD because [she] was a woman. [She] needed a doctorate—a better qualification than most men at that time—for an academic career' (Lodewijks 2007, 434).

When she finally succeeded in gaining academic employment at the University of Queensland, she faced a 'totally male chauvinist Department', in which 'every day there was a crack about how women should be home and not teaching' (Tyrell and Hughes 2004). She continues that there was 'constant resentment of [her] "taking the bread out of men's mouths"', and recalls being publicly humiliated and verbally attacked for 'neglecting [her] children and taking a man's job' (Lodewijks 2007, 437). She says she remembers feeling 'palpable resentment from her colleagues for even being in there, as it was a men's club' (Tyrell and Hughes 2004). This posed a challenge in establishing her career.

Professor Hughes was also confronted with negative attitudes and a male-dominated working environment at the World Bank. When she joined the World Bank in 1968, there were 2000 professionals at the bank and only six of them were women. She reflects that when she 'became Division Chief, a couple of men left [her] Division because they felt it to be demeaning to have a woman boss' (Lodewijks 2007, 433).

Professor Hughes recounts three particular strategies that she implemented to overcome barriers to her professional potential. First, in response to the negative attitudes and undermining comments on her legitimacy, she recalls that '[she] decided upon the simple strategy of always saying what [she] thought' (Tyrell and Hughes 2004), as she felt she was destined to be criticised regardless of what she said. Second, she purposefully sought progressive environments—the London School of Economics rather than the conservative establishments of Cambridge and Oxford—in order to gain high-level skills that would assist in making her competitive in the male-dominated culture of academia (Lodewijks 2007, 434). Third, she established an important mentor in her career—the economist Sir John (Jack) Crawford. He encouraged her to leave the University of Queensland when she was experiencing discrimination and assisted her transition to the Australian National University. It was also Sir John who encouraged her to take a sabbatical at the World Bank in order to learn about the realities of development, which resulted in a highly successful 15-year career there from 1968 until 1983 (Lodewijks 2007, 439). By establishing a supportive professional mentor relationship, purposefully seeking high-level skills and supportive environments, and maintaining a resilient attitude, Professor Hughes gained a prominent senior position in international affairs, despite systemic

discrimination and hostile attitudes. She spent her final years as a senior fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies.

Her Excellency Ms Penny Wensley AO

Her Excellency Ms Penny Wensley AO (1946–) was appointed governor of Queensland in 2008 and is a highly distinguished former Australian diplomat. She contributed to Australia's international affairs in a range of senior positions during her 40-year career from 1968 until 2008. She first served as head of mission in 1986 as consul general in Hong Kong, and subsequently went on to serve in a number of fields and high-level positions at the United Nations in New York and Geneva, and as high commissioner to India and ambassador to France. She reflects, however, that she experienced substantial challenges and barriers to her advancement to senior levels in the field emanating from systemic discrimination, an unsupportive culture towards female officers with family responsibilities, and socially constructed gender assumptions and expectations.

In her autobiographical writings in *Women with a Mission: Personal Perspectives* (Dee and Volk 2007, 67), she writes of the challenges of joining the Department of Foreign Affairs in 1968, where, although she 'never suffered from the marriage bar', she was the only woman in an intake of 19 diplomatic trainees and received discriminatory treatment in the form of unequal pay. She also recalls being in 'uncharted territory' as she tried to move ahead in the department, as there were very few women in senior positions and, as a legacy of the marriage bar, 'the role models were all single women, no one with families and the challenge of managing two careers' (Wensley 2007, 64). She reflects on the department's unsupportive culture towards female officers with families: 'As I was the first woman policy officer to have a baby while on posting, I provoked considerable argument within the Department, which wanted to terminate my posting and bring me home' (Wensley 2007, 63). Furthermore, she writes of the difficulties in overcoming negative attitudes of her professionalism in managing family and work:

> I remember vividly, and still with some pain, my immediate boss at the time challenging me one evening as I rushed out of the office at the end of the day to collect our daughters from family day care, saying 'When are you going to make your mind up, Wensley, whether you are a mother or an officer?' (Wensley 2007, 64).

Indeed, she writes that, with 'virtually no support systems', managing a demanding job and family responsibilities with young children was 'exhausting and stressful' (ibid.).

Even as a head of mission, Governor Wensley recalls that she was expected to undertake additional responsibilities because they were traditionally done by a woman. There was 'an unspoken assumption' that, although she 'had substantial policy, managerial and representational responsibilities', she would

also manage the residence and staff, and organise official functions (see also Domett 2005). Wensley (2007, 67) notes that: 'at least among my generation, there is a well-known joke among women heads of mission that our problem is that we do not have wives'.

Governor Wensley employed a number of strategies in pursuit of senior positions. She sought to establish a more equitable environment through activism. As the first woman to have a baby while on post overseas, she fought with the Department of Foreign Affairs and won her right to remain on post; she believed that 'it was important that the Department accepted that having children was a normal aspect of the life of women officers, not something to be tucked away' (Wensley 2007, 63). Furthermore, she writes of trying to form a lobby group to push for change, particularly for the establishment of a crèche on the premises of the department in Canberra. Finally, Governor Wensley articulates that, for her, factors which assisted her in reaching top positions in the traditionally male-dominated field of diplomacy have been hard work and determination, a genuine enjoyment of her career, the strengthening of supportive professional relationships with the Department of Foreign Affairs, strategic career choices, and the conscious development of specific skills and experience.

Professor Hilary Charlesworth FAIIA

Professor Hilary Charlesworth FAIIA (1955–) is a highly distinguished human rights lawyer, an Australian Research Council Laureate Fellow, a judge ad hoc of the International Court of Justice and the director of the Centre for International Governance and Justice in the Regulatory Institutions Network at the Australian National University. Previous positions include president of the Australian and New Zealand Society of International Law, co-editor of the *Australian Yearbook of International Law*, and visiting appointments at universities in the USA and Europe.

She likely encountered the legacy of openly sexist attitudes from the very beginning of her career, attending the University of Melbourne's Ormond College the year after it opened admission to women. In later years, she saw how family responsibilities affect career choices and progression in the field of international affairs. She recalls how she curtailed her in-country research in order to be close to her family. She reflects that:

> I always feel quite anxious about a lot of my writing in that it's based more on ideas than going into the field… it's something I see as a real gap and if I could go and live my life again I'd probably try to do it quite differently (University of Westminster Centre for Law, Gender and Sexuality 2008, 27).

In an interview on feminist scholarship and international law, she highlights that 'male theorists barely acknowledge feminist scholarship', 'there has been almost no engagement' and 'feminists talk to one another, and they will pick apart

articles and critique them and that sort of thing, but the boys take absolutely no notice' (Fox and Hall 2006, 5; see also Ackerly, Stern, and True 2006; Tickner 1996). She describes as dominant the view that 'feminist scholarship is an optional extra, a decorative frill on the edge of the discipline' (Charlesworth 2011, 3342). Early in her career, Professor Charlesworth co-presented a paper on feminist approaches to international law at the Australian National University. After the presentation, several people advised her to 'get back to "real world" international law for the sake of [her] career' (Fox and Hall 2006, 8). It is evident that gendered norms influence what is defined as 'legitimate' scholarship, and women seeking to analyse international affairs through a gendered lens are marginalised both directly and indirectly. For example, Professor Charlesworth says:

> I can recall my colleague Christine Chinkin being told by a senior international lawyer that she should leave off any feminist articles on her CV [curriculum vitae] when she applied for promotion as he thought that she wouldn't be seen as very serious (University of Westminster Centre for Law, Gender and Sexuality 2008, 11).

Professor Charlesworth has been an activist on these issues. She has spoken publicly on multiple occasions about the way that gender and a gendered perspective make working in her field challenging. In the 2013 International Women's Day speech posted on the Australian National University's website, she reflects that: 'as I have grown older, I have become more impatient with the slow rate of change and now see the value in taking more active steps' (Charlesworth 2013). Similarly to Sheryl Sandberg's (2013) advice to 'lean in', she encourages women to put themselves forward. When accepting her Australian Research Council Laureate Fellow award in July 2010, she argued that women are significantly under-represented in applications, despite the wealth of talented women. She implored institutions to consider why relatively few women apply for research fellowships, and why 'last year just 13% of the applicants were women and this year 17%' (Charlesworth 2010, 3). Professor Charlesworth suggested that a lack of confidence could be the reason why many women do not apply for positions and awards for which they are qualified. She noted that the support and encouragement of the Australian National University's pro vice chancellor for research, Professor Mandy Thomas, had been instrumental in helping her to overcome her own reticence (Charlesworth 2010, 3), and encouraged young scholars to make finding a mentor a priority.

Conclusion

This article has presented the empirical evidence that women are under-represented at senior levels in Australia's international affairs and asked why this is the case. It has looked at a range of explanations for this under-

representation and found that the most convincing explanations are the legacy of historical direct discrimination against women, ongoing indirect discrimination, the lack of support for family responsibilities and the influence of socially constructed gender norms. These will have greater or lesser impact in different sectors within the field. There is no evidence that women lack either ambition or interest in international affairs; women have been entering the field in equal numbers to men, but do not progress equally to senior positions. Instead of the subject matter of international relations being too 'hard', or inherently masculine, it appears that it is the work culture and practical considerations that currently make it hard for many women to achieve senior positions in international affairs.

Given this, employers should ask whether their hiring, workplace and promotion policies are truly gender-neutral, or whether they provide a hidden advantage to male employees or disadvantage to female employees. A good example of such a process is the Gender in Defence and Security Leadership Conference, where the chief of the Australian Defence Force identified that: 'the cultural change and real challenge for our organisation is one where women become a regular feature in the senior leadership landscape' (Department of Defence and Royal United Services Institute 2013, 5). If employers establish a foundation for dialogue on gendered problems and openly acknowledge the different experiences of men and women in the workplace, female employees may feel that they can legitimately raise their concerns about gender equality without fear of reprisal. Men can take responsibility to help change cultures which encourage or condone barriers that impede women's professional advancement.

For women themselves, it can be useful to refer to the experiences of women who have a strong record of achievement in international affairs. Women can emulate the successful strategies for career advancement used by Professor Emeritus Helen Hughes AO FAIIA, Her Excellency Ms Penny Wesley AO, Professor Hilary Charlesworth FAIIA or other role models. These strategies include actively looking for opportunities in progressive working and learning environments, finding strong mentors, speaking out against obvious impediments to gender equality (such as the lack of childcare), taking advantage of all opportunities for professional development and maintaining a keen interest in the field of international affairs. Clearly, deep institutional change is also necessary: the prevalence of masculine norms in international affairs and ongoing indirect discrimination are significant obstacles to gender balance in Australia's international affairs. However, women can also make the most of their opportunities for advancement by utilising a range of strategies and by helping the women who come after them. The evidence presented in this article has demonstrated clearly that a gender imbalance exists in Australia's international affairs; at a minimum, men and women involved in the field should ask themselves if they are happy for this imbalance to continue.

Notes

1. The views expressed in this article are the authors' own.
2. Officer of the Order of Australia.
3. AC stands for Companion of the Order of Australia.

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