Women in Leadership: The Role of Individual Agency in Leadership Career Decisions of Female Executives in South Australian Public Service

Syeda Nuzhat E Ibrat
Master of Social Science, University of Dhaka

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Philosophy

Politics and International Studies
The University of Adelaide

February 2015

Dedication

I dedicate this MPhil Dissertation to my mother Professor Sajeda Khanam Choudhury. She was my inspiration to do a research on those women who aspire for success in career and at the same time do not fear to become a mother knowing that it may bring them unavoidable work/life collisions and societal judgements.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude for the support of the following people in writing this thesis:

- My principal supervisor Associate Professor John Spoehr for his invaluable advice, support, encouragement, and guidance throughout the thesis writing process. Thanks to him for believing in me;

- Professor Christine Beasley, my co-supervisor, for her assistance and support;

- Associate Professor Ray Broomhill who worked as an informal supervisor for this thesis. I am thankful to him for his guidance and support. He was always there whenever I needed, sometime even in a very short notice. This thesis has benefited enormously from his experience, knowledge and expertise. I am grateful to him also for his tireless proofreading;

- Mrs. Miranda Roccisano for her editing and proofreading supports;

- Mrs. Gayle Peak, CPSU, PSA, for providing necessary support to contact the research participants who were female public servants in South Australia;

- The interviewees who devoted their valuable time for this research, without their participation and help this thesis would not be a success;

- The team of WISeR, The University of Adelaide, for their encouragement, support, wit, laughs, giggles and yummy foods. During my thesis writing days, I never felt bored or isolated because of their company.

- Finally, my father Professor Sayed Abdul Hye and my husband Arif Sadat Hai. My father used to say, 'things half-done than never done'! Because of his enthusiasm, encouragement, and guidance I have been able to finish my thesis successfully. And my husband Arif, who was always there whenever I needed him. I am forever grateful to these two men in my life for their supports and beliefs in me.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Glossary of Abbreviations and Key Terms

Abbreviation/ Term	Explanation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
APS	Australian Public Service
ASO	Administrative Service Officer
ASX	Australian Stock Exchange
AWALI	Australian Work and Life Index
CPSU	Community of Public Service Union
EL	Executive Level
PSA	Public Service Association
SAPS	South Australian Public Service
SAES	South Australian Executive Service
SES	Senior Executive Service

Special Clarification

In this thesis, I have used the term 'mainstream feminism' to describe the central ideologies of feminism relation to the emerging concepts of post-feminism. Although the thesis of post-feminism is criticised as a distraction in feminism, it is believed that post-feminism arrived because of the demise of feminism.

Feminism always believed in empowerment of women by establishing equality of rights, opportunities and power between genders. However, post-feminism argues that equality of gender is a back dated phenomena as women living in postmodern, affluent societies have already achieved equality with men. Thus, empowerment of these women now resides in their ability to choose their own fates; their own lifestyles. Post-feminism, therefore, is an anti-concept of all the other feminists' views and opinions. 'Mainstream feminism', therefore, is the argument which rejects post-feminism and at the same time upholds the persisting need for feminism to achieve gender equality.

Papers Written during the Course of the MPhil Program

I published three peer reviewed conference papers during the course of MPhil programme:

Ibrat, Syeda Nuzhat, Women in Leadership: Can Women Have it All? (2014). The Australian Political Studies Association Annual Conference, University of Sydney Paper. Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=2440508 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2440508

Ibrat, Syeda Nuzhat, Women in Leadership: Choice or Constrain? (2014). The Australian Political Studies Association Annual Conference, University of Sydney Paper. Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=240510 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2440510

Ibrat, Syeda Nuzhat, Gender Equality in Leadership: A Public Policy Failure? (2013). The Australian Political Studies Association Annual Conference, Murdoch University Paper. http://www.auspsa.org.au/sites/default/files/gender_equality_in_leadership_nuzhat_e_ibrat_syeda_.pdf

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

…………………………………………..

Syeda Nuzhat E Ibrat

……………………………………………

Date

Abstract

Today there is a wide spread perception amongst young women that career choice and advancement are matters of lifestyle preference of men and women as no structural barriers based on gender discrimination prevail in organisations. Numerous recent studies have also argued that gender equality is a less important goal for the new generation of women as women now enjoy genuine choices in their preferred lifestyles. One very thought provoking yet controversial argument relating to this is that women themselves in many instances choose not to seek leadership positions. In this view the factors in their decision making are less of a socio-economic nature but rather to do with personal factors such as their chosen goals, values, aspirations, motivations and priorities. However, the counter argument is that in spite of this perceived increased choice available to women, most still remain unable to achieve top leadership roles in organisations and the gender pay gap is widening instead of declining.

The broad purpose of this thesis is to analyse what factors continue to hold more women back from achieving leadership positions in employment. To do so the thesis adopts a case study approach utilising primary data gleaned from interviews with 30 female South Australian public servants aged from 30 to 55. The thesis critically examines the argument that individual choice and psychological factors have significant impacts on women's career and lifestyle behaviours. The case study focuses this approach by seeking to discover the nature of the choices available to a group of women pursuing careers in a state public service in Australia.

The case study findings suggest that gaining leadership positions in their employment was easier for some of these women than for others. Moreover, promotion opportunities generally are restricted, even in a modern public service where equal opportunity and family-friendly work practices are in existence. Although young Australian women increasingly are showing a desire to pursue a career, this research suggests that while the existing policies and structures in the workplace do facilitate and support women's increasing workforce participation they do not in themselves improve women's success in achieving leadership positions in the workplace. The direct consequence is an ongoing low rate at which women achieve senior leadership positions in their employment.

This study indicates that the women interviewed do not possess a lack of career ambition and are aware of their potential for leadership. However, they are also aware that the scales are tilted against combining a leadership role with motherhood and many express the view that

combining both aspirations is not easy. The common strategy utilised by women with leadership ambitions is to delay motherhood or to not have children. Therefore, although some post-feminists claim that women are now free to choose between career and family, this choice remains highly constrained, particularly in relation to securing career advancement to senior leadership roles while at the same time maintaining a family life.

In conclusion, in addressing the problem of the on-going lack of women in senior leadership positions, this thesis argues for policy reforms which go beyond providing access to employment and allow women to combine work and family. Policies are needed to allow women (and men) to parent and fully participate in family life while at the same time fulfilling their aspirations to career advancement. It rejects the idea of 'gender neutral policy' provisions, which are based on the idea of providing free choices of lifestyle for every individual in the society. Society is not yet sufficiently fair or neutral to look after the diverse and sometimes distinct needs of women.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1   Introduction to the Research Problem

Studying as a new Australian citizen at a quintessential sandstone university, I have been surprised and fascinated by the attitudes of my peers - Australian female early career researchers who on the whole show little awareness of, or concern for, gender disparity within senior managerial positions in Australian workplaces. Nor are they prepared to countenance the idea that the paucity of women in leadership positions is possibly due to persistent gender stereotypes which continue to influence women's career prospects and progress. During my time studying with these vibrant and confident young women, I began to realise that in a country like Australia, where the previous prime minister was a woman and where equal opportunity is a valued cultural meme, it is not unusual for young women from comparatively privileged social backgrounds to believe that women are equally enjoying the same rights and opportunities as their male counterparts. They have had the privilege of an urban upbringing, had access to higher education and, usually, a choice of career and lifestyle, all of which encourage them to perceive gender parity in this society.

My own perception as a young female researcher was that awareness of discrimination and inequality have been eroded and become invisible to many educated women. Many women now appear to believe that women have achieved equality with men. Their own success is reflected in their high attendance and completion of tertiary education and in the growth rate of female labour market participation (ABS, 2011). In each of these aspects, they have outnumbered their male counter-parts.

Increasingly, these achievements encourage today's young women to believe that they have access to unlimited opportunities and choices, and thus they can achieve whatever they want. Acknowledging this shift in attitude, some post-feminists argue for women's agency, stating that career and lifestyle decisions are no longer restricted by social impositions. Therefore, whatever choices women make is a feminist choice because women have 'made it' (Boyes, 2012).

Despite a widespread perception of freedom of choice and equal opportunity among the new generation of women, a number of studies demonstrate that inequality and a discriminatory gender culture still exists in the labour market and within workplaces. For example, the gender pay gap persists and a majority of women are employed in insecure, part-time positions where they earn a lower rate of pay. Further, women remain under-represented in senior roles.

Within the Australian labour market, the gender pay gap is one of the most critical contributors towards gender discrimination, and this gap not only persists, but continues to expand. In 2004, women's average weekly earnings were 87 cents for every dollar earned by men, whereas by 2008 women earned 84 cents compared with every dollar earned by men (CPSU, 2008). Five years later in 2013, Australian women's earnings had further decreased to only 83.5 cents. Therefore, the gender pay gap has remained at around 17.5% depending on average, weekly full-time earnings and has apparently increased. Moreover, on some other measures the gap is even wider (Summers, 2013).

Perhaps more surprisingly, the current graduate gender pay gap across all professions remains at 9.1 percent (Graduate Careers Australia, 2012). Australian men with a bachelor degree or higher and with children can expect to earn 3.3 million dollars over their working lives, which is nearly double the amount that women can expect at around 1.8 million dollars (Report by AMP and the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra (2009) as cited in Summers, 2013). A 25 year old woman with post-graduate qualifications earns just 2.40 million dollars over her lifetime, whereas an equally qualified man of the same age earns 3.78 million dollars over his. Moreover, it is discouraging for highly qualified women to know that, in Australia, men with Year 12 qualifications earn at least 0.15 million dollars more than women with postgraduate qualifications (Summers, 2013).

Research reveals that the gender pay gap is evident in the managerial professions as well. The following figure shows the average weekly earnings of managers from selected occupation groups in May 2012 in Australia.

Figure 1 Average weekly earnings, Australia: Manager-selected occupation groups; May 2012
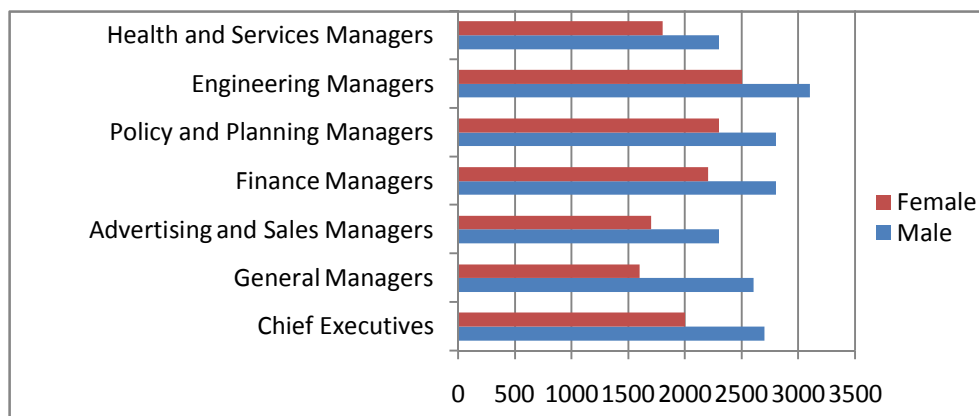
The figure clearly identifies that male managers in selected occupations are paid more than their female counterparts. It is noteworthy that in occupations which include Advertising and Sales, Health and Welfare Services, female employees outnumber male employees in overall participation. Nevertheless, they continue to be under-represented in management roles and are paid significantly less than male managers (Bird, 2010; Wirth, 2009).

Another clear indication of gender inequality in the workplace is the ever present glass ceiling. The glass ceiling has been widely researched and robustly debated within the academic literature in regards female career trajectories. Research findings almost always suggest that the glass ceiling certainly remains present in Australian workplaces and continues to restrict female career progression which secures leadership level roles (Bishop, 2010; Connell, 2006; CPSU, 2008; Gundlach & Sammartino, 2013; Kee, 2006). Again, a lack of women in highly paid executive or managerial roles creates pay inequalities for women (Kee, 2006; Summers, 2013).

If women appear to have achieved more freedom with respect to career and lifestyle choices; if social and environmental factors have reduced their impact on the options available to them; and if women themselves do not believe that they are discriminated against, then why are they still unable to smash through the glass ceiling and pursue leadership positions? Observing women's achievements in tertiary education in particular, it becomes clear that there are no cognitive differences between the sexes to differentiate learning capabilities. This, of course, gives rise to an obvious query: Why? Why is this new generation of highly qualified women so sanguine about opportunity and freedom of choice when they continue to

4

be under-represented among the top managerial and executive jobs proportional to their participation?

To answer this question, I have chosen the South Australian public sector as a case study for examination. This is because employees within the public sector throughout Australia provide a kind of 'best case' exemplar. They experience predominantly favourable conditions for achieving gender equity within the workplace, yet even here it would seem the glass ceiling continues to exist.

1.1.1 A Closer Look at the Australian Context

An interesting development of the twenty-first century is the choice that many professional women make to work in the public sector rather than the private sector. In the Australian Public Service, 57% of employees are women and nearly half of the executive level jobs are also occupied by female executives (ABS, 2010). Surprisingly though, women are disproportionately under-represented in the Senior Executive Services where there are fewer female executives in senior executive roles than males (Bourke & Andrews, 2011). It seems that access to senior leadership positions remains a challenge for female employees in the Public Service of Australia.

In 2012, Australian women comprised 47% of Executive Level employees of the Australian Public Service and only 39% of the Senior Executive Service (SES) although they outnumber men in all junior classifications (ABS, 2012). In the 2009-10 financial year, women held only 1887 (33.4%) of a total 5655 positions on 529 Australian Government boards and bodies which indicated that there were more than 10 men to every one woman involved (Australian Public Service Commission, 2008). The following graph demonstrates the gender composition of SES employees of the APS in 2008.

Figure 2 Men and women participation in the SES, 2011
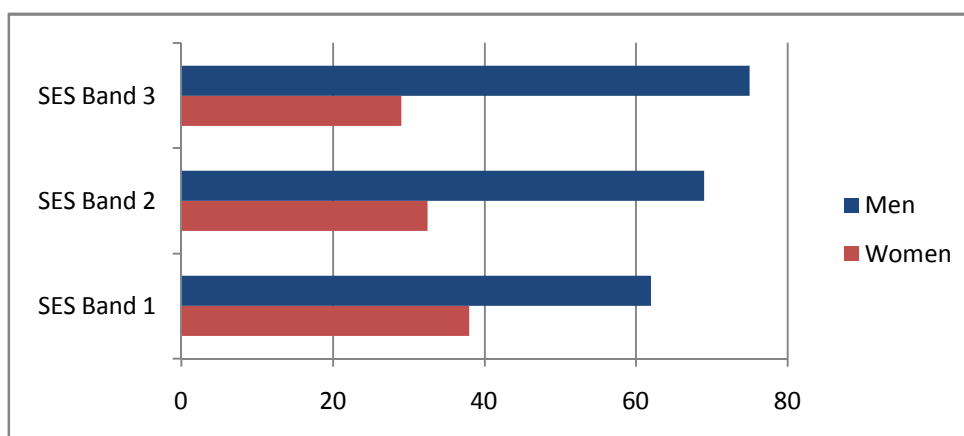
Statistics from the private sector are worse than these. In the 200 listed Australian Stock Exchange companies, women held only 8.3% of board directorships, 10.7% of executive managerial positions, and only 2% of positions as chair (EOWA, 2008). That is, in the CEO level there were more than 49 men to every one woman. Evidence also suggests that in the same year the number of companies without women executive managers rose sharply to 45.5% from 39.5% in 2006 (Andrews & Bourke, 2011). This is clearly shown in the following table.

Table 1 Trend data on the profile of women according to the 2004, 2006, 2007 EOWA census

	2004	2006	2008	Change
ASX200 Chairs	1%	2%	2%	No change between 2006 to 2008
ASX CEOs	3%	3%	2%	Reduction between 2004 and 2008
ASX200 Board Directors	8.2%	8.7%	8.3%	No significant change between 2004 and 2008
ASX200 Executive managers (total)	11.4%	12%	10.7%	Reduction between 2004 and 2008

The Australian Census of Women in Leadership EOWA (2008) has revealed that the growth of women within leadership in this sector is, surprisingly, 'stagnant' or 'slipping'. Although female board directorship numbers rose substantially during 2012, very little has changed in terms of the number of women within executive ranks within the last decade. It is argued that due to fluctuating growth of female representation in the key Executive Personnel positions, this cannot be interpreted as stable progression towards leadership equality in Australia (EOWA, 2010).

Although the number of women in leadership positions appears more encouraging in the public service than in the private sector, a similar trend of very sluggish growth of progress towards leadership equality is evident in the public service too. A very slow upward progression is clearly illustrated in the following diagram.

Figure 3 Female SES managers in the APS, 2002-2012
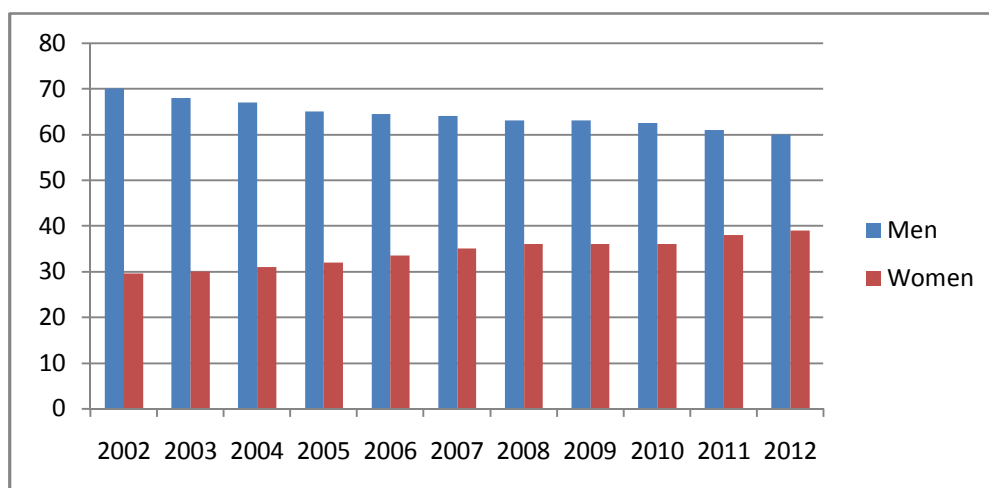
A more detailed summary of women's positions in the South Australian public Service is contained in the chapter three.

1.1.2 Far from Equal

As with other professions, it is clearly evident that in the public sector the number of women in decision making positions is disproportionately low when compared with their total numbers.

Two decades ago when Guy had completed her research on women's status in the public service of the United States of America, she concluded that women's career progression is never static nor linear and described it more accurately as 'three steps forward, two steps backward' (Guy, 1993, p. 285). Guy argued that women have a long way to go before they would reach parity. She also contended that females would continue to hold the same status in the public service. They would always have to convince men in the higher positions in order to achieve their demands and desires to be fulfilled through legitimate government actions and through implementing new or reformed policies, programmes and services. Gender equality in the public service is a difficult political ambition and not easy to achieve (1993).

Twenty years after Guy published her findings, a similar notion is currently shared by scholars who presume that it will not be possible in the near future to achieve leadership equality (Cassells, 2010; Rodgers-Healey, 2013; Summers, 2010). That is, it is a long way to the top for women, particularly in the public service (Summers, 2010).

While the public sector is to be praised for its affirmative action strategies, the study 'Far from Equal: The Glass Ceiling in the Australian Public Service' completed by the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) in 2008 suggested that a conscious and unconscious bias - as well as discrimination - is still a part of the organisational culture in Government workplaces. This is one of the primary reasons for women's lack of upward mobility toward leadership roles. The CPSU summarised the findings of their study by establishing the following four points:

• Pay inequalities between agencies that are female dominated and those that are male dominated are significant and easily identifiable.

• Agencies which are vastly feminized are necessarily service delivery organisations, including, for instance Medicare and Centrelink.

• In all agencies, regardless of whether they are male or female dominated, more women than men are clustered at the lower end of the job spectrum. Although more women are in the pipeline for senior positions, in all agencies men are securing those roles more than women.

- There is clearly a glass ceiling for women in the APS that obstructs their career progression up toward the highest policy making levels. (CPSU, 2008)

It was once believed that if women were to gain access to the same educational opportunities and professional networks as their male counterparts, they would shatter the glass ceiling. But decades later, with the erosion of traditional barriers and with more women than men graduating from professional courses like law and medicine, it is surprising to find that women continue to occupy but a small fraction of board memberships and top managerial positions.

This thesis attempts to critically examine the reasons why this should be so through a case study of the South Australian Public Sector that is based on interviews with a number of women employed at Senior Executive levels and a number of others employed at middle management levels. In doing so it also aims to critically explore the existing debates about the lack of women in senior positions – in particular in relation to the strands of 'feminist' theories on this issue.

1.1.3 Competing Explanations for the Glass-ceiling

In attempts to answer the question of why women continue to face a glass ceiling and remain under-represented at senior levels of organisations, researchers and commentators have offered a variety of conflicting explanations.

The mainstream feminist arguments recognise the adverse impacts of social and organisational obstacles which create labour market and workplace inequalities, and hence the need for government intervention to promote more egalitarian and non-discriminative workplaces for women. In relation to the glass ceiling, they suggest that if there were less or no social and structural barriers, women would automatically progress to the highest levels of the organisational hierarchy. Feminist researchers have also argued that even in the Public Service where many gender advances have been introduced, a genuine non-discriminatory gender culture is yet to be achieved (Connell, 2005, 2006; CPSU, 2008; Dolan, 2000, 2004; Nutley & Mudd, 2005; O'Faircheallaigh, Wanna, & Weller, 1999; Olsson & Pringle, 2004; Whelan, 2011).

In contrast, a group of post-modern feminists have argued that the reason why women remain under-represented at senior levels is more directly related to the individual choices that they are now free to make rather than any remaining structural barriers to their advancement. For example, prominent British sociologist Catherine Hakim has argued that evidence of women's

inequality in employment within affluent, post-modern societies (such as a lack of women in senior executive positions in organisations, company boardrooms and on decision-making tables) is not a result of gender discrimination. Rather, it is the outcome of 'choices' that women can afford to make in the changed context of the twenty-first century (Abbott, 2011). Hakim's argument is further supported by other post-feminists who think that 'choice' is becoming an increasingly important variable in influencing women's career goals and other life aspirations (Boyes, 2012; Himmelweit & Sigala, 2004; Murphy, 2012).

Therefore, my thesis places a significant emphasis on exploring the role of women's own agency as an explanation for the continued presence of the glass ceiling. However, the thesis also explores the role of the many contextual factors which remain influential in determining female career choices and behaviours, particularly since women's career choices cannot be made in a vacuum. While central feminist analyses suggest that female career development is still very much dependent on social and structural variables including work/family conflict, organisational culture, policies and practice, social norms, values and expectations, I argue that in attempting to balance 'structural' and 'agency' forces, feminist research has generally undervalued the role of women's own agencies.

I believe that it has become interestingly important to understand individual choices and the decision-making process, as considerable social and political changes during the present century have created large contextual variations in the current social gender order. This includes the assumption that equal opportunity policies are widespread, gender labour market segmentation has eased, and career ambition is considered a lifestyle choice by the majority of the new generation of women.

1.2 Identifying the Missing Links

In career development theories, the traditional schism between psychological and sociological perspectives (between an emphasis on personal variables and sociological variables) has been eliminated since it was identified that both factors are equally important in analysing the career behaviours of women (Astin, 1984; Hakim, 1996b)I would argue that in Australia, few studies have sufficiently considered the relative roles of social and personal variables in determining the career behaviours of Australian women in the changed gender context of the twenty-first century.

Throughout the thesis I make specific references to post-feminist theories including the 21st Century Lifestyle Preference Theory developed by Hakim who argues that the choice between paid and unpaid work and the preference for a particular lifestyle have a greater influence today in determining female employment patterns and career progression.

Despite counter-argument and criticism, Hakim's work has proven to be influential within the Australian context. For example, Bob Birrell has argued that 'Hakim's thesis is very much in play in Australia' (Arndt, 2003). Former Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, was very impressed by her theories. The Howard Government was particularly influenced by Hakim's arguments in designing policies to help increase fertility rates. Success was considered to be more likely if they could make choices easier for 'home-centred' and 'adaptive' women. This is because these two groups of women are more likely to have babies. In this way, a home care allowance supports this particular option. Inspired by this ideology, the Australian government introduced the 'Baby Bonus' for mothers who choose to stay at home after child birth (Arndt, 2003). The main purpose appeared to support women's independent decision making with regards to career and lifestyle choice.

This thesis seeks to analyse the assumptions underlying Lifestyle Preference theory and the emerging feminist ideology of 'choice' as primary determinant of female career behaviour by acknowledging that the structure of opportunity is not yet equal for women. In order to address the gap in the existing research and literature, my focus is on identifying the role of women's individual agency in determining the persistent effects of the glass ceiling. The main purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to understand whether post-feminist philosophy which incorporates pro-choice and lifestyle preference ideologies has any validity in adding to existing understandings of women's lack of leadership representation, with a particular reference to the South Australian Public Service. Similarly, if it does play a role in determining women's career behaviour then how crucial is its effect.

Therefore, in the summary the central research question to be addressed by the thesis is:

1. To what extent (and in what ways) do individual choices play a major role in determining female public servants' success or otherwise in achieving leadership positions?

   Two other related research questions that this thesis seeks to answer are:

2. In seeking a career/life balance, how do female public servants adjust their private aspirations and goals within the organisational structure of the employer?

3. What are the policy implications in relation to the career development of female public servants in the South Australian Public Service?

Finally, the structure of the remainder of the thesis is as follows:

The following chapter (Chapter 2) examines the debates about the reasons for women's lack of equal representation at senior executive levels. Chapter 3 discusses the rationale and aims of the thesis in more detail and outlines the conceptual framework that the thesis utilises comprising three different but interdependent dimensions to the analysis of the causes of leadership inequality. Chapter 3 also outlines the thesis' research strategy, design and methodology. The next two chapters report on the evidence gathered from the case study of firstly, women employed in senior executive levels of the South Australian Public Service (Chapter 4), and secondly, women employed at mid-executive levels (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 draws together conclusions from the two findings chapters and reflects on these findings in relation to the different positions taken by the various feminist theorists discussed and makes some comments on the policy implications of the findings.

Chapter Two

Context of Research

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a context to the research by discussing feminist approaches to understanding the reasons for the continued under-representation of women in leadership positions, in the workplace and the key impediments to female career progression. I begin by discussing the factors that the mainstream feminists have presented as the key barriers to women's career success. I then discuss post-feminist arguments, which claim that mainstream feminists give inadequate consideration to the role of individual agency and personal choice in explaining women's lack of representation in leadership positions. Next I provide a more detailed outline and discussion of the theories of the most prominent of these choice theorists, Catherine Hakim. To conclude I identify the key research questions of the thesis and their significance in contributing to the debates in feminism about persisting leadership inequality in the 21st century.

2.2 The Mainstream Feminist View of the Glass-ceiling

Feminists have long believed that if women had access to the same educational opportunities and professional networks as their male counterparts, they would shatter the glass ceiling. But decades later, with more women than men often graduating from professional programs like law and medicine, and with many of the traditional barriers now gone, it is surprising that women still occupy only a small fraction of board and top managerial positions.

In response to evidence of the maintenance of a glass ceiling, many feminist analyses suggest that female career development is still very much dependent on the social and structural variables that often determine their career prospects (Bishop, 2010; Connell, 2006; CPSU, 2008; Gundlach & Sammartino, 2013; Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon, 2009; Jackson, 2001; Kee, 2006; Kochanowski, 2010; Rodgers-Healey, 2013; L. Still, 1994, 1997; Summers, 2003, 2013; Wirth, 2001, 2009). They argue that the structure of opportunity is not yet equal for women in the workplace. A glass ceiling persists in restricting the smooth career progress of female employees to the highest levels. In the next sections (from 2.2.1 to 2.2.2) I discuss the mainstream feminist arguments for the lack of female representation in the leadership of both public and private organisations, and the assumptions behind those arguments.

The current feminist discussion around leadership inequality in Australia revolves around two major concerns:

1. The role of workplace organisation, culture and practice in obstructing a smooth career path for female employees
2. The role of factors external to workplace organisations in restructuring the career development of female employees.

2.2.1 Workplace Organisation, Culture and Practice

In recent years, because of an increase in female participation in the labour market, employers are increasingly implementing strategies to achieve an egalitarian workplace culture where 'diversity and inclusion' are regarded as valued organisational practices (Deloitte & Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2009; Francoeur, Labelle, & Sinclair-Desgagne, 2006). This has brought apparent changes in workplace employee relations and in the organisational gender ethos, making gender-based discrimination less visible today. However, feminist scholars have warned that 'invisibility of gendered dominance' or 'denial of gender in organisation' are actually elements of sexual politics that keep women away from the power struggle and ultimately from the influential leadership streams (Sharp, Franzway, Mills, & Gill, 2011).

Kochanowski's study (2010) has found that structural constraints are still prevalent. Organisational culture and practice are not yet gender-neutral and still contains a glass ceiling for female employees who wish to advance careers to top managerial levels. The crucial elements that sustain the glass ceiling for women and which organisations need to address are identified as:

- The perception that men are leaders and women are supportive followers (stereotyping; preconception of masculine roles and feminine ability)
- The lack of strong female role models (or mentors, or sponsors)
- The 'good old boy' network (including the exclusion of informal networks of communication)
- Family responsibilities (commitment to personal and family issues)
- The need for women to develop a professional style, language and ethos, which male counterparts already have (e.g. women's management style is more interactive than that of men, which is directive)
- The lack of significant line experiences (creating management ability, training and development)
- Other barriers such as: tokenism, glass wall, sticky floors, trap doors, (Kochanowski, 2010; Oakley, 2000; L. Still, 1994, 1997)

Oakley (2000) has identified two different categories of explanations and theories for the factors that preserve the glass ceiling. The first category comprises barriers that are created by workplace practices, such as, selection, recruitment and promotion processes that prefer males

over females. These are more objective practices that are easier to deal with through policies and programs. The second category comprises barriers that are often behavioural and cultural. The explanations for these barriers 'revolve around issues, such as, stereotyping, tokenism, power, preferred leadership styles, and the psychodynamics of male/female relations'(Oakley, 2000, p. 322).

Even though organisational practice is not visibly gender-biased after the equal opportunity revolution, it is argued by mainstream feminists that workplace culture and attitudes, particularly in the higher executive/corporate levels, continue to secure bias and discrimination against female employees. Culture and attitudes are, therefore, a main reason for the lack of women in senior management positions.

Female senior executives who have overcome stereotypical structural and social barriers, nevertheless, report that their capabilities and contributions have often been underestimated due to male domination in workplaces (Chesterman, Ross-Smith, & Peters, 2004; Oakley, 2000; Vardon, 2010). Because of such biases and discriminative attitudes, many senior female executives experience burn-out (Vardon, 2010). There is evidence to suggest that such cultural and behavioural forces push female middle managers away from senior managerial roles (Jackson, 2001).

Many senior female managers complain that they are often treated as 'tokens' in the boardroom (Vardon, 2010). In organisations in which more than 30 per cent of the senior management is female, their leadership skills are viewed as feminine traits rather than successful management. For example, there is a perception that female management is characteristically interpersonal. That is known as a transformational management style, which is more communicative and people-oriented. This perception of differential male and female management styles tends to be disadvantageous for females, who are portrayed as less capable leaders, who are less likely to achieve deadlines, targets and profits (Chesterman, et al., 2004; Oakley, 2000; Ross-Smith & Chesterman, 2009).

Gender-based stereotypes and the closed-circle 'old boy network' are strong organisational forces that are slow to change (Oakley, 2000). Scholars argue that the 'old boy network' is still strong because of male majority in the senior posts; men still think, 'we feel more comfortable with people like us around' (CPSU, 2008; Summers, 2003; Vardon, 2010). A common complaint of senior executive women, therefore, is that they often fear isolation. In the boardrooms they often are not taken very seriously; they feel as if they do not exist (Vardon, 2010). Battling this phenomenon is like 'pushing peanuts uphill'. In the absence of

opportunities and a suitable work atmosphere, women are continually blamed for not pushing harder to progress their careers to leadership levels. It is kind of 'workplace domestic violence': women face mock challenges to compete for leadership but when they attain it their voices are usually unheard and undermined (Vardon, 2010).

A number of feminist scholars have suggested that there is a need to rethink the job design of executive roles (Bourke & Andrews, 2011; Simpson, 1998). In many organisations these roles are so unfavourable to women that they contribute to the perpetuation of the glass ceiling phenomenon. As ideal working norms are strongly applied at top executive roles, it is argued that the job design and work-life situations of these positions are never family-friendly. The question then arises: is there something about the nature of jobs themselves, particularly about the executive roles that deters women from them? Does the structure of such roles reflect 'hidden biases' towards masculine abilities and reject femininity in leadership and management roles? (Bourke & Andrews, 2011, p. 177). Moreover, the decisions by female employees about career choice and career progression are often made at the intersection where the job design overlaps with their caring responsibilities (Bourke & Andrews, 2011).

Feminist scholars have criticised the current approaches to reducing the glass ceiling effects. They argue that these approaches to helping women move up the hierarchy are designed around finding ways to adapt and blend in; rather than changing the structures that make it difficult for women to advance, such as: the masculinity biased job design of senior executive roles. Similarly, feminist researchers examining why so few women are represented in senior management have argued that it is also crucial to examine what factors still exist outside the workplace that prevent female employees from achieving senior leadership positions (Oakley, 2000).

2.2.2 Work Family Collision and Women's Career Prospects

The existing literature on women at work acknowledges the strong interdependence between women's career progression and work family collision as an underlying disadvantage for women wishing to progress into senior leadership positions in many Australian organisations (Andrews & Bourke, 2011; Austen & Birch, 2002; Connell, 2006; EOWA, 2010; Hoobler, et al., 2009; Johnstone & Lee, 2009; Pocock, 2003, 2005a, 2005b). There is evidence to show that the activity of caring for children is still very much gendered, as is the responsibility for household domestic work (Pocock, 2005a), both of which often impact on women's ability to secure senior executive roles.

Several studies have suggested that it is still the mother who is primarily responsible for balancing paid work and parental responsibilities (Connell, 2005; Duxbury & Higgins, 2008; Pocock, 2005b; Pocock, Skinner, & Pisaniello, 2010; Wattis, Standing, & Yerkes, 2013). A common strategy for working mothers balancing the contesting demands of work and family is to work part time or take leave from paid work for several years. However, this leads to the common perception of female employees as 'drifters' with a non-linear and interrupted career path, known as the 'mommy track' (Miller, 2011; Sidle, 2011). Such a career path eventually affects their prospects for leadership roles, where full-time work and an 'ideal worker'[1] profile are two essential requirements.

It is definitely hard work for women to appear to effectively manage both the family and a successfully progressing career. A number of scholars have raised the importance of acknowledging the domestic participation patterns of males and females when accounting for Australian work experience. They argue that work experience cannot be properly demonstrated without reference to a broad definition of labour that includes domestic/household care (Broomhill. R & Sharp. R, 2013; Pocock, 2005a).

2.2.2.1 The Realisation: Dual Earner Households are not Dual Carer Households

Understanding of the complex gender changes in post-modern societies is tied to the processes of how it addresses both the labour market and the unpaid household sector (Broomhill & Sharp, 2013). Although the changed gender order in society and social policy supports have essentially improved the current work experiences of female employees, it has

---

[1] 'the ideal worker is someone who works at least forty hours a week year round' (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, & Moen, 2010)

been argued that equality legislations and social policies have failed to socially engineer a more equitable dual earner and dual carer household model (Broomhill & Sharp, 2005). The ideology of breadwinning as a special male responsibility continues albeit changed slightly to view females in dual-earner families as secondary earners who usually do not possess provider identity (Reeves, 2008).

Studies show that in 1997, Australian women engaged in almost twice as much domestic and caring work than men; on average, they performed 33 hours a week of housework, child care and shopping, compared to men's 17 hours (Pocock, 2005b). Ten years later with significantly increased paid work participation their unpaid household work had also increased by five minutes on average. By combining unpaid and paid work, Australian women are shouldering a greater 'total labour share' than men, and therefore, are often in a state of juggling or in a 'squeeze' (Pocock, 2005a). The Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI) report in 2010 found that, as a result, 61 per cent of working female respondents often or always feel rushed or time-pressed and almost 70 per cent of working mothers report they are constantly juggling their dual responsibilities in homes and at workplaces (Pocock, et al., 2010).

To address the issue of leadership inequality for women and to pioneer women in positions with leadership responsibility combined with a responsible work life balance Leahy (2012) argues that it is necessary to bring:

> … 'a significant shift in social attitudes, changes to the nature of work, a restructured tax/transfer system, more comprehensive system of high quality care services for children and elderly and disabled people, and a dramatic improvement in the status, remuneration and conditions of employment for paid work'.

More importantly, the best possible policy approach would be to establish equitable gender order in society by successfully bringing men into unpaid work spheres (Giullari & Lewis, 2005; Leahy, 2012; Lewis, 2009; Sharp, Broomhill, & Elton, 2012). However, it is argued that a more equitable distribution of labour will take time, as the younger generation of women still appear unable to break through the domestic glass ceiling, let alone the organisational glass ceiling (Leahy, 2012).

21

2.2.2.2   The Myth: Part-time Work is an Easy Way out for Working Mothers

Researchers have revealed that much of the recent job growth in Australia has been in part-time employment, mostly casual. In Australia, part-time work is the most common strategy for women who wish to combine work and family: that is, their productive and reproductive roles (M. Baird, 2010; Connell, 2005; Johnstone, Lucke, & Lee, 2011; Pocock, 2005a). The Parental Leave in Australia Survey, 2006, indicates that 70 per cent of full-time female employees in Australia return to a part-time position following a baby's birth (Whitehouse, Baird, & Diamond, 2006).

To understand why it is mostly women who work part-time it is important to do a cause effect analysis (Vlasblom & Schippers, 2006). By doing a cause effect analysis Baird and Charlesworth assume that modern Australian women work part-time because of:

- Partners' long hours and significantly limited involvement in unpaid work including domestic work, child care

- Problems with availability and affordability of suitable child care

- Australian taxation system disincentives to a second earner in a family

- Cultural dilemma of mothers working full-time or fathers adjusting their work schedules to include family responsibilities (2010).

To some extent and for some households it is indeed the best practice: however, scholars are divided on the question of whether or not part-time work is in women's best interest. Although a considerable number of scholars and policy makers suggest that the only effective way to retain women in the labour force is to increase the availability quality part time work, 'especially during their childrearing years' (M. Baird, 2010). Many others have termed part-time working a 'gendered strategy' because it usually limits women's ability to progress their career to the highest levels in organisations (Higgins, Duxbury, & Johnson, 2000; Warren, 2004; Webber & Williams, 2007).

Working part-time not only limits career prospects, but it also 'reinforces gender inequality in families' (Webber & Williams, 2007), because mothers' large scale participation in the labour force does not necessarily lead to a similar increase in men's participation in domestic work. When one spouse (usually the wife) works part-time household work and care-giving responsibilities rest entirely with her because the spouse (usually the husband) works full-time. As a result, the total workload of part-time wives is usually extensive with a poor time

schedule and less (if any) leisure time than their husbands and other full-time working or stay-at-home wives (Webber & Williams, 2007).

With the realisation that the achievement of full-time work for women does not necessarily lead to equal sharing of domestic work between male and female partners, and that working part-time actually lessen women's career prospects and financial independence: a number of feminists today argue that to successfully achieve equality in leadership it is necessary to make males take greater responsibilities for caring and domestic work (Broomhill & Sharp, 2013; Broomhill & Sharp, 2005). Until males assume equal responsibility for the domestic workload, females will not achieve equality in the labour market or their share of senior positions. Moreover, work-life collision will always be an issue in women's lives.

2.3   Post-feminist Arguments: A Focus on Choice

In contrast to the mainstream feminist view, a group of scholars and practitioners who are known as post-feminism feminists have argued that if significant numbers of the new generation of women do not exhibit leadership attributes or willingness to push harder to secure top managerial careers; it is their individual choice- it is 'girl's power' today (Boyes, 2012; Dezso & Ross, 2008). Linda Hirshman has named this feminist perspective 'choice feminism'(2006). This new development in feminism argues that a changed gender context now exists in society, that women are more qualified, independent and empowered than ever before, and that this progress has caused associated changes in female values, aspirations and behaviours towards career goals and life aspirations.

British sociologist Catherine Hakim is a prominent exponent of these arguments. Her ideas are discussed in detail below, however, a range of other choice feminists have contributed to this new focus on women's choice and career. They claim that women today are more independent in deciding on their careers, lifestyles and success in life. As women are more likely to be in the position to make choices about every aspect of their lives, and because they make those choices themselves, their choices are in fact 'feminist choices' (Boyes, 2012; Murphy, 2012).

This emerging approach challenges the traditional ideology of career success which measures success by a person's ability to scale the career ladder to its highest levels. In contrast, proponents of choice feminism argue that career success is career freedom: the freedom for women to be able to determine their own career goals and what they need to attain the best level of life satisfaction. They also recognise that not all women (and not all men) aspire to leadership roles and are happy nevertheless. Thus, such choices of female employees should be acceptable in feminism and should be backed by social policies (Boyes, 2012; Ferguson, 2011; C. Hakim, 2003a).

To describe patterns of 21st century women's career development in the changed gender context, researchers have suggested two categories. One is 'traditional lifestyle', in which young women become mothers at relatively early ages and their work, career, further education and lifestyle fit around their family and motherhood activities. The other is, 'modern lifestyle', in which young women delay motherhood, obtain further educational qualifications and pursue careers (Warner-Smith and Imbruglia (2001) as cited in Johnstone,

et al., 2011). Although the recent trend suggests that 21st century women are more inclined to adopt the modern lifestyle, the traditional lifestyle is also widely recognised and practiced (Hakim, 1996b). Such different lifestyle behaviours indicate that choice is a vital factor in understanding female employment patterns and career aspirations.

To describe this recent development in feminism, scholars use examples such as, Anne-Marie Slaughter, Hillary Clinton's Director of Policy Planning, who stepped down from her 'high powered Whitehouse position'(Hayward, 2012) and Nicola Roxon, the former Australian Attorney General who resigned from her role to become a stay-at-home mother (Thompson, 2013). Both left their hard-earned leadership positions from personal preference. Slaughter argues that society should value those women who choose to value family over professional advancement to ensure a quality life for their family and for themselves. Because they are making choices about their own lives, nobody has the right to justify their life decisions:

> '… if we really valued these choices, we would value the people who make them; if we really valued the people who make them, we would do everything possible to hire and retain them; if we did everything possible to allow them to combine work and family over time, then the choices would get a lot easier' (Slaughter (2012) as cited in Hayward, 2012).

Although the post-feminist views have not been accepted very readily in the mainstream feminist literature, a ten-year long study by a privately funded research group has found that women's attitudes and lifestyle choices have radically changed over the past decade. Women now want freedom to focus on what matters to them rather than what feminism imposes on them, such as, securing powerful positions and prestige (The Heat Group, 2014). These research findings actually support the emerging post-modern explanations for differential career and lifestyle choices of women today. They report that whereas ten years ago women sought career success and fulfilment above all, women now rank preferred lifestyle, freedom of choice, and travel as their top priorities. Thus, women's focus has shifted. The Managing Director of the research group Gillian Franklin has commented:

> ' Over the years we have heard about glass ceiling and sticky floor but we are saying there is a fundamental shift because women now want freedom to make their own choices- so success on their terms… We have seen aspirations for status and power almost slip into oblivion

with only one percent saying it is still a priority, down from 21 percent in 2003'(2014).

It is clear that career choice and social acceptance of 'individual lifestyle preference', is gaining much importance among post-modern feminists. However, I find that 'choice feminism' is still ambiguous and has not been clearly defined in gender studies. In the following discussion, I evaluate the concept of 'choice' as an important variable in analysing persistent leadership inequality in the post-modern workplace today.

Choice feminism begins with the proposition that women should be allowed to choose between having careers and being housewives or stay-at-home parents without guilt or judgement. The debate of choice feminism in developed societies arises when the current generation of women, who are modern, educated, and socially and politically empowered, start giving equal merit to the choice to stay at home and/or to build a career targeted at key executive/ management positions.

Linda Redlick Hirshman, a lawyer and a critic of choice feminism wrote in The American Prospect, an online USA-based magazine,

> 'a woman could work, stay home, have ten children or one, marry or
> stay single … it all counted as "feminist" as long as she chose it'
> (2006).

Therefore, choice is not a mainstream feminist idea of the 80's or 90's. Instead, this is an idea that has opposed the assertive or directive agendas of feminism on gender equity. It arises in response to three common criticisms of feminism: that feminism is too radical, too exclusionary, and too judgemental (Ferguson, 2011). While bringing a difference to feminist thinking, it has also given equal value to a family life combined with career and employment for women. The idea, therefore, was that 'women should decide for themselves how to combine children, career, romance and vacuuming' (Cohen, 2006).

It is argued that 'when people are forced to behave in ways that contradict their ideals, they often undergo what sociologists call a value stretch' (Nicole & Maggie, 2011), in which they try to adjust things the way they want or desire according to their own values and ideals. The philosophy of choice feminism respects women's own values, priorities and choices. It indicates that today, whatever the opportunities or social expectations, female employees ultimately decide on their careers according to on their own values, ideals and judgements.

Choice feminism, then, supports the decisions of those senior executive women who have left their leadership roles for the sake of their families' well-being, or those women who do not want to be in leadership roles despite having the potential and prospects. Pro-choice feminists argue that choice feminism is an adjustment to reality. It recognises women as a heterogeneous group, in which not all women (and not all men) want to be a leader; or think or desire in the same way as other women (or men). It criticises the existing feminist ideology for pressing women to make choices that are accepted or permitted in feminism in the name of gender equality, 'feminist choice'- as opposed to 'choices for women', whatever they may be.

Therefore, according to these choice feminists, the emergence of choice as a factor in determining women's career behaviour is natural and should be socially and politically acceptable today. Social policies should be neutral and supportive to accommodate different individual choices and preferences for lifestyles and careers, rather than aim to tailor it in one direction.

At the beginning of this century the prominent British sociologist Catherine Hakim made quite an impressive attempt to describe 21st century women's career and lifestyle preferences. She developed the 21st century Lifestyle Preference Theory, which she claims is the sociology for the 21st century. This theory provides a framework for understanding women's employment and career outcomes that emphasises the key roles of individual agency and choices. It also links the behavioural patterns of women with the social, political and economic variables that typically influence the decision-making processes of these behaviours. The following section of this chapter provides an outline of Hakim's theories followed in the next section by a review of critiques of her work.

2.4   Hakim's Lifestyle Preference Theory

Catherine Hakim's lifestyle preference theory suggests that all women living in post-modern affluent societies can make genuine, free 'choices' regarding their career and lifestyle. According to Preference theory, irrespective of educational qualification or social class, when women have genuine choices they choose one of three different lifestyles: work-centred (committed to career), home-centred (committed to mothering) or adaptive (focused mainly on domestic and reproductive spheres but organise paid employment in response to policy and

social conditions). The majority of women are concentrated in the adaptive lifestyle and are committed neither entirely to their families nor entirely to their careers (2000a)

According to the theory's propositions, women are not a homogeneous group but generally have three lifestyle choices in affluent societies such as Australia. 'One size fits all' social policies, therefore, are not appropriate to assist the career development of these different groups of women with different life aspirations and career behaviours (2003; 2004, 2008, 2010). The theory emphasises that men usually have no choice but to specialise in career development. As a more homogeneous group, men will always dominate paid employment and thus, are likely to be more eligible for leadership-type roles (1996b, 2000a, 2000b).

2.4.1 The Philosophy of Preference Theory

Hakim's Preference theory (2000b) suggests that the five social and economic changes that began in the 20th century are the basis for a 'qualitatively different and new scenario of options and opportunities for women in the 21st century'. These five changes are:

1. The contraceptive revolution

2. The equal opportunity revolution

3. The expansion of white collar occupations

4. The creation of jobs for secondary earners

5. The increasing importance of attitudes, values and personal preferences in lifestyle choice.

Preference theory (2000b) posits that in post-modern affluent societies where these five revolutions have fully happened and created a 'new scenario' for women, women have genuine and free choices in resolving the conflict between paid and unpaid jobs. Depending on the variations in work-related choices, Hakim claims most women have one of three idealised preferences:

• Home-centred preferences,
• Work-centred preferences
• Adaptive preferences.

Therefore, the theory makes the following assumptions:

1.   Female career behaviour, these days, is impacted relatively more by individual goals and preferences than by situational factors. Structural or institutional constraints, therefore, are not solely significant in influencing female decision-making about career and fertility ([1998](#)).

2.   Lifestyle choices are more likely to be free and genuine for women in affluent societies like Britain, the USA and Australia. The opportunities are fair and equal for men and women in post-modern affluent societies where the five revolutions stated above have occurred ([2000b](#)).

3.   Women are not a homogeneous group. Women are heterogeneous in their preferences and priorities in the conflict between family and employment. Therefore, 'they are heterogeneous also in their employment patterns and work histories'([1996b](#)).

4.   The heterogeneity of women's preferences and priorities creates conflicting interests between groups of women. Because of women's conflict of interest, men, as a more homogeneous group, will continue to dominate in the workforce and in public life while women will continue to dominate in family life, even in the absence of sex discrimination. This is because traditionally some residual differences prevail in the tastes, values and lifestyle choices of men and women ([2005](#)).

5.   Women's heterogeneity is the main reason for women's variable responses to social engineering policies in post-modern societies ([2000a](#), [2002](#); [2003a](#)).

2.4.2 Application of Preference Theory in the 21st Century Context

Catherine Hakim carried out two national surveys in Britain and in Spain to test her theory. She found that personal preference is strongly and very effectively related to women's decisions about fertility and behaviour towards career and employment. To claim the applicability of Preference theory in the changed context of the 21st century, Hakim proposed a number of credibility approaches or prospects. After studying her claims and propositions, I have divided the discussion into seven broad sections:

2.4.2.1   Preference theory and feminist ideology

Hakim's theoretical assumptions are based on the factors impacting on women's career development processes as explained in the recent literature. She has argued that current feminist's discussions and debates about women's career development choices and lifestyle decision-making is based on several myths or fallacies, which she attempts to probe by her empirical research-based theory. These are:

- Women's employment has been increasing

- Women's work orientation / commitment is equal to men's

- The need for childcare is the main barrier to women's employment

- Part-timers' are exploited in poor quality jobs

- Women's employability is equal to men's (Ginn et al., 1996)

Instead, she suggests-

- The total number of part-time jobs has increased significantly, although actual full-time jobs have not.
- Women generally do not show work and career commitments equal to men and women's attitude to work still has not significantly changed
- The major issue with female career development is not child care but voluntarily choosing part-time work
- Part time work is of poor quality because part-time workers (the majority of whom are females) have low or limited expectations and are satisfied with poor job quality and benefits
- Women usually have non-linear, interrupted career growth; their job tenure is generally shorter than that of men. They are often career drifters, they quit or ask for leave more often than male employees; therefore, women's employability, particularly in roles with leadership responsibilities, is not equal to men's (Ginn, et al., 1996; Hakim, 1995).

2.4.2.2   Preference theory and female employment and career development process

Preference theory holds that females' employment and career development is closely linked with their preferences for a particular lifestyle. Supporting this theory is a study done by Hakim in Britain, which shows that two-thirds of work-centred women work full-time. In contrast, two-thirds of adaptive women work part-time or do not work at all. As expected half of the home-centred women do not work, but, a relatively high number (40%) of home-centred women have full-time jobs. It is a very surprising result, which Hakim explains by suggesting that in certain circumstances social constrains and economic factors can override personal preferences (2002). However, as career development and participation in paid work are two different life decisions, ultimately women decide about career development from their own preferences rather than social circumstances.

Thus, preferences can predict work rates and career orientations, but, employment (full-time or part-time) does not predict women's work and career-related values and aspirations. Again, as evident in Hakim's study irrespective of educational qualifications or economic status, women exhibit three broad career preferences, therefore, 'social, economic and cultural capitals are not important correlates or predictors of lifestyle preferences' (2002, 2004).

Hakim, thus, denies the general assumption made by feminist researchers who presume that highly educated modern women prefer to work full-time and are careerists. However, she agrees that higher education increases women's likelihood of participating in paid work. She also agrees that having children may impact on women's work and career orientations, although she does not think these are any longer the primary factors in determining female career choices and decisions.

2.4.2.3   Preference theory and individual values, motivations, goals and life aspirations

Hakim accepts that preferences do not predict outcomes with complete certainty, even when there are equal opportunities for women. Individual abilities and factors in the social and economic environment may account for variations in decision about career and lifestyle. However, in prosperous post-modern societies preferences have indeed become a very important determinant; often, as the author suggests the primary determinant of women's behaviour (Hakim, 2003; C. Hakim, 2003a).

Preferences are closely related to the individual's values, motivations, aspirations and goals in life. Hakim identifies the goal of life or 'work plan' in life as a significant independent predictor of women's work behaviours. Women who continuously plan for work are 30 per cent more likely to participate in paid employment than women who plan not to work. In the same way, women who plan for a 'marriage career' are less likely to work after marriage or if they do work, it is due more to family's financial necessity than to their own choices. Therefore, planning to work or to acquire necessary skills has a significant advantage for women in advancing their careers to leadership level (Hakim, 2006).

The theory also suggests that those who work only if their family responsibilities allow them to do so are actually the women whose prior life choices emphasise a homemaker career not a career-centric one (Hakim, 2002). Fertility expectations thus have little negative impact on the young women's work motivations. Instead, work plans exert a significant negative impact on their child-bearing plans. Therefore, Preference theory identifies the factors that have been long regarded as the primary determinants of female career behaviours (e.g. family income, educational qualifications, marital status, children and the age of young children) as important factors in the career decisions and work behaviours of those women who have little or no work commitment and who are generally adaptive or home-centred type (Hakim, 2003). However, these factors are generally unimportant in determining career behaviours of all

women, especially those career-centric women who are ambitious and aspire to top managerial positions.

2.4.2.4   Preference Theory and Patriarchal Norms, Values and Ideologies

Preference theory shows that patriarchal values have less influence on female career behaviours than lifestyle preference. It argues that patriarchal values are 'only tenuously linked to behaviour'(1996a; 2003b).

The studies on which Hakim based her theory have suggested that patriarchal values do not determine female work behaviour. Many females who work full-time in highly responsible jobs still accept patriarchal values. Many of these women still believe that their male partners are the breadwinners: that in time of massive unemployment males should have priority for jobs and, if there is no financial necessity, females should not work. Thus, they accept patriarchy in the home and in the labour market. However, such acceptance of patriarchal ideologies does not necessarily define their work behaviours.

2.4.2.5   Preference theory and fertility pattern

Preference theory has suggested a new point of view from which to explain the declining fertility rate in most developed societies. It argues that all the previous studies were 'variable centric' and analysed the problem from a macro point of view. Those theories ignored the micro or individualistic side of the issue, where the primary determinants should be the 'views, perspectives and goals' of women (2003c).

This theory suggests that as the contraceptive revolution gave females control over fertility, social demographic and economic developmental theories should give more emphasis to the factors that are closely associated with the motherhood decision-making processes of modern women.

It also criticises social economic theory which has linked the rising female employment rate with falling fertility and suggested more family-friendly employment policies to solve the problem. However, according to Preference theory family-friendly policy practices may support women in paid employment with fair work and family balance, but it has very little influence on the motherhood decision-making of women and thus, on the fertility pattern of society (Hakim, 2010).

As motherhood is a personal decision for women, Preference theory argues that to maintain and increase fertility rates policies and social attitudes should be supportive of those women who are more likely to have babies. Therefore, to increase the overall fertility rate, public policies should provide more incentives and social and economic supports to home-centred women than to career-centred women (2003c).

2.4.2.6   Preference Theory and the Socio-economic Policy Interface

Preference theory argues that women are a heterogeneous group; they clearly do not have one view on the issue of work and home. Their responses to social policies, thus, are various and sometimes conflicting and contradictory; therefore, social policy options should be neutral to allow the various and distinct choices of individuals. It should be flexible enough to meet the various preferences women have. A one size fits all policy would not work in the new scenario of post-modern societies (2008).

If some women want to stay at home and do not desire a top-ranked management career, then government policies should recognise and accept their preferences. To welcome a diversity of career and lifestyle choices for women, they should formulate policies that maximise women's flexibility and freedom to choose their preferred lifestyle(s). Policies should not direct them towards a pre-determined end. Hakim says,

> '… Such an open ended scheme would leave mothers free to decide whether to use the money as a replacement for lost earnings while they stay at home to raise their child, as a salary for this alternative occupation, or as a subsidy for any childcare services that they use to enable them to return to part-time or full-time employment. The home care allowance introduced in Finland and France begin to offer this kind of neutral, open-ended benefits instead of the benefits with social engineering aims that promote particular choices and behaviours… The challenge for politicians and policy-makers in the 21st century is to design policies that are neutral between the three preference groups. The challenge for policy researchers is to design research projects that assist and inform this process' (C. Hakim, 2003a)

2.4.2.7   Preference theory and leadership equality

According to Preference theory, leadership jobs are designed as 'male occupations' that essentially require full-time work and do not generally provide part-time working hours. With this in mind, Hakim suggests that only work-centred women are likely to be inclined to participate in leadership or top managerial/executive personnel roles (2000b, 2006). Even though her study found that both home-centred and work-centred groups of women tend to work full-time, she suggests that only work-centred women will eventually choose to be in leadership roles prefer such roles. Home-centred women work full-time to fulfil their family financial needs and generally do not possess a preference for higher status, prestige and managerial responsibilities with a higher salary.

She also suggests that career-centred women are generally more enthusiastic towards their work roles and enjoy career competition. Their main priority in life is their career. They undertake higher studies and acquire more skills and qualifications to be able to compete for top jobs in the organisations. As these women do not prioritise family, they are less likely to marry or to have children and are more likely to be separated or divorced. Even if they have a family and/or children they still prioritise work as the centre of their life activities. They are a small number of women. Hakim presumes that these women will always be a minority and it is wrong to think that 21st century women are more likely to be career-centric and that the number is increasing. She says, 'professional and managerial women are exceptional minorities' (1998, p. 139); therefore, they cannot be the basis for any general theory defining women's employment behaviours and choices.

2.5   Preference Theory: Controversy and Criticism

Hakim's Preference theory has been heavily criticised and even bluntly rejected by feminists, and is termed 'flawed' by social scientists and policy experts (Leahy & Doughney, 2006, p. 37). The debate began when this theory asserted that women in post-modern affluent societies are in the position to make unrestricted choices about their careers and lifestyles. The most disputed part of the theory is that it has raised an argument that women are not capable of acquiring top organisational jobs, as it claims women are less successful in the labour market because of their general preference to focus on raising children instead of on career development. It is also argued that the theory has wrongly suggested gender equality in leadership is 'a non-issue and no further intervention are required' (Leahy, 2011). The same scholars Leahy and Doughney (2006) have identified three crucial problems with the theory:

- Hakim fails to acknowledge the constraints faced by women

- She does not recognise that an individual's priorities shift over her lifespan

- She fails to take account of the careful empirical work carried out on choice, preference formation and decision-making.

Almost all of views opposing Preference theory (for example- research done by Leahy and Doughney in 2006) suggest that individual preference is closely connected to context or to current circumstances. An individual's preference is significantly influenced by her experiences, particularly in those situations where they face discrimination or inequality (Leahy, 2012; Leahy & Doughney, 2006). Therefore, aspirations, motivations, and goals in life cannot be independent variables in determining women's career choice.

Scholars also disagree with Hakim's proposition that men and women have different and distinct paid-work orientations. They argue that because Hakim did not provide adequate explanation for or reference the reasons for this difference; the theory is based on dubious foundations (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Ginn, et al., 1996). As well Hakim has been criticised for making a sharp distinction between paid work and other forms of work, such as reproductive work. This distinction has been the basis for her proposal for achieving gender parity through complete role reversal[2], which is 'completely impossible and unnecessary' (Leahy & Doughney, 2006, p. 39).

---

[2] When males perform work that is typically associated with female abilities, such as house works and caring for dependents; and females perform works that is typically associated with masculine abilities, such as outdoor works and/or paid employment.

Choices or preferences cannot be formed within a vacuum. Johnstone and Lee (2009) have found that very few women in Australia are exclusively home-centred or prefer to stay out of the labour force altogether. If they choose not to work they are actually trying to cope with their personal life situations. According to their research they suggest that most women cherish both- a family and a career (Johnstone & Lee, 2009). A number of studies have found the strategy of achieving balance by decreasing the number of working hours or by leaving paid employment completely is often not a voluntary decision for women, rather, it is generally a 'trade-off' following a life situation cost-benefit analysis (Johnstone & Lee, 2009; Johnstone, et al., 2011; Leahy & Doughney, 2006; McRae, 2003).

It is argued that Preference theory overlooked women's preference formation processes in which they actually adjust their preferences in response to persistent inequality; thus, their preferences are actually an 'adaptive preference' (Leahy & Doughney, 2006, p. 38). 'Preferences may change over time', too (Van-Wanrooy, 2005, pp. 153-159). To identify the factors contributing to the preference formation process, Johnstone and Lee (2009) have suggested that urban or rural residency and social class are important variables in determining female career choice and lifestyle preference. Their study also identifies significant socio-demographic impact in the preference formation process (Johnstone & Lee, 2009). Another study shows that public policies, educational attainment and life events are also important variables in this process (Johnstone, et al., 2011).

Preferences are more likely to change over life stages and often because of many life events. Johnstone, et al. (2011) have suggested that young women's' aspirations for 'having it all'; marriage, children, and full-time employment with greater economic independence and career prospects very often conflict with reality. This leads to a 'coming down to earth' process as they grow older and get involved with family: particularly with reproductive business, and realise that 'their lives are restricted by social and economic circumstances' (Johnstone, et al., 2011). This is how the 'neo-traditional employment' pattern has arisen for women today, they are often forced to negotiate their career goals and ambitions, and life aspirations and parenthood, and make a choice. Their career behaviours, therefore, are not choices made by free will; instead, they are constrained life decisions (Maher, 2005).

Hakim's ideology, that most women's work behaviour and career prospects somewhat revolve around their aspirations for motherhood, has been widely criticised. Motherhood is an activity for today's women, not an identity (Maher, 2005). The new generation of Australian

women are generally more career-centric and committed to their careers than is explained in the preference theory (Summers, 2003).

Yerkes (2013) studying the impact of individual preferences on female labour market behaviours, also suggests that there is a very weak relationship between work preferences and work behaviours, that the influence of preferences is visible only when individual, household and job characteristics are controlled. Thus, Yerkes rejects the primary tenets of Preference theory that preference is currently an independent variable that determines female career behaviour.

One of the other primary assumptions of Preference theory depends on its essentialist viewpoint, its emphasis on the existence of natural gender differences between the sexes. It is argued that, overall, even in the 21st century, the theory undermines the importance of these differences. Motherhood is a unique gender role of women and it is evident that women's career potential, even today, has continued to be associated with their motherhood status and other life circumstances.

Former Prime Minister Bob Hawke's comment on Tanya Plibersek's ability to work in the Labor leadership is a recent example of persistent social norms and values around gender difference that still doubt working mothers' ability to accomplish leadership roles and responsibilities. Recently, Bob Hawke commented that despite Tanya Plibersek being a very impressive representative, she may not be a candidate for Labor leadership as she has a three-year-old child. However, for the same post, the nominated male candidate Bill Shorten also happened to have a three-year-old child (Robinson, 2013).

Studies also show that men and women usually possess different views about the factors contributing to leadership inequality. A survey shows that male senior managers tend to view women's attributes, preferences and life circumstances as barriers to their success; whereas the females are likely to point to the organisational features when identifying barriers to career development (Leahy & Doughney, 2006).

Hakim, the proponent of Preference theory, argues that the social changes of previous decades have created an improved opportunity structure for women. The opponent of this thesis, on the other hand, suggests that opportunity is not equal; therefore, preferences for career development are essentially dependent on situational factors (Kangas & Rostgaard, 2007; Leahy & Doughney, 2006; Procter & Padfield, 1999; Walsh, 1999). Further studies have shown that individual decision-making is a complex phenomenon, neither straightforward nor

rational (Crompton & Harris, 1998; R. Crompton & Lyonette, 2007; Gash, 2008; Kangas & Rostgaard, 2007; McRae, 2003). It is, therefore, shown to be important not only to explore the preference formation process but also to understand the consequences of each choice or preference made by women.

In their empirical research-based book named *Australian women and careers: Psychological and contextual influences over the life course*, Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) suggested that women's careers and their orientation to success, achievement and life satisfaction, are different from those of men; and, often change over the course of lives: thus, female career and lifestyle choice and decisions are not fixed and static. Policies that seek to establish gender equality in all spheres of life should recognise the changing individual values, gender norms and societal realities.

Older generation feminists argue that they have fought to establish choice, opportunity and independence for women but they never expected there could be incidences where women would choose to stay out of the workforce or choose to be aloof from career ladders in the name of personal preference (Sandberg & Scovell, 2013). The value of feminism, feminists argue, is 'in breaking the glass ceiling, unravelling the sex classing of women, and equalizing the sacrifices of parenting and careers between the sexes' (Heather, 2012), not just establishing individual choices or priorities.

Anne Summers has carefully analysed this emerging post-feminist thesis in her book *The end of equality: Work, babies and women's choices in 21st century Australia* (2003). After thorough research, not only has she criticised the appearance of 'choice feminism' as a threat to the gender equality achieved so far, but she has also warned that it would soon end 'the equality'. In her opinion, it is not yet time for 21st century women to think that the battle is over and that women have achieved everything they need. Throughout her book she has effectively discussed evidence of obstacles that women still face when reconciling their ambitions for successful careers and other life desires.

Summers has also indicated that most of these obstacles are 'man-made roadblocks', because gender discrimination is still there (Summers, 2003, pp. 259-260). While most of the new generation of women perceive that discrimination based on gender has waned and there is choice amongst equal opportunities, female employees often face discrimination at the very beginning of their careers, when they usually have no family responsibilities or children and demonstrate enthusiasm and ambition equal to male candidates. For instance, in 2007, in New South Wales, the gross starting salaries of male law graduates were $7000 higher than those

of their female counterparts ([Summers, 2013](#)). Such evidence has also been discussed in the recent 2013 report by CEDA *Women in leadership: Understanding the gender gap* which says,

> '…In fact, the pay differential exists even among graduates for whom the usual explanations for salary disparity (e.g. amount of experience) do not typically exist' ([2013, p. 6](#)).

While Hakim's Preference theory posits that discrimination is an outdated phenomenon, critics of her theory mainly argue that such a claim is naïve and false in the current context of the gender inequalities that exist in affluent societies like Europe and Australia. Opportunities are not yet equal. Discrimination is endemic. Female career progression still faces direct and indirect obstacles. Thus, choices cannot be free and genuine for women as is claimed in Hakim's Preference theory.

2.6   Conclusion

Although Hakim remains a controversial figure for Australian academics and policy bureaucrats, one of her critics once remarked that her works are 'the most important synthesis of research on women's works in this decade' ([Peter Elias (2003) as cited in Arndt, 2003](#)). Sociologist Mariah Evans believes that Hakim's ideology of diversity is different and vast; it does not imply narrow policy options; thus, Hakim's assumptions and the tenets of Preference theory, however heavily criticised, are not entirely rejected by feminist scholars. Some of them even argue that her theory is thought-provoking and establishes new ideas; consequently, the importance of her theory cannot be underestimated.

Not all reviewers of Preference theory are equally critical of all its assertions. Walsh's study in 1999 found that the link between female paid work behaviour and preference is very complex but not entirely insignificant. She studied female part-time employees in Australian banks and found that although half of the participants had chosen part-time work because of young children, a significant number also expressed their frustration at being unable to find suitable full time jobs. Nevertheless, a significant number of childless women seemed happy with their part-time work hours and showed no intention of looking for full-time work ([Walsh, 1999](#)). The findings, in fact, support the Preference theory assumption that preference is an independent determinant of the career behaviour of modern women today. However, Walsh also cast some doubt on the theory's assumptions arguing that it over-simplified the

linkage between female career expectations and attitudes, and the organisation's opportunity structure.

Researchers have also criticised the new post-feminist view of choice and preference on the grounds that choice is relative. There are still social and organisational barriers that influence female career preferences and lifestyle behaviours. The main argument against choice as a feminist ideology and preference as a primary determinant of career behaviour of 21st century women is that these propositions have underestimated the impact of contextual variables such as persistent and wide-spread structural constraints and the glass ceiling. Their argument identifies that even in the 21st century; the structure of opportunity is not equal for everyone. Therefore, choice feminism is a theory that appears to be more relevant to women who belong to the upper class or upper-middle class (Nicole & Maggie, 2011).

Hakim though did not exclude structural and organisational variables from her study. Instead, she claimed that along with contextual influences, the time has come to recognise personal and motivational factors as independent determinants of female career behaviours and lifestyle choices. She wrote:

> 'Preference theory does not deny the impact of social, economic, and institutional factors. These will continue to ensure no convergence of female employment patterns in societies, such as Britain and the United States that have achieved the new scenario for women. However, the social environment is no more than that. Women's motivations and aspirations are independent factors with causal powers that must now be investigated more thoroughly.'(2002, p. 47)

For my thesis, I have chosen to analyse the assumptions made by Preference theory and the new emerging feminist ideology of choice as an important determinant of female career behaviour while acknowledging that the structure of opportunity is not yet equal for all women in society. My main purpose is to understand whether the post-modern thesis has any validity in adding to the existing understanding of women's lack of leadership representation in modern workplaces such as the modern public service in South Australia.

As noted, the thesis seeks to address this task by conducting an empirical study in which I interview a number of female public servants in the South Australian public sector with a view to answering the following questions:

- To what extent (and in what ways) do individual choices play a major role in female public servants' success in achieving leadership positions?

- In seeking career/life balance how do female public servants adjust their private aspirations and goals within the organisational structure of the employer?

- What are the policy implications in relation to career development of female public servants in the South Australian Public Service?

In the following chapter (Chapter Three) I discuss why I have selected the South Australian Public Service (SAPS) as a case study for the research conducted for this thesis. I also develop a conceptual framework for the study based on the discussion and reviews in this chapter. The conceptual framework gives a theoretical and methodological direction to the study, to answer the key research questions.

Chapter Three

Research Method

3.1　Introduction

As discussed in Chapter One, this dissertation attempts to understand why women are under-represented in leadership positions in the Australian public sector. The position of women in the SAPS has been chosen as a case study. What makes this thesis distinct from other research is that it aims to identify the role of personal choice and agency amongst female employees in the process of career development. This thesis, while fully acknowledging the structural factors that negatively influence the career journey of female public servants, in particular seeks to analyse the extent to which women themselves interact with environmental and structural factors and utilise their own agency by making their own career and lifestyle choices.

In this chapter I discuss the research methods used.

3.2 Developing a Conceptual Framework

To give direction to the enquiry of this thesis, I have developed and utilised a conceptual framework (see figure 4) that provides a method to analyse the interrelationship between the role of key structural factors and the role of individual choice and agency in determining female career behaviours and lifestyle preferences in the 21st century. From this conceptual framework I have developed a research methodology to answer the three broad questions addressed in this thesis.

The conceptual framework comprises three different but interdependent aspects or dimensions to the analysis of the causes of leadership inequality for female public servants in the South Australian Public Service. These dimensions are closely related to the three research questions of this study (set out in Chapter One) and are illustrated in the following table.

Table 2 Conceptual dimensions

Dimensions	Structure of opportunity	Agency	Policy
Factors	Organisational extrinsic Organisational intrinsic	Motivational and emotional factors/ Psycho-social factors	Organisational and workplace policies/ state and federal government policies affecting women and employment

3.2.1 The Structural Dimension

There are systematic and unsystematic structural factors in an organisational sphere that directly or indirectly influence female employees' employment patterns and career prospects. For a better understanding of the effect of the organisational structure of opportunity in determining the female career development process, I have divided these factors into two major streams, intrinsic and extrinsic factors:

3.2.1.1 Extrinsic Factors

Extrinsic factors arise outside the workplace and may or may not reinforce gender division in the workplace. Although they are not organisational characteristics, they can severely influence job satisfaction, career choice, work commitment and turnover rates. The most common external factors are related to the employee's familial role and responsibilities; care and dependents; household work pattern; recreation, leisure, arts and cultural life; and social norms and gender identity.

3.2.1.2 Intrinsic Factors

Intrinsic factors are the organisational factors that directly or indirectly influence female employees' career prospects and job satisfaction. Moreover, these factors essentially influence the 'gender order' of an organisation and interplay with the power struggle politics within the hierarchy. Common examples of intrinsic factors are the management ethic, organisational culture, organisational practice, and job design.

3.2.2 The Agency[3] Dimension

These are the factors directly related to the personal choices of female employees themselves. The agency factors that this study is primarily investigating are the variables that influence the preference, decision, and behaviours of female employees about career, career and life balance, career development and lifestyle patterns. The role of psycho-social variables, such as, values, perceptions, expectations, goals, aspirations and motivation in life, are central to this research.

3.2.3 The Policy Dimension

The policy dimension comprises government and organisational policies that have been introduced in order to help women workers achieve gender equality in the workplace and in the labour market. As this research comprises a case study of a state public sector, it has emphasised the role and impact of the relevant state government policies in relation to

---

[3] 'Agency' refers to the volitional and purposeful nature of human activity. When social structure is believed to exert a constraining effect on human activity; agency refers to the ability of individuals to act independently of this.

women's position in the public service; however, it has also considered broader policies affecting women and employment at both the state and federal levels.

This three dimensional conceptual framework allows the research to focus clearly on the central research question of this thesis,

1. To what extent (and in what ways) do individual choices play a major role in female public servants' success in achieving leadership positions?

For a detailed understanding of how and to what extent individual choices impact the career behaviours of today's women, this thesis utilises two additional research questions:

2. In seeking career life balance, how do public servants adjust their private aspirations and goals within the organisational structure of the employer?

3. What are the policy implications for the career development of female public servants in the SAPS?

The additional research enquiries assist this study to analyse the interrelationships between the three main aspects identified in the conceptual framework and thus, explore the role of individual agency (personal choice, expectations, motivation and socialisation) in women's under-representation in leadership while acknowledging and accounting for the role of both structural factors and policies in this process.

Figure 4 Conceptual framework[4]

---
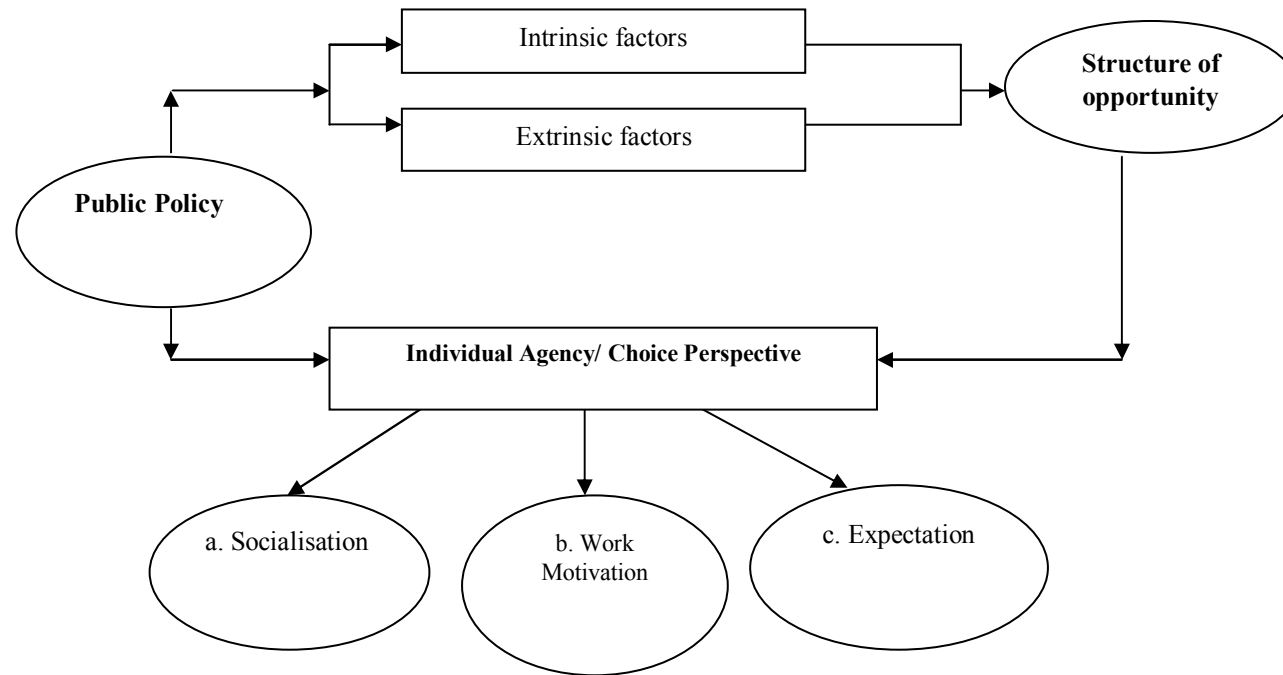
[4] This conceptual framework draws on the principles illustrated by Astin in 1984 in her need-based socio-psychological career behaviour model. However, the conceptual framework utilised in this thesis is an original contribution; the Individual agency/psychosocial perspective acknowledges the importance of the three main principles (a, b, c) that Astin has described in her theory and in the model (Astin, 1984)

3.3   Research Strategy and Design

3.3.1   Research Design

3.3.1.1   Case Study

To address the key research questions, the thesis develops a case study utilising primary data gleaned from interviews with 30 female South Australian public servants aged from 30 to 55. The South Australian public sector is the focus of the case study research. This sector accounts for more than 12 per cent of employment in South Australia; therefore, its employment pattern and practices can directly impact employment and career opportunities for under-represented groups such as female workers (State of the Service Report, 2013).

South Australia as a Case

In 1894 South Australia was the first state in Australia to give women the right to vote and to stand for parliament (Sawer, 2002), therefore, women have been politically empowered in South Australia for a very long time.

More recently, the Government of South Australia has recognised that women are underrepresented in senior government roles:

> 'Organisations must be competitive in providing leading edge
> conditions, flexibilities and career development opportunities if they
> are to attract and retain women. Whilst women's employment
> participation is increasing, women are significantly underutilised in
> the workforce and when in employment, don't enjoy the same career
> progression as men' (Government of South Australia, 2010 cited in
> ABS, 2010)

When in late 2010, the then federal government announced a target of 40% women, 40% men and 20% unallocated would apply to government boards by 2015, the South Australian and the Australian Capital Territory governments were the first amongst the state and territory governments to include similar targets in their policy agendas. It is true that such initiatives have been effective in South Australia; in past decades there has been a dramatic increase in

the percentage of women in senior executive positions in this state. However, the State of the Service report in 2013 suggested that although good progress has been made as a result of implementing the policy measures, women continue to be underrepresented on government boards and in powerful leadership roles in the South Australian public sector (State of the Service Report, 2013).

South Australia also has special state policies and strategic plans to improve women's representation in leadership roles, such as:

I.   Boards and committees - increase the number of women on all State Government boards and committees to 50% on average by 2014, and maintain thereafter by ensuring that 50% of women are appointed, on average, each quarter (target 30)

II.   Chairs of boards and committees - increase the number of women chairing state government boards and committees to 50% by 2014 (target 31)

III.   Women - have women comprising half of the public sector employees in the executive levels (including Chief Executives) by 2014 and maintain thereafter (target 52) (Office for Women, 2011).

To fulfil target 52, South Australia has implemented additional strategies, such as:

- Targeted marketing to attract increased applications from women for executive positions

- Improve executive capabilities amongst women in executive positions and executive 'feeder groups'

- Ensure that Chief Executives, Human Resource Directors and Divisional Heads demonstrate commitment to employing women in executive levels

- Make SA government women's choice of employer with better work life balance initiatives (Office for Public Employment and Review, 2012).

- There are also two specific targets in South Australia's Strategic Plan in relation to the retention and development of women in the work force; T2.12 which focuses on improving work-life balance and T6.23 which focuses on women in executive positions in the public sector (ABS, 2010).

In 2011, an alternative report on the state of the Public Service, published by the Centre for Policy Development, showed that after initiating the SASP there was a significant increase in

the number of women executives in the SAPS. Indeed, in 2011 South Australia was in the leading position among all other Australian jurisdictions because 42% of its public service executives were women. It also shows that this state is very near to achieving target 30; as in 2011, 46% (45.64%) of all positions are occupied by women in government boards and bodies. However, women comprise only 35% of chair positions (Whelan, 2011). Just one year later, in 2012, the updated State of the Service Report revealed that the Department for Education and Child Development, the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion, the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet have already met target 52 (State of the Service Report, 2013).

Therefore, it is true that the SAPS has made progress towards gender equality in leadership roles. However, it is also evident that progress is visible mostly in those government departments and agencies that work predominantly for social welfare and service delivery, and are generally female-dominated workplaces (Whelan, 2011).

Such evidence emphasises the importance of understanding the impact on women's career prospects of the relationship between organisations' structural and employees' individual agency as well as its connection with greater progress in female-dominated organisations than in male-dominated ones. It also raises the question of the role of state government policies in female participation in leadership positions in the overall public sector. Because the primary focus of this thesis examines not only the reasons for lack of female representation in leadership, but also the impacts on this process of the SAPS, with its remarkable progress in gender equality in leadership, proved to be most appropriate for this study.

3.3.1.2   Research Strategy

In Chapter two I have reviewed various explanations for women's continued underrepresentation in organisational leadership roles. For the reasons explained in that chapter, in this thesis, I will seek to test the validity and utility of the explanations presented by Lifestyle Preference theory and choice feminism and, more generally, will examine the role of women's individual agency in influencing the numbers of women occupying leadership roles in the public sector. From my analysis of the theories, I developed a conceptual framework for the research from which to test these theories and refute or accept them by matching them to data collected from in-depth interviews with female public servants in South Australia.

For this study, I conducted four pilot interviews and 30 in-depth face-to-face interviews of female public servants in South Australia. For the face-to-face interviews I used a purposive selection process. To contact participants I obtained the assistance of the Public Service Association (PSA) of South Australia, a branch organisation of the Commonwealth Public Service Union (CPSU). I developed a participant information sheet (see Appendix- 1) which the PSA emailed to all the female members of the union on my behalf. The email also included an expression of interest form (see Appendix- 2). Those members interested in participating in this research project gave their work designation and contact details on the form and returned it to me via email. A summary of the research topic and purpose as well as confirmation of anonymity and confidentiality were included in the information sheet.

3.4   Overview of Methods

This section provides a description of the qualitative interviews and the questionnaire development process, sampling, data and information administration, and analysis technique.

I used a qualitative interview method to address the objectives of this thesis. In May 2013, I conducted four pilot interviews with female employees at the University of Adelaide to develop an appropriate questionnaire for the interviews. Three of the participants had previously worked in the Australian public service; one of them also worked in the SES. After revising the questionnaire twice I was able to construct the final questionnaire for the interviews with the female public servants in South Australia. I developed two sets of separate but interrelated questionnaires for the actual interviews. One set of questionnaires was developed for the non-executive but officer rank of female public servants, and, the other set was developed for female senior executives. The characteristics of the two sets of questionnaires are discussed under 3.5.2 Data Collection Technique.

In June 2013, the PSA distributed an email among its female members on my behalf containing information for potential participants about the research project and the interview process and requirements. Unfortunately, the number of responses from potential interviewees received within one month was insufficient. In July 2013, I administered a reminder email and another invitation to participate in the research project and within four weeks had received an overwhelming number of responses.

The interested participants were required to provide their contact details, work designation and age in an expression of interest form. I contacted a selection of them to arrange a suitable time and date to conduct the interviews. I started interviewing in the second week of August in 2013 and completed interviewing 24 participants by October 2013.

3.4.1 Participants

3.4.1.1 Characteristics of Participants

Study group and site

Female public servants from entry levels to the most senior levels of the Public Service of South Australia were the target group for this research. The chosen age range was from 30 to 55, as women are generally more concerned about career development within these years of their lives. This is also the prime time for modern Australian women to begin their own family ([Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2003](#)).

The characteristics of the two samples of women were as follows:

- Nine senior women from SES

- Sixteen female employees from mid-career executive levels and five female employees from non-executive levels.

Table 3 Data collection samples

Sample	No. of participants	Work levels	Comment
1	9	SAES* 1,2,3	Female Chief Executives, Assistant Chief Executives, Senior Executives levels SES 1-3 in leadership roles
2	21	SAPS^: 1-6 EL>:1-2	Female executives working just below the SAES and other female officers working in non-executive junior work levels

*SAES: South Australian Executive Service ^SAPS: South Australian Public Service
>EL: Executive Levels

3.4.1.2 Sampling

Stratified purposive sampling

As mentioned earlier for participant selection I contacted the PSA to assist by helping me to identify target subjects to assist in interviews. This method was chosen to free study from the limitations of random or snowball sampling. In this way, all of the participants were well-informed about the purpose of the research project and contributed to it of their own free will.

To select interviewees from interested participants I used stratified purposive sampling. From a large population of interested female members of the PSA (41 interested female public servants), I selected participants on the basis of two specific categories or *stratum*; namely, *age* and *work level*. The subcategories of the age stratum were age group 30-45 and age group 45-55. The subcategories of the work levels stratum were entry to mid-career levels and senior executive level (see Figure 5). Participants were then selected randomly from the combination of these strata. For example, seven women were chosen from the age group 40-55, who are in the senior executive work levels.

Figure 5 Stratified purposive sampling
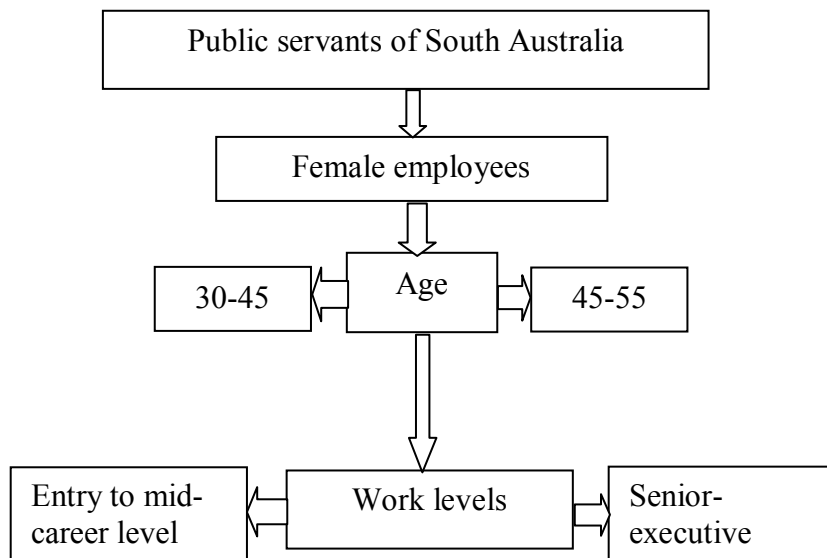
3.4.2   Data Collection Technique

3.4.2.1   Short Survey

I constructed a short survey questionnaire with only five questions about participants' relevant demographic information (see Appendix -2). Bryman (2012) has upheld the importance of contextualising people's interview responses and suggested that the interviewer must record 'face-sheet' information of a general kind, such as, name, age, gender; and, specific details such as- position, designation, number of years employed. This enables the researcher to understand the context of the answers. Keeping this in mind, I developed the survey questionnaire and provided it to the participants before starting the interview.

The demographic profile of each of the participants comprised the following information:

- Age

- Education/qualification

- Household income (before tax)

- Relationship status

- Number of children

- Age of having first child and how many children

- If no children, any plans to have children (optional)

- If no children, the reason (optional)

3.4.2.2 Interview

To collect the data, I used a qualitative semi-structured interview method. This is a popular method in feminist studies and in social sciences. According to Bryman (2012) qualitative interviews seek the interviewees' points of views rather than any of the interviewer's pre-conceived concerns. For this reason, unstructured and semi-structured interviewing methods have become very popular among feminist researchers, particularly; when interviewing other women, because they establish flexibility, feeling of togetherness, and non-hierarchical power relations. This research methodology, therefore, is very appropriate for my feminist research study.

The main intent of the interviews conducted in this study was to explore the interviewees' personal experience and views: their 'self-knowledge', 'what respondents usually think, generally feel, normally experience, or really believe' (Gomm, 2008). Therefore, most of the questions asked were open-ended, to give respondents room for thinking and adding information on their own. Thus, the questionnaire was semi-structured and gave both the interviewee and the interviewer flexibility to discuss questions and answers. Indeed, the questionnaire was primarily a guide for conducting the interviews. I did not always follow the sequence of the questions listed in the interview schedule. I asked many questions during the interviews that were not in the original questionnaire (for example- I asked many of them about the profession of their husband and/or partner and if there is any impact of their husbands' profession on their career choice). Those questions emerged in the course of the interview in order to explore the full story from the participants' experiences. The complete list of questions in the questionnaire which were based on the topics identified in the conceptual framework for this research was covered in each interview session, although I sometimes changed the wording of questions or pattern of questioning during the interviews to fit into the flow of conversation.

I chose face-to-face in-depth interviewing as the method for data collection because the aim of the study is primarily to know and understand the experience and expectations of the participants regarding their career development and lifestyle preferences. Therefore, by giving interviewees ample time to discuss these matters the semi-structured interview situation provided them with a safe environment in which to reveal their own life experiences, ideas and thoughts. Johnson 2002 suggests that in-depth interviews aim to gain access to the subjects' private and sometimes occluded perceptions objects. He also asserts that in-depth interviews are effective when the study is mutually beneficial for the interviewees and the

interviewer and may provide a very efficient way to understand multiple aspects of a matter ([Marvasti, 2004]).

All of the interviews were audio-recorded. In order to preserve the confidentiality of the interviewees I have used pseudonyms when quoting directly from the data.

Interview schedule/ guide

The interview questions were based on the conceptual framework and the identified conceptual themes of the research, which are discussed in the first part of this chapter in 3.1 Introduction. Sixteen conceptual themes or topics (see Table- 3) were identified and were discussed with the participants over each interview session.

Table 4 Conceptual themes/ topics for interviews

Conceptual dimension/ aspect	Conceptual factors	Study themes
Structure of Opportunity	External factors	Family structure and household pattern
		Work/life balance
	Internal factors	Organisational culture and practice
		Management ethics
		Job design and work roles
		Job distribution and recruitment process
		Work/life balance policies and practices
Agency	Sex-role Socialisation	Gender identity and stereotypes
		Career plan
	Work motivation	Financial independence
		Work/life balance
		Power, status, achievement
	Expectations and aspirations	Career goals and ambitions
		Job satisfaction
		Role model and/or mentor
Policy	Policy impacts	Public policy influences

As noted, I used two questionnaires for interviews with two groups of participants. One questionnaire was for junior women working at ASO1-ASO6 and EL-1 and EL-2 levels, and the other was for the senior executive women working in SES. These two questionnaires were slightly different based on my research focus and purpose in relation to each group. Although most of the questions were the same and covered the sixteen conceptual themes (shown in Table- 4), the intention of interviews conducted with the senior women was to explore their experiences of combining career-building and lifestyle and the reason for their success. The interviews with the junior women focused on their expectations, career goals and decision-making processes for career choice and lifestyle preference.

Table 5 Differentiated interview schedule based on research focus and purpose

Interview questionnaire	Research focus	Issues to explore	Analysis
Questionnaire 1*: Female public servants in leadership roles	Identifying the factors that influenced their progress to a leadership position positively and negatively	Attitudes towards career	As these women already are in leadership roles this study explores the factors that have supported them in their leadership career and associated lifestyle
		Strategy/approach adopted to achieve successful careers	
		External support/ assistance/ mentoring/ inspiration	
		Individual issues/ factors/ conditions that have restrained their career progress	
		External conditions that worked as barriers to their careers	
		Experience of family-friendly work policies	
Questionnaire-2 ^: Female public servants not in leadership roles	Identifying the factors that influenced their role in their organisation and particularly in not achieving a senior leadership position	Attitudes towards career	As these women are not in executive/ senior executive roles, this study explores the factors that have resulted in their existing work situation
		External/environmental factors that have impacted on their work and career	
		Internal/ individual factors that have influenced career aspirations and expectations	
		Perception of opportunity and equal opportunity in practice	
		Availability, usage, and, benefits of family-friendly work arrangements	

*Questionnaire for Junior Public Servants (See Appendix 3) ^Questionnaire for Senior Public Servants (See Appendix 4)

3.5   Data Analysis

3.5.1   Thematic Analysis

I used a thematic analysis method to analyse data from the interviews. Thematic analysis involves identifying the key themes in the whole set or sub-set of interviews and placing them in a framework to enable comparison and contrast between the different respondents (Gomm, 2008, p. 244).

Data analysis proceeded in five stages:

1.   After listening to all the interview records I selected and transcribed ten interviews that seemed to be richer in relevant information and data for this study.

2.   I, then, transcribed the most relevant parts of the remaining interviews.

3.   I noted themes that were present in the whole set of interviews.

4.   Using a technique called 'Reading between the lines' I develop one to two pages summarising each interview around the crucial themes that had emerged from the data analysis (Sharp, et al., 2011, p. 29).

5.   I used the identified themes as a guide to compare and contrast responses from the different interviewees in the different groups (participants of Questionnaire-1 and participants of Questionnaire-2). From this, I identified the findings to the key research questions of this thesis.

3.6   Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research design, methodology and data analysis strategy used in this thesis. First, I defined the key variables to be examined and provided an overview of the conceptual dimensions: structure of opportunity, individual agency, and policy. The variables for each dimension and the inter-relationships between them are discussed briefly and highlighted through a conceptual framework. Second, I provided a focus to inter-relate the conceptual framework with the key research questions of this thesis. The conceptual framework also assisted in developing the methodology for the study. Third, I discussed the method for data collection and organisation in the main body of the chapter. The chapter ended with an overview of the data analysis technique.

Whereas Chapter 3 focused on the research methods and strategy for data analysis, the following chapters discuss the findings in relation to the central research questions of this thesis.

Chapter Four

Senior Executive Women in SAPS: the View from the Top

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine data and information gleaned from interviews with nine female senior executives in the SAPS. First, I, analyse the information they gave on the role of their own agency in successfully securing leadership opportunities. Second, I, examine the organisational context of the women to identify their experiences of equal opportunity and their perceptions of gender equality and the structure of opportunity within the organisational settings of their employers. Third, I examine the women's work-life balance, their adaptive strategies and the implication of the employer's employee relations policy on their career and lifestyle behaviours. To conclude, I discuss the findings in relation to the key research questions of the thesis. I also discuss their suggestions and opinions on the issue of overcoming leadership inequality in the SAPS.

When I invited the female senior executives to participate in this research, I did not expect an overwhelming number of positive responses. However, after starting to interview these high-profile executive women, I noticed that they had so much to tell about their success stories: their failures, their career experiences and their personal strategies to overcome career-family collisions, as well as their suggestions for the young generation of women successfully achieving leadership roles. The positive attitudes from these female leaders, reflected their integrity, eagerness and support for leadership equality in the public service. They also helped this research to successfully draw conclusions on the research problem identified.

The primary focus of interviewing with these senior female executives in the SAPS was to analyse the factors that allowed them to secure their leadership roles in the public service. The interviews also discussed organisational structural elements, policies and practices and their work-life balance experiences. The main purpose was to identify factors that supported them or obstructed success and to reveal the approaches that these senior executives had used to overcome any impediments.

Before going into in-depth discussion on the findings of the interviews, I provide some demographic information or the participants 'face sheets', in order to allow a better understanding of each interviewee's workplace position and personal situation.

4.2   Demographic Information

I interviewed nine senior executives in the SAPS ranging in age from 30 to 55. Six of them held post-graduate degrees and the rest were graduates. All were working in full-time contract positions, except one, who was working in a contract part-time position.

All were married, except one, who had a de facto partner. Seven of them had at least one child. The other two did not have children. One will never have children and the other does not have a plan to have children within the next five years.

Six of these senior executives identified themselves as working in female-dominated workplaces and two of them said they were working in male-dominated workplaces. In this study, a female-dominated workplace is defined as the workplace where at least 40% of both employees and executives are females and a male-dominated workplace is defined as a workplace where at least 40% of both employees and executives are male (State of the Service Report, 2013).

To give a better understanding of the demographic information of these powerful female leaders in the SAPS I have summarised their 'face sheets' in the Table 6:

Table 6 Demographic information on the female senior executives

NAME	Linda	Lisa	Christina	Sara	Amanda	Clare	Emma	Bianca	Caroline
DEPARTMENT	DPC	DTF	AGD	DPC	DPC	DPC	DCSI	HEALTH	HEALTH
CURRENT LEVEL	SAES 2	SAES 3	SAES 1	Deputy Chief Executive	SAES 2	SAES 1	SAES 3	SAES 2	SAES 3
EMPLOYMENT STATUS*	Contract Full-time	Contract Full-time	Contract Full-time	Contract Part-time	Contract Full-time	Contract Full-time	Contract Full-time	Contract Full-time	Contract Full-time
QUALIFICATION	PhD	PG	PG	G	G	G	G	PG	PG
AGE	40	48	48	38	42	32	53	42	55
RELATIONSHIP	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	De-facto	Married	Married	Married
CHILD	2	2	0	2	3	0	1	3	2
AGE OF WHEN HAD FIRST CHILD	35	33	-	33	35+	-	25	35	27
REASON FOR NO CHILD	-	-	Personal choice	-	-	Personal choice	-	-	-
CAREER TRAJECTORY^	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time	Not Always Fulltime	Full-time	Full-time	Not Always Fulltime	Full-time	Not Always Fulltime
WORKPLACE GENDER RATIO	Female dominated	Male-dominated	Male-dominated	Female-dominated	Female-dominated	Female-dominated	Female-dominated	Female-dominated	Female-dominated

Notes: DPC= Department of Premier and Cabinet; DTF= Department of Treasury and Finance; AGD= Attorney-General's Department; DCSI= Department of Communities and Social Inclusion; SAES= South Australian Executive Service; PhD= Doctor of Philosophy; PG= Postgraduate; G= Graduate.

^All full-time responses had always worked full-time. *All interviewees were contractors.

4.3 Examining the Role of Choice and Individual Agency in Determining Career Success

4.3.1 Career Trajectory: Career Goal, Ambition and Achievements

It has long been argued that one of the major reasons for the under-representation of women in leadership roles is their lack of career ambition and goal. As discussed in Chapter 2, this argument has been developed most completely by Hakim, who claims that there are three different categories of women, depending on their ambitions and aspirations about paid and unpaid work. According to her theory, the majority of women still belong in the adaptive category, choosing to follow a middle path in combining family and employment as they are likely to lack career ambition and aspiration.

Other scholars, however, argue that gender difference in ambition and aspiration for career progression has been minimised as women are now more educated, more empowered and aware of gender discrimination (Ransom, 2013; Woodfield, 2007). In my study, participants gave interesting responses about their career trajectory. None of them confirmed the assumption that today's modern women are more motivated towards career success and possess definite career ambitions. However, the responses suggest that for these women career success does not always relate to having and fulfilling straightforward goals.

When I asked the high-profile senior executive women about their career goals and ambitions, the majority of them indicated that they never had a specific goal to be in the SES. It is very interesting that most of them had never had a clear career plan, and none of them had actually aspired to senior executive positions. Any career plans they might have had were short-term and temporary.

Linda (40, SAES-2) who has been working in an executive role in government for seven years and in a senior executive role for almost two years, commented,

> 'I had no ambition to work in powerful executive jobs with the public service. I think I am a natural leader. So, I have naturally driven into a leadership role.'

When I asked her about her career journey up to senior executive level she said,

> '…It just fell into place and it all just kind of happened. I have been appointed for a job in the public service which I even did not apply for. I applied for an alternative job. They said, look, we do not want you to do the job. We want you to do another executive job, and I did not have a clue how I was going to do it but I said, alright.'

She also added that,

> '… in terms of power and ambition I think that a lot of the senior executives I know have kind of fallen into these roles based on their capabilities and competences rather than ambitions.'

Lisa's (48, SAES-3) comment echoed Linda's response,

> 'I never had a specific career goal. All of my career ambitions were temporary or fleeting. It is something that…umm…what might be the next thing to do?'

Career Aspiration and Career Drive

Although most of these senior executives had never had a clear career plan or any targeted ambition, most of them acknowledged that they had always been driven towards career achievements and career development. They had always wanted to do well at work and to add value. Bianca (42, SAES-2) identified this attitude as 'commitment to work'.

Amanda (42, SAES-3) said,

> 'I was not single-minded-ly ambitious, but my personal approach was being good and enjoying what you do … my career motivation is, be inspired … always try to learn new things.'

Lisa (48, SAES-3) suggested,

> 'I want to make a difference by my work … I work those roles from which I think I will get job satisfaction.'

Career flexibility

The majority of the female senior executives suggested that it was not having a clear and fixed career trajectory that had made them successful in securing leadership roles. Instead, it was their ability to take every opportunity that came into their career path despite any work-life collisions. They said they became successful because they were always flexible and easy about their work-family situations. Sara (38, Deputy Chief Executive) commented,

> 'Career trajectory was not my aim. I was open. I did not have any career plan or goal … Many women do not want to travel, umm … but, I think they need to be flexible. It is their choice. They should decide about their own work/life balance. One thing helps; good time management ability.'

Therefore, aspirations for career achievement and a positive drive had motivated these senior executive women in their career development. Even though they had never had clear career goals, their attitude showed that they were always committed to their careers and had the ability to shape other life commitments around the needs and demands of their work roles.

All of the senior executives in this study were satisfied in their current roles, despite having tremendous workloads, juggling between work and life and with no option for flexibility at work. The only thing that bothered them was the work hours.

Bianca (42, SAES-2) said that for her, job satisfaction came from, 'autonomy, good team, and good boss.'

Sara the 38-year-old Deputy Chief Executive with two young children suggested that sometimes she struggled to achieve a balance between her work and her life. But, it did not hamper her job satisfaction. She identified that she gained satisfaction from seeing her skills being utilised and adding to her work.

Amanda (42, SAES-3), who had worked in the SAPS since 1995, was managing three young children and a powerful leadership position at SAES-3 level that she had held for the past two years. Even with three children and a highly responsible job, she did not uphold work-life balance as an important element of job satisfaction; rather, she said that for her the essential elements of work satisfaction came from,

> '… Content and subject matter … people who I work with, sense of
> making a difference, and, learning new things.'

Because the flexibility for a better work-life balance in teaching is commonly thought of as a popular career choice for women Linda's experience came as a surprises. Linda (40, SAES-2) an academic who joined the public service seven years ago as a mid-level executive was promoted to the SES 18 months ago. Compared with her previous job, she said that she had greater job satisfaction in her current role:

> 'I have incredible job satisfaction. I am also paid incredibly well. It
> gives me a good lifestyle. I feel I am extremely privileged.'

It is clear that for these career women, job satisfaction did not relate significantly to the work intensity of their roles or their work-life balance. Instead, it depended on a number of crucial factors related to the work environment, context and work achievements.

However, Emma (53, SAES-3), who had worked in the SAPS for 18 years and in her present role for three years, commented,

> 'To some degree, yes, but I am not entirely satisfied. I feel I work too many hours. There is a lot of drama in higher levels … I think I need a job which has less stress. Again, the public perceptions about public service are also very negative; it bothers me.'

Self-limiting behaviour

Although all of these women demonstrated a high level of career commitment and job satisfaction, they did not show a similar level of positive motivation for career progression. Many of them expressed the tendency to select out, or to self-limiting behaviours. Such self-limiting behaviour is termed a female disease by Ross-Smith and Chesterman (2009) who found that women usually suffer from a self-limiting career approach, which they describe as a wide-spread and chronic disease. This study confirms that even with confidence in their abilities and achieving career success, most of these women have a tendency to limit their career progression after a certain level.

Lisa (48, SAES-3) said,

> 'The only posts that I can get into from this role are chief executive and deputy chief executive. But I don't want to be a chief executive. I fear I will lose job satisfaction'.

Similarly, Amanda (42, SAES-3), who has been working in a senior executive role for seven years, did not want to apply for the chief executive role. She admitted,

> 'Opportunities are there, but I don't aspire for promotion to the next level. I now look for new challenges not new roles. My career plan is to work in equivalent levels.'

Emma (53, SAES-3), who was near to retirement years, said that,

> 'When you look at your boss you may think, well, I can do this. So it is not that I am necessarily driven. In fact it is quite the opposite; I keep telling myself no more career advancements. This is it, just stop.'

Furthermore, two of the senior executives, who are also new mothers, suggested that because of their young children, at this point of their lives they did not want to progress their careers any further. They feared that a new work role and increased responsibility would damage their work-care balance and hamper their job satisfaction.

> 'In the chief executive role … the nature of work is more time-consuming and demanding. When you have young children it becomes more difficult to have a work-family balance.' (Sara, 38, Deputy Chief Executive)

However, Linda (40, SAES-2) provided a different dimension to women's self-limiting tendency. She explained that she used to fear her new role as Deputy Chief Executive as she had had no previous experience working at such levels. But, after working as Acting Deputy Chief Executive for a few days she eventually began to like the new role and gained confidence. At first she held back from taking new responsibilities because of lack of confidence in her own abilities and experience. She said,

> 'Look, I worked as deputy chief executive for 12 months; it was quite a senior role. But, I did not want to do that. I was sort of talked into it. I did not apply for the role. They asked me to do the job; I said no, I said no three times. Then in the end I had no choice, so I took the job. But I really enjoyed the role after a while. So, if I am honest …umm yea … I will probably progress … But, I have also internal conflict, because I really like the job I am doing right now.'

Linda's comment reveals agitation and lack of confidence in progressing her career. It seems that even after acquiring high-powered leadership roles in the SES, for these women career decisions remain a complex experience.

4.3.2 Lifestyle Choice: Socialisation, Expectations and Priorities in Lives

Lifestyle Priority

Most of these senior executive women had almost always worked full-time. A few of them worked part-time when their children were young and one of them worked flexible hours to complete her post-graduate degree. It is important to note here that none of these women had career breaks. Thus, all demonstrated a full-time work commitment to climb to the senior executive levels. A recent study done by [Adams and Kirchmaier (2012)](#) also showed a strong correlation between the rates of full-time working women and the number of women in boardrooms.

In the study on which this thesis is based, I found that although most of these highly qualified senior executives had almost always worked full-time, they had their first child in their mid-thirties when they were already in the SES. It is visible from their comments that while career and family decisions were interrelated; they gave priority to their career first and then to having children after fulfilling the aspiration to be in considerably senior positions.

For example, Amanda, who had been married for nine years, had her first child when she was 37 years old and was working in Level 1 of the SES. At the time of this interview she was in Level 3 of the SES with a three-year-old daughter and a six-month-old toddler. She said she had been working at this level for past two years; however, she had her second child while in this role and as she took 18 months of maternity leave, she had actually been working in her current role only for six months. Her strategy for managing career and family was to have children in her late thirties when she already was in the senior executive roles. Therefore, her priority had been a successful career before family or parenthood. Even as a parent of two children, she said her career was her priority, and she felt that managing a home, especially after having children, was more of a struggle than work.

The participants of this study who had children before taking on executive or senior executive roles were older than rest of the participants and were noticeably a minority. This trend suggests that the younger participants had given priority to their careers rather than motherhood. They made sure of their position in the executive stream first and made the decision to have a child.

However, Clare (32, SAES-1), the youngest senior executive participant who did not yet have children said,

> 'I was not ready myself for having children … But, I had always
> forced myself to think that the ideal situation would be to not have
> children until I become an executive.'

But, she also observed that it was not easy for women to give priority to career at the ages when they were expected by society to extend their families. As she said,

> 'Having children is not my first priority in life … I think other women
> make it hard for women to be focused solely on careers; women who
> do not identify themselves as really focused on child-bearing are seen
> as mean and selfish by the women who have children … you know …
> like a bitch or something.'

However, Linda (40, SAES-2) suggested that priorities might change with the impact of life events. For her, priorities shifted from her career to her family's needs after she had children. She suggested that once a woman had a child she generally prioritised job security and income rather than career progression. Children created the obligation for a bigger house and more expenses. Maintaining a work-life balance or making more time for family became one of her main priorities.

On the other hand, senior executive women who did not have children viewed this attitude change as a decreasing career commitment in professional women. As Clare (32, SAES-1) said,

> 'A lot of my friends, I think, who were like, professional career
> women are proud to have kids. After having kids their lives have been
> changed. They have gone back to work but they do not care anymore.
> They have gone back to work, you know, for making money, because
> this is what the family needs, and because they enjoy it. But, they are
> not, like, into it in the same way they were before.'

Christina (48, SAES-1), commented,

> 'Being a mother is related to your career choice. I doubt, if I had
> children, I would be able to be a senior executive!'

Social Norms and Parenthood Identity

It is argued that in society women are still seen as the primary carers. It is also evident in social research that such stereotypical social norms and judgements affect women's accessibility and suitability in leadership roles. The female senior executives in this study personally did not believe in such societal prejudices, but they had faced such judgements several times in their lives. In a recent study, however, it was discovered that Australian new mothers neither expressed motherhood as their preferred identity nor represented mothering or a 'familial role' as an inhibitor to other life aspirations, such as ambitious careers (Maher, 2005). I found a similar attitude in the senior executives in this study who, over-all, showed no or very little concern about any dispute between motherhood aspiration and leadership career; it seemed that they viewed parenthood as a regular life activity, rather than, an identity.

Emma (53, SAES-3), the oldest senior executive participant in this study and the mother of a daughter, commented,

> 'Mothering is not my primary identity. It never was … having a child
> is a part of my identity but not the whole of me.'

Amanda (42, SAES-3), mother of three, said,

> 'I love my children, but it is not the best thing I have ever done … the
> best thing I have ever done is all the things which I find personally
> rewarding, for example, my work.'

Bianca (42, SAES-2) added,

> 'People have multiple roles these days. It is just what you do and how
> you manage it. Motherhood is one of these roles and not an identity
> for me.'

4.3.3 Individual Agency: Confidence, Social Intelligence and Self-belief

The majority of the senior executives acknowledged that there were gender differences in the career progression behaviours of male and female employees. What they all agreed was that females have less confidence in their abilities than males, and that women doubt their own abilities. But, they also agreed that less confidence or lack of ability to stand out did not mean they had lesser capabilities or skills.

Linda (40, SAES-2) commented,

> 'Presentation or appearance is not gendered anymore. They all have career ambitions. But females usually feel they need to get it 100 per cent right but males will do it 70 -80 per cent right.'

She accepted that this was also true for herself as she had never had the courage to advance her career without other people's encouragement,

> 'To be honest with you, all of my career progressions have been because other people told me to go for the jobs. You know, I was encouraged by others … I really did not think I could do any of them.'

Lisa (48, SAES-3) encouraged junior women to have self-belief and to gain confidence in their own abilities, saying, 'Confidence in people is attractive'.

She also added,

> 'We have confidence issues. Men will have self-belief and entitlements; women are not good at it.'

To describe her own attributes she said,

> 'People think I am confident. But I don't think I am. I am good at faking it. I have social intelligence. It works for me.'

Here, Lisa pointed out a very important characteristic that women needed to develop. Social intelligence includes an ability to understand and manage complex social relationships and to effectively and wisely negotiate social change, complex environments and various different situations. According to her, when a person has social intelligence it gives the impression of confidence, ability and dynamism, even if it is not true.

Although all of these high achieving women talked about women's lack of confidence as a barrier to career success, they all admitted that they themselves suffered from the same

symptom. To describe strategies for gaining confidence, Sara (38, Deputy Chief Executive) said,

> 'I used to talk with people who are in high positions; it gave me the
> ability to present myself. Confidence is very important.'

From Sara's comment it is understandable these senior executives had to work on themselves to gain confidence, and that they had strategies to do this. For example, Sara used to talk with people who were in high-powered positions, which gave her confidence to socialise and network with high-achieving people. This strategy enhanced her confidence and ultimately enlarged the road map to success. Thus, confidence built the road map to success. Thus, confidence-building is sometimes a learning process that many women need to adopt to be successful in achieving leadership roles.

Confidence-building is also necessary to give women scope to compete in career opportunities. As Emma (53, SAES-3), commented,

> 'A risk-taking attitude is less common in women as they are lacking in
> confidence … That is why women do not see as many opportunities
> … as men see. This is how we operate. It is, of course, a barrier.'

The only interviewee in this study who thought she had naturally grown confidence to tackle all sorts of leadership situations was Bianca (42, SAES-2), but, she also upheld the necessity of using self-development techniques to be confident enough in all situations. She suggested that managing one's personal discomfort was the first step to developing self-confidence,

> 'If you are competent, gender in the boardroom is not intimidating for
> you. You need to be driven and be capable of managing various
> situations confidently. Be open, honest and transparent. Good
> communication ability can boost confidence in yourself. I was
> confident. Seniority or gender did not matter as I was able to manage
> the discomfort within me.'

4.4   The Role of Organisational Structure and Opportunity

In the current study, I have found that there is a wide distinction between the perception of equality and the reality of the gender order that exists within organisational settings. It is also interesting to note that gender perceptions and gender realities were different in different organisational settings and at different work levels. Therefore, the significance of organisational structure and opportunity is different for the various interviewees in this study.

In the following section, I discuss the common perceptions of equal opportunity and gender equality in public organisations. I then analyse the participants' comments to explore the reality of gender equality within their organisations.

4.4.1 Perception on Gender Equality and Organisational Structure of Opportunity

In her book, *The End of Equality*, Summers (2003) has shown that generation Y women possess a general perception that gender equality has been achieved and the battle for equality is over for modern women in the 21st century. Although she has extensively criticised this attitude of modern women and warned that it will damage the equality that has been achieved so far, I found in my study that such perceptions are wide-spread and cannot be ignored. This is particularly true for the modern organisational settings of the public service where the majority of employees are women, and generally they are qualified women.

During my interviews with the senior women executives I noticed that, invariably, each observed equal opportunities exist for males and females, both in their organisations and overall in the SAPS. When I asked them about the selection and promotion process within their organisation, their first impression was very positive. They said that the process was generally fair and non-discriminative these days. None of them identified any kind of gender discrimination in their unsuccessful applications for new positions or promotions; instead, they said that often their applications were rejected because of their own inadequacy, such as lack of relevant experience or lack of suitable expertise or qualifications, or because there were better candidates for the same jobs.

Clare (32, SAES-1), who has recently been promoted to the SES and was the youngest interviewee from the senior executive stream in this study, said that her previous application for the senior executive role was unsuccessful because she herself was not ready to take on such a big role,

'I think I did not feel like I was ready and so I did not give a sense of being capable of taking the job.'

On having equal opportunity she commented,

'I do think it is really hard to go from ASO-8 to Executive levels as it is very competitive. There are a lot of people at the ASO-8 level but the senior executive level of jobs does not get advertised very often. So I do not think there is any particular barrier for women. I think the same would be true for men and women in the same level and the challenges are the same in taking the next step.'

As Clare thought excessive competition was a barrier to many securing leadership opportunity, I asked if that meant there were systematic or non-systematic barriers to women's career progression. A number of interviewees replied that there were systematic as well as cultural barriers that might limit women's career prospects but those were not necessarily related to gender or gender discrimination. Instead, these restraining factors were related more to public sector work ethics and the culture of public personnel management.

In this regard it was very fruitful to have a discussion with Sara (38, Deputy Chief Executive) who had experience of working in the top management levels for more than 12 years. She advised this study that the selection and appointment process in the public service was quite centralised. She perceived, the recruitment process to be fair and transparent, but, not as fair and transparent as it seemed. At the executive levels those candidates who were usually appointed were known faces who had been working in the relevant departments for a long time. She also remarked that it had become the culture of public sector recruitment for years.

Although Clare (32, SAES-1) gave a very positive response about equal opportunity she actually criticised the interview and recruitment processes in the public service,

> 'I thought that it was quite fair and open in the public service. I never thought I would have been asked anything inappropriate. But what I see is there has always been a preferred candidate. They usually use the interview process to really make that person stand out; for example, someone already being in a similar role who knows a lot of things about it. I have been to several interviews where I have been asked questions about the role which were so detailed that you could not have possibly been able to answer them unless you were already doing it. So, of course the candidate who already was doing it was able to answer those questions really well.'

Christina (48, SAES-1), who worked in a male-dominated workplace, explained the situation from a different point of view. As she worked closely with men most of the time, she observed that women were not as good as men at networking and socialising at professional levels, which is disadvantageous to the careers of female employees.

She said,

> 'We in the public service are not recruiting for potentials. We do not like to come out of the comfort zone, recruitments happen by knowing someone. We do not take risks. It is very stereotypical … However; patriotism or nepotism in the public service is clearly defined. So, theoretically it does not happen. But again performance measurement is not very tactful here. Recruitment decisions are taken depending on perceptions … As women are not good at networking; they usually are not known faces in the workplaces. The impression is not created at all. The perception thing, therefore, is not in favour of women. Thus, they get discriminated.'

To answer whether women's inability to stand out has any link with their lower numbers at the executive levels, Clare (32, SAES-1), explained,

> 'Men are more successful at gaining those positions because they are better at demanding. I know a few occasions where men have said, well, if you wanna keep me you're gonna have to promote me to the executive level, that attitude, and the way they sell themselves is not common in women … I am not good at selling myself the kind of really impulsive and brave way ... So, I think that would be a factor as well.'

Therefore, from the initial discussion with the senior executives it appeared that they are confident enough that the structure of opportunity within the public service is generally equal, non-discriminative and fair in relation to gender. However, their main concern was that, even though direct and systematic gender discrimination is not a standard phenomenon in the public service these days, women are still being discriminated against indirectly because of their own inability to comply with the workplace culture in the public service. In particular, the women interviewees referred to three characteristics frequently lacking in women workers that limited their ability to gain promotion;

- confidence

- stand out or demanding ability

- networking ability

These factors actually disadvantage female employees in the recruitment and selection processes within government.

4.4.2 The Reality of Organisational Structure, Culture and Opportunity

As already noted, in the initial discussion about equal opportunities in the organisational structure and work practice, most of the senior executive participants disregarded any experience of inequality or discrimination within the SAPS. However, after an in-depth discussion on their experience of working in leadership levels, they shared a lot of incidents where they felt intimidated or discriminated based on gender differences. Most of them identified that those incidents were generally behavioural discriminations by fellow male senior executives who were mostly older and more experienced, so, they did not see them as

organisational structural barriers, but, as barriers stemming from broader stereotypical gender norms and cultures manifested in the attitudes and behaviours of individual male executives.

Below, I discuss their experiences and opinions under three broad headings:

1. Equal number of participation matters

2. Equal impact, value and influence in decision-making is not an universal practice

3. Equal remuneration, benefit, job security and career prospects are at stake

4.4.2.1   Equal Number of Participation Matters

Even though the participants did not see or experience gender-based discrimination in their organisations in relation to recruitment, selection and promotion prospects, a number of them experienced gender-based harassment and discrimination in the boardrooms and on many other occasions while working in the decision-making processes. They assumed that these attitudes were generally linked to stereotypical gender conceptions and organisational culture. Such cultural practices persisted because female senior executives were so few in number that they were unable to act as change agents within the SES. However, many of them argued that such behavioural issues were also related to power struggles and the workplace culture of government organisations.

Emma, a comparatively older and more experienced senior executive in this study, suggested that to achieve gender equality in the SES a special quota for women or a specific target needed to be introduced. She also said that improving numbers of female executives in the SES levels would not solve the problem if the workplace gender culture were not also improved. Policies, programs and legislation should be there to protect female senior executives from being treated unjustly and from indirect discrimination. There should be an effective performance appraisal process to measure the performance of both male and female executives. She also suggested that men themselves cannot effect the change as they are historically the privileged group. To bring change women need to take the initiative, and for this it is necessary to promote more women to the decision-making levels.

4.4.2.2 Equal impact, value and influence in decision-making is not an universal practice

There is evidence to suggest that in the public service, women are slowly but steadily occupying an increasing number of the leadership roles. However, studies have found that many of these female leaders are perceived as 'tokens' (Vardon, 2010). When I asked the participants in this study about the effectiveness and influence of the increasing number of female leaders in the policy-making process I got mixed reactions. Some of the senior executives commented that even though qualified and competent women were coming into the policy-making streams, their contributions are often not valued equally with those of males. However, others perceived that their contributions were valued and that the workplace culture within their organisations was no longer gender-biased.

When I analysed their comments, I found that most of the senior executives from the female-dominated departments were mostly satisfied in their roles in terms of value, respect and impact on the decision-making process, but, it was the participants who were in the male-dominated organisations who were unhappy and felt discriminated.

Lisa (48, SAES-1) used to work in a female-dominated workplace that was concerned with social policy implementation. Recently she was moved to a typically male-dominated department concerned with finance and treasury. At first, it was very daunting for her to adjust to the organisation's workplace culture. She often felt she was not taken very seriously, as she came from a policy-making arena. The meetings that she attended now were mostly male-dominated and the chairs of those meetings were almost always males.

She said,

> 'Males usually think that they can take over; you have no control over it.'

She also added that in the male-dominated work culture, if women proved to be good decision-makers they were viewed as aggressive; if women gained good reputations they would almost always face unfair judgements.

Sara (38, Deputy Chief Executive) shared a similar story. She said that she experienced a situation where she was the only female member in the board-room and the males took over the whole decision-making process. She felt intimidated and left out. However, she said that happened in the departments that were male-dominated. Departments that were female-oriented were not like that,

'… Because of more female executives it is made friendlier looking.'

Amanda (42, SAES-3) faced similar discrimination in the board-room; but, in a female-dominated organisation. She said that it is usually male executives who dominate the board-room. As female executives are generally 10 to 15 years younger than the male managers, they face discrimination and devaluation because they are less experienced. She attributed this to the existence of a strong 'old boy's network'.

Bianca (42, SAES-2) looked at these issues from a different angle. She said that even though women were often vulnerable in board-rooms and in the decision-making process they could get over it if they were a little more confident and resilient. Although she worked in a female-dominated workplace, because of the nature of her work she had to attend many boardroom meetings with male chief executives and senior executives from other departments.

She said,

> 'I worked in board rooms with 25 male senior executives who were physically stronger and bigger. But, I was confident. If you are confident and competent, gender in the boardrooms is not intimidating for you. You have to conduct yourself. Seniority and gender do not matter if you can manage the discomfort inside you.'

4.4.2.3   Equal remunerations, benefits, job security and career prospects are at stake

The senior executives said that remuneration, benefits and career prospects were visibly fair and non-discriminative in the public service. They argued that in their organisations, remuneration and benefits were not determined on the basis of gender. Instead, they provided some very concerning insights on the salary and benefit prospects of the senior executive levels. Their comments broadly suggested that although the SES was highly paid and prestigious, it was not worth it for many mid-executive women, particularly those who are mothers, to pursue their careers at these levels.

Christina (48, SAES-1), who was promoted to SEAS 1 level from the EL 2; one year ago, said that higher salary in the senior executive levels could be a good motivation for female mid-career executives to pursue careers in the SES. But she suggested, from her own experience, that remuneration and benefits were not enough to attract women, particularly women with children, to the SES. She said that she decided to progress into the leadership levels, as she did not have children, but, mid-executive women with dependants usually took a cost-benefit analysis to their career decisions. For instance, when working just below the senior executive levels they could expect to earn around $110, 000 a year with additional benefits, such as-flexi-time, less stressful work hours and superannuation. By proceeding to senior executive levels they started to get around $140,000 a year, but ultimately lost all the additional benefits. Therefore, her comment suggests that employees aspiring for a good work-life balance and who have dependents are less likely to be encouraged to apply for senior executive roles.

It is again; true that to be eligible for an executive or senior executive role a woman almost always has to prove her capabilities and competences more extensively than a man. Such unfair competition has become a part of the organisational culture and a noticeable de-motivator for young women, as the participants resentfully commented. Although the structure for remuneration in the public service is defined, career prospects and appraisal technique are not clear. A woman has to give a lot more than any man to get into senior executive roles,

> 'Females are more competent than most of the males in these positions
> but they have to struggle more to get into these leadership roles.'
> (Christina, 48, SAES-1)

> 'You can be really fabulous but still you can be undermined. You have
> to know that cultural barriers are still there and you have to be
> prepared … We actually need organisations to recognise these
> barriers.' (Emma, 53, SAES-3)

Furthermore, these senior executives identified that the non-executive women, particularly those who had children, were more likely to be discouraged by the crucial factor that all the senior executive roles were contractual. This means that when the contract finishes there is no guarantee of contract renewal or getting a new contract. Thus, in terms of job security senior executive roles are very insecure; therefore, they are not desirable positions for many working mothers who are sole breadwinners or who do not want to lose job satisfaction because of lack of job security and financial uncertainty.

84

Sara (38, Deputy Chief Executive) had been working as a Chief Executive for two terms, having been able to renew her contract. However, she addressed contract positions in this way:

> '…once you are senior executive you are much more vulnerable when your contract finishes or if the work you are doing is no longer an important sector for the government. You are again vulnerable when the government changes or ministry changes … but in non-executive jobs there is a provision for deployment and they get paid even after the job loss … It is true for every male and female executive. But it impacts more on female executives because they, umm … think about job security, flexibility and tenure more than males.'

Therefore, these senior executives suggested that a woman had to be aware of these things before considering a leadership role.

4.5 Work/life balance and the Role of Policies and Practices

In most of the feminist literature on women at work, it has been stated on various occasions that women's family and care responsibilities and work-family collisions have made it difficult for them to advance their careers to the leadership levels (Austen & Birch, 2002; Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994). However, the senior executives in this study have shared some different views on their work-life situations and strategies for achieving better work-life balance. Nearly half of the participants said that although they worked too many hours and there were no fixed hours in their jobs, they did not necessarily have to juggle their work and life. They were, as they said, most of the time satisfied in their jobs. However, the main reasons they experienced few work-life collisions were that they either did not have children or their children were grown-up.

However, the other half of the senior executive women interviewed particularly those who had young children, complained that they had to do quite a bit of juggling. It was clear that their perception of work-life balance was often related to their personal life conditions; that is, whether or not they had young children, rather than work intensity, work hours or job requirements.

Christina (48, SAES-1) commented that she worked a lot of overtime, which as always unpaid, but she never felt she was juggling between work and life as she did not have children. A similar feeling was echoed in Lisa's statement:

> 'I do overtime. I am here most nights after 6pm. It is not paid. I travel a bit but not extensively. But my children are older. I don't feel that I juggle much!' (Lisa, 48, SAES-1)

Bianca (42, SAES-2) was also unhappy about her working hours; she has to work 70 or 80 hours a week. She also travels a lot. But as to her work-life balance, she said, she achieved balance by following a strategy. Her strategy is to delegate and to manage her time effectively.

Sara's experience was little different. She said her life was terribly work-centred. She even worked on weekends. She commented,

> 'I have no time to be sick. I don't have time for holidays. My work-life balance is not the answer for many people, particularly for mothers with young children. They would be horrified.' (Sara, 38, Deputy Chief Executive)

When asked whether such work intensity impacted on their job satisfaction or career goal, almost all of them replied that their job satisfaction was not really related to their work-life conditions. They also stated that they knew they had to be available 24/7 for the type of jobs they were choosing to do and it was also written into their job contracts that they had to be available whenever needed.

Sara (38, Chief Executive) said,

> 'The women who do not mind the hours and the pressures should come forward for leadership-level-jobs. The work environment is good. You have autonomy and control over your own time. I used to work less job hours but the team was not very helpful and the work environment was horrible. I was stressed. But in this role I feel I am satisfied.'

4.5.1 Managing Work and Life

For most of these female senior executives, managing home was more difficult than managing the work.

Amanda (42, SAES-3), who has two pre-school children and one infant, commented,

> 'Work is not struggling. Managing home is struggling … After children, arranging a home is struggling around full-time work.'

Sara (38, Deputy Chief Executive), who also had one pre-school going and one junior school going children advocated,

> 'I juggle a lot. It is a day-by-day proposition. When there is a young child there is less control. To me, work at home is harder than work at work. Sometimes even before coming to work you have to do the work for the whole day at home …When there are work deadlines and things at home are not going smoothly, you will feel guilty.'

These executives also said that a number of support systems in their lives had helped them to achieve the ability to manage between work and home; strategies that they said are essential and invaluable for women to be able to sustain leadership-level-jobs.

Partner support

To succeed in their careers all of these senior executives said that family support was very important, particularly from their partners.

Bianca (42, SAES-2) whose partner was working part-time at the moment, said that she would not be able to manage her highly demanding work and a family with three young children without the support of her partner.

However, Clare (32, SAES-1), who had no children, also said that when she had extensive workloads, such as when there were looming project deadlines, she needed the support of her partner.

All of these women identified partner support as crucial for success in their careers.

> 'My partner is reasonably considerate and supportive. He is self-employed, so he's better than others may be. We both respect each other's work. We operate like single parents sometimes.' (Amanda, 42, SAES-3)

However, a few of the women were doubtful that their partners would be as supportive if they needed to travel frequently. Christina (48, SAES-1) said, her partner was,

> '… to a degree supportive. But if I work to go out or travel a lot I do not think he would be very supportive, as long as it is convenient for him'.

Child-care support

The senior executives with young children said that they received formal support with child care. Amanda (42, SAES-3), talking about combining young children and an executive career, focused on the importance of appropriate child care and said that child care was indispensable for female workers' work-life balance,

> 'I am spending my money for my sanity. I cannot do it all. When all the children are looked after, I can do my own work, like banking, exercise, relaxation, etc.'

All of them also received informal support for their families from grandparents or family friends. What stood out was that the majority of them felt they were extremely lucky as their partners were very supportive about child-rearing. Overwhelming, the interviewees were extremely happy and satisfied when talking about partner's attitudes and support in child-rearing activities, as if their partners' contributions to child-rearing exceeded their expectations and imaginations. It represented that in their inner minds they still believed that child care was their sole responsibility and that, if their male partners did a fair share it should be praised.

Linda (40, SAES-2) said,

> 'We have support from grandparents for our kids. But, I am very lucky… my husband manages the kids when I am away.'

An interesting child-care arrangement had been worked out by Sara (38, Deputy Chief Executive) and her husband. When Sara had her first child she took six months' maternity leave and then came back as full-time. She did not have to work part-time as her husband decided to stay home full-time to take care of their first child. When she had her second child, she decided to work part-time and her husband worked full-time. It helped her to grow her career as a senior executive and later to become a chief executive. She stated,

> 'I did not have any emotional problems returning full-time after the
> birth of my daughter because I was not choosing between my daughter
> and the work. Instead, I was choosing between me being part-time or
> my husband being the carer. And my husband was at home for the
> care of our first child. It definitely helped me grow my career.'

Sara's experience seemed similar to the 'role reversal' approach of Catherine Hakim (2007, 2010). Hakim assumed that to assist women in their career progression and to gain complete gender equality in the workplaces, there should be a complete role reversal of gender labour in the households. By role reversal, she meant complete reversal of the gender division of labour, where males play all the roles that have been traditionally played by females and vice versa. However, Sara also said that even though the strategy she and her husband used for her career advancement, it was an unusual arrangement and she had never heard of it happening with anyone else.

Domestic work sharing and support

Most of the participants shared that they were satisfied with their domestic work-sharing with their partners and they did not see many gender differences. A number of them even commented that their partners did more than they did. It seemed that all of these executive women saw themselves as one of the primary breadwinners for their families. They seemed not to perceive inequalities in their families based on gender difference.

Linda (40, SAES-2), whose partner was self-employed, said,

> 'It is not an issue for us. In fact, he does far more than me. I do
> shopping and bills, work that means going out. He does most of the
> in-house work.'

Most of the participants also fused external support, such as, assistance from a paid cleaner or a cook or a gardener:

> 'Yes, we share, it is 50:50; we have a cleaner though. I am satisfied.'
> (Emma, 53, SAES-1)

Bianca (42, SAES-2) said,

> 'My partner works part-time, so he does more than me, although we
> have a cleaner and a gardener for external household supports.'

Lisa (48, SAES-3), said that she used to do more domestic work when they had young children, but now that her children had grown up, she and her partner share the work equally. It is a very important finding for this study that even though the majority of these interviewees were happy with their domestic work sharing arrangements with their partners, they actually did more when they had young children. This suggests that when the children are young the female partners have to do more domestic work than their male partners. It reconfirms the AWALI report of 2007 that discovered that Australian women on an average spent more total work hours in both paid and unpaid roles than their male counterparts (Pocock, et al., 2010).

4.5.2 Work/life Balance Policies: Interviewees' Experience and Expectations for the Role of Policy in Relation to their Career Development

When asked about managing work and family the senior executives mostly said two things:

- The main job dissatisfaction in their roles comes from the intensive work hours and the expectation of 24/7 availability.

- Work/life collision mostly happens for the executives who are new mothers.

I was curious to know if there was any method or strategy that could be used to overcome these two concerning situations. I enquired about the effectiveness of work-life balance policies in bringing about career-care balance for executive women and for those women who aspire to executive-level-jobs. I also asked about the option and availability of part-time executive-level-jobs to reduce the impact of extensive work hours and work-life collisions.

It came as a surprise that work-life balance policies were not very effective in bringing about balance for these women in powerful leadership positions. All of the senior executives acknowledged that the introduction of work-life balance policies and practices have made the lives of the junior, mid-executive female employees easy but it was not the same for the senior executive women. The first thing that they identified was that in executive level jobs no employee was entitled to flexi-time options or flexible work arrangements. They could only take purchased leave, compressed leave or working from home options. The senior executives who had young children said they suffered the most when an emergency situation came up. If they needed to take unexpected leave or time off for any emergency they could take it informally but they had to make it up later by working overtime.

The participants said that compressed leave was not suitable for the kind of jobs they did because there were no standard working hours for them. Regarding purchased leave, Caroline (55, SAES-2) stated,

> 'I just do a completely full job but I have to pay for it when I am
> purchasing two hours' leave.'

They said that working from home was rarely a suitable option for them because it was very difficult to manage the work intensity and the job requirements at the leadership level from home. Emma (53, SAES-3), stated that she sometimes works from home:

> 'At times I work from home but it is not to achieve a better work-life
> balance. It is because I have too much to do. My purpose, therefore, is
> not work-life balance, it is work.'

Caroline (55, SAES-2) and Emma (53, SAES-3) both had grown-up children but still thought the work/life balance supports at leadership levels were not effective enough to give them a good work-life balance. It created the question that, if older women who did not have many familial roles to play and who had grown-up children, had insufficient work-life supports, then, how did the younger women, who had dependents, manage between their leadership roles in the SES and their personal responsibilities.

It rather seemed that either senior executive role was particularly suited for those without family responsibilities and/or young children, or, that employees with family responsibilities and dependents were not expected to apply for senior executive positions.

On combining parenthood and a senior executive role, the participant who did not have children commented,

> 'If you are an executive, you have to meet expectations of long hours. If you leave early, for example at 5:30 p.m., it is seen as you are not serious enough or giving the right attention as an executive. There is a risk that your contract may not be renewed. If the work culture were different and family friendly then mothers would benefit.' (Christina, 48, SAES-1)

However, Amanda (42, SAES-3), who has three young children, said that it was not true that women with young children were not suited to executive-level-jobs; rather, she suggested that women who were willing were more likely to be able to manage executive-level-roles and their care responsibilities because in such roles employees had vast authority as well as control over their own time. In her opinion, it was more difficult for women in the pipeline for executive roles to maintain a smooth career progression and combine parenthood. She added,

> 'It is not about the job design of the executive roles. Modelling work-friendly hours is needed, meetings not before 9 a.m. and after 4 p.m. something like that …We need to create a culture suitable for people with dependents. Male executives have their wives to support them. But we do not have that.'

Christina (48, SAES-1), said,

> 'Cultural change should come from the top. The top people should model a family-friendly work environment.'

From the discussion with these senior executives it was clear that current work-life balance policies and available policy provisions did little to assist their work-life balance and career progression, whether they have dependents or not. They stated that it was their own determination, family support, and lifestyle strategies that helped them to achieve leadership roles.

When I found there were no flexible work arrangements for senior executives and, moreover, their working hours were the main reason for their job dissatisfaction, I asked them about the availability of part-time employment at that level. In this study, there was only one senior executive who was working part-time (taking off one day a week). When I asked her about her experience, she said that, even though it was called part-time work as she took one day off, she actually had to work from home on that day, but, she did not get paid for that. Her experience shows that working part-time in executive-level-jobs is neither easy nor effective. All of the other senior executives agreed.

When asked about working part-time working to achieve a better work-life balance, Linda (40, SAES-2) commented,

> 'It is absolutely rubbish. If you work part-time in my role you actually
> work full-time but just get paid less.'

Christina (48, SAES-1) supported this conclusion,

> 'If I worked part time I would still have to be constantly available. I
> think I would have to do exactly the same work load but get paid less.
> I do not think it would work.'

Bianca (42, SAES-2) said,

> 'Part-time is difficult. Part-time is easiest in teaching where you
> generate work but for management roles, work generates you. You are
> paid part-time but you have to work more hours.'

Amanda (42, SAES-3) speculated that although part-time work might generate a better work-life balance for senior executives with young children, whether or not it would be easy to introduce at leadership levels in current working culture was another matter:

> 'Young executive women with children should establish examples
> how things can be managed; however, I know it is not easy at all.'

While most of the senior executives thought leadership roles could not be done part-time, Lisa (48, SAES-3) suggested that for effective work-life balance, it would be timely to attempt to introduce part-time work provisions in these roles. She claimed that the key managerial/executive roles could easily be done part-time. However, I found that her comment contradicted her own views somewhat, as she said,

> 'Part-time is possible in my role. I wanted to be part-time this year.
> However, the current project that I am doing is pretty intense. When
> it's running well I may consider going part-time.'

Her comment suggests that even if senior executives wanted to go part-time they could not do it because of the workloads in those roles.

Therefore, although the participants accepted that the option of working part-time work could improve the work-life balance conditions in their jobs, at the same time they, recognised that the type of work they do in the SES makes the implementation of part-time employment very problematic, at least within the existing workplace culture, structure and job design.

4.5.3 Lifestyle Preferences - Having it all

I asked these women whether such a family-unfriendly work atmosphere in leadership-level-jobs was stopping the mid-career women from progressing to these levels, particularly those who had children or aspired to have children soon. Those senior executives who had young children suggested that young women needed encouragement, mentoring and training as well as modelling from the top; that if they wanted it was possible to do it. Although it is a difficult decision at the time women are planning to have children, they said that combining parenthood and executive roles was not entirely impossible if someone was strongly motivated.

Linda (40, SAES-2) said that the appeal of advancement is there for mid-career women, but they need role modelling. If they make the decision to progress they can do it, work-life balance is a lifestyle choice they just need to take. She said,

> 'I do not think you need to increase the appeal. I think there are lots of
> women in the pipeline who want to move into senior positions. The
> system or the organisational structure needs to be improved to support
> them moving into senior roles. Role modelling is important too. Role

modelling can increase the appeal. I personally do not think it is the appeal that is stopping them.'

Lisa (48, SAES-3) held a slightly different view:

'I don't think you need to increase the attractiveness of the executive roles to women. It is already attractive and women are there who are interested. If some women do not want to progress it is their own choice. Therefore, we should value people's own choice.'

Christina (48, SAES-1) upheld the importance of career motivations:

'Young women have to be clear about why they want to be there, why they want to achieve leadership level jobs.'

The participants said that, for them, career progression to secure leadership-level-jobs actually depended on their decision to make a definitive lifestyle preference and be able to stick with that decision by applying adaptive strategies to manage their career and other life events. Strong career aspiration and effective work motivation encouraged them in their decisions to seek a leadership career and its associated lifestyle.

They also identified three common but essential factors that mid-career women need to acknowledge when making decisions about their own lifestyle:

1. Accepting that covert but consistent cultural barriers still exist in the workplace

2. Knowing that everything cannot all be done at once and that, therefore, they need to adapt a delegating strategy

3. Having confidence in their own abilities and their own choices.

4.6   Conclusion

The central research question of this thesis is to investigate the extent to which individual agency plays a major role in female public servants' success in achieving leadership positions. This chapter has aimed to identify the factors that have helped this sample of female senior executives in the SAPS to be successful in securing leadership roles. In particular, the chapter has investigated the extent to which individual choice and women's own agency have been key factors in their success. It has also sought to identify the barriers that have then had to be overcome.

Undoubtedly, a major ingredient in the success of these women lay in their willingness to make their career their main priority in life. They are clearly, in Hakim's typology, career-centric women. The interviews suggest that in order to achieve a leadership role in the SAPS women need not only to have the necessary qualifications, skills and confidence, but just as importantly, they must be highly motivated.

However, the interviewees identified a number of other traits that were key to their success. One ingredient demonstrated by most of these women was the ability to adjust some of their private aspirations and goals to do it all; that is, the home and the work. As these senior executives have suggested, taking on a leadership career is actually choosing a new and unique lifestyle; it requires some adaptive strategies to become successful. One of the adaptive strategies that many of these women have applied is choosing to delay having children, often having children in their late thirties when they were already in senior executive roles.

Although each of the interviewees identified barriers that they have had to overcome, not surprisingly, each also has said that these barriers or negative influences can be overcome if a woman really wants to progress to a leadership position. Although most of these senior executives described similar experiences within their organisations, there were a few significant differences. The main differences in their comments and experiences stem from two underlying situations:

- whether or not they have young children.
- whether they have worked in male or female dominated workplaces.

Interviewees who had young children described experiences different to those who had either no children or had grown up children. Those with grown up children observed that it is remarkably difficult to cope with a senior executive role with young children and non-

executive women who have young children or who desire to have children soon should be aware of this when applying for senior executive roles. And the women who had no children, perceived that it would have been impossible for them to secure and sustain leadership roles if they had children. The youngest senior executive in this study who does not plan to have children within the next five years believed that having children would make it harder for her to have a career-life balance and perform her highly responsible job effectively.

It is worth noting, however, that the two participants, who had young children at the time of interviewing said that it is not impossible to combine a leadership career and children. In their opinion, having young children can be a barrier for progressing career from non-executive roles to executive and senior executive roles; but, after becoming a senior executive it is not as difficult as it is perceived by more junior women. However, they also said that it can prove difficult without adaptive capabilities, the right support from their families and access to suitable formal and informal childcare support.

It is also worth noting that these two extremely optimistic senior executives, who are also mothers of young children, work in female-dominated departments. As well, most of the women in female-dominated organisations were more likely to be optimistic and satisfied about the working culture and career prospects in the leadership levels.

Most of the interviewees in this part of the study suggested that gender-based discrimination and inequality, although not common in today's workplaces, are more likely to be identified in male dominated than in female-dominated organisations. It suggests that the stereotypical male dominated culture still exists when there are more men and fewer women, and when the men are more powerful as a group. The senior women, who had already proven their potential and advanced to leadership roles in male-dominated workplaces, nevertheless acknowledged that this work environment remains highly intimidating for women. They have also suggested that such a work environment can be overcome if women are able to develop the necessary confidence, abilities and resilience. Again, an effective means of minimising such behavioural and cultural discrimination is to increase the number of female executives in these organisations.

In order to identify policy implications for combining a leadership career and care responsibilities, interviewees were asked about their experience of the impact of the policy provisions on the day-to-day activity of balancing work and family. It was very surprising to hear that the existing policies achieving work-life balance were not seen to have played a role in assisting these women to achieve their senior positions. Family friendly work benefits and flexible options, which are undoubtedly important for junior women's participation in

employment, were not seen as useful in assisting those at the most senior levels of the public service where flexibility, part-time work arrangements and so on are rarely possible. For those senior women, their capacity to meet the demands of day-to-day management of work and family depended more on their personal adaptive strategies.

Therefore, it can be concluded that individual agency expressed through personal choices, priorities and aspirations, is a significant factor in determining some individual women's capacity to secure a senior position in the SAPS. Combining a leadership role and children actually depends on the individual's own choice to have it all, although it is very important to have informal family support and to be willing to apply adaptive strategies. Thus, most of these senior executives are convinced that women can overcome all the barriers and obstacles if they really want to, although their experience also suggests that government policies should be reformed to make these choices easy for more women today.

Chapter Five

Mid-career Executive Women in the SAPS: Experience of Career Progression

5.1   Introduction

In this chapter, I seek the experiences and opinions of the women who are in the mid-executive levels in regard to their own agencies as well as available opportunities. One aim of this chapter, therefore, is to identify the motivations of these women to progress their careers into the leadership. To do this, I also focus on explaining the associated factors that fuel or inhibit their career motivations. To conclude, I analyse the central research question of this thesis in the light of the research findings and key observations.

Although the main focus of this chapter is to explore the experiences of mid-executive women, to explore a range of opinions about motivations for career development and career decision-making, I also interviewed a small number of non-executive women who work from ASO 1- ASO 6 levels.

Before going into in-depth discussion of the findings of the interviews, I provide some demographic information or the 'face sheets' of the participants in order to allow a better understanding of each of the interviewee's workplace position and personal situation.

5.2 Demographical Information of the Participants

I interviewed 16 women from mid-career executive levels (EL-1 and EL-2) and five women from non-executive levels (ASO-1 - ASO-6). Their ages ranged from 30 to 55.

Among the interviewees 11 women had post-graduate degrees, five had bachelor degrees, two had graduate diplomas and the remaining three had high school qualifications. Thirteen of the women were working in permanent full-time positions; of them, four had extensive management responsibilities. Three were working in full-time contract positions, mainly on project work. Only four participants were working part-time during the interviews.

All of the non-executive women in this study were working full-time.

The majority of the interviewees from the mid-career executive levels were married and had children. Only four of them were single and three of them were either separated or divorced.

A significant number of these interviewees were working in education, health, policy or social welfare -related departments, which were typically female-dominated workplaces. A minority were working in male-dominated departments, such as Environment, Water, Natural Resources and Energy; Transportation; Finance, Treasury and Planning; Transport and Infrastructure.

The demographic data is displayed in Table 7.

Table 7 Demographic information of junior female public servants

NAME	Department	Level	Employment	Qualification	Age	Relationship status	Child	Age of child taking	Reason of no child	Career trajectory	Workplace culture
Olivia	DCSI	ASO-8	PFT	Diploma	55	Separated	1	<25	-	Worked PT when children young	Female-dominated
Nichole	TAFE SA	ASO-8	PFT	High school	54	Married	1	35	-	Worked PT when children young	Female-dominated
Judith	DHA	ASO-8	PFT/Mgt.	PG	54	Single	1	<30	-	Worked PT when children young	Female-dominated
Emily	DHA	ASO-8	PFT/Mgt.	PG	50	Married	3	25	-	Always worked FT	Female-dominated
Danielle	DHA	MAS 3	PFT	PG	42	Married	2	27	-	Always worked FT	Female-dominated
Isabel	DPTI	ASO-7	CONT.FT	PG	44	Married	1	35	-	Worked PT when children young	Male-dominated
Lily	DTF	ASO-7	PFT/Mgt.	PG	42	Single	NIL	NIL	Health reason	Always worked FT	Female-dominated
Mary	DCSI	ASO-7	PT/0.6	Graduate	42	Married	2	35	-	Working PT as children young	Female-dominated
Camila	DEWN	ASO-7	CONT.FT	PG	36	Single	NIL	NIL	Personal preference	Always worked FT	Male-dominated
Kelly	DTF	ASO-7	CONT.PT	PG	36	Married	1	34	-	Working PT as children young	Male-dominated
Melissa	DCSI	ASO-7	PFT/Mgt.	Diploma	51	Married	2	<25	-	Career break and PT because of children	Female-dominated
Susan	DPC	ASO-7	PFT	Graduate	50	Divorced	2	<25	-	Worked PT when children young	Female-dominated
Sara	DECD	ASO-7	PT	PG	35	Married	2	31	-	Working PT as children young	Female-dominated

Bianca	DPC	ASO-7	PFT	PG	33	Partnered	NIL	NIL	Personal preference	Always worked FT	Female-dominated
Adele	DCSI	ASO-7	CONT.PT	PG	36	Married	2	30	-	Worked PT when children young	Female-dominated
Sharon	DTF	ASO-7	PFT/Mgt.	PG	42	Single	NIL	NIL	Personal preference	Always worked FT	Male-dominated
Melanie	DPC	ASO-6	PFT	PG	40	Married	2	<30	-	Worked PT when children young	Female-dominated
Jennifer	DPC	ASO-5	PFT	Graduate	38	Married	2	<25	-	Worked PT when children young	Female-dominated
Dana	DCSI	ASO-5	PFT	High school	50	Divorced	3	<25	-	Career break and PT because of children	Female-dominated
Cecilia	DNWNR	ASO-4	PFT	High school	45	Single	NIL	NIL	Health reason	Always worked FT	Male-dominated
Sarah	TAFE SA	ASO-2	PFT	Graduate	36	Partnered	NIL	NIL	Personal preference	Always worked FT	Female-dominated

Note: DPC= Department of Premier and Cabinet; DTF= Department of Treasury and Finance; AGD= Attorney-General's Department; DCSI= Department of Communities and Social Inclusion; DNWNR= Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources; DECD= Department of Education and Child development; DHA= Defence housing Australia; DPTI= Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure; PG= Postgraduate; G= Graduate; PFT= Permanent full Time; PT= Part-time; CONT.FT = Contract Full Time; CONT.PT= Contract Part Time; MGT.= Manager.

5.3   Examining the Role of Choice and Individual Agency in Determining Career Behaviour and Lifestyle Preference

5.3.1 Aspiration for Senior Executive Role

As the majority of the participants were mid-career executives, I initially planned to explore their career plans and leadership aspirations; that is, to know how eager they were to progress their career into the next senior executive levels. I asked them about their aspiration and readiness about securing these roles. A considerable number of the interviewees (13 women) said they aspired to senior executive roles; however, four of them also said that they were not looking for opportunities for the time being because of family issues. The remaining eight showed no interest in securing senior roles.

I observed that the female executives who aspired to leadership roles were mostly mothers with grown-up children or with no children. The mid-career executives who had young children were not looking for opportunities to progress their careers even if they did want a leadership career. At the time of these interviews, these women were mostly working part-time; but, most of them showed a willingness to go back to full-time work when their children were older. The interviewees who did not show any interest in pursuing leadership roles were either older women who were planning for retirement or working mothers who feared losing their work-life balance in the senior leadership roles.

It came as a surprise in this study to discover that those mid-career women who wanted to progress into leadership levels were unable to fulfil their aspirations because of lack of suitable and available opportunities at those senior levels. Danielle (42, ASO 8), who had two school-going children, thought she was ready for senior roles and was actively looking for opportunities to progress her career. However, she complained,

> 'I think I am ready because I have skills. But there are not many opportunities'.

Isabel (44, ASO-7), who also had one school-going child, said,

> 'My goal is to jump to senior executive level, but because of reduction and retrenchment in the public service, opportunities are very few in number now-a-days. So my goal of becoming an executive director has become like a dream.'

The women who did not aspire to leadership roles said that even if they had opportunities they would not progress their career anymore; they showed a tendency to self-select out. For example, Emily (50, ASO-8), one of the older participants in this study, said,

> 'No, I don't want to progress my career any further. If possible I want to sit here until I retire. I think that I am incredibly fortunate in my profession and in my personal life. I really love my job; if possible I would love to be here, at the same place. If I am forced to move I will look into a different industry but I don't aspire to be in the senior executive levels.'

Melissa (51, ASO-7), another older and very experienced participant in this study, determined that an important reason some women did not secure leadership positions was lack of confidence. She worked in a fairly high position with significant management responsibilities. Her experience and skills suggested that she would be an ideal candidate for senior leadership role in the SES. However, she said,

> 'A senior executive role is not appealing for me personally. There are a lot of women in my department who work in senior leadership positions but I do not have any drive for that. Probably I lack confidence. I don't like to be in the lime light. I don't like public speaking or the attributes necessary to be a leader. I am very emotional. I am like a friend rather than a boss. I think to be in leadership you need a certain level of toughness in you which I think I don't have.'

For Kelly (36, ASO-7) it was not her age or lack of confidence that made her less inclined to pursue a leadership career. She was a young mid-level executive with two young kids. She said,

> 'I don't want to be a manager or a senior executive. In terms of managerial career I see my present manager as pretty good, she handles things very efficiently. I try to emulate her. In terms of a personal life, I don't want her personal life. I admire her a lot but in terms of work-life balance I don't like the way she does it. After putting her children to bed she works three hours at night. I feel that I don't want to be like that. I admire that she has made it so far. But what I see is that friends of mine who are really happy at home and have a good work-life balance tend not to be senior executives and that is the choice they have made. I like the idea actually. May be I don't wanna put up with any more work loads.'

It seemed that even with potential and aspiration there were a few factors that determined the career decisions and behaviours of the mid-level female executives in relation to advancing to leadership levels. Depending on career ambition and behaviour, I observed that, broadly, there were three types of mid-career women, those who:

- had unfilled leadership aspirations

- did not wish to progress careers into the senior leadership for the time being

- did not aspire to leadership.

I discuss the factors that determined their different aspirations and personal career choices further.

To understand the difference in their career aspiration for leadership roles I first asked the mid-career executives about their overall career goals and ambition. A significant number of these interviewees indicated that they had no clear career goals in their lives. Some of them said that they had never wanted to be an executive or a manager. For example Judith (54, ASO-8), said,

> *'I* am not careerist. Although I am a manager because of the pressure
> in the organisation, I never had a career goal to be a manager.'

Others, however, showed ambivalence about their career goals and ambitions. As Emily (50, ASO-8) said,

> *'*I don't think I had a strong career goal in my early years; perhaps, it is
> not quite true. I did have and it was affected by several life events,
> such as- marriage, child birth. I think coming out of the workforce for
> a substantial amount of time and then working part-time have
> impacted my career trajectory; I could not go where I would have been
> going normally, it is the reality.*'*

Although the majority of these women said they had never had a clear career goal or ambition, it was curious that, a significant number of the interviewees had shown aspiration for senior executive roles. This seeming contradiction seems to have been caused by the language of the questions. I found that for most of these women, the direct words 'goal' and 'ambition' had somewhat negative impacts; they were highly undesirable and often intimidating. On the other hand, when I used words like 'aspiration' and 'career motivation', these women were more comfortable talking about their career planning and career goals.

Even though most of these women did not have career goals, they did have plans for career advancement; however, those plans seemed to be mostly short-termed and unstable.

Camila (36, ASO-7) said,

> *'*My career plan is to pursue a management role. I want to be a
> manager or leader after climbing one more ASO level, that is, to ASO-
> 8.*'*

Danielle (42, ASO-7) said the same thing,

> 'I have a goal to go one step further.'

Mary (42, ASO-7) said,

> 'I would like to see myself in a fairly high level of management
> position where I can give high-level advice.'

5.3.2 Job Satisfaction and Career Progression

Previous research has found that there is a positive correlation between job satisfaction, employee performance and career growth (Hodson, 1989); however, in this study a more critical result for those same variables is found in South Australian female public servants.

When asked about job satisfaction, most of the permanent full-time mid-level executives in this study gave overwhelmingly positive responses. Emily (50, AS0-8), who had always worked full-time in her career and became an executive with extensive managerial responsibilities said,

> 'I am satisfied because I am accountable to myself; I have my own
> unit and team and I have terrific work colleagues and a terrific team.
> My role is autonomous and highly responsible. Our work is nationally
> and internationally recognised, which is good. The organisation, the
> organisational values all are highly satisfying, so it's a good place for
> me.'

Judith (54, ASO-8) also a manager, said that she joined the public sector because she wanted a job that would provide her with job security and which would match her ethics. She was very satisfied in her present role:

> 'I am satisfied because of autonomy, the reason the organisation exists
> - it is an independent organisation and we make differences; I like all
> of these … The organisation is itself respectful of the work we do and
> very supportive of work-life balance. Again, I need to have some
> sense that the work is worthwhile.'

However, neither of these participants, Emily and Judith, aspired to progress to senior leadership levels, even though they were highly satisfied in their jobs and had good work records as managers in their own organisations.

By contrast, interviewees in this study who were working in contract-based temporary positions generally shared negative impressions about job satisfaction. In their experiences, they felt that their jobs were insecure and their work was not valued adequately.

Kelly (36, ASO-7) said,

> 'My job satisfaction diminished. I wanna feel like I am important. My contributions should be recognised. If you wanna take training courses to improve yourself you can't do it. One training course is for two years but you are in a contract for one year, so you can't take it. They won't pay $2000 to train you. You feel like you do not matter at all … The pay may be good, but satisfaction would be achieved by becoming a part of the organisation.'

A similar tone was echoed in Mary's voice. Mary (42, ASO-7) came back part-time after taking one year's maternity leave. She also said that after becoming part-time her job satisfaction decreased,

> '…I feel like I am underused. Pretty frustrating! I tried to make myself as busy and as useful as possible.'

Although Kelly and Mary were dissatisfied in their present roles, they showed aspiration to progress careers to the leadership levels if the opportunity arises for job security and better work-life outcomes.

Camilla (36, ASO-7), who worked in the private sector for more than eight years, shared some different views on her job satisfaction in the public service. Although she said she had definite ambition to secure an executive role that was associated with government policy-making, she also said,

> 'I do enjoy my role but I think community acceptance and perception about government is not very positive. The work I do is not valued as it should be. Sometime it bothers me.'

It can be said that job satisfaction or dissatisfaction in these women was often dependent on a number of factors; such as for example, job security, work recognition and work environment,

and team members; however, it was not always related to their career aspiration, work behaviour and career choice.

5.3.3 Socialisation, Identity, Expectations and Lifestyle Choice

When asked about the influence of social identity and socialisation on their lifestyle choice and career behaviour, the majority of mid-career executive women said that social norms and values had very little impact on their career choice. They generally felt they were career women, no matter what society, today, had imposed on them. A significant number of them recognised that societal norms and values concerning women's paid and unpaid work identities were also changing.

Camilla (36, ASO-7), one of the youngest participants in this study, said,

> 'I do think it is changing. There is clear recognition that women are contributing, whether they are mothers or not. They have the same footstep as males.'

Emily (50, ASO-8) echoed this notion. In her life time, she has observed three generations of working women. Commenting from a historical point of view, she said,

> 'Society is changing. Norms have changed today. Thirty years ago when I had to leave work for the birth of my first child I really felt a loss of identity. Suddenly I was at home and I was just a mum! But today women do not necessarily have to feel like that. These days I think there is more balance.'

However, she also added,

> 'Motherhood is still a unique thing for women. I see it is a bit of struggle for the young women today that … they have to sort out are they primarily mothers or workers? And how that meshes together? You see, still, now, if a child is sick it is the mum who has to give up her work day to go home to look after her baby.'

These women who said they could see change in societal norms and values were either single women or women who had grown-up children. Mid-aged interviewees who had young children shared somewhat opposite views. They said they felt a sense of identity crisis when trying to combine family and work after becoming a mother.

Mary (42, ASO-7), who had two young children and who recently had come back from maternity leave to her previous workplace, said,

> 'I don't see that society is changing. It is annoying that when you become a mum people start to see you as a mum. But I see myself as a parent. It is my biggest concern, but if you ask is this my identity? I would say no! ... I think there is a perception that people think if you are a mother you want to be with your children all the time. Quite frankly speaking, I am happy if I can get away from them for a little while. People think, as you have children, that is what you think about all the time and that is what you do. It is just not true. When you come back to work you strive really hard, because you have to prove yourself over again that you are actually serious about your job … because it is automatically assumed that you are not!'

Whereas Mary upheld the prevailing impact of societal norms and values on working mothers at work; Isabel (44, ASO-7), who is herself a mother of one child, suggested that the mothers themselves often underwent emotional changes that impact their career behaviours. She said,

> 'When you become a mother it becomes difficult. When you are working and you become a mother you automatically start to feel like a mother and you start to be treated like a mother. You can't divorce it from you.'

Judith (54, ASO-8) and Kelly (36, ASO-7) suggested that media recognition and public discussion, as change agents of social norms, had significant impact on the identities of working mothers. Kelly said,

> 'Women having children are seen as working mothers. But I have never heard of working fathers. I think society is so cruel to us; women are defined differently than men. I do not know whether it is bad thing or not but more attention has always been given to women whether they are mothers or not! You see in newspapers that the CEO of xyz is a woman and she is a mother of two or three. You will never see the same is written for the father if he is a CEO.'

It is clear from the comments and experiences of these women that even though there has been change in societal norms for women's paid work contributions and labour market participation, they still influence a working mother's identity after she becomes mother. It

indicates that parenthood and caring for children are still seen primarily as women's work and that these perceptions have influenced the career behaviours and career prospects of many of these female public servants.

5.4   Analysing the Role of Organisational Structures and Opportunity

To determine more explicitly the role of internal and external organisational factors on the career behaviours of the mid-career executive women I asked them about the structure of opportunity within their organisations. I asked questions about:

- their perceptions of the   availability of equal opportunities in career progression towards the key executive/ managerial positions in the SES;

- their own experiences of the availability and accessibility of these opportunities.

5.4.1 Perception of Equal Opportunity and Workplace Culture

When I first asked the mid-career executive women about their perceptions of the opportunities in their organisation to progress to leadership levels I received a mix of various comments. Most of the older women who were over 50 said that they were not looking for any more opportunities to upgrade their careers as they were looking forwards to retirement. A number of the younger ones said that they would progress, if the opportunities arose, but there were few suitable opportunities, especially in the senior executive positions.

When I asked whether lack of opportunity was related to gender discrimination; none of the women perceived that opportunity was really related to gender difference or gender discrimination. Instead, they suggested that scarcity of opportunity was the outcome of many internal issues in the public service. These issues, if not directly, then indirectly obstructed the career development of many women in the pipeline for senior executive levels.

A number of these interviewees said that there were significant job cuts in the public service, especially in the senior executive roles, which caused a lack of opportunities in the SES. Camilla (36, ASO-7), Judith (54, ASO-8) and Emily(50, ASO-8) said that continuous restructuring of the public service made it difficult these days to look for suitable job and promotion opportunities in the SES.

Camilla (36, ASO-7) said,

> '… Not many. It is not a large agency … It is a difficult time. Significant restructuring is going on. So, not many opportunities are created.'

Their comments show the impact of the government's socio-economic policies on the career prospects and behaviours of female employees, especially those who work in the public sector.

Here again some of them pointed to several systematic issues with the public service selection and recruitment process, which ultimately created lack of opportunities; Isabel (44, ASO-7) said,

> 'In the public service they take someone they know. They do not take someone from outside.'

Therefore, their comments suggested that lack of opportunity was one of the major reasons why mid-level executive women in the pipeline for senior executive roles, even those with adequate skills, qualifications, and career aspirations, do not secure leadership roles. In general, they did not perceive the scarcity to be related to gender discrimination. However, there were some other views that actually identified a structure of opportunity in the public service that was different to that commonly perceived. I discuss this in the following section.

5.4.2 Reality of Organisational Structure, Culture and Equal Opportunity

Part-time and Contract Positions

In the leadership levels, positions were very limited; therefore, competition was extremely high. In this tight competition, several interviewees suggested that only those candidates who were working in permanent full-time positions and who had always worked full-time might successfully climb into the leadership. For example, those women who worked in part-time positions reported that part-time roles were like traps; if anyone became a part-timer it was really very difficult for them to come back to full-time jobs or to progress their career further.

Mary (42, ASO-7) returned to her work part-time after maternity leave. After a while she was transferred to another department in a different role, where there were not many career progression opportunities. As she said,

'They have shifted me to another role. I was restructured out; because I wanted to work part-time after coming back from maternity leave. The PS Act makes it easier. There are many other women who get the same experience. It has been told to them that managerial roles were not possible part-time. It is extremely frustrating. I don't see any possibility for career progression. I feel that I am parked somewhere.'

When asked how the Public Service Act, 2009 had made it easy to discriminate against women who wanted to work part-time, Mary (42, ASO-7) replied,

'It is quite easy for them to do that because the PS Act says, they are meant to keep me at the same pay level but it does not say whether it is in the same role or in a new role. The shift of employees does not need to be linked to career progression … or with their skills and expertise!'

Nichole (44, ASO-8) also shared a similar story. She was also moved to another role after she wanted to go part-time. She said,

'I get the same pay but I don't get the same responsibility or career support. I was shifted side-ways … I have 15 years of work experience. It is bad for the department, they are not accessing my ability or utilising my experience. For me it is like you are not taking me seriously anymore … I don't get to sense that I can progress to a senior role in my whole life.'

Kelly (36, ASO-7) was working a contract-based part-time role during this study. She chose to work part-time because her daughter was very young. Her experience seemed to be the worst amongst all of these interviewees. She was actively looking for opportunities, because her one-year contract was going to finish soon. Again, as she worked part-time she saw no hope of getting a job anytime soon as there were usually very few career and employment opportunities for part-timers. She said,

'There is no job security in contracts. As I work part-time, opportunities have shrunk. It is difficult when you are a part-timer.'

She also added,

'I have no career goal. I always have to look for opportunities; just a job, not a goal … I would prefer job security to a pay rise.'

Although contract-based positions present a job security issue for both men and women; Camilla (36, ASO-7) suggested that it was worse for women, more so for mothers with young children, because they were likely to be less flexible about relocating. This resulted in fewer job opportunities and increased insecurity. Camilla was working in a contract-based full-time role. She said it was easier for her to move states for job purposes as she did not have children. She also said,

> 'In the executive levels 95 per cent jobs are contract-based. In more senior levels it is 100 per cent. If I had a choice I would like to be permanent but there is no choice.'

It would appear that the availability of full-time positions was strongly correlated to the career decisions and career behaviours of these women.

This study also noticed that the women who were working in contract-based roles were all working in male-dominated organisations. The women displayed more doubts and insecurity about their jobs and their employers than other women in this study.

For example, Kelly (36, ASO-7) who was working in a typical male-based organisation said,

> '…even if there were opportunities they are very short-term. They hire females in the short-term positions like three months or six months roles. Interesting projects which are big are mostly done by males … In public service if you wanna be a senior executive you have to be full-timer and male.'

Isabel (44, ASO-7), shared another interesting observation. She was also working in a contract-based role in a male-dominated organisation,

> 'I think, in general, men are employed in senior roles unless women have much higher qualifications than men. With the same qualifications men and women do not get into the same position. To have a senior role women need to have more qualifications and demonstrated skills and experience … I see that men with no qualifications easily qualify … It means it is certainly a place for boys. We have four deputy chief executives in this department. One of them was a female. When she left, instead of replacing her they recruited an existing male for the role … He did not have the required qualifications. So, I think men are not judged by education or qualification.'

Therefore, the mid-level executives' experience of the structure of opportunity in the SAPS suggested that it is still not entirely gender-equitable as equal opportunity was not available for all women in all the levels and in all organisations. It appeared that more opportunities are available for those women who usually worked in full-time permanent positions.

Recruitment and Selection Process

Most of the interviewees said they had equitable and non-discriminative experiences in the recruitment and selection process. None of them actually experienced any discrimination or unfair treatment. On the job interview process, Melissa (51, ASO-7) commented,

'I haven't had found different approach because I am a woman.'

Dana (50, ASO-5) explained,

'In the past, the interview process wasn't very effective or transparent. They took the people they knew. But now a very strict and clear interview process has to be followed.'

Judith (54, ASO-8) said,

'My application was unsuccessful. And the reason was that I was the second preferred candidate. The person they took had more experience than me. So, it was a merit-based and fair selection process.'

However, there were some different views too. Kelly (36, ASO-7) said,

'When you are there you don't feel you are treated differently. I have had three interviews when I had a young child and obviously I have got one. There is nothing tangible or … serious. They do not say anything these days, they are very careful. Fifteen years ago they might ask you; do you want to get married? Or do you want to have babies soon?'

She also added,

> 'The recruitment process has changed enormously in the last 15 years. It almost feels like it's litigious; like they worry that I am gonna sue them if they ask me if I am gonna have babies? But I think, umm ... if I feel like I am in a safe environment and it was not going to prejudice them against me, I would be quite happy to talk about my future plans regarding career and family. Having baby or not is very important in your career decision … but I always feel like ... umm … guarded!'

Another participant Camilla (36, ASO-7), said,

> 'My experience is not really related to gender. I personally do not think gender is very significant now days. It is related to skills and qualifications. However, my last interview experience was not that positive although they had well-structured questions and the panel was gender-balanced and quite knowledgeable. I thought they wanted someone who they already had in their mind.'

The interviewees were mostly satisfied on the recruitment and selection process in their organisations. They did not experience direct discriminations or inequality. However, some of them felt that the recruitment and selection process was too formal these days which did not provide potential employees the flexibility to discuss about any diverse (if any) needs.

Workplace Culture

This study placed a significant emphasis on understanding the workplace culture that the interviewees were in. According to Oakley (2000, P. 322), in determining the impact of the organisational opportunity structure on career behaviour it is also very important to understand the non-systematic and behavioural factors in the workplace cultures in an organisation.

Although the majority of the interviewees said that they never experienced direct discrimination, or overt sexual harassment; indirect discrimination was still widespread. Mary said,

'They tend to be discriminative as there were so few women in senior management roles. They automatically take guys seriously. Women need to do the same work, harder, to get noticed.'

Another participant (Sara, 35, ASO-7) revealed that she had only experienced discrimination once by one of her female managers when she asked to work compressed hours in a senior role. She said that this particular female senior executive seemed not supportive at all, even though she knew that she had an infant. Because of such a discriminative attitude she decided to forgo that position, which she had achieved after a tough recruitment and selection process.

Susan (50, ASO-7) shared a similar experience:

'I never had male mangers. I had male directors … Generally I do not have any issues but my worst experience was with a female manager, not male. I think often women are their worst enemies. They stab each other in the back to climb up there.'

She also said,

'In senior executive levels women burn out easily because of its unique work culture. I think they see it as a bit of boy's club. They have to play the power-game … Either you play their game or you don't … I like a nice work environment. Woman like me don't like to be in their game … The glass ceiling is to keep both men and women who have nice personalities out of the game, so you have to have a hard helmet if you are going to break it. You have to be ambitious, competitive and know the rules of the game.'

Although discrimination can happen under both male and female managers, the existence of the boy's club in the key managerial or executive roles seemed to be a major concern for women with better work experience and qualifications. Isabel (44, ASO-7) who worked in a male-dominated workplace described her own experience:

'I felt directly discriminated against in a meeting when a male senior executive dismissed me. I was the only woman in the meeting. It does happen when there are very few women in a board meeting. You have to get up and leave the room if it does not suit you. Most of the time nobody will support you, especially when you are with a group of males.'

Emily (50, ASO-8) said,

> 'I still think there is male domination and it is hard for women to push
> through it. People say that today gender discrimination is rubbish;
> leadership equality is a matter of time and the availability of qualified
> women. But I think a boy's club still exists. Whenever I look above to
> see who is at the top I see a man.'

However, Camilla (36, ASO-7) observed that the culture is changing today. Young men are more egalitarian and respectful to women, although older male managers are still discriminative. As she said,

> 'Older male senior executives think women are not capable enough,
> men do this job better … It is not an organisational perception. It is a
> perception of a part of the organisation.'

Judith (54, ASO-8) observed a very important cultural issue. She thought that the view that managing should be done in traditional male way was widespread within workplaces, and this was a kind of discrimination to women. According to her, if female managers wanted to establish their own style of management, which might be more humane and interpersonal, they would be undermined, teased and discriminated against. But female managers mostly did not challenge the traditional male ways; rather, many of them tried to imitate it. She remarked,

> ' … Whoever is part of dominant group needs to actively display that
> management can be done in different ways than the traditional
> masculine way.'

From the experiences of female mid-executives it was understandable that although organisational structure seemed more equitable these days, organisational culture was yet to be gender-neutral. As society is changing and the young generation of males are more egalitarian, the resistance mostly comes from the older males and managers and it mostly happens in male-dominated work environments. Sometimes female managers are also an obstacle. They cannot work as change agents when they just imitate a masculine management style, trying to be successful as a leader or as a manager in the male-biased work culture within the senior levels in the public service.

5.4.3 Impact of Organisational Structure and Culture on Career Decision-making

When asked whether or not the structure of opportunity and the workplace culture impacted on their decision to follow a leadership career, most of the mid-executive women said their aspirations and career goals had been impacted severely.

Isabel (44, ASO-7) said,

> 'There are so few opportunities! Appointments in the senior executive levels are generally done in every five years. Again, when they employ they take someone they know. So my goal of being executive director is like a dream … if good opportunities come you have to move sideways or take on additional responsibilities. It is, therefore, not a straight ladder.'

Kelly (36, ASO-7) shared,

> 'I wanted to do a more meaningful job, not contract-based ones, where you always have to look for opportunities - just a job, not a goal. But opportunities are not there for women like me who get trapped into contract-based jobs … you are always looking for opportunities, whatever it is. You are even ready to downgrade yourself … Therefore, my career goal becomes piecemeal. I don't have many long-term expectations … I always need to change my career goal. It is like going backwards and forwards and thus staying in the same position. Goals cannot be fulfilled anyway!'

Mary (42, ASO-7) said,

> 'I would like to see myself in a fairly high level of management position where I can give high-level advice; the job that will push me to my full capacity. In my current role I feel bored and frustrated. I see no career progression for me. Not many people look for part-time employees for managerial roles … There are jobs. When I send emails asking if they will consider part-time work or job-share; I don't get a reply … I feel that managerial roles can be done part-time. I don't say that it is possible for every case … I feel that it is an antiquated and backwards idea. It is 2013, I just can't believe it! If it is only full-time

then you are intentionally excluding young mothers, this is not equal opportunity!'

Thus, it is understandable that career choice and decisions are heavily impacted by the structure of opportunity of the organisation and its workplace culture. And, thus, fulfilling career aspiration is not just a matter of personal agency but a matter of equal opportunity.

5.5   Work-life Balance and the Role of Policies and Practices

It was interesting that while many of the interviewees were somewhat unsatisfied with the structure of opportunity and the workplace culture of career progression towards the senior leadership levels, most of them were in fact satisfied with the available work-life balance arrangements within their organisations. To understand their work-life goals, and their impact on career decisions, I asked them about their household situations, work-life needs and available supports.

Domestic work sharing and work-life Balance

Before asking the interviewees about their work-life situations I asked them about their household work and earning arrangements. All of the full-time working women said they were in an egalitarian family structure where they were one of the primary breadwinners and they and their husbands shared domestic and household works equally. Each of these women was satisfied with the domestic work share arrangements with their husbands.

Susan (50, AS0-7) said,

> 'My husband does all the cooking and half the share of cleaning.
> When I returned to full-time work my husband was very helpful in
> child care as well. I am very fortunate.'

However, the part-time women shared some different scenarios. On household work sharing Sara (35, ASO-7) said,

> 'I do most of it. He does a bit, but not much. He is lazy. I am the
> primary carer. I am not satisfied with the arrangement at all.'

Adele (36, ASO-7) said,

> 'My husband does some work, umm … well, only when I ask him to do something!'

Kelly (36, ASO-7) shared a similar experience:

> 'I think work-life balance policies and programs are very effective for those who work full-time. They are not effective when you are working part-time … I am part-time not because I don't have potential but because I have added responsibilities at home. If I worked full-time my husband probably would do more house-work. But now, he primarily depends on me.'

Formal and informal work-life arrangements and the balance

While there were significant differences between the household work experiences of full-time and part-time women, they were all happy with the availability of the family-friendly work benefits from their employers. However, they commented that even if there were provisions for better work-life balance from the employer, the effectiveness of these policies and provisions was purely dependent on the manager you worked with.

Judith (54, ASO-8) said,

> 'The effectiveness of workplace policies depends on managers … managers should be supportive and there should be one rule of thumb for all.'

Mary (42, ASO-7) commented,

> 'Yes I took the advantage of family-friendly work supports and that was how I came back part-time after the maternity leave. The availability of these benefits is entirely up to your manager. If they do not realise the impact on your family, there is nothing you can do … I think there should be some place to complain. Some managers are really horrible, some are good. It is a personality problem, not a gender problem.'

As a manager herself Isabel (44, ASO-7) suggested,

> 'The public sector is very forgiving and flexible. It is very easy to get flexibility these days. I do use flexible options. I find that it is you who decide how much flexibility you need … yes, the manager's support is also important. But as I am the manager here I control my own time. I usually use these benefits for meeting family and care needs.'

To explain how these provisions work effectively she said,

> 'The take up rate – umm - and the effectiveness of these provisions solely depends on the manager. If you have a high degree of trust in your staff and if the staff has their ethic right, like if you have confidence in your staff it does work. You have to have a high degree of confidence in your staff.'

As managers are so important in the effective implementation of workplace policies, I tried to understand their own views and values about this.

Emily (50, ASO-8) a manager, a mother of three grown-up children, described the situation in this way:

> 'It is a very female-dominated industry: health. Therefore, family-friendly work supports are very effective here. There is a very high acceptance rate of family-friendly work benefits like- flexi-time and part-time work. Eighty per cent of staff actually believes they have a family-friendly work environment. The majority in our clinical work areas work part-time … women work part-time, this is how it works here. I don't have many issues with this but it is true that part-time staff are difficult to manage; especially when there is lots of pressure. It is difficult to communicate the same message to all at the same time. Again, you have to make sure they are not over-committed or doing less, but still connected with … To be honest, if possible I would prefer full-time workers in my department.'

Lily (42, ASO-7) was managing a large number of employees in a male-dominated organisation. She was single with no dependants. She said that managing full-time employees was easier than managing a mix of full-time and part-time employees. In her organisation, whereas most of the employees were males and full-timers, there were a small number of

part-timers who were mostly females and working mothers. She complained that the part-time mothers were the most difficult ones to manage as they usually had less work motivation and often came with issues, such as family and children problems. She also thought that in her organisation the culture of utilising family-friendly work benefits was wide-spread among females who prioritised family over work responsibilities.

Melissa (51, ASO-7) who had been working in the public service for more than 35 years, held some different views on the availability of family-friendly work benefits to today's female employees,

> 'Family-friendly work benefits are very effective. The young generation of women just don't know how easy they get it! They think it is a God-given right to get everything … In our times it was as difficult as hell; flexible options were not available … when I had young children I used to prepare food at midnight; because I had no time to cook. I did not have a social life. I had to stay with my children most of the time after work, otherwise I felt guilty. But today it is all very easy for young mums … But, at the same time a lot of women who do not have children or whose children have grownup, feel resentful or frustrated; because you have to do the work; of those who are taking the family-friendly benefits. It may not be their fault, but there seems to be no reward for this. The other women always have to take their slack. There is frustration. I have heard them say many times, 'she is not in again!''

She also said that sometime parents (mostly female employees) with young children were disruptive to workplaces:

> 'I have a problem when parents bring their children into the office when they do not get child care supports. I have a real problem with that. I know that sometime it is not their choice but I personally do not like this. You know we had to manage when we got back to work after maternity, not everybody has parents to look after children. So, you should make your own arrangements. If you can't get care you should not be at work.'

The managers in this study seemed to have different and sometime discriminatory values and experiences regarding implementing employee relation policies and practices in their workplaces. A number of interviewees suggested that just having policies and legislation were not enough to effectively develop the family-friendly workplaces in the public service unless all the managers were well-informed and equally trained about employee work entitlements and benefits.

Work-life Balance and Job Security

Regarding the effectiveness of work/life balance policies, Judith (54, AS0-8) upheld the question of its relationship with job security. She advocated,

> 'Organisational restructuring makes the work-life balance policies uncertain and in many cases ineffective. It indirectly impacts your thinking or aspiration for work-life balance. When you don't know about your job security you will feel vulnerable and won't be willing to explore part-time or flexible work options.'

Kelly (36, ASO-7) shared,

> 'I wanted to work on policies. So I joined the public service. The sort of work I wanted to do was not done by the private sector. It was also in my mind that public service is a secure place to work for and they will look after you and your family. Many benefits you get in public service like- flexibility and many other types of leaves which you can't get in private sectors. But I see most of these benefits and flexibilities are meant for permanent full-time jobs. In contracts you can take these benefits but there is no job security for this.'

Therefore, it is conceivable that to make work-life balance policies effective in public service workplaces, the managers play a vital role. However, these benefits and arrangements become less useful when they cannot ensure job security of the employees who take them. Except for these two conditions, the interviewees in this study were mostly satisfied with existing work-life balance policies in achieving work-life balance.

All the interviewees in this study agreed that after the introduction of family friendly work arrangements it became easier for working mothers to combine their work and family and thus, might have a positive impact on career achievements. However, as my study wanted to know why with all the necessary organisational supports, so few mid-level executives actually make it to the leadership levels; I was curious to know about the impact of these available supports on career choice and motivations.

It was quite interesting to discover that very few of them actually thought these benefits were useful in fulfilling any of their career goals and/or had an impact on their aspiration for a leadership career. Although they did not think motivation to progress their careers towards leadership was in any way linked to the effectiveness of policies for work-life balance, they suggested a lack of work-life balance and job security linked positively to career motivation for leadership roles.

Mary (42, ASO-8), who used to work full-time in an ASO-8 position with extensive management responsibilities, decided to apply family-friendly work benefits by working part-time for a while after returning from maternity leave. She was told that after becoming part-time she was no longer eligible for a management position. As management required constant supervision and being available at work whenever needed, it could not be done part-time. She, then, had to move to a new role, which was also an ASO-8 level position but could be done part-time. However, soon after joining the new role she found that her current role was not entirely a match to her expertise and ability. Again, in that post there was no scope for any career progression let alone to senior executive roles. She said such a sideways shift seemed to happen a lot in the public service to the women who wanted to work part-time after childbirth. To those women who aspired to having a career and children together, it seemed a kind of covert discrimination.

To explain her situation she told,

> 'It is damaging. They really do not know what to do with me? They do not know what to do with my skills? It feels like I am parked somewhere … There is a real perception that managerial roles have to be full-time. So it automatically excludes females like me. The stubborn idea that only full-time employees would be taken very seriously is bullshit! And there is also a culture that automatically

assumes that when women have babies their IQ automatically drops, their ability drops, their focus is always going to be elsewhere, and their professionalism goes out of the window! ... If they decide to work part-time, they have to sit and watch while their peers accelerate past them, not necessarily because of talent, but because they are a parent working part-time, and are not even allowed to be a contender, or are discounted as only a part-timer.'

She also added,

'Taking family-friendly benefits is good and effective for the family. But it is not necessarily supportive to fulfilling your career goal. There is no guarantee for career development. It is discouraging … Also, one thing I really fear for myself is that while I am parked as I am at the moment with no real prospects, I worry that I am being de-skilled because my managers do not think about me when training opportunities come up. Also, in the present world, things change quickly, but if you are not working on it, you can start to miss out on developing new skills.'

It appeared from these comments that there was a policy gap in which job security, career development and career progression were not really linked with effective work-life balance; however, it appeared that such a gap could also create lack of motivation for mid-level executive women to pursue leadership roles. A number of interviewees who did not aspire to a leadership career said that they did not want to progress their career because they did not want to lose their current work and life balance.

When asked about aspiration to climb to leadership levels, for example, Judith (54, ASO-8) replied,

'Hell no! I am actively not looking for senior executive roles. I think the current work atmosphere in the SES is barbaric and hostile to people's work-life balance. I actively do not seek opportunities because I actually do not think it is a decent workplace or work sector; the cost to your family life is too high, for minimal rewards … I think it is endemic across the sector and I think it is particularly difficult for women. Although the policies talk about work-life balance, talk about being family-friendly, I think it is still difficult for most of the women

127

in senior executive positions to have those things taken into account. Because the demands and expectations are so great, if people seek to have a work/life balance, then it may put their positions or their career paths in jeopardy.'

She added,

'My present role is fairly a high level executive role and I have significant management responsibilities. But, I don't have to juggle much, it suits me. I control my own time. I occasionally work overtime but I am happy because I can take time off when I need it. It is very important to have control over your own time. I have access to flexible work arrangements and there are also informal arrangements.'

It is understandable, from these examples, that there is a lack of good policies to allow these women to meet both family and promotion needs. Although policies and programs existed to provide working mothers with better work-family balance, they fell short in establishing a link between their goals for work-family balance and career progression. Because of this policy gap, many unofficial barriers grew up (as was evident in Mary's case), which made advancement impossible for these women. As they also did not provide universal work-life supports to all women in every level in the public service, these policies again created lack of motivation within the mid-career executives to pursue leadership careers for fear of losing their current work-life balance.

5.6   Conclusion

As the central research question of this thesis is to identify the role of individual agency in female public servants' success in securing leadership positions in the SAPS, this chapter sought to explore the extent to which the mid-level executives were able to apply their own agency to achieve leadership roles. The findings suggest that personal agency is not yet a major determinant of the career behaviour of these mid-career women.

Although the majority of these executive do aspire to a leadership career, most of them do not see career progression into the SES as ever possible. For the most part they have not deliberately 'chosen' not to seek career progression into the leadership levels. Their experiences suggest their choice and aspiration for career progression is still bounded by many systematic and non-systematic factors that are beyond their control.

One of the major issues is lack of adequate and suitable opportunities for career progression. The interviewees who were actively looking for such opportunities suggest that positions for leadership roles are not only very limited but also are advertised rarely. Therefore, female mid-career executives who want to progress their careers experience extreme competition for leadership-level jobs. Because of continuous restructuring in the public service, new opportunities are not created. Again, because of the impact of recent austerity and job cuts, mostly in the SES levels, the scope becomes very narrow and limited. Although it impacts both male and female employees, it makes career progression of female employees more difficult as they are more likely to have breaks in their careers, became less known faces in the executive streams and have lesser flexibility in choosing careers.

Moreover, even if positions are created in the leadership levels, opportunities are not likely to be available for many of these women, as it is easier for those public servants who work in permanent full-time positions to secure them. The part-time and the contract-based workers in this study seemed to be more vulnerable in terms of career progression and acquiring family-friendly work benefits. Equal opportunity, therefore, seems even now not to be a universal phenomenon in the public service.

Many of the interviewees have also identified a covert but persisting bias for males for leadership roles in the public service, which often excluded qualified female candidates from achieving these roles. Even though the overall recruitment and selection process in the public service seems fair and merit-based; in the SES recruitment often happens not on merit but by knowing someone. Some of the participants also argue that as males are most of the known faces because of their greater networking capabilities they are generally the preferred ones. They say, females are rarely appointed to the leadership roles; they are appointed only if they can prove that they are extraordinarily qualified and have the ability to comply with the workplace culture within the SES. The presence of the boy's club also often influences the recruitment process, favouring males for key executive/managerial roles even when female candidates possess higher qualifications.

Such bias towards male executives and full-time employees becomes more prominent when many of these female executives decide to work part-time for a while after having children. They say the part time work option when children are very young (a popular family-friendly work arrangement, particularly for females who want to combine motherhood and employment in the public service) is an effective work-benefit for young mothers; however, it also comes at a cost to their careers. As these family-friendly work benefits are not properly linked to job security and/or career progression and do not provide a career safety net, these

women are often trapped in low-quality part-time jobs without the opportunity for career advancement or skill enhancement. Thus, they are either excluded from leadership career opportunities or discouraged from any further career development.

While the interviewees who aspire to leadership roles have identified the above-mentioned factors as barriers, those who do not have identified other factors that have actually deterred them from seeking such career progression.

Lack of job security in contract-based leadership positions is identified as one of the things that put many mid-level female executives off in pursuing leadership roles. Most of the working mothers in this study said that they would always prefer job security to higher pay and more prestigious roles.

Job design and the workplace culture of the SES were two other major reasons why many of the mid-level executives do not want senior executive roles. They perceive that to be a successful leader in the public service one needs to have a unique personality or personal circumstances which enable them are able to comply with the workplace culture and job requirements of the leadership roles. These jobs often require extraordinary intelligence, a level of toughness, the ability to participate in nasty workplace politics and be able to comply with the boy's club. For some of these women such behavioural change is undesirable and contrary to their ethics; therefore, they prefer to stay away from such a work culture.

Interviewees working in male-dominated organisations had the worst perceptions about the work culture in the leadership levels and have generally shown the least faith in their employers' ability to provide equal opportunities for career progression. A number of them observed that in male-dominated organisations females are either directly or indirectly discriminated against. For example, it is tougher for women to secure full-time permanent roles in male-dominated agencies and departments. Again, many males are appointed to executive roles without having tertiary qualifications, whereas females always have to have tertiary qualifications and skills to secure these roles. Female executives in these organisations often feel excluded and somewhat unwanted in the senior roles when they see that those working in the top roles are all men.

The majority of the interviewees who say they do not aspire to leadership roles also say that they do not prefer these roles not only because of the job design but also because of the worse work-life outcomes. While they appreciate those women, who have acquired leadership positions despite being aware of its impact on their work-life balance, they do not want such a situation for themselves.

Although many of these interviewees admit that sometimes they themselves have selected out of acquiring leadership roles or purposely have not progressed their careers; they at the same time also have suggested that their career behaviours are not actions of free will. It is, therefore, not always their personal choice not to pursue senior executive roles; rather, their choices are constrained by a number of internal and external organisational factors; such as-lack of suitable opportunities, job insecurity, and possible work-life collision.

I observed that those interviewees who desired senior executive roles see more organisational barriers, such as the lack of opportunities and systematic or unsystematic discrimination than the rest. More interestingly, interviewees who did not aspire to leadership roles were more aware of and concerned about work-life balance outcomes and family well-being.

The most important finding was that women with young children in mid-career executive levels suffer the most in terms of career progression, whether they aspired to leadership roles or not. They usually did not experience career discrimination or the so called glass ceiling until they had children and unless they had taken family-friendly work benefits. They say it is comparatively easier today for women to exert their own choices when they do not have children. However, after becoming parents it becomes difficult for most female employees to pursue executive careers; especially leadership careers because of the build-up of a 'maternal wall' around them. This maternal wall ultimately restricts their career progression and binds them to the mid-career executive levels.

Although the interviewees mostly focused on the factors that have inhibited their career aspirations and therefore, career advancements, they have also identified a few factors that help women in their motivations for career development and better work-life balance.

For example, many of these interviewees said that when they see a woman in the top-most position and doing her job effectively they feel encouraged and motivated to secure leadership positions. Therefore, they stressed the importance of role models in motivating more women to secure leadership roles. Again, they also maintained the importance of job satisfaction, which for them usually comes from autonomy, work recognition and job security. However, it is also evident that some interviewees thought that their work was not well recognised or adequately rewarded. These women were mostly dissatisfied in their jobs and less likely to feel organisational attachment, and, thus, they were less inclined to pursue leadership careers in their departments.

All these women, whether single, partnered or divorced, said that partner/husband support is very important to enable a woman to advance her career. In this respect, this study found that

those women who worked full-time were more satisfied with the household work sharing arrangement with their partners than were the women working part-time. They suggest that having support from their partners on the domestic front has made them able to work full-time and grow their careers as executives.

It can be concluded from the findings of the interviews with the mid-career executive women that whether they aspire for a leadership career or not, many structural factors still exist to either obstruct or influence their career progression. The impact of these factors is more severe when they want to progress their careers, particularly into the senior leadership levels. Therefore, these women do not appear to have free will in their choices in pursuing a leadership career. Although they identified a number of factors that acted as positive influence on their motivation for career success; these also depend on the organisational work culture and the particular family atmosphere. While some choices might be there for the full-time executives, this is not universal for all public service women. Rather, it again shows that the career and lifestyle choices of these women are still bound by the structure of opportunity within an organisation.

Chapter: Six

Women in Leadership: Choice versus Constraints

6.1   Introduction

This thesis originated from a desire to investigate the validity or otherwise of the widespread perception amongst young women that their career choices and advancement are matters of their own lifestyle preference and that former structural barriers based on gender discrimination now no longer prevail in the workplace. It quickly became evident also that some recent 'post-feminist' academic studies have argued that gender equality is a less important goal for the new generation of women as women now enjoy genuine choices in their preferred lifestyles. One very thought-provoking yet controversial argument of the post-feminists is that women themselves in many instances choose not to seek leadership positions. According to this view the factors in their decision-making are less of socio-economic nature and more psychological, such as their chosen goals, values, aspirations, motivations and priorities. The post-feminist thesis has considered in particular one of the most frequently quoted and controversial post-feminist theories, the Lifestyle Preference theory of the sociologist Catherine Hakim. It also addresses the counter-argument generally presented by feminists that, in spite of the perceived increased choice available to women, most remain unable to achieve leadership roles in organisations and workplace inequalities (e.g. the gender pay gap) are widening instead of declining. Considerable research evidence exists that a 'glass ceiling' remains in Australian workplaces and continues to restrict female career progression towards leadership level roles (Bishop, 2010; Connell, 2006; CPSU, 2008; Gundlach & Sammartino, 2013).

The broad purpose of my thesis, therefore, has been to identify whether or not individual agency currently plays a major role in determining female career success at leadership levels and to analyse what factors continue to hold women back from achieving leadership positions in employment? To test the thesis, I developed a case study utilising primary data gleaned from interviews with 30 female South Australian public servants aged from 30 to 55 years. Two different groups of women in the SAPS were interviewed. Because the SAPS has achieved a higher than average ratio of women at senior executive level, I interviewed a number of women in these senior positions to investigate their experiences, their opinions and the reasons for their success. I also interviewed a number of women employed at levels below SES to investigate their experiences, their opinions and the reasons for not achieving, or seeking, senior executive positions.

The findings of this research suggest that, for some of these women, gaining leadership positions in their employment has been easier than for others. Personal agency was one factor

that made their life-decision and career-progression easier; however, it was not the major factor. Suitable opportunities and family supports were two other factors that played very important roles for their success in careers. The supporting factors, thus, were both socio-economic and psychological.

Those women who faced more obstacles, however, suggested that opportunities were frequently restricted even in a modern public service where equal opportunity and family-friendly work practices are in place. Thus, personal agency and career aspiration are often not easy to fulfil. Although the majority of these women showed a desire to pursue a leadership career, this research identified that while the existing policies and structures in the workplace facilitate and support women's increasing workforce participation, they were not sufficient to improve women's success in achieving leadership positions. The direct consequence of this policy inadequacy is an on-going lower rate at which women achieve senior leadership positions in their employment compared to men, even in success stories such as the SAPS.

Significantly, this study concludes that the women interviewed who did not lack career aspiration were aware of their potential for leadership. However, they were also aware that the odds are stacked against combining a leadership role with motherhood and many said that combining both aspirations is not easy. The common strategy utilised by women with leadership ambitions was to delay motherhood or to deliberately not have children. Therefore, the claim some post-feminists have made that women are now free if wishing to advance to senior leadership roles while at maintaining a family life is not supported by this research.

In this final chapter, I further discuss the implications of these findings in relation to the Lifestyle Preference theory of the post-feminist theorist, Catherine Hakim. To conclude, I identify a number of policy reforms that can be considered by policy makers who wish to address those ongoing inequalities. This thesis argues for policy reforms that go beyond providing access to employment and allow women to combine career and family.

6.2   Leadership as a Lifestyle Preference?

Post-feminists suggest that for modern women today, career progression is a matter of choice and lifestyle preference, as environmental influences have little significance anymore. They argue that society has changed to become more equitable and non-discriminative. Choices exist for women and merit is given to those who make the right choices.

Hakim, the renowned but controversial post-feminist has divided modern women into three distinct groups (home-centric, adaptive, and, career-centric) depending on their choices for lifestyle and career. She has argued that women are not a homogeneous group. According to Hakim, social policies today need to acknowledge such differences in career choices and accommodate the different lifestyle preferences of these women. Her theory and the arguments of the post-feminist outlook were discussed in details in the second chapter.

Although the findings of this study contradict most of the assumptions made by Preference theory and post-feminism, they actually confirm two of its primary assumptions that lifestyle choice is an important factor today to determine female career behaviour and modern women are not a homogeneous group because of their various choices for career and lifestyle. This study finds that the female participants possessed broadly two types of career progression behaviours. It also reveals that Hakim's categories of home-centred and career-centred women do not adequately represent the complexity of the roles that women in each group play in reality. While one group of women would be described by Hakim as exhibiting home-centric career behaviour and the other senior executive group exhibiting career-centric behaviour, both groups of women in this study were clearly adaptive in combining family needs and career demands in one way or another.

To some extent, the senior executive women did tend to conform to the career-centric model. The majority of the members of this group have prioritised their leadership careers by adjusting their lives' overarching demands, family and personal needs to meet the demands of their careers. Mostly, they believed that even though organisational systematic and cultural barriers are still there, today's women have the ability to break through it by using personal agency and having adequate confidence to overcome the stereotypical societal norms and values. Although the majority of these women utilised adaptive strategies to combine work and family, they prioritised career progression over child-bearing so that they reached the top positions in their organisations. This means that many of them decided to have children only after achieving a leadership role.

On the other hand, many of the women at levels lower than the SES in the public sector have chosen to give priority to their families' well-being over career progression or taking on more responsibility at work when there was a possibility of work-family collision. They typically have not pursued a leadership role for fear of losing their work-life balance. These women tend to fall into Hakim's home-centric category; however, for majority of them, not seeking a leadership role was a temporary adaptive career-strategy to meet their present work-life goals. However, while being adaptive in combining family and career, most of them had not lost their leadership career aspirations.

The experiences of the participants in this study suggest that preferences and priorities change over time too; they are not static phenomena as is generally assumed by the Preference theory. Career decisions and lifestyle preference depend not only on individual choices and priorities but also on the changing family and life situations: the presence of children, the support system they are in, the structure of opportunity provided by their organisations and the need for work-family balance. Therefore, these interviewees exhibited different career behaviours depending on their different situations, the availability of opportunities, and their lifestyle preferences and priorities. Their behaviours were not simply a result of career and lifestyle choice.

For example, a small number of interviewees from the senior executive group showed a preference for a 'traditional home-centric lifestyle'. Where they had children at a relatively young age when they were in non-executive public service roles. It is understandable that in their early careers they generally gave priority to having children and nurturing their families; however, in their mid-forties they became more careerists and gave priority to their career needs and development. It was possible for them to focus on their careers at this stage of their lives because they had few or no caring responsibilities, there were suitable opportunities and they used their personal agency to grow their careers.

Therefore, it can be said that these women were not a homogeneous group, not because they belonged to different lifestyle groups, but because they chose to prioritise one or more lifestyles over their whole lives depending on their life situations and the opportunities available at the time. In this process, personal agency played a significant role but it was not an independent variable to solely influencing their career behaviours.

The experiences of the research participants, thus, confirmed most of the criticism of Preference theory made by the mainstream feminists, who argue that the preference formation process remains constrained. These women have actually adjusted their preferences in

response to circumstances; thus, their work-life choices are actually 'adaptive preferences' (Leahy & Doughney, 2006, p. 38); that often change over time (Van-Wanrooy, 2005, pp. 153-159). The experiences of these women also confirmed Johnstone, et al. (2011)'s suggestion that young women's' aspirations for 'having it all'- marriage, children, and full-time employment with greater economic independence and career prospects - often conflict with reality. Rather, they adapt through a process of 'coming down to earth' as they grow older and get involved with family; particularly with reproductive business, and realise that 'their lives are restricted by social and economic circumstances'. This is how the 'neo-traditional employment' pattern espoused by Maher (2005) experienced by the women requires them to negotiate between their career goals and ambitions with life's aspirations and parenthood choice.

6.3   Policy Implications

An interesting finding is that although the two groups of interviewees had different work-life goals and career strategies depending on their life's needs, most identified themselves as career women. None believed that they were working solely to meet the financial needs of their families. By identifying themselves as career women they primarily meant that they value their work roles and career identity as much as their family identity. They did not feel that motherhood defined their identity; or was an obstacle to pursue a career until they reach the middle management levels.

Both the career centric and home centric women in this study identify that transition between the mid-management levels to the senior leadership levels is not smooth and easy, particularly for female employees. The primary reason is not so family-friendly work/life requirements, extensive work hours and the stress involves in the top roles. Such work requirements in these levels often contradict with many private aspirations and goals of female mid-level managers. Family-friendly work policies were available such as- work sharing, working from home, purchased leave; however, most of the time they did not effectively work to make it easier for female employees to go through the transition and to pursue a leadership role while keeping their private aspirations, goals and needs fulfilled.

It has been argued in the current feminist literature that many mid-career female executives, particularly those who are mothers; do not apply for a leadership career for fear of losing a reasonable work-life balance. A lack of family-friendly work supports and job design that

requires the 'ideal worker' automatically excludes, or perhaps discourages, many mid-level female executives from pursuing these roles. It is, therefore, the nature of these jobs that silently but very effectively disadvantages women (Bourke & Andrews, 2011; Irvin, 2014). This study found this claim to be true, but, the situation is not as simple as it has been explained in previous studies.

Through these interviews, this study has demonstrated that the reality is far more difficult for female employees with dependents than for those without them. Their experiences suggest that when they have children, not only is there an existing glass ceiling to restrict their career progression towards the leadership levels, but a 'maternal wall' also grows around them, built by the requirements placed upon workers in these roles. It happens because of the distinctive needs of women with children. As these working mothers need flexibility and/or continuous supports for child care when working, senior executive roles do not seem to be an appropriate place for them where there is no formal provisions such as flexi-time. This maternal wall is also linked to the workplace culture and practice, which is often very difficult to change because of the demands enforced by the senior leaders themselves, irrespective of whether they are male or female.

I argue from this study that the current employee relations policies affecting women at work in the SAPS fall short in assisting female employees at the executive levels to combine career and children as well as in supporting those who aspire to leadership positions. These policies fail in two ways:

1. They fail to connect the career progression of female employees with their changing needs and goals for work-family balance.

2. They fail to establish effective and universal work-life supports for all women (and men) at every work level in the public service, but especially for those women trying to combine working at a senior executive level with having a normal family life.

Therefore, policies need to be reformed to provide working mothers in line for leadership roles with more authentic support not only for combining employment and family, but also for combining career progression and family. Introducing formal arrangements of flexi-time in senior executive levels may be one of the effective policy reforms to support working mothers not only in the senior executive roles but also in the middle management levels who

aspire to pursue more senior roles. An additional policy focus might be based on the recognition that promotion is particularly different for women in male-dominated areas.

Policy provisions are also needed to create a career safety net (such as- legislative provisions which restrict managers to discriminate against those employees who work part-time or are dependent on family-friendly benefits) for female employees who take advantage of family-friendly work benefits when their children are young. Such a safety net will provide them with the necessary provisions for career progression that depend on their qualifications, expertise, skills, experiences and work-life needs, and not on the hours they work. It will, thus, protect job security, ensure career progression and recognise the work-life balance needs of part-time and contract-based employees.

Most of the qualified working mothers at the mid-career executive levels would benefit from such policy reforms and initiatives as these provisions would challenge direct or indirect discrimination against them and increase their career choices. Without these changes, even the introduction of quotas for senior managerial positions would fail to attract more women to these roles; mid-level women will choose to opt out from seeking such roles if the cost continues to be too great.

Establishing the recommendations given above will encourage more mid-level executive women to choose leadership careers. Assuming that this happens, this study has also identified the need for some reorganisation in the SES levels to make the choices of its participants easier and more effective.

The findings of this study point to the need for a comprehensive policy interface for family-friendly work arrangements and practice is to be introduced in the SAPS. It cannot be claimed that the public sector is a family-friendly workplace that supports employee welfare and work-life balance until and unless equitable family-friendly work entitlements are available at the senior executive levels. This study highlighted the ineffectiveness of the current job design and work hours of the SES; and that, part-time working and job-sharing are not effective ways to achieve work-life balance for senior executives. Flexible work hours, which are readily available for public servants with dependents in all of the other work levels, are not available in the SES. Thus, a 'flexible' schedule comes at a very high price for them.

To implement effective work-life balance policies in the SES it is first necessary to analyse the job design of these levels. If these roles cannot be redesigned by introducing all-inclusive family-friendly work benefits immediately, the majority of mid-level women with children

will never be interested in or able to seek these roles and leadership equality for the public service will prove to be unattainable. Even if women do choose to acquire these roles, they have to make personal sacrifices by adjusting their personal life goals and aspirations or even discarding these aspirations.

To address this issue Bourke and Andrews (2011) in the book *Women at Work: Research, Policy and Practice* developed a framework for modern job-design principles that analyses the design of senior roles in terms of gender equality. They identified a redesign process for extreme jobs; namely, senior executive jobs. Although their efforts suggest possible ways for positive job redesign in senior roles, they have not been adequately developed and tested in in the public sector. The findings of this study, therefore, point to the need for further research in applying such job redesign to the SAPS.

Hakim is then partially right when she claims that the current policies are not adequate to accommodate the different career choices and lifestyle preferences of today's women, who are not a homogeneous group at all. But, she totally misidentifies the causes of the different career behaviours of 21st century women and their relationship with the policy interface. She assumes that 'adaptive' women freely choose not to progress to leadership even if opportunities are available to them. This clearly suggests that policies have nothing to do with supporting them to secure leadership roles (2003a).

However, this study finds that policy reforms in relation to women at work and their work-life balance are very important in providing positive change in workplaces and in accommodating women's various career choices and work-life goals. Such policy changes would ultimately influence female employees' career behaviours by making their career and lifestyle choices easier and more effective, and, in making the workplace culture supportive of these changes. To achieve such change, the female leaders who are already in powerful positions also need to work as change agents by taking the initiative in introducing new and reformed family-friendly work policies and by role modelling a better work-life balance in these roles. If change is possible, it will ensure a wider choice of career and lifestyle and will make these choices easier to achieve.

6.4   Conclusion

Whereas post-feminists claim that today's women can achieve any goal that they choose; this study reveals that such an assumption holds true only for the experiences of a particular group of women. Furthermore, within this study, this belief was only found amongst those women who had already achieved top management careers. They are already privileged, successful women who have the resources to exercise their personal life choices and aspirations. Thus, the post-feminist view provides only a partial understanding of female career prospects and behaviours. It certainly does not represent the views and experiences of all the women in this study.

Although choice is an important factor in women's work behaviours in the 21st century this study has shown that these choices are not always free or unconstrained. Moreover, in seeking career/life balance female employees need to adjust their private life aspirations and goals often in a way which barely allows them to achieve a preferred lifestyle. Employee relations policies have made it easier for women to combine work and family lives, but, do not by themselves necessarily facilitate women's access to top leadership positions. Individual agency, therefore, may play a more significant role in today's women's decisions about their careers, families and combining them; however, it is not the major factor in determining the career paths of most women.

The conceptual career development model developed and utilised in this thesis presumed that the factors contributing in differential career choices and behaviours of 21st century women were not one dimensional (as suggested in the Lifestyle preference theory); rather multi-dimensional and were also interdependent on each other. After in-depth discussion with the participants of this study it gets clearer that 'agency' or 'individual choice' as a contributing factor is getting more important today; however, it is not an independent variable yet and most of the time cannot influence their career behaviours without interacting with the other 'structural' and 'policy' dimensions.

Post-feminist theories have usefully highlighted the role of individual agency in the new generation of women's career and lifestyle behaviours. However, as these interviews with public sector women in South Australia has shown, these theories tend to understate the role of prevailing social and organisational factors in the career experiences of many of these women. Therefore, in seeking to explain the lack of women in leadership levels in this post-modern age, post-feminist views have failed to see the big picture of the issue from a wider and all-inclusive lens.

The following statement, shared by one of the interviewees in this study, shows the choice dilemma that today's women face if they want to progress to the senior leadership levels:

'All through school and university we tell young women they can achieve as much as anybody else, that they can compete, they can achieve, and we recruit young women through our graduate programs. The brightest young women who progress and show management potential may think they have a rosy future until such time as they realise they have to work full-time to be a leader. So what does this mean if they want to have children, or already have them? As a society, we need families to have children to create the next generation of workers and taxpayers, experts etc., but women who are future leaders in our public service are not free to choose. Do they choose career progression or children, or do they feel pressured to return to work full-time when they really wanted to be part-time for a while?' (Mary, 42, ASO-7)

Clearly, policies are needed that allow women (and men) to parent and fully participate in family life while at the same time fulfilling their ambitions to achieve senior leadership roles in the workplace. The findings of this study reject the idea of 'gender-neutral' policy provisions that are based on the idea of providing free lifestyle choices for every individual in society. They show that society is not yet sufficiently fair or neutral to be able to neglect looking after the diverse and sometimes distinct needs of women.

Bibliography

Abbott, E. (2011). The relationship between gender inequality and women's choices. Retrieved from http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/diversity/2011/03/gender-equality-and-womens-life-choices/

ABS. (2010). Women in South Australia's workforce. *SA Stats*. Retrieved from http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/1345.4feature%20article1dec%202010

ABS. (2011). Fifty years of labour force: Now and then. Retrieved from http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6105.0Feature+Article1Oct%202011

ABS. (2012). Gender Indicators, Australia. In A. B. o. Statistics (Ed.). Retrieved from http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by+Subject/4125.0~Jan+2012~Main+Features~Australian+Public+Service+senior+and+middle+managers~6140

Adams, R. B., & Kirchmaier, T. (2012). *Making it to the Top: From Female Labor Force Participation to Boardroom Gender Diversity*. Paper presented at the Asian Finance Association Conference 2013.

Andrews, J., & Bourke, J. (2011). Trends in women's participation in the Australian workforce 1900-2010. In P. Murray, R. Kramar & P. McGaw (Eds.), *Women at work: research, policy and practice* (pp. 23-51). Victoria, Australia: Tilde University Press.

Appelbaum, S. H., Audet, L., & Miller, J. C. (2003). Gender and leadership? Leadership and gender? A journey through the landscape of theories. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 24*(1), 43-51.

Arndt, B. (2003). Myths and misconceptions, *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/02/06/1044498913240.html

Astin, H. (1984). The meaning of work in women's lives: A sociopsychological model of career choice and work behavior. *The Counseling Psychologist*.

Austen, S., & Birch, R. (2002). *Family responsibilities and women's working lives*: Institute for Research into International Competitiveness, Curtin University of Technology.

Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2003). Having children (pp. 182-205). Retrieved from http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/diversity/14havingchild.pdf

Australian Public Service Commission. (2008). State of the service report.

Bain, O., & Cummings, W. (2000). Academe's Glass Ceiling: Societal, Professional/Organizational, and Institutional Barriers to the Career Advancement of Academic Women. *Comparative education review, 44*(4), 493-514.

Baird, M. (2010, 19/08/2010). [Organisational effectiveness and the flexible workplace].

Baird, M., & Charlesworth, S. (2010). *Flexible and part-time work in Australia: some responses to the need for worklife balance*. Paper presented at the 'Egalite homes/femmes et articulation travail/ famile: vers un nouveau modele?' An international conference held in Paris, Paris.

Barnett, R. C., & Hyde, J. S. (2001). Women, men, work, and family. *American psychologist, 56*(10), 781.

Baxter, J., & Chesters, J. (2011). Perceptions of work-family balance: how effective are family-friendly policies? *Australian Journal of Labour Economics, 14*(2), 139-151.

Beatty, A. (Producer). (2012). The Labyrinth of Leadership. Retrieved from http://www.slideshare.net/q4solutions/labyrinth-of-leadership-7-10-12

Bird, A. (2010). The Under Representation of Women in a" Feminized Profession": Gender Stereotyping, Management Politics, and the Dissemination of Information. *Dalhousie Journal of Interdisciplinary Management, 3*(1).

Bishop, J. (2010, 08/01/2014). Is there still a glass ceiling for Australian women? *Dynamic Business: News, Opinion, Debate*. Retrieved from

http://www.dynamicbusiness.com.au/entrepreneur-profile/is-there-still-a-glass-ceiling-for-australian-women494.html

Bourke, J., & Andrews, J. (2011). Getting to the heart of the gender equality in executice roles: Applying job design principles to achieve gender equality outcomes. In P. A. Murray, R. Kramar & P. McGaw (Eds.), *Women at Work: Research, Policy and Practice* (pp. 169-199). Victoria, Australia: Tilde University Press.

Boyes, L. (2012). Choice feminism. In *Boyes club*. Retrieved 10/05/13, 2013, from http://lucyboyes.com/choice-feminism/

Brennan, D. (2007). Babies, budgets, and birthrates: Work/family policy in Australia 1996–2006. *Social politics: international studies in gender, state & society, 14*(1), 31-57.

Broomhill, & Sharp. (2013). Gender at work and in the home. In J. Spoehr (Ed.), *State of South Australia*. South Australia Wakefield Press.

Broomhill, & Sharp, R. (2005). The changing male breadwinner model in Australia: a new gender order? *Labour & Industry, 16*(1).

Broomhill. R, & Sharp. R. (2013). Gender at work and in the home. In J. Spoehr (Ed.), *State of South Australia*. South Australia Wakefield Press.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carli, L. L., & Eagly, A. H. (2001). Gender, hierarchy, and leadership: An introduction. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*(4), 629-636.

Cartwright, S. (2004). Women's decisions about paid work and family life after childbirth: A critique of the Hakim model. *Women and Work: Current RMIT University Research*, 24.

Cassells, R. (2010). Is there still a glass ceiling for Australian women? *Dynamic Business: News, Opinion, Debate*. Retrieved from http://www.dynamicbusiness.com.au/entrepreneur-profile/is-there-still-a-glass-ceiling-for-australian-women494.html

CEDA. (2013). Women in leadership: Understanding the gender gap. Retrieved from http://www.ceda.com.au/media/310731/cedawiljune%202013final.pdf

Chesterman, C., Ross-Smith, A., & Peters, M. (2004). Senior women executives and the cultures of management. *Australian Technology Network Women's Executive Development Program*.

Cohen, P. (2006). Today, some feminists hate the word 'choice' *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/weekinreview/15patti.html?_r=0

Commissioner for Public Sector Employment. (2012). South Australia's Strategic Plan Target 52- Women in leadership: Office for Public Employment and Review. Retrieved from http://www.oper.sa.gov.au/page-346

Connell, R. (2005). A really good husband: Work/life balance, gender equity and social change. *Australian Journal of Social Issues, The, 40*(3), 369.

Connell, R. (2006). Glass ceiling or gendered institution? Mapping the gender regime of public sector worksites. [Essays on equity, gender and diversity]. *Public administrative review*, 837-849.

CPSU. (2008). Far from equal: the glass ceiling in the Australian public service.

Crompton, & Harris, F. (1998). A reply to Hakim. *The British journal of sociology, 49*(1), 144-149. doi: 10.2307/591268

Crompton, R., & Lyonette, C. (2007). Reply to Hakim. *The British journal of sociology, 58*(1), 133-134. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-4446.2007.00143.x

Deloitte, & Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. (2009). Waiter, is that inclusion in my soup? A new recipe to improve business performance. Retrieved from http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-Australia/Local%20Assets/Documents/Services/Consulting/Deloitte_Diversity_Inclusion_Report_V4_Nov_2012.pdf

Dezso, C., & Ross, D. (2008). "Girl Power": Female participation in top management and firm performance. Retrieved from http://www.en.cams.bwl.uni-muenchen.de/files/girlpower1.pdf

Disney, R., & Szyszczak, E. (1989). Part-time Work: Reply to Catherine Hakim. *Industrial Law Journal, 18*(4), 223-229. doi: 10.1093/ilj/18.4.223

Dolan, J. (2000). The senior executive service: Gender, attitudes, and representative bureaucracy. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 10*(3), 513-530.

Dolan, J. (2004). Gender equity: Illusion or reality for women in the Federal Executive Service? *Public Administration Review, 64*(3), 299-308.

Duxbury, L., & Higgins, C. (2008). *Work-life balance in Australia in the new millennium: Rhetoric versus reality*. South Yarra: Chris and Beaton Consulting.

Duxbury, L., Higgins, C., & Lee, C. (1994). Work-family conflict. *Journal of Family Issues, 15*(3), 449-466.

EOWA. (2008). Australian census of women in leadership. Retrieved from https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/2008_EOWA_Census_Publication_tagged.pdf

EOWA. (2010). *Australian census of women in leadership*. Retrieved from http://www.eowa.gov.au/Information_Centres/Resource_Centre/EOWA_Publications/EOWA_Census/2010_Census/2010_census.pdf

Ferguson, L. (2011). *Taming the shrew? Choice feminism and the fear of politics* Gender and Sexuality Studies Workshop.

Folbre, N., & Himmelweit, S. (2000). Introduction-Children and Family Policy: a Feminist Issue.

Francoeur, C., Labelle, R., & Sinclair-Desgagne, B. (2006). Gender diversity in corporate governance and top management and financial performance.

GACIARZ, B. (2011). Women in the Workplace in Poland: From Egalitarian Economic Necessity to Elite Freedom of Choice and the Pervading Inequality in Status. *International journal of sociology, 41*(3), 68-94.

Gash, V. (2008). Preference or constraint? Part-time workers' transitions in Denmark, France and the United Kingdom. *Work, Employment & Society, 22*(4), 655-674. doi: 10.1177/0950017008096741

Gautam, T. (2012). Real men don't need Work Life Balance. Retrieved from http://lifestyle.topnewstoday.org/health/article/2332511/

Ginn, J., Arber, S., Brannen, J., Dale, A., Dex, S., Elias, P., . . . Rubery, J. (1996). Feminist fallacies: A reply to Hakim on women's employment. *The British journal of sociology, 47*(1), 167-174. doi: 10.2307/591122

Giullari, S., & Lewis, J. (2005). Adult worker model family, gender equality and care: the search for new policy principles, and the possibilities and problems of a capabilities aproach *Social Policy and Development Programme Paper*: UNRISD.

Gomm, R. (2008). *Social research methodology: A critical introduction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Graduate Careers Australia. (2012). Grad stats 2012: Employment and salary outcomes of recent higher education graduates. Retrieved from http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/GCA-GradStats-2012_FINAL1.pdf

Gregory, A., & Milner, S. (2009). Editorial: work–life balance: a matter of choice? *Gender, Work & Organization, 16*(1), 1-13.

Gundlach, S., & Sammartino, A. (2013). Australian women go overseas to escape the glass ceiling. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from http://theconversation.com/australian-women-go-overseas-to-escape-the-glass-ceiling-14797

Guy, M. (1993). Three steps forward, two steps backward: The status of women's integration into public management. *Public Administration Review*, 285-292.

Hakim. (2003, 2003 Autumn). Competing family models, competing social policies: Even in modern societies, women's views are often still overlooked. *Family Matters,* 52.

Hakim, C. (1995). Five feminist myths about women's employment. *British journal of sociology*, 429-455.

Hakim, C. (1996a). Labour mobility and employment stability: Rhetoric and reality on the sex differential in labour-market behaviour. *European Sociological Review, 12*(1), 1-31.

Hakim, C. (1996b). The sexual division of labour and women's heterogeneity. *The British journal of sociology, 47*(1), 178-188.

Hakim, C. (1998). Developing a sociology for the twenty-first century: Preference theory. *The British journal of sociology, 49*(1), 137-143.

Hakim, C. (2000a). *Key issues in women's work: Female heterogeneity and the polarisation of women's employment* (Vol. 4): Continuum.

Hakim, C. (2000b). *Work-lifestyle choices in the 21st century: Preference theory*: Oxford University Press, USA.

Hakim, C. (2002). Lifestyle preferences as determinants of women's differentiated labor market careers. *Work and Occupations, 29*(4), 428-459. doi: 10.1177/0730888402029004003

Hakim, C. (2003a). Competing family models, competing social policies. [Article]. *Family Matters*(64), 52.

Hakim, C. (2003b). Lifestyle preferences versus patriarchal values: Casual and non-casual attitudes. *Advances in Life Course Research, 8*, 69-91. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1040-2608(03)08004-3

Hakim, C. (2003c). A New Approach to Explaining Fertility Patterns: Preference Theory. *Population and Development Review, 29*(3), 349-374. doi: 10.2307/3115278

Hakim, C. (2004). *Key issues in women's work: Female diversity and the polarisation of women's employment*: Routledge Cavendish.

Hakim, C. (2005). Sex differences in work-life balance goals.

Hakim, C. (2006). Women, careers, and work-life preferences. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 34*(3), 279-294.

Hakim, C. (2007). The Declining Significance of Gender? . *British Journal of Industrial Relations, 45*(2), 445-447. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8543.2007.00621_7.x

Hakim, C. (2008). Is gender equality legislation becoming counter-productive? *public policy research, 15*(3), 133-136.

Hakim, C. (2010). (How) can social policy and fiscal policy recognise unpaid family work? [Report]. *Renewal, 18*.

Hayward, H. (2012). Yes, women can have it all... on one condition. *Inside Story*. Retrieved from http://inside.org.au

Heather. (2012). Is feminism about choice? Retrieved from http://freethoughtblogs.com/zinniajones/2012/06/guest-post-is-feminism-about-choice/

Higgins, C., Duxbury, L., & Johnson, K. L. (2000). Part-time work for women: does it really help balance work and family? *Human Resource Management, 39*(1), 17-32.

Himmelweit, S., & Sigala, M. (2004). Choice and the relationship between identities and behaviour for mothers with pre-school children: some implications for policy from a UK study. *Journal of Social Policy, 33*(03), 455-478.

Hirshman, L. (2006). *Get to Work: A manifesto for women of the world*. New York: Viking

Hodson, R. (1989). Gender differences in job satisfaction. *The Sociological Quarterly, 30*(3), 385-399.

Hoobler, J., Wayne, S., & Lemmon, G. (2009). Bosses' perceptions of family-work conflict and women's promotability: Glass ceiling effects. *The Academy of Management Journal ARCHIVE, 52*(5), 939-957.

Ibarra, H., Ely, R., & Kolb, D. (2013). Women Rising: The Unseen Barriers. (cover story). [Article]. *Harvard business review, 91*(9), 60-67.

Irvin, J. (2014, 27 August). The real reason for the gender pay gap is the working habits of high-income earners in particular *The Advertiser* p. 22.

Jackson, C. (2001). Women middle managers' perception of the glass ceiling. *Women in Management Review, 16*(1), 30-41.

Johnstone, M., & Lee, C. (2009). Young Australian women's aspirations for work and family: Individual and sociocultural differences. *Sex Roles, 61*(3-4), 204-220. doi: 10.1007/s11199-009-9622-8

Johnstone, M., Lucke, J., & Lee, C. (2011). Influences of marriage, motherhood, and other life events on Australian women's employment aspiration. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 35*(2), 267-281.

Kangas, O., & Rostgaard, T. (2007). Preferences or institutions? Work—family life opportunities in seven European countries. *Journal of European Social Policy, 17*(3), 240-256. doi: 10.1177/0958928707078367

Kee, H. (2006). Glass ceiling or sticky floor? Exploring the Australian gender pay gap. *Economic Record, 82*(259), 408-427.

Kelly, E. L., Ammons, S. K., Chermack, K., & Moen, P. (2010). Gendered Challenge, Gendered Response: Confronting the Ideal Worker Norm in a White-Collar Organization. *Gender & Society, 24*(3), 281-303. doi: 10.1177/0891243210372073

Knox, A., & Todd, P. (2011). Legislated Frameworks and Future Challenges. In P. A. Murray, R. Kramar & P. McGaw (Eds.), *Women at Work: Research, Policy and Practice* (pp. 120-138). Victoria: Tilde University Press.

Kochanowski, S. (2010). Women in leadership: persistent problems or progress? *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table*.

Leahy, M. (2011, 28 November). Women and Work in Australia. *Australian Policy Online*. Retrieved from APO.org.au website:

Leahy, M. (2012, 8 march). Modern families. *Inside Story*. Retrieved from http://inside.org.au/modern-families/

Leahy, M., & Doughney, J. (2006). Women, work and preference formation: A critique of Catherine Hakim's preference theory. *Journal of Business Systems, Governance and Ethics, 1*(1), 37-48.

Lewis, J. (2009). *Work-family balance, gender and policy*. UK: Edward Elger Publishing Ltd.

Maher, J. (2005). A mother by trade: Australian women reflecting mothering as activity, not identity. *Australian Feminist Studies, 20*(46), 17-29.

Marvasti, A. B. (2004). *Qualitative research in sociology: An introduction*. London: Sage Publications

May, K. (2010). Female executives in public service on the rise, *The Gazette*. Retrieved from http://www.montrealgazette.com/life/Female+executives+public+service+rise/280082 8/story.html

MCC. Our experiences in elevating the representation of women in leadership.

McGraw, P. (2011). Gender Pay Equity Issues in Australia: Patterns and Causes. In *Women at Work: Research, Policy and Practice*.

McMahon, M., Patton, W., & Tatham, P. (2011). Managing life, learning and work in the 21st century: issues informing the design of an Australian blueprint for career development.

McRae, S. (2003). Constraints and choices in mothers' employment careers: a consideration of Hakim's Preference Theory. *54*(3), 317-338.

Miller, A. R. (2011). The effects of motherhood timing on career path. [Report]. *Journal of Population Economics, 24*, 1071+.

Murphy, M. (2012, 2012 Summer). Choice feminism: how our rallying cry got co-opted and why we need to take it back. *Herizons, 26(1)*.

Murray, P. A. (2011). Executive women, gendered behaviour and adoptive social structures. In P. A. Murray, R. Kramar & P. McGaw (Eds.), *Women at Work: Research, policy and practice* (pp. 202-238).

Nicole, & Maggie. (2011). Is there anything wrong with choice feminism? Retrieved from http://nicoleandmaggie.wordpress.com/2011/06/05/is-there-anything-wrong-with-choice-feminism/

Nutley, S., & Mudd, J. (2005). Has the glass cliff replaced the glass ceiling for women employed in the public sector? *Public Money and Management, 25*(1), 3-4.

O'Faircheallaigh, C., Wanna, J., & Weller, P. (1999). *Public sector management in Australia: New challenges, new directions*: Macmillan Education Australia.

Oakley, J. (2000). Gender based barriers to senior management positions: Understanding the scarcity of female CEOs. *Journal of Busioness Ethics, 27*, 321-334.

Office for Public Employment and Review. (2012).

Office for Women. (2011). South Australian state policies and strategic plans. Retrieved from http://www.officeforwomen.sa.gov.au/?p=54

Olsson, S., & Pringle, J. (2004). Women executives: public and private sectors as sites of advancement? *Women in Management Review, 19*(1), 29-39.

Pocock, B. (2003). *The work/life collision: What work is doing to Australians and what to do about it*: Federation Press.

Pocock, B. (2005a). Work-life balance in Australia: Limited progress, dim prospects. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources, 43*(2), 198-209.

Pocock, B. (2005b). Work/care regimes: Institutions, culture and behaviour and the Australian case. *Gender, Work & Organization, 12*(1), 32-49.

Pocock, B., Skinner, N., & Pisaniello, S. (2010). How much should we work? Working hours, holidays and working life: the participation challenge. *The Australian Work Life Index 2010*: Centre for work +life, University of South Australia. Retrieved from http://w3.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl/documents/AWALI2010-report.pdf

Pocock, B., Skinner, N., & Williams, P. (2012). *Time bomb: Work, rest and play in Australia today*. Sydney, Australia: NewSouth Publishing.

Poole, M., & Langan-Fox, J. (1997). *Australian women and careers: Psychological and contextual influences over the life course*. Melbourne, Australia: Cambridge University Press.

Procter, I., & Padfield, M. (1999). Work orientations and women's work: A critique of Hakim's theory of the heterogeneity of women. *Gender, Work & Organization, 6*(3), 152-162. doi: 10.1111/1468-0432.00078

Ransom, H. (2013). The young and the restless: Gen Y and the 21st century barriers to women in leadership. In *Women in Leadership: Understanding the Gender Gap*. Melbourne.

Reeves, K. (2008). *The backstop breadwinner: Working women in the transition to parenthood.* Bachelor of Commerce (Liberal Studies) (Honours), University of Sydney.

Robinson, A. (2013). Bob Hawke says Tanya Plibersek shouldn't lead Labor as she has a three-year-old. *Essential Baby*. Retrieved from http://www.essentialbaby.com.au/life-style/family-finances/bob-hawke-says-tanya-plibersek-shouldnt-lead-labor-as-she-has-a-threeyearold-20130909-2tgku.html

Rodgers-Healey, D. (2013). It's still a long way to the top for Australia's working women. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from http://theconversation.com/its-still-a-long-way-to-the-top-for-australias-working-women-11024

Ross-Smith, A., & Chesterman, C. (2009). 'Girl disease': Women managers' reticence and ambivalence towards organizational advancement. *Journal of management and organization, 15*(5), 582-595.

Sandberg, S., & Scovell, N. (2013). *Lean in: Women, work, and the will to lead*. London: WH Allen.

Sawer, M. (2002). The representation of women in Australia: Meaning and make-believe. [Article]. *Parliamentary Affairs, 55*(1), 5.

Sharp, R., Broomhill, R., & Elton, J. (2012). 'Modern' Labor and the Fair Work Act 2009: Challenging the male breadwinner gender order? Adelaide: Australian Workplace Innovation and Social Research Centre, University of Adelaide.

Sharp, R., Franzway, S., Mills, J., & Gill, J. (2011). Flawed policy, failed politics? Challenging the sexual politics of managing deversity in engineering organizations. *Gender, Work and Organization*.

Sidle, S. D. (2011, 2011/05//). Career track or mommy track: how do women decide? *The Academy of Management Perspectives, 25(2),* 77+.

Simpson, R. (1998). Presenteeism, power and organizational change: long hours as a career barrier and the impact on the working lives of women managers. *British Journal of Management, 9*, 37-50.

State of the Service Report. (2013). *State of the service series 2012-13*. Retrieved from http://www.apsc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/29223/SOSR-2012_13-final-tagged2.pdf

Stead, V., & Elliott, C. (2009). *Women's leadership*: Palgrave Macmillan Basingstoke.

Still, L. (1994). Where to from here? Women in management: The cultural dilemma. *Women in Management Review, 9*(4), 03-10.

Still, L. (1997). Glass ceilings and sticky floors: Barriers to the careers of women in the Australian finance industry *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission*. Sydney.

Still, L. V. (2006). Where are the women in leadership in Australia? *Women in Management Review, 21*(3), 180-194.

Summers, A. (2003). *The end of equality: Work, babies and women's choices in 21st century Australia*. NSW: Random House Australia Pty. Ltd.

Summers, A. (2010). At last, jobs for the girls: But why is the private sector, not government leading the charge, *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/at-last-jobs-for-the-girls-20101217-190pa.html

Summers, A. (2013). Gender pay gap still a disgrace. Retrieved from http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/at-jobs-for-the-girls-20101217-190pa.html

The Heat Group. (2014). The heat report: Ten years on. Victoria, Melbourne. Retrieved from http://www.heatgroup.com.au/sites/default/files/users-data/user10/press-releases/Heat-Group-10-Years-on-Report.pdf

Thompson, V. (2013). Universities failing simple equality test, *The Australian*. Retrieved from http://aap.newscentre.com.au/cpsunat/130227/library/victorian_public_service/30555724.html

Van-Wanrooy, B. (2005). Adapting to the lifecourse? Evaluating men and women's working-time preferences. *Australian Journal of Labour Economics, 8*(2), 145-162.

Van Wart, M. (2011). *Dynamics of leadership in public service: Theory and practice*: ME Sharpe Inc.

Vardon, S. (2010, 17 March). *Pushing peanuts uphill*, Canberra.

Vlasblom, J. D., & Schippers, J. (2006). Changing dynamics in female employment around childbirth: evidence from Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. *Work, Employment and Society, 20*(2), 329-346.

Walsh, J. (1999). Myths and counter-myths: an analysis of part-time female employees and their orientation to work and working hours. *Work, Employment and Society, 13*, 179-203.

Warren, T. (2004). Working part-time: achieving a successful 'work-life'balance? . *The British journal of sociology, 55*(1), 99-122.

Wattis, L., Standing, K., & Yerkes, M. (2013). Mothers and work–life balance: exploring the contradictions and complexities involved in work–family negotiation. *Community, Work & Family, 16*(1), 1-19.

Webber, G., & Williams, C. (2007). Part-time work and the gender division of labour. *Qual Sociol, 31*, 15-36.

Whelan, J. (2011). The state of the Australian Public Service: An alternative report. Retrieved from http://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/CPD_OP12_2011_State_of_APS_Whelan.pdf

Whitehouse, G., Baird, M., & Diamond, C. (2006). Highlights from the parental leave in Australia survey. Retrieved from http://www.polsis.uq.edu.au/highlights-from-the-parental-leave-survey-december-2006

William, J. C. (2003). Beyond the Glass Ceiling: The Maternal Wall as a Barrier to gender Equality. *Thomas Jefferson Law review, 26*(1).

Wirth, L. (2001). Women in management: Closer to breaking through the glass ceiling? *Women, gender and work*.

Wirth, L. (2009). *Breaking through the glass ceiling: Women in management*: International Labour Organization (ILO).

Woodfield, R. (2007). *What women want from work: gender and occupational choice in the 21st century*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Yerkes, M. A. (2013). Choice or Constraints? Women's Weekly Working Hours in Comparative Perspective. *Sociologica*, 9-30.

YWCA Australia & WomenOnBoards & ACOSS. (2012). Reflecting Gender Diversity: An analysis of the gender diversity in the leadership of the community sector: Inaugural survey results. Retrieved from http://acoss.org.au/images/uploads/NFP_Boards_and_Gender_Diversity_2012_final.pdf

Appendix 1- Participant Information Sheet

Women in Leadership

> NOTE:
> This figure/table/image has been removed
> to comply with copyright regulations.
> It is included in the print copy of the thesis
> held by the University of Adelaide Library.

The Role of Individual Agency in Leadership Career Decision of Female Executives in South Australian Public Service

Although nearly 60% of public sector employees are female, only 37% of senior executive positions are filled by women. Recent research and policy has focused on the role of organizational factors and lifestyle choices on women's career aspirations. This study seeks to understand the role of psycho-social factors on modern women, and how this impacts career behaviours and lifestyle preferences. We aim to identify effective policy directions to increase gender equality in the public service for its female employees.

This study is currently being conducted as part of a Masters of Philosophy program undertaken at the University of Adelaide.

What is involved?

We would like you to participate in an **interview**. Through the interview we hope to uncover your experience of the work place, your job, how you are motivated and factors impacting on the balance between work and life. We will be talking with other women with the similar roles.

The interview will take approximately **30-35 minutes**.

Confidentiality

Your interview responses will be **confidential and anonymous. Only the researchers will see your responses,** and your participation or non-participation will not affect your employment in any way. Important points to be considered:

Participation in this project is completely voluntary.

An appropriate location for interview, to ensure anonymity, will be discussed prior to interview.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to **sign a consent form on the day of interview** (this can be provided in advance if requested)**.**

Further information

For further information, please contact: Syeda Nuzhat E Ibrat (Researcher) on (08) 8313 1467 or at nuzhat-e-ibrat.syeda@adelaide.edu.au, Associate Professor John Spoehr (Principal Supervisor) on (08) 8313 3730 or at john.spoehr@adelaide.edu.au, or Associate Professor Christine Beasley (Co-Supervisor) on (08) 8313 3443 or at christine.beasley@adelaide.edu.au.

We hope you will take part in this important study.

Please retain this email and return the registration form.

Appendix 2- Expression of Interest Form

RESEARCH PROJECT

Women in Leadership:

The Role of Individual Agency in Leadership Career Decisions of Female Executives in South Australian Public Service

If you are prepared to participate in this Research Project, please complete this form and return electronically to the following address:

nuzhat-e-ibrat.syeda@adelaide.edu.au

Name:

_____

Employer/Organization:

_____

Work level/ Position:

_____

Email Address:

_____

Contact telephone/mobile number:

_____
_____

Note: We may not contact everyone.

Appendix 3- Short Survey Questionnaire

Women in Leadership: The Role of Individual Agency in Leadership Career Decision of Female Executives in South Australian Public Service

Thank you for participating in this research project. Please take a few minutes to complete this short survey.

Your name

Your age

Your work designation

1. What is you highest level of education completed?
   A. High School
   B. Diploma or Associated Diploma
   C. Graduate Degree
   D. Postgraduate Degree
   E. Other

2. What is your current employment status?
   A. Permanent Full-time
   B. Permanent Part-time
      (Please specify fraction of time)

   C. Other, Please specify

3. What is the earning make up for your household?
   A. Single earning household
   B. Single earning partnered household
   C. Double earners household
   D. One and a half earners household

4. What is your household income (before tax)?
   A. Less than 40,000
   B. 40,000-80,000
   C. More than 80,000

5. Do you have children? If yes how many?

   ┌─────────────┐
   │   │
   └─────────────┘

6. How old were you when you had your first child?
   A. Less than 25
   B. 25-35
   C. More than 35

7. If no children, are you planning to have children at some stage? If so, when?
   A. Within 5 years
   B. Within 10 years
   C. Never **

** If you plan to have no children, would you please indicate the reason for that?

A. Personal preference
B. Health reasons
C. Personal/relationship circumstances
D. Others

CONSENT FORM

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" style="background-color:#c0504d;color:white;text-align:center">Women in Leadership: The Role of Individual Agency in Leadership Career Decision of Female Executives in South Australian Public Service</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ethics Approval Number:</td><td>HP-2012-105</td></tr>
</table>

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. My consent is given freely.

3. I have been given the opportunity to have a member of my family or a friend present while the project was explained to me.

4. Although I understand the purpose of the research project it has also been explained that involvement may not be of any benefit to me.

5. I have been informed that, while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will not be divulged.

6. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time.

7. I agree to the interview being audio/video recorded.   Yes ☐   No ☐

8. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Participant to complete:

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher/Witness to complete:

I have described the nature of the research to _____
(print name of participant)

and in my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature: _____ Position: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 4- Interview Questionnaire for Female Non-senior Executives

Interview Question	Comment
Part-1	
1. **How long have you been working in the public service?**	**Beginning question for all.** ***Supporting question for No. 5:** Where do you want to see yourself after 5 or 10 years in your life?
2. **Have you ever changed your career track? Or working hours/workload in your working life?**	
3. **What was the reason for that?**	
4. **Has this impacted your career goals?**	
5. **Would you please elaborate on your career goal or plan?***	
6. **How prepared do you think you are for promotion to the next level of your job?**	***EL 1 & 2 or SES**
7. **How appealing to you is the Executive/managerial* level of jobs? What attracts you the most about managerial/ top executive level jobs?**	
8. **In terms of scope for promotion, do you recognise suitable/sufficient opportunities to apply for higher level jobs?**	
9. **Have you ever had an unsuccessful promotion application? What do you think was the reason for that?**	***Do you think it was fair and legitimate?**
10. **What is your general experience in the interview process? ***	
Part-2	
11. **Did you have a specific reason for choosing the public service for your career path?****	****salary/ prestige/ autonomy/ responsibilities / leadership/work-life balance**
12. **Are you satisfied in your present role?**	*personal not household: their own financial aspiration
13. **Does your income meet all your* financial needs?**	
14. **What is the essential component for you to be satisfied in a job?**	
15. **Do you have a role model* who has inspired you in your career and in your life?**	***male/female; family/work-based**
Part-3	
16. **Often studies have found that' in society, generally, women's care responsibility not their work designation is regarded as their primary identity'. Do you agree with this? What is your opinion on this?**	
17. **What is your opinion about having crèches/ child care facilities in the workplace?**	Do you think it can be a source of distraction for mothers in the workplace?
18. **How soon did you return to work after having your *first* child? Would you please describe your emotional and motivational state when returning to work?***	***If have children**
19. **Do you think life events like child birth has impacted your career plan and aspiration?**	
20. **Do you find you have to juggle between your work roles and mothering roles? Please describe what this means to you.**	
21. **In terms of domestic or household works, how do you**	***If have partner**

and your partner share the responsibilities? How satisfied are you with the arrangements you and your partner have?* 22. Do you and your partner share child rearing activities, such as: cooking children meals?* 23. In regard to your career how supportive and encouraging is your partner?	*If new parents
Part-4	
24. Does your workplace provide flexible work arrangements, and if so, do you make use of these options? 25. Mostly for what purpose do you use it? 26. Have you shared the benefit of parental leave with your partner? ^ 27. In your opinion, how effective are the family friendly policies in your workplace in improving the working experience of female employees?	^ if young mothers, from 2011.
Part-5	
28. Have you ever experienced gender-based harassment or discrimination in the workplace?	
29. How would you describe the attitudes of your male colleagues in your organization? 30. How supportive do you think they are? 31. How supportive and empathetic is your manager regarding your work/life circumstances and your career?	
Part-6	
32. In your opinion what could be the reason for lack of women in senior managerial roles in the public service given they outnumber men in the junior classifications?	

Are there any other issues you wish to discuss that are relevant to this research?

Appendix 5- Interview Questionnaire for Senior Executives

Interview Question	Comment
Part-1	
1. **How long have you been working in the public service?** 2. **How long have you been in your present role?** 3. **Do you have a role model who inspires you in your career and in your life? Can you please describe how he/she inspired you to be successful in your career?**	**Beginning question for all.**
4. **Have you ever changed your career track? Or work hour and load in your working life?** 5. **What was the reason for that?** 6. **What is the impact of it on your career goal?**	
7. **Would you please give a brief description of your career journey up until now?** 8. **In terms of promotion scopes, do you recognise suitable promotion opportunities are there to apply for?** 9. **Have you ever had an unsuccessful promotion application? What do you think was the reason for that?** 10. **What is your general experience in the interview process? ***	
Part-2	
11. **Did you have a specific reason for choosing the public service for your career path?****	(salary/ prestige/ autonomy/ responsibilities / leadership/work-life balance)
12. **Are you satisfied in your present role?** 13. **What is the essential component for you to be satisfied in a job?**	
Part-3	
14. **Do you work over time, and if so to what extent?** 15. **Does your job require you to travel frequently?** 16. **Do you find you have to juggle between your work roles and other life commitments? Please describe what this means to you.** 17. **How do you manage your work and life to have a balance?**	
Part-4	
18. **Do you think part-time availability of your job can benefit you to have a better work life balance?*** 19. **What in your opinion can increase the appeal of senior managerial roles to junior women in the pipeline?** 20. **For you, what is the most important characteristic of key managerial/executive personnel positions? ^**	*to make more family-friendly ^(higher salary, power, prestige/ responsibility and challenge/ authority, autonomy/ increased control over own time)
Part-5	
21. **Studies have found that 'in society, generally, women's care responsibility not their work designation is regarded as their primary identity'. Do you agree? What is your opinion on this?**	
22. **After becoming a mother, did you experience any change in your aspirations and attitude towards your**	***If have children**

life and career plan?*	
Part-6	
23. **Do you and your partner share domestic/ household works? Are you satisfied with the arrangements you and your partner have?***	*If have partner
24. **In regard to your career how supportive and encouraging do you think your partner is/ always been?**	
Part-7	
25. **Does your workplace provide flexible work arrangements, and if so, do you make use of these options?**	*if have children
26. **Mostly for what purpose do you use it?**	
27. **Did you use the maternity leave and/or parental leave benefits from your employer?**	
28. **In your opinion, how effective are the family friendly policies in your workplace in improving the working experience of female employees?**	
Part-7	
29. **How supportive and friendly do you find your male colleagues are?**	
30. **How do you think women can best operate at the senior management level of the public service, given the predominance of men in these roles?**	
Part-6	
31. **What do you think is the most important characteristic in a woman to preserve career motivation to make it to the key managerial/executive personnel positions?***	*round up question

If you want to add something which you recon are deem necessary for this research to know, please feel free to discuss.