

Women and Research

Issue 1, 2018

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Mission statement

To foster an active and inclusive research environment in order to enhance high quality research output



Welcome from Angela

Dear Fellow Researchers,

Recently, I saw a social media post from History PhD student, Samantha Knapton. Samantha is studying at Newcastle University (researching Polish Displaced Persons in the British zone of occupation, 1945-1951). She posted the conference bingo card being given to delegates at the European Social Science History Conference held early April.

Bingo boxes on the card included 'Is there a question in there somewhere?', 'name dropping', 'female scholar gets mansplained' and 'unintelligible academese'. No prizes were offered, but anyone who completed the card in one session was advised to visit the conference desk.

I was very interested in this bingo card. First, given the number of related posts on the conference Twitter site, it certainly raised awareness of the contents of the boxes as current and topical issues (and perhaps, as a result, prevented their occurrence?). Second, it must have been a brilliant way of ensuring audience attention - no 'multi-tasking' on mobile devices when it's down to the wire on who gets to shout a personal bingo! :-)

There is a third reason for my interest; there is fun to be had in activities such as playing bingo at work and fun has a hugely positive impact on learning. I think, as we've grown up and left behind the colouring in and Play Doh days, we forget what fun we had in those early classrooms of our childhood. Check out Dorothy Lucardie's (OAM) work in this space.

In her research, fun was found to be a powerful motivator for both learners and teachers to attend classes and a mechanism for encouraging learner concentration and focus. Fun was also found to be as beneficial and important for adults as it is currently considered to be for children's learning; all the more reason we should be having lots of it! Have you used a bingo card at work? If so, please get in touch and tell me about it.

In this issue we consider diversity, academic self-promotion and leadership lessons. Madeleine Archer, who recently joined RMIT University, talks about her experiences on a walk designed to challenge assumptions of identity and opportunity and which, quite literally, encourages us to walk the path of another.

The Women's Wall is a new initiative here in the School of Economics, Finance and Marketing. Professor Lisa Farrell (Economics Professor) had the idea for the wall as a means by which female colleagues could be encouraged to showcase their successes. Dr Leonora Risse and Dr Lauren Gurrieri are the facilitators of the wall and we spoke with Dr Risse about developments to date. Our final article is brought to us by Professor Belinda Tynan, Deputy VC Education and Vice President at RMIT University. Professor Tynan talks with us about her lessons relating to leadership and her self-reflection journey.

Warm regards,

Angela

Editor

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Previous Issues

<http://angeladobele.com/newsletter>

Diversity Walk Reflection and Relevance

by Ms Madeleine Archer



Ms Madeleine Archer

I can attest to the sheer extent of hidden barriers

It is important to walk the walk of another if we are to break them down

My name is Madeleine Archer, and I joined RMIT as a Strategic Innovation Support Officer within the Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Portfolio in August 2017. I am also a final semester Master of Arts Management student also at RMIT; I have special interests in the curation of arts and culture, advocating understanding of social and scientific knowledge and critical reflection through discussion, as well as international relations, health, and the natural world.

As a Support Officer specialising in Communications, I have been fortunate enough to feel supported and confident to pursue the areas within my portfolio that represent my values and interests. Recently I was given the opportunity to participate in a 'Diversity Walk' activity with Medibank. In this activity, I experienced a very practical and visual demonstration of hidden inequalities and social barriers that exist for different individuals in a contemporary, professional organisation. I found the experience to be extremely valuable, observing the open dialogue and willingness to engage that my co-workers demonstrated in response to their given 'personas'.

As an early-career female Post-Graduate student and casual employee of a University, I can attest to the sheer extent of hidden barriers that a young woman can experience, regardless of background, appearance, education, or socio-economic status. A 'Diversity Walk' challenges assumptions of identity and opportunity - quite literally positioning people to 'walk' in the shoes of another person and observing that their progress is determined by whether or not their persona can say 'yes' to various workplace scenarios and opportunities.

This ability to step forward may be hindered by factors as diverse as chronic fatigue limiting full-time work abilities, family or care commitments impacting outside-work-hours capability, cultural and/or religious customs

requiring adherence to particular social constraints, and other factors such as ill health, mental illness, their demographic and lifestyle factors.

An example of a persona is provided below:

You have multiple sclerosis. A symptom of this is extreme fatigue and you are not able to work long hours. High levels of stress have a negative impact on you. You have found doing Pilates and yoga three mornings a week at 7am helps with relaxation. You never miss your class and do this on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday mornings. You refrain from drinking due to the medication that you take. Sometimes your MS flares up and you need to work from home for periods of time.

The beauty of the Diversity Walk activity lies in the perspective it is able to bring to anyone who participates. There is a great humanising effect in acknowledging the experiences of others; of co-workers and managers sharing their own challenges in response to a persona to which they relate, or have experienced in someone close to them. It is a reminder that true change for stronger diversity and equality requires conversation, adaptability, and innovation. Most of all, it calls for leadership that encompasses all three of these factors and more.

The exercise brought home to me the role that we play. Women in Research are leaders. They are passionate, committed, multifaceted, and dedicated. They are also human. By participating in a Diversity Walk activity, assumptions are identified and challenged, and the barriers (that often go unrecognised) that operate in organisations to limit career and development opportunities can be highlighted.

Both individuals and organisations benefit from open dialogue to adjust attitudes, beliefs, and expectations, which can promote greater workplace flexibility and inclusiveness.

Women's Wall: The Writing is There

by Associate Professor Angela R. Dobele

In July 2017, the School of Economics, Finance and Marketing (EFM at RMIT University) launched a new initiative called the Women's Wall. The Women's Wall was designed to support and elevate the profiles of the school's female academic staff and to contribute to RMIT's Gender Equality Action Plan.

The Wall features research and highlights from EFM staff including new publications, grant successes and teaching innovations and awards. It also includes career highlights such as conference presentations, media engagements and other examples where EFM women are making an impact.

The original idea came from Professor Lisa Farrell, an economics professor in EFM. Professor Farrell's vision was for the wall 'to celebrate the achievements of women in the School'. This wonderful initiative was supported by Professor Ian Palmer (PVC and VP, College of Business) and the Head of School of EFM, Professor Tim Fry.

Dr Leonora Risse and Dr Lauren Gurrieri have run with the idea and we now have regularly updated and celebrated achievements on the Women's Wall in the EFM building.

The idea behind a Women's Wall showcasing achievements makes sense from an inspiration perspective. We draw inspiration from a lot of different things around us, and for career inspiration we may look to role models.

But when we look at academia, we often don't see a lot of women at the very top; estimates of the percentage of women in key leadership positions are typically around 20%. So it is crucially important that young and new female academics see successful female academics who can serve as role models.

Dr Risse describes the Women's Wall as 'designed to foster a culture where women feel more confident and comfortable about

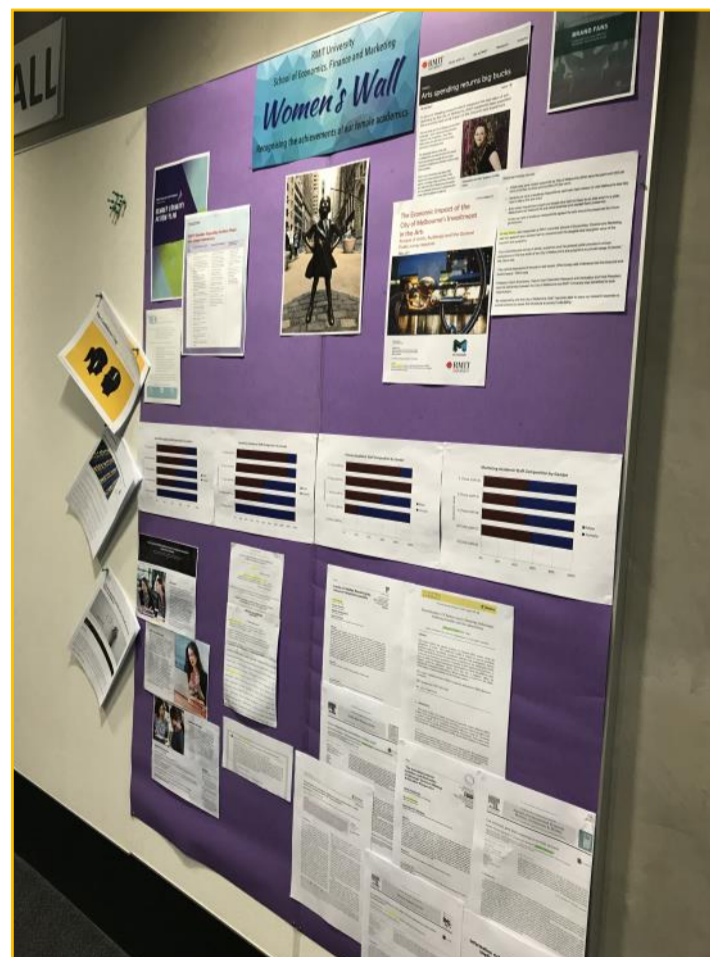
sharing news about their recent work and achievements.'

She goes on to explain that 'In an academic sphere, being able to promote, disseminate and talk openly about your work is something that men tend to do more willingly than women. Yet it is one of the important ingredients to career success.'

Dr Risse adds that 'we understand that many women feel hesitant about promoting themselves, so we also want to encourage people to nominate other women whose work should be recognised. Often women tend to do a better job of acknowledging and celebrating the work of others rather than ourselves!'

I look forward to seeing how this initiative will evolve over time. It is a wonderful idea.

If you would like more details or want to hear more about this initiative please contact either Dr Risse (leonora.risse@rmit.edu.au) or Dr Gurrieri (lauren.gurrieri@rmit.edu.au).



Women's Wall: Located level 10, Building 80, 445 Swanston St, Melbourne, Australia

The Women's Wall is designed to support and elevate the profiles of the school's female academic staff

Designed to foster a culture where women can share news about their recent work and achievements

The Women's Wall

Leadership Lessons and the Importance of Self-Reflection

by Professor Belinda Tynan



Professor Belinda Tynan

My career is one of transitions

A key leadership lesson is to know oneself

When Angela asked me to write something for the Women and Research newsletter, I must admit letting out a big sigh because, while I rarely take time to be reflective about my own journey, I frequently counsel others to do so! So I suppose what is good for the goose is also good for the gander.

I joined the higher education ranks, as a lecturer at the School of Music at the University of Western Australia in 1998, after a successful career in school education for 10 years. I also took a huge pay cut as my experiences - although hired for them - didn't seem to count in the academic ranks. That I had successfully lead two large music departments, was an accomplished educator and had a National reputation counted for little. Yet, I was hired on the strength of this experience. I stepped through a door which has ultimately brought me to my current role as DVCE at RMIT.

This journey of 19 years has taken me to some fabulous places such as New Zealand, Singapore, Scotland and the United Kingdom. In addition, I have learned loads about myself and feel enriched by the experience. Living and working in other countries has been great; you grow in unexpected ways. Coming back to Melbourne after 25 years has been challenging but I am loving every moment of it.

On reflection, I think my life/work journey has been one of transitions - not necessarily planned, but certainly framed by the expectations laid out by an academic community. In the early days I had very little understanding of this, having come from a different sector. But, it doesn't take long to be inducted into a culture and you acculturate surprisingly quickly. It isn't always a good culture, however, and being able to question and keep your own sense of purpose is critical.

There have really only been two steps in my journey where things were really out of kilter

and I made the decision to move on. When my values were crossed and I could see a lack of fairness and equity I have made the decision to go. I have done this twice now in my career, I call it 'sniffing the wind'. It is my internal radar and compass - it has on the whole served me well.

I have learned over time to be more attuned to myself and if there are any leadership lessons I would share they sit around 'knowing oneself'. And, by knowing oneself, I mean quite deeply. Your strengths, Achilles heels, ways of behaving and your impact on others. I'd say I am still a work in progress, but my aspiration is to achieve a level of authenticity that I and others are really comfortable with. I want to lead in a way that inspires others and is authentic and deeply honest to who I am. How this plays out for the good of others is very important to me.

My career, as I have mentioned, has been one of transitions across countries and disciplines. While I started in music education, I later crafted for myself a whole new area of research and interest in pedagogy; the intersections of academic perceptions of teaching and learning and how they can be agents of change.

I have a huge passion for how learners actually learn and the role that teachers play. It remains a concern for me that, knowing that learner outcomes are improved when teachers are qualified, we are still debating the professionalisation of our workforce in higher education. Yet, the literature is compelling. There is more than 30 years of research around what constitutes a great teacher, but we have great difficulty agreeing on what that role is in higher education.

I liken it to surgeons; we wouldn't go to an unqualified surgeon for a back operation. But we will let unqualified teachers teach the next generation in our classrooms. Why do we leave that to chance?

Notwithstanding the gender bias two tips stand out:

Develop trust in others

Believe passionately in what you are doing

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The PhD has never, and will never be, the pedagogical ticket to great teaching. I look forward to these discussions at RMIT.

I still can't accept that we do not fully recognise the importance of the field of higher education. I have researched successfully, I have published in great journals, book chapters and presented keynotes at conferences. I have received competitive funding of not insignificant sums. I ran a research centre.

Yet, even when I won one of the largest government grants ever received, \$3.6million and then followed up two years later with a further \$2.1 million I have been told that it is *just* education research. Somehow that is not as important as other research. I don't accept this view. There are many staff who are researching their practice and the praxis of their discipline and teaching. Not capitalising on their hard work is an opportunity lost for mostly teaching oriented Universities.

This is one of the reasons why an early projects I have engaged with (Project METIS) has been rewriting the promotion criteria so that teaching can be recognised for its importance at RMIT and more broadly. As I now also move into supporting RMIT's Vocational Education sector more closely, I'm looking forward to exploring the unique teaching environment of this community.

I have built a career on the scholarship of learning and teaching and will no doubt defend its place as worthy and important for a long time to come!

Building a career based on learning and teaching has taken me to some interesting and unexpected places. I have experienced a

variety of what I might refer to as 'gender issues' that I am sure many readers will have experienced. Sometimes this discrimination is subtle, like being left out of conversations. How many times have I wondered 'How did he get that opportunity?' Not being in the right place at the right time, especially when in one workplace many decisions were made 'down the pub' on a Friday evening.

Other times discrimination stares you down and you can stand paralysed in shock wondering 'what happened there?!' You thought you were in the groove! I will never forget the day a very senior male colleague said to me, in front of others, 'you need more decorum, Tynan.' It was completely out of context, loaded with presumption and created an awkward, horrifying silence. Just exactly what did that mean? Who was this man to say this to me from his privileged and powered position? I could have decked him I was so angry and humiliated. But, I broke the ice, laughed, and put all at ease - demonstrating my 'decorum' perhaps. I quote this anecdote often now and I laugh about it. But at the time it was incredibly destructive and inappropriate.

These experiences notwithstanding, I have also experienced some great sponsors - and two I call out for what they taught me. I think one of their most important lessons is to develop trust with, and in others, and believe passionately in whatever you do. For me, there is satisfaction in that. I love my work.

I also subscribe to the notion that in the end you do what you can with what you have. Making the possible from the impossible isn't fair. Mind you, with my personality type, I'll still give it a go!

Associate Professor Angela R. Dobele is an academic research professional with a passion for word of mouth (wom) marketing, from traditional face-to-face through to social media and electronic wom. Her research interests extend to marketing education and education issues including academic workload and student performance.

Angela is an experienced quantitative and qualitative researcher who has published 50+ papers. In the field of wom, she has contributed to the understanding of the key drivers of positive wom and the organisational strategies that facilitate it. She is currently developing a framework to assist commercial marketers improve the effectiveness of blogs and micro-blogs: building on co-creation and collaboration to communicate with loyal and passionate community members.

In the field of education, Angela is currently working with Griffith University's Professor Sharyn Rundle-Thiele to develop an understanding of the full impact of ERA and the differences in academic workload and performance on promotion.

Angela has developed strong links with industry with a commitment to bridging the relationship between practitioners and academia. Her current industry projects involve research into tourism, life insurance and blood donation.

