

Baked beans on toast and beating the gender odds

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Baked beans on toast and beating the gender odds

Abstract

This invited Commentary examines responses to the book, *Beating the Odds: A practical guide to navigating sexism in Australian universities*. The book is relevant to the theme of the Special Issue, as women leading teaching and learning are doing so in a sexist environment that limits their opportunities to lead and that under-values their contributions when they do manage to achieve leadership roles. The editors invited me to write this Commentary, explaining that they were seeking "... a contemporary, thought-provoking piece by a leader in the topic of the Special Issue". They suggested the Commentary might be "...an examination of the impact of the book and the emotive response it has generated in higher education". Reactions to the book are discussed in terms of: resonance with the book's contents; value for young/early career women; value for men; mixed emotions and value in taking action. The Commentary ends with a call to action related to baked beans on toast.

Practitioner Notes

1. Understand the odds of succeeding in higher education
2. Understand the forces working against your advancement
3. Strategise your career
4. Do more of what counts and less of what doesn't count
5. Form a support squad

Keywords

Gender inequality, leadership

[...] *Your book influenced me to take a couple of actions I wouldn't have normally...I asked for \$10,000 more in salary when offered a new contract (got it).* – Anonymous, private LinkedIn message (2021).

Introduction

In June 2021, I was asked to join the editorial committee of this Special Issue of the Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice (Butler-Henderson et al., 2022) that sought to examine the leadership challenges and opportunities for women in higher education learning and teaching. Less than one month earlier, in May 2021, I had released a book (Devlin, 2021) related to this topic, *Beating the Odds: A practical guide to navigating sexism in Australian universities*. The title was deliberately both an accurate description of the contents of the book and a provocation: It assumes that the existence of sexism in our hallowed halls was so significant that a book on how to manage it could be possible and even useful. It is my view that the book is relevant to the theme of the Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice Special Issue, as women leading teaching and learning are doing so in a sexist environment that limits their opportunities to lead and that under-values their contributions when they do manage to achieve leadership roles.

In August 2021, the Editors of this Special Issue on women in learning and teaching leadership, Professor Kerryn Butler-Henderson and Professor Angela Carbone, invited me to write a commentary for this issue. They explained that they were seeking "... a contemporary, thought-provoking piece by a leader in the topic of the Special Issue". They suggested that the launch of my book made me a suitable author for this commentary. Professors Butler-Henderson and Carbone suggested the commentary might be "...an examination of the impact of the book and the emotive response it has generated in higher education"

Initial responses to the book

I was pleased that on publication, my book was immediately popular across the sector in Australia and overseas. The book became a finalist in a national career book award just weeks after it was released. It sold out and went into a second print run just over 10 weeks after it was launched. A Vice-Chancellor heard about the book and wrote to me to ask for an advance copy so she could use it for an annual lecture on gender equity. Three tertiary education executive teams ordered a copy of the book for every member of the senior team. One university ordered 30 copies. One (male) Deputy Vice-Chancellor offered to host book launches in several states.

An entity called HEDx – a higher education brand strategy and culture firm – interviewed me and co-authored a subsequent media article on the book's topic. They then invited me to collaborate to launch a new aspect of their work, HEDx Live Events, with a launch of the book in Queensland. Almost 300 people from nine universities – each of which agreed to sponsor the event and send 30 staff – signed up to attend this statewide event (subsequently postponed and then rescheduled as a partly pre-recorded, partly livestreamed event because of COVID restrictions).

I have received numerous invitations to be interviewed for various media, give talks at universities and professional association gatherings, and to participate in podcasts. At the time of writing, I have given four invited addresses in various fora, including an equity practitioner's event and an MBA class on *Gendered Workplaces*. I have agreed to give another eight talks over the next few months. Several positive reviews of the book have been published. Readers have come back and bought additional copies for friends, relatives, and colleagues. A book group centred around the book has met. And still the orders roll in.

Sources of data

Responses to the book used to compile this Commentary came from a range of sources. Prior to receiving the request for the commentary for this Special Issue, I had already received several emotive and responses to the book. These took the forms of:

- public comments on social media,
- public reviews on websites from which the book had been purchased, and
- private messages to me via email, and other platforms/services.

I have treated the public comments as such and have included some in the current Commentary. I sought permission from people who wrote to me to privately to use their comments in this piece, either with or without attribution, according to their preference and some of their comments are included. In addition, in August 2021, after being asked to write this Commentary, I emailed a mailing list of over 550 people that I have compiled of relatives, friends, colleagues and others who have bought the book or in some other way demonstrated interest in the book. I shared the request from Professors Butler-Henderson and Carbone and invited those on the list to write to me and share their reflections on, emotive and other responses to, and thoughts about the book. Over August and September, readers sent me their comments and I have drawn on some of these responses in this Commentary too. I am grateful to everyone who contributed and informed this reflection, named or not.

Women in leadership in universities

It is increasingly well-understood that there are gender disparities in academia. In Australia, as of January 2021, of 37 public university chancellors, just 10 were women (27%) and 27 (73%) were men. It was the same for vice-chancellors: 10 women and 27 men. Together, this means that in early 2021, men held 54 of the 74 top jobs in Australian higher education.

While deeply disappointing, these figures are not surprising given that men also dominate the upper levels of Australian academia. DESE's (2019) latest available figures show:

- 86 percent more men than women at associate professor and professor levels D and E (10,363 men, 5,562 women), and
- 11 percent more men than women at senior lecturer level C (6,355 men, 5,724 women).

These same figures show that women dominate the lower levels of Australian academia with:

- 25 percent more women than men at lecturer level B (7,428 men, 9,253 women), and
- 15 percent more women than men at associate lecturer level A (4,426 men and 5,093 women).

My own experience over around 15 years in university leadership roles – including in Acting Vice-Chancellor, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Executive Director and Director roles – was often of being one of a very small number of women, or the only woman, in the room. Sadly, some of my experience was that I was sometimes in the room primarily 'for optics' and definitely not for the breadth or depth of alternative perspective or insights – or contribution to improved performance – that I might bring. One senior leader I worked with actually told me – and more than a little bit crossly – that my job was to *agree with him*, not to have, or share, views that differed from his. While I understand and appreciate the importance and value of a united front between senior leaders, it was the complete lack of interest in my perspectives and potential contributions that disappointed me.

Women in senior leadership, of learning and teaching and more broadly, bring a potential wealth of benefits, including perspectives that differ from those of the men historically selected for university leadership roles. These women also bring a keen understanding of the significant value of diversity and inclusivity in strategic thinking, decision-making and care of those in your charge as a leader. In addition, women help improve the performance of an organisation. As I report in the book, journalist Annabelle Crabb (2020) reported on a world-first study that shows a link between greater gender diversity and business success. Specifically, the Australian study found that a female CEO increased market value by five percent – that’s nearly \$80 million to an average ASX200 company. The evidence shows that increasing the number of women in other key leadership positions by 10 percent or more increases a company’s market value by 6.6 percent, or an average \$105 million. While universities aren’t usually looking to make profits *per se*, they do need to be financially viable. The evidence suggests that, in the increasingly competitive, market-driven and accountable world in which universities operate, having women in the university leadership ranks will help their performance.

It follows that having women in learning and teaching leadership positions in universities will enhance performance in this critically important area. However, as my book discusses, female university leaders face specific challenges. These include, among others:

- gendered expectations that they will behave certain ways and accept lower level work and focus on serving others’ careers,
- being invisible to decision makers,
- having to work with or under benevolent sexists and/or nice-guy misogynists,
- being interrupted by men (‘maninterrupted’) in meetings,
- having their ideas appropriated by men (‘bro-propriated’),
- perceived style ‘problems’ that men just don’t ever seem to have (‘not being nice enough’),
- having the ‘incorrect’ balance of gravitas/humility, and
- being gossiped about, disparaged, bullied, mobbed, gaslighted, threatened, ostracised and pushed out of leadership roles.

That is why this Special Issue is so important. It is often assumed that the dearth of female leaders in universities is a matter of a confidence deficit in women or that a simple fix like a mentoring program will sort things out. As the papers in this Special Issue show, the situation for female leaders needs much more complex solutions than these.

It is certainly not all bad as a female senior leader. I have had the opportunity to conceptualise and enact change and progress that improved many aspects of the teaching and learning and student related strategies, plans and operations of the universities in which I have served. Other women I know have had similar opportunities and impacts as leaders. I am particularly proud of the work I have done to improve teaching and learning and the student experience, to improve awareness of gender inequity and to provide professional development/learning opportunities for both academic and professional staff and for emerging and established leaders. Many other women are similarly proud of their work. Along with many senior women, I remain a strong advocate for women to strive for leadership roles so they too can bring power and life to their values and convictions.

Wider context

In early 2021 in Australia, now former staff member Brittany Higgins made an allegation of rape by her senior colleague in a federal Minister’s office and of a lack of proper care in the aftermath of that incident. At around the same time, there was also an allegation of another rape by a sitting Cabinet Minister (an allegation he strenuously denies). With these incidents in the public spotlight, many women had the feeling that, colloquially speaking, they had had enough – of women being sexually assaulted, sexually harassed and being the subject of sexism. After weeks of intense media attention and discussion on social media platforms prompted by these rape allegations,

thousands upon thousands of women and their supporters marched for justice across Australia in March 2021.

What followed in terms of a response from the sitting Prime Minister, including reminding the women that they were fortunate to be allowed to march and not to ‘be met with bullets’ as might happen in other countries, and refusing to undertake any proper investigation, did little to satisfy concerns. Subsequent rearrangements of Ministerial portfolios were widely perceived as an attempt to mollify rather than address the deep concerns about how women are treated at work. In the weeks and months that followed, significant numbers of disclosures of sexual assault, including on social media, were evident, as was individual and collective anger, among girls and women in particular. It was in this context that the book *Beating the Odds: A practical guide to navigating sexism in Australian universities* (Devlin, 2021) was launched in May 2021.

While this timing was coincidental, given that books take many months to be conceived, researched, written, edited, designed, laid out, printed, and marketed and given that no-one could have foreseen the allegations coming from federal parliament nor their impacts, the timing mattered. The release of the book at a time of heightened awareness, dialogue and emotions around related topics are likely to have influenced how the book was received and the responses and reactions to the book. The book was warmly welcomed, embraced, and celebrated, perhaps in a way it might not have been had the context been different.

Reactions to the book

I have considered all the public responses to the book that I am aware of and all the private responses that I have permission to use. I have presented them in five categories. These are:

1. Resonance with the book’s content
2. Value for young/early career women
3. Value for men
4. Mixed emotions
5. Value in taking action.

Resonance with the book’s content

Many responses to the book referred to resonance with someone’s experience and/or validation of that experience. The following give a sense of the sorts of responses that fell into this category.

The book arrived safely yesterday, at a very serendipitous moment. I'd spent the day in an email exchange where (again) my saying 'no' to some additional teaching was not the end of the conversation but sparked a perverse negotiation to try to persuade me otherwise, including through escalation to the head of department. So I read Chapter 2 and 3 with glee! Then just got on with an important research task, re-drawing some figures for a paper proof – Anonymous, email.

Your thoughts, facts and discussions resonate with me so I thought I would reach out. I was a Senior Lecturer, promoted without a PhD, based on the quality of my work. My mission statement “To educate people with truth to improve or restore their lives” steered my 30 year career ... albeit a considerable time spent part-time and 3 years on maternity leave. I left [the university] long before I intended and just as my career was becoming my priority due to a “Boys Club” operating in ...[my Faculty]. With my knowledge of health and wellbeing, I knew if I stayed my anger about what was happening would make me unwell! – Anonymous, email.

Your book validated so many of my experiences at work and made me more determined to 'beat the odds' ... for example on one occasion, I was at a [university] function standing next to ... [a colleague, 'X'] when a local business CEO approached us and said 'Hi X, is

this your lovely wife?". X was embarrassed and quickly said 'No, this is Penny, the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Y', at which the CEO glared at me, then turned his back on me, grabbed X's arm and guided him towards the bar, saying 'Bloody women', as he walked away! – Professor Penny Paliadelis, email.

Curse you and your fake moustaches Marcia Devlin, PhD, GAICD. I'm supposed to be finishing preparation for my wonderful ...MBA... intensive weekend... But your deeply insightful and brutally honest book on being a woman in Higher Ed which arrived yesterday has me laughing out loud, nodding furiously with agreement, reading out random passages to my bunny-in-the-headlights partner (who also loves to cook btw) and determined to finish it tonight. You even have me wanting to return with a vengeance to the sector I loved for over 20 years and left a year ago. Such effective writing...It ALL resonates – Kate Gaffney, LinkedIn.

Devlin lays bare the shocking (but not unsurprising) reality facing so many successful female leaders in almost any industry. As a female reader, you are sure to recognise the universality of coping with mansplainers, maninterruptors, manipulators, saboteurs and the just outright offensive colleague. Interspersed with the tragic-comic personal stories, humour and lessons learned, is verifiable data, trends and evidence based analysis demonstrating sexism and its fallout goes way beyond personal prejudices into institutional, cultural and systemic containment and suppression of women – Dianne Semmens, Google review.

As well as my work in higher education, I serve on a school-related board and am a registered psychologist. A small number of comments to a presentation on the book's contents that I gave in a higher education context that I placed on LinkedIn came from outside our sector:

Wise words Marcia Devlin, PhD, GAICD. I love ... your accurate observations. This could also be a parallel narrative for women leaders in our school sector – Dr Toni Meath, LinkedIn.

Thank you for this Marcia Devlin, PhD, GAICD. Sadly it's not just the HE institutions. As you know 80% of psychologists are women. The industry body[,] the Australian Psychological Society [APS] "bestows" Honorary Fellowships to people for "extraordinary" and "distinguished" contributions to the APS and psychology. Of the current 15 Honorary Fellows, 12 or 80% are MALE. So frustrating – Isla Carboon, LinkedIn.

Some responses to the book highlighted resonance for the reader in a specific area or with a specific idea. The following are examples of these sorts of responses.

Just finished reading this great book by Marcia Devlin, Highly recommend colleagues (regardless of gender) in the university sector to add this to their list. Insightful, funny and practical. My key takeaways [are] 'Get an Attitude' and 'Learn to strategise' – Zeenat Fayaz, LinkedIn.

Am reading your book for the second time now and getting even more out of it. Now working on my attitude! Thank you – Dr Jo Pyke, LinkedIn.

Time for women to stop doing the 'office housework' – Kathryn Shine, Twitter.

I'm currently reviewing promotions processes at UWS and Beating the Odds and the phrase "academic housework" is getting a fair bit of air time. So making a difference – Professor Jonathon Powles, Twitter.

The concept of developing a support squad around you is also highly valuable and great advice to everyone, as is recognising and minimising the time you spend with those who sap your energy and aren't supportive – Claire Shaw, email.

Bro-propriation had me seriously thinking I had a problem with MY communication techniques... I was told outright as a bright young thing 20 years ago to not attract too

much attention or be too successful. . . too often my name has just "accidentally" been dropped from a final product with a cute "oops. We didn't realise" response when challenged. ... one manager told me I was an exceptionally gifted academic but he wasn't renewing my contract because he wanted to have sex with me and "having you down the hall is a distraction" ... I've been passed over for less qualified/ experienced men and then even asked to mentor and support them in their new role – Kate Gaffney, LinkedIn.

The responses to the book that fell into this category may be relevant to female readers of this Special Issue of the Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice who are seeking to lead, or already leading, teaching and learning in universities. Those readers experiencing challenges in their leadership might find validation as female leaders through the reactions of others. Understanding that you are not 'the problem' and further understanding that it is the sexist structures, norms, and practices in which you work that *are* 'the problem' might assist female leaders to keep doing the outstanding teaching and learning leadership work they do and encourage younger/early career women to keep aspiring for leadership roles.

Value for young/early career women

A second recurring theme in responses to the book was the specific perceived value of the book for young women and women at earlier stages of their careers. This was an expansion of the first theme in a sense, with the addition of a view that the points that resonated with readers were of particular value to women earlier in their careers. Many women wrote to me to let me know that they had read and then passed on the book to their daughters or nieces to read. In addition, here are a sample of reactions I received that fell into this category:

A wonderful resource for a young woman starting out in academia – I know you said you wished you had this book when you were younger, so I thank you for writing it and paving the way for the younger generation! – Brittany Hayward-Brown, LinkedIn.

As a young woman experiencing barriers to leadership roles in higher education, I struggled for many years to find resources that would support my particular situation. Marcia sums up the experiences of myself and many of my peers and helps to frame a strategy forward in navigating the difficult pathway to leadership in Higher Ed. This book is a must-have for any woman wanting to advance her career, to life her profile and/or to get recognition beyond her immediate peer group – Professor Lisa Scharoun, email.

As I read Marcia's book I thought back on my own academic career. It never occurred to me to advocate on my own behalf when I saw my work disappear into the ether of someone else's career. If I had read this book I would have learnt to be strategic, to be less grateful and more rambunctious. Such important life lessons for all young people! – Dr Toni Ryan, LinkedIn.

One of the forces that holds women back from aspiring to learning and teaching and other leadership in universities is their experiences as women in a highly sexist workplace. As is the case for readers generally, these sorts of responses showed that the book's contents might be particularly helpful to female readers of this special issue who are earlier in their career who are aspiring to learning and teaching leadership roles. Understanding the career risks of being asked to do more teaching, knowing that there are 'boys clubs' to be navigated and being aware that you may be more likely to be assumed to be the wife of the 'real' leader rather than the actual leader, for example, can be particularly useful for younger women as pre-warnings about potential traps ahead. Having 'take-aways' as articulated in the previous category of, for example, careful choices of attitude, strategising your career, avoiding the academic/office housework, and realising that challenges and obstacles that you face are not of your making can also help younger/earlier career women reach leadership goals. If we are to have more women in teaching and learning leadership as per the focus of this Special Issue, in the absence of systematic management of

sexism and its impacts, ideas for women to self-navigate to get to these leadership roles are critical.

Value for men

I was very pleasantly surprised by the number of men who responded – and responded positively – to the book and/or its launch. Some indicative responses:

Congrats...Marcia – your humour, wit and energy is uplifting and your message on point! In your explanation of good/bad girl gender judo, I was reminded by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's quote; "well-behaved women seldom make history". Let's hope this handbook is the inspiration for many. – Mark Young, LinkedIn

Just finished Marcia Devlin, PhD, GAICD's excellent new book. Highly recommend anyone (regardless of gender) working in the University and Government sector to add this one to your list! Insightful, hilarious and motivating are just a few words to describe the experience – Luke Jarquin, LinkedIn

Wonderful work Marcia Devlin, PhD, GAICD – Bryce Ives, LinkedIn.

Just finished it! Fantastic read! – Professor Braden Hill, Twitter.

One comment came from my friend and colleague Dr Matt Brett by email. I quote Matt in the book. In a subsequent email to me, he says:

One of the central messages of the book is blokes taking the credit for things when they shouldn't. Putting this into practice[,] you cite me and what I said in one section. I did indeed say that to you – but the credit for this should be attributed to an early career female academic in a meeting discussing gender equity in research and the advice given to them from one of their senior female academic mentors. Back to impact, credit needs to be attributed to the source, micro anecdote by micro anecdote at a time, and the book has me playing closer attention to how I'm man-splaining, man-terupting and man-taking-credit-for-things-I-don't deserve. Hoping other male readers do the same – Dr Matt Brett, email.

And finally, several men wrote to me indicating they were rethinking their behaviour and role in all of this. Here's one example:

As someone who grew up in a small highly conservative town and moved into a larger city, I often feel on the backfoot of the being the best person I can be; there is a lot to learn. Having had a childhood of extreme poverty also makes it hard to think about how your actions affect others sometimes; it's difficult to be inclusive when you're struggling yourself. I read Marcia's book as a way to explore what the top echelons of academic looked like, and found myself feeling both really comfortable (in her writing style) and uncomfortable (in realising I've seen the same things happen here) reading it. I was reminded of just how differently women have it (currently), and can recall instances where, as a very junior academic I have seen the same things occur but unsure of how to respond as a bystander. The survivalist mentality I grew up with ... was challenged by this book, with me seeing spaces from the book where I could apply the same principles in my own workplace. I'm not sure if it was meant to have this effect, as a man, but I felt empowered to be the change; to create opportunities for women to grow as I do. Thanks for taking the time to help us grow and learn from your experience – Anonymous, email.

Having men on board to support changes in gender equality is critical to have women in teaching and learning leadership roles – and succeeding in these roles requires the support of men in universities. Male readers of this Special Issue who want to help women may be interested to know that I provide a section specifically for men in the book. The section includes advice around: intervening when women are manterrupted in meetings; stopping women's ideas being bro-

propriated; and explicitly and deliberately supporting women's contributions both publicly and privately. And, of course, there is plenty of advice for men on doing more of the office/academic housework to free up the women who usually do this work so they have time to lead and to advance their careers.

Mixed emotions

Some responses to the book indicated a mixture of positive and negative emotions. The three quotes below are illustrative of these types of 'mixed emotions' responses to the book.

My emotive response upon reading your book was mixed. At the beginning it made me feel angry/slightly depressed/crestfallen, where you very clearly and quantitatively outline just how the odds are stacked against women rising to the highest levels in academia (Australia focused, but let's face it, it's a global issue). But, your re-assurance/encouragement to keep going, and advice on how to navigate the system, respond to sexism, and avoid falling into common traps have lit a fire in me to keep trying, to beat the odds, and bring a team of people along with me on the journey - women, men, all gender identities. Who knows if I'll make it yet, but your book will certainly be re-read to help me along the way – Dr. Caitlin Moore ECR, email.

Just finished reading the book. It is sad to hear more of the sexism stories at universities, where we should promote equity, morals, and knowledge. A fantastic book that shares sexism issues with a funny tone. If you are looking to improve gender equity and learn how to navigate a toxic situation - you must read this. Easy to read, funny and good pieces of advice given in this book! – Associate Professor Fion Lim, LinkedIn.

As a female tertiary education professional from a non-English speaking background and culture, your book resonates strongly with me. With over 30+ years of experience in the same Tertiary Education industry, reading your book made me recall many of my own similar experiences and made me reflect on my determination and actions to create awareness and change with the goal that it would lead to a paradigm shift within my lifetime. There is comfort in knowing you didn't imagine 'it' and that the adverse impact of unchallenged and systemic gender bias is real and cumulative. There is a deep sadness, that despite the fact that this negative impact and the slow progression to something better for individuals, their families and businesses is being measured and clearly articulated, that there is not a greater collective willingness to deal with it faster. There is a regained confidence that we, who are willing, can and will do this in my lifetime. With the increased number of female leaders in a range of industries describing their experiences, calling it out, having public conversations and proposing practical and workable solutions, it makes me feel safer and supported to do what I can, where I can and when I can. The frustration and anger in me is shifting to a determined and potent calm – Anonymous, email.

Readers of the Special Issue may have similar mixed emotions about the Special Issue. Some may wonder why such a Special Issue is necessary in 2022 and on reading the excellent articles in this issue, feel angry, frustrated, depressed, sad and a myriad of negative emotions about the fact that we still need to deal with sexism and women being excluded and held back from leadership roles. Concurrently, the same readers may feel comforted by the facts that they are not alone in tackling their own challenges, that there are initiatives such as the Special Issue to raise awareness of and share approaches to managing these challenges. Readers may also feel encouraged – even that they have a fire lit within – and greater confidence to tackle the obstacles and challenges to, and odds against, their leadership ambitions.

Value in taking action

The final category of responses to the book, *Beating the Odds*, indicated that the focus on practical strategies and action was welcome. Typical responses included:

It is practical, honest, and real. It is collegial, empowering, and sisterly. It speaks directly to the real lived experience of women within the universities, and captures brilliantly – and with wonderful humour – the kinds of issues, barriers, and men that we confront. Best of all, it provides strategic, clever, positive and good humoured solutions to assist us to navigate this world and beat the odds – Julie Fletcher, email.

[The book] ... goes the extra mile in giving some really practical and entertaining suggestions on how to respond and act on the sexism that is alive and well in our universities. Even if those exact strategies aren't for every reader, they are a great starting point for thinking about how to recognise and subvert the sexist practices that create such uneven odds for women to succeed in the university system – Dr Joanne Pyke, Google review.

From the introduction, which clearly sets out the what, why and how of this practical and persuasive work, to the conclusion and recommendations, this is a book that says what it means and means what it says. ... for me the strength of this work is the argument it makes based on lived experience and its practical value for anyone seeking strategies to beat the odds – Anonymous, Google review.

It is simultaneously a practical guide to navigating career barriers/blockers and a socio-political call to action. It [is] ... a searing expose of the outrageous gender discrimination which continues to permeate our 'enlightened' corridors of learning – Dianne Semmens, Google review.

Lots of wise advice by @MarciaDevlin who has helped me and hundreds of other academic women write successful promotion applications – Associate Professor Debra Smith, Twitter. (Note: Debra recently achieved another promotion and is now a Professor).

The Journal Special Issue, similarly, points to the value in taking action. The fact that the special issue was conceived and supported and has resulted in such high-quality work speaks to the value of taking action. That the Special Issue then contains practical advice for women seeking to lead learning and teaching or already doing so highlights that value. **Konjarski et al.'s** article about women helping women through a community of practice and **Harvey et al.'s** detailed article about how women can claim their contributions to leadership are but two examples of papers that outline how action by women themselves can result in significant change.

Will the book change the world?

As I draft this Commentary in late 2021, the following have occurred in Australia over the past few weeks:

- the ABC has aired a special series via their flagship program 7.30, called 'Why Women Are Angry'. It examines the gender pay gap, domestic violence, sexual harassment and the rest,
- the Prime Minister's Office has ceased an investigation into who knew about the alleged rape of Brittany Higgins and when,
- there has been no investigation into the allegations of rape against the sitting Cabinet Minister (which he strenuously denies) but the move he made while attorney General to close the Family Court has been actioned, and
- after sitting on it for 18 months, the federal government has only supported 6 of the 55 recommendations of the landmark *Respect at Work* report by Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Kate Jenkins.

As I finalise the draft of this article in early 2022, the 2021 Australian of the Year, Grace Tame has been subjected to intense media scrutiny and widespread and at times very strong criticism for *not smiling* in a staged photo opportunity with the current Prime Minister. In the same week as

Tame's 'Smilegate', a male celebrity was accused of punching and kicking a woman. As many commentators have recently noted, the male celebrity's alleged violent and criminal behaviour did not attract nearly as much media attention or criticism as the behaviour of Ms Tame in choosing not to smile at a particular moment. Women leading in universities are leading in this national context. They are being subjected to gendered expectations and sexism every day. The book *Beating the Odds* speaks to that daily, weekly, monthly and for some, career-long experience. To use the words of long-time academic, now CEO, Kate Gaffney, the book *Beating the Odds* has "touched a nerve".

Final word(s)

The editors of this Special Issue, Professors Butler-Henderson and Carbone, asked me to provide "an examination of the impact of the book...". In the book, I share an anecdote about feeding my then nine-year old son completely tasteless dahl and rice for dinner and later make the assertion that baked beans on toast *is* a meal. I do the latter with a shaky argument about how tall both of my sons are, despite having had to eat (bad) food I cooked as I raised them, and an anecdote about a non-dietician agreeing with me about the baked beans. The assertion taps into the collective guilt mothers feel at not being 'perfect' housewives and about cutting corners in their child raising so they can also focus on their careers.

This is one of my favourite responses to the book from an anonymous colleague best described as 'a retired chemist/biochemist with whom I once helped teach science to non scientists'. I will give her the (nearly) last word:

Baked beans on toast is most definitely a meal...was I the not-really-dietician who gave you the lecture on protein balance? I certainly used to give it in my biochem lectures...hoping they actually retained the scientific part about the proteins. Basically anything with both vegies and grain will give you the right protein balance, and the vegies part will provide vitamins. Exactly the same with the nutrition balance of your dahl and rice. Flavour has nothing to do with nutrition. My second granddaughter would agree with your son at age 9 about that –Anonymous, email.

My fervent hope is that women in – and aspiring to – leadership in teaching and learning and more broadly, in academia and beyond, all over Australia and the world, will read the book and – with mixed emotions if necessary – buy up big on baked beans. Not only are they a meal (if placed on toast, according to a retired chemist/biochemist), doing so will help these women to put themselves under significantly less pressure to be perfect housewives – at home and at work. This in turn will save their time, energy, and goodwill, which they can then use to beat the odds against them and help them achieve their leadership goals, plans and ambitions.

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