



# Work/Life Balance For Senior Women Executives: Issues Of Inclusion?

*Stream 19: Gender Perspectives & Management*

**Judith K. Pringle**

*University of Auckland*

**Su Olsson,**

*Massey University*

**Robyn Walker**

*Massey University*

Dept of Management & Employment Relations,  
University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019,  
Auckland  
Aotearoa/ New Zealand  
Email: [j.pringle@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:j.pringle@auckland.ac.nz)  
Fax: 64-9-3737477  
Phone: 64-9-3737999

Dept of Communication & Journalism,  
Massey University,  
Private Bag 11 222,  
Palmerston North  
Aotearoa/ New Zealand  
Email: [S.C.Olsson@massey.ac.nz](mailto:S.C.Olsson@massey.ac.nz)

Dept of Management,  
Massey University,  
Private Bag 11 222,  
Palmerston North.  
Aotearoa/ New Zealand  
Email: [R.J.Walker@massey.ac.nz](mailto:R.J.Walker@massey.ac.nz)

**Work in progress, not to be quoted without the authors' permission.**

## **Work/life balance for senior women executives: Issues of inclusion?**

### **Abstract**

Much of the work-family literature has focussed on the dilemmas of balance. Key assumptions underlying the concept of work-life balance are that work and life are separate and that balance between the two spheres is sought. Women's inability to achieve work-life balance has been part of a discourse of exclusion, particularly from senior management roles. A counter discourse of inclusion, where balance is not a central concern, is currently absent within the gender and management research. This paper examines the experiences of women who have achieved senior management positions in public and private sector organisation. The women's accounts reveal a multiplicity of challenges, excitements and negotiated spaces. We contend that these women construct a discourse of inclusion that focuses on work-life choices, which displaces the myth of work-life balance. Finally, we suggest that the experiences of these 'highly successful' women need to be included in gendered management literature.

## **Introduction**

Much of the work-family literature has focussed on the dilemmas of balance. Key assumptions underlying the concept of work-life balance are that work and life are separate and that balance between the two spheres is sought. Not only is balance sought, the promise is that balance, once achieved, creates contentment (Jackson, 2002). Work-life balance, however, represents a duplicitous discourse in which balance, while constituted as desirable, remains conceptually problematic and ideologically unchallenged.

Women's inability to achieve work-life balance has been part of a discourse of exclusion, particularly from senior management roles (Brett and Stroh, 1994; Linehan and Walsh, 2000; Rutherford, 2001). Liff and Ward (2001: 26) report that "both men and women managers in their study expressed concerns about whether it was possible to combine senior jobs with any real family life". Arguments for organisational changes (Bailyn, 1993; Lewis, 2001; 2002) that may be more inclusive of women's roles, also serve to accentuate potential exclusion. Less overtly, this focus on exclusion bypasses women's active negotiation of work-life choices. It also serves to reinforce stereotypes of woman as primary caregiver, 'nurturer' and organiser of the home/life sphere. A counter discourse of women's inclusion in senior management, where balance is not a central concern, is currently absent within the gender and management research.

This paper examines the representations made by women who have achieved senior management positions in public and private sector organisations. We argue that these senior women managers construct a discourse of inclusion that focuses on work-life choices, and displace the myth of work-life balance. Our aim is not to deny the important contributions made through work-life balance initiatives to workforce policies and conditions. Rather we explore senior executive women's accounts of their experiences, which reveals a multiplicity of challenges, excitements and negotiated spaces that constitute their work-life choices.

## **Problematizing the work-life balance ideal**

In order to develop a counter discourse, it is necessary to clarify the conceptual framework of the work-life balance ideal. While work-life balance is an intuitively appealing concept, it is one that has not been clearly defined. The definitions of work and life are slippery and shifting. Since the industrialisation of western countries, paid work and home have been perceived as two separate domains in time and place (Clark, 2000) and as adversarial (Fletcher and Bailyn, 1996). Paid work has been imbued with greater [economic] value than other activities, although this differential value has not necessarily been experienced at a micro level as individuals struggle to enact home and work responsibilities with equivalent value (Pringle and Mallon, in press).

The term 'life' has recently superseded 'home' as the partner in balance for a variety of gender and equity reasons, including the desire to include all organisational members in work-life initiatives, such as those without dependents. (Bailyn et al., 1996; EEO Trust, 2003). The term 'life' seems to

equate to 'non-work', an expansive grouping that can include such categories as family, friends, pets, leisure, recreation, confinement to the private home site, unpaid activity, caring for children, and love-motivated activities.

Work-life balance is predicated on the separation of (paid) work from 'life' and a quest to achieve some equilibrium between the two spheres. A whole industry has been built upon the work-life conceptual framework, founded on a perceived conflict between the roles and activities required of 'work' and 'life'. Indeed, most current Equal Employment Opportunity activities have become focused on work-family and work-life balance (EEO Trust, 2003). There are organisational audits, consultant activity, life coaches, advocates in the popular press, and academy style awards for organisations.

Associated with this pursuit of work-life balance, is the implication that the balance depends somewhat on an optimal distribution of time that can be monitored and altered (Bailyn et al., 1996; Hochschild, 1997). This utilitarian model means that work and family/'life' trade-offs become a zero sum game (Friedman, Christensen, Degroot, 1998; White, 2000). Bailyn (2000:2) dramatically outlines the spheres of work and home as pitting "a nurturing or responsibility rationality" embedded in a cyclical sense of time against a "technical-economic" time of the workplace. Work is patterned on a linear clock time, a commodity that can be sub-divided, bought and sold. Time (and its understudy - money) is the commodity that is actively traded in each sphere; deals are cut, equivalences judged through some creative time accounting. The employees in Hochschild's study (1997) go so far as to signify quality time with the acronym - QT. But does two hours of playing Monopoly with a child equate to four hours responding to emails? Can a meaningful comparison be made between Bailyn's (2000) suggested cyclical and linear time?

For the work-life industry the dichotomy is essential and explicit in the discourse. Accordingly, work becomes oppositional to life. The ambiguity of this supposed boundary is apparent through the convention of using a hyphen i.e. *work-life* rather than the more intertwined *work/life*. This conceptual separation implies that organisational members at work are functioning in a realm that is not 'life'. It also implies that 'work' is merely a means to experience 'life', reminiscent of the instrumental approach to motivation illuminated through industrial studies such as Goldthorpe (1966). While this may well be the view of some workers, it ignores the interactions, satisfaction, and sense of achievement individuals may gain from work and which actually serve to cast their 'life' experience into the background.

As an ideal, the concept of work-life balance ignores the multiplicity of individual differences and choices. Even within discussions of home-work balance there is evidence to suggest that there has never been clear separation. A significant amount of the work-home/life research reports the 'intrusion' of home into the workplace and conversely the spill-over of work into home. For example, a major finding of a national telephone survey carried out in New Zealand reported the desire for access to a telephone in working hours as a simple way of accommodating the need for connection between

mothers at work and their dependent children in the home (MacDonald, 1994). As individuals negotiate working hours and flexible places for their work the division in time and space becomes increasingly blurred. The multitude of organisational initiatives designed to bridge the space and time of work and life, such as flexitime, job sharing, teleworking, also serve to expose the myth of work-life divide. For senior women who spend long hours in the workplace, the imbalance is not usually constructed as home intruding into work. Rather work spills into designated 'non-work' time and spaces and is often deliberately intermingled with leisure (Sinclair, 1994). An extreme example of this 'invasion' of work into life spaces is graphically described in Jackson's (2002:22) account of a bond trader who has "nearly a dozen monitors" placed around his home to stay abreast of the global financial markets. Technology adds more work seamlessly into life.

In addition to the work-life literature, broader academic analyses of organisational experience have revealed the permeability of work-life boundaries (Clark, 2000; Fletcher and Bailyn, 1996, Pringle and Mallon, in press). Studies of careers (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999; Hall 1996), emotional labour (Fineman, 2000), sexuality (Hearn and Parkin, 2001; Hearn, Sheppard, Tancred-Sheriff and Burrell, 1989; Lobel, 1993) and workplace harassment (Gutek, 1985; Cleveland, 1994) all point to aspects of 'life' that were previously confined to the shadows within management and organisational research.

### **Women in senior management: discourse and counter discourse**

A feature of 'women in management' research has been to highlight women's continuing under-representation in senior management (Davidson and Burke, 2000; Linnehan and Walsh, 2000; Oakley, 2000). Additionally, reports of women's experiences of the senior management culture have concentrated on the negative consequences for women (Brett and Stroh, 1994; Marshall, 1995). Inhospitable conditions for work-life balance (Liff and Ward, 2001; White, 2000) and the 'long hours culture' (Lewis, 2001) have been viewed as a means of excluding women from executive management positions unless they are prepared to sacrifice family to paid work. Ironically, the persuasive arguments for the inclusion of 'home/life' dimensions in the corporate world have maintained the work/life dichotomy and implicitly reinforced unhelpful stereotypes about (all) women's care giving and emotional priorities. On the one hand, the women CEOs of organisations are presented as 'having it all', namely, influence and remuneration at levels that symbolise high value. On the other hand, they are depicted as having to be 'overly' committed to the organisation, and required to 'sacrifice' traditional women's roles. We suggest that this ambivalence towards senior women executives is partly a product of the conceptual separation of work and life coupled with valuing or denigrating either sphere.

We propose a counter discourse of work/life choices to this dichotomy by reducing 'balance' to one of many possible choices for both women and men in the workforce, while suggesting there is a constant interplay between aspects of so-called work and so-called life. We suggest this counter discourse is especially appropriate for understanding executive experience.

The argument based on choice emerged from an empirical study of senior women managers. The perceptions and experiences of 30 senior women managers were gathered through personal interviews as part of a larger research programme benchmarking statistics and experiences of women managers in New Zealand (McGregor, 2002).

In this study the terms 'senior manager' were not precisely defined. Women were asked their job title and half listed 'chief executive' while the remainder were in senior management positions. Two-thirds of respondents were in the private sector and the remaining third were in the public sector. The women were predominately of Anglo-Saxon origin, three-quarters were aged 41-55, (average 46-50) and most were highly educated. Commensurate with their senior position these women were high-income earners, most earning more than five times the median income for women. Half of them were also the major income earners for their household. Unlike many of the studies of senior women managers, three-quarters of the sample were living in a long-term relationship, two-thirds had children, and just over half were caring for children or elderly dependents at the time of the study.

The transcripts from the interviews were analysed according to their discussions of the place of career in their lives, the perceived relationship between paid work and other aspects of their lives, the satisfactions and stresses of work, family and the personal lives. The responses from the 30 women are summarised in the following sections: their perceptions of the job, comments on work-life balance and managing their domestic worlds and their acceptance of senior management culture.

### **The excitement and challenges of 'life' at the top**

Women executives repeatedly described the excitement and challenges arising from being included in, and part of the decision-making at the top levels of business and government organisations. A recurrent theme throughout the interviews was a 'love' of the job. Often such statements were linked to the ability to foster the talents of staff in a constantly changing and invigorating milieu:

I love my job. I love it because I get to nurture all the young talent coming through. I get to be refreshed and generated every day. Organisations are always changing. I love it. It's dynamic and you have to be current in my job.  
(05)

A number of women spoke of their passion, energy and enthusiasm for their work. Indeed, the dynamic nature of business seems to fulfil a need in women executives to be faced with new challenges: I've got to constantly have new stretches, new horizons to work towards. (10)

Satisfactions arise from coping with these challenges and overcoming problems. A Chief Executive, who had only been a short time in her private sector position, states

At the moment, because I've only been here eight months the whole thing is, it's challenging in that way, exciting, and every time you do something that you think, "Wow! Got over that one!" and that makes it so rewarding. (29)

This sense of excitement does not diminish with years or experience at executive level. A highly experienced Chief Executive in the public sector nearing the end of her current career makes a similar response to her counterpart in the previous example:

Dealing with things that look, when they come in the door, as if they're a crisis in the making. And finding an answer to them....Yes. That's exciting. (28)

These positive views are reminiscent of Kanter's (1989) post-entrepreneurial corporations where management work was intellectually absorbing and immensely exciting, offering 'the exhilaration of living on the edge' (cited in Wajcman 1999:137). This kind of working can easily become the centre of a person's emotional life (Wajcman, 1999; Hochschild, 1997).

Rather than a positing a separation of work-life, with a forced choice of either/or; these women executives' discourse of inclusion constructed work as contributing to life:

It's just that I love working. I will never not work. I love it. I love the dimension that [work] contributes to my life. (04)

More than this, work is seen to give a shape to life that enhances a valuable work-life interdependence:

I enjoy what I do enormously. I enjoy time off but I like the shape that my work gives my life. (13)

For many women executives the shape work gives to their life also provides an important contributing factor to their sense of self. As one Chief Executive states: I suppose a career becomes your form of definition, and it's very hard for that not to happen. (28) For other women, by affirming the importance of their careers, they link their management role to feelings of self-esteem:

It's [career] very important to me. I hate to admit this, that self-esteem is very relative [related] to it. Yes, definitely. And when I've got a role where I feel as though I'm using my skills and getting reinforcement for that, that reinforces me as a person....Because when you are in management you can feel quite proud of what you do. (22)

These women find a major source of their identity through their paid work, in ways that parallel of men's identification with paid work roles (Arthur et al. 1999).

### **Re-defining the work-life choice**

All the women were asked how important their career was to them and one executive responded emphatically with: Desperately! In total 75% identified work and career as a central part of their lives. The responses were ranged from a direct "hugely important" (17)<sup>1</sup> to the more understated, "It is quite

---

<sup>1</sup> The numbers in brackets refer to the identity number of the women so that the reader may track who is responding.

important to me and I suppose it defines me” (28). Five women moderated their comments by including family as also important. Notably only two women stated that career was secondary to them, but even one of these women was equivocal in her response, namely,

My family is first. You know, I don’t live to work, I work to live as it were but I love what I do. Now, and if I had to have a choice that I’d just be home with the family, I’d go mental. I’ll be quite honest with you. (21)

The women in the study accepted the senior management role, perceived it as a choice and most stepped willingly up to the particular challenge of working long hours. One woman noted that one of her survival strategies was to work long hours, and admitted, I’m probably...people...I think generally people would say I was a workaholic. (29) For her, work and life were inseparable.

Moreover, an acceptance of a lack of work-life balance is often accompanied by an acknowledgement of the permeability of work-life boundaries:

The reality is that life goes completely unbalanced a lot of the time....

Management can completely take over your life because you never actually let it go. Even when you’re at home it’s still ticking away. (10)

Through the accounts of most of the women in the sample, it is apparent that long working hours were an unquestioned reality of executive functioning:

I thought, I’m on a roll, I’ll just do a few more things. I looked at my watch and it was one o’clock. I thought, “Go home. You’d need to meet new friends, get out more.” But I love it. (04)

It’s not okay to have a work-life balance in this place. I mean I was here till one o’clock this morning. And it’s the way it is, you know. There were at least six people on this floor who were here at one o’clock...We will all work like that. It needs to be exposed (05)

Although personally accepting the long hours this woman did express her concern in the final comment. She also pointed out the unacceptability of long hours for non-management staff. The executive secretary can’t keep working 12 hour days. She can’t, she’s ill, she can’t do it, and it is expected of her. And she will leave. It’s the reality. (05)

Nevertheless, the general acceptance of this senior management norm is an implicit endorsement of the edict that success is dependent on accommodating long work hours:

It is like that so often, so you have to be able to live with it and you have to have your home circumstances such that you can do it. Otherwise you’re not going to succeed. (05)

What emanates from most of these women’s accounts is that work-life balance is not a goal that they have selected in their pursuit of the career and self-definition:

I think you need to make very conscious decisions, because unless you are that committed and believe it is right for you, you shouldn’t be doing it. (08)

These senior women managers have made a conscious choice of a paid work career as primary. As one Chief Executive states: At the end of the day I don't do this for any other reason than I want to (18). These women's lives do not simply accommodate work, rather they actively absorb a managerial career. They have re-defined the work-life choice by creating their life around and through their paid work.

### **Re-framing domesticity and family**

Alongside the discourse of inclusion in executive culture through choice is a reworking of the discourse of domesticity. As was noted earlier a high proportion of women in this study had children (two-thirds) compared to other similar studies. For example, in a British study Wajcman (1999), found that two-thirds of the women did not have children. These data raise the issue of how these women (and their partners) took care of their dependents in addition to enacting a senior management role that demanded their presence in the workplace.

Most immediately, women with children relied heavily on a system of contracted labour. A nanny is seen as essential. I've always had a nanny ...I couldn't do it without that...You've got to have good childcare". (20) Many others mention supportive mothers, family members and partners. With a lot of support from my mother and my mother-in-law and other women in the family. (08)

For half of the sample the women in the partnerships had become the primary income earner, and this was occasionally accompanied by an inversion of traditional tropes of domesticity. Some executive women then rely not only on a system of contracted labour for domestic tasks, but also on their partners assuming the primary nurturing role within the home:

I've always had a nanny. My partner's very supportive of me. At the end of the day I am the primary income earner. When the chips are down my expectation is that John<sup>2</sup> will be there. Not always his. But mine. You've got to have good childcare. (20)

One Chief Executive, with a grown son, but with a partner who has younger children, sees the children as his primary responsibility, again reconciling this inversion of traditional roles by pointing to her position as primary income earner:

Often there are times when we have hassles with, you know, babysitting and who's going to do what. And it's always him –it's his problem, not mine...I'm the major breadwinner and my job's more important than his, it's not more important, it's the income's more important and the expectation of my role is more important so I get first shot at it. But he supports me and does what he can. (14)

Traces of guilt or notions of sacrifice (Else, 1996; Hochschild, 1997; Wajcman, 1999) were notably absent in the accounts related by these senior women. I absolutely love my children and there are no regrets at all but I do have the anxiety of

---

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms have been used throughout to preserve the anonymity of the respondents.

it. (21) Only one woman stated that she felt that she had sacrificed relationships in the course of her career.

Another mother had developed some creative time accounting (Hochschild, 1997).

I either do the part time job now while my daughters young and do the mother ballet thing after school, or I'm around when she's a teenager and I've chosen to be around when she's a teenager.

Later on in the interview she explained further.

Well, C. [the child] comes first. There's no question about that.. I balance things. [the] father has her one week and then I have her the next week... The week that I have C, because I can't pick her up or take her to school because of my work commitments, I have somebody who lives with me, who takes C to school in the morning and picks her up and brings her home and gives her dinner and baths her. And I'm home by the latest, at seven o'clock on the week that I have C. And I won't work the weekend. The week that I don't have C, I work. I like working. (04)

In spite of an obvious work-oriented schedule this woman appears to have done some cognitive rebalancing to avoid any unnecessary dissonance that may have arisen from spending relatively little time with her child. Another consequence of not spending a lot of time when the children are young is that some of the women appeared to have an unrealistic expectation of what was involved.

We decided to be our own nanny for a while and you know we're really good at it and it's terribly enjoyable. You know I'm happy to stomp around and ...supervise piano practice and all that stuff. (21)

One lone voice echoed the cry of popular culture with, Why have children if you never see them? (05)

Many of the women with children extended their management skills to the organisation of the domestic sphere. One woman executive mentioned the emotional demands involved balancing the needs of her children with the demands of work and of domestic organisation. She redefines this balancing as a matter of communication and prioritising:

You don't have to be superwoman, although some days you feel like it...It was always a balancing act for me and it tugs at your heart strings.... I learned, one, to communicate, that was my biggest lesson, to get the communication right, and two, to prioritise really well. I've got to be super organised to do this balancing act. (07)

Another common strategy for work-life balance is to compartmentalise but attempts to have a clear boundary between the domains (Clark, 2000) is rarely successful, as one woman remarked: I'm quite good at cutting off,... I think only of home if the phone goes and then my heart sinks because it would only be the nanny (10).

Yet, despite the pressures and the balancing act involved for women with children, there is a continued assertion of the choice and satisfaction in the continued pursuit of career:

I have two children at primary school... That makes you much more efficient. Before I had children, you know, I worked all sorts of hours and it wouldn't worry me.... I have all sorts of nannies and family and all the rest of it. The school holidays are a nightmare always a continuing juggling act....If I hated what I was doing, if I thought, "Shit, this is just horrible, I can't stand juggling," I wouldn't be doing it. (06)

At the same time, executive women without children recognise the additional pressures on women with children or dependents as one woman states:

I'm lucky in that I'm not juggling, I'm only juggling a husband and two Labradors. So that's a big difference compared with women with a family, huge. I guess it's two-edged, it's dangerous in that I might not compartmentalise my life to the extent that they do and [I] bring work home but they probably bring work home too. But it does give me the luxury of choice of spare time. (02)

The work-life choice of senior management inclusion meant that at times a reframing of motherhood and domesticity occurred. Even with a team for domestic support, there were still occasional 'systems failures' but these were accepted as par for the course. Any doubts were only a whisper in the chorus of positive voices.

### **The discourses of choice and of achievement**

A major theme throughout the interviews was that the woman's choice of career provided a form of individual fulfilment and recognition that was not to be found in the domestic sphere. Associated with this was the sense of power and achievement: Things I do for my staff, its kinda going to bat for them and I'm not saying anything different from what they are, it's just that I'm doing it from a different position of power. Women also appreciated other benefits of organisational rank, including the enhanced ability to influence and the social standing: The status thing is important too, if I'm honest, because it opens doors and it's certainly easy to get things done. (19)

One woman with adult children suggested that her career provided her with recognition as an individual that contrasted with her previous status in the domestic sphere:

Career is very important to me. It came very early on, I mean I'm going back fifteen years, twenty years. I was aware as a woman I was somebody's wife, somebody's mother. And the biggest thrill to me was when I was recognised in my own right. (01)

One executive with a young child felt her involvement within her career provided her with satisfactions that enabled her to be a better mother: I personally know that I would not be as good a mother if I were home 24 hours a day. (04). In contrast to work-life separation, this woman outlined her view that the two spheres did not have to be opposed, but that domesticity by itself did not offer enough satisfaction:

I love the dimension that [work] contributes to my life...I don't have to give up one dimension and replace it with this [the baby]. I can actually expand the dimensions in my life. So I actually worked up to the day before I had her and I was back at work two weeks later. I was bored.... At week two I was sitting on the couch and I phoned up my secretary and I said, "Can you just send me the mail?" (04)

An executive career for these women provides the constant stimulation of the new and a sense of continuing personal growth. As one Chief Executive comments:

I can't learn enough, change things quickly enough. But the crazy thing is –if I was able to do it all within three months, then I would be sitting around saying, "Oh, what do I do now?" (18)

An equally important theme in the reasons given for immersion in the senior manager role is the more tangible achievements of executive experience compared with the tasks of the domestic sphere. One senior executive sums this up with reference to inclusion in what used to be called a 'man's world':

I always used to look at my husband and he'd build things on the property. And I'd say to him, "Well, you've just built a concrete path and that's there for ever, and I've just cooked this wonderful meal and it will be gone in five minutes. And I know I love it, but I mean, there's nothing to show for it. And I thought it's nice to be part of, part of that men's world you could say in the old days, where we've now got things that we're creating and that are there and you can't take that away. Great, isn't it! (26)

One Chief executive ironically contrasted her power in the public sphere with her servitude in the private sphere:

I stood there and I thought 'I've put in a tough day today and I've written the X [and] administered Y which meant quite a lot to me and in the greater scheme of things, you know. And I thought 'Here I am doing bloody potatoes at half past six. (28)

Clearly apparent in this comment is the differential value ascribed to the paid work world compared to the domestic world. As they reduce their involvement in the 'home/life' these women reinforce that differential. Also implicit in these various accounts, is that these senior women managers are still responsible for organising the domestic labour team.

### **Limits to re-defining the workplace**

While women executives gain fulfilment and achieve within a world still dominated by corporate masculinity, there are some indications that these women executives are attempting to redefining the executive workplace, not only by their presence and success, but also by their attitudes and approaches to work itself. For example, a number of women spoke of the pleasure they gained in encouraging the potential of their staff, and in trying to redefine work as "fun". One Chief Executive outlines how she attempts to foster the ideal of work as enjoyable in her organisation:

In my ideal world people would love the jobs that they had and the people that were in the management position, part of their care or duty was that they had to make the workplace a fun place to be, an enjoyable place and of creating an environment where people can not only achieve, but they can overachieve. ... You know, we spend the vast majority of time in our lives at work.... Now you know, when you can make things fun, people love it.... I'm doing my little bit in my small corner of the world.

Senior management culture is one in which 'work' becomes embedded in extra-organisational activities (Sinclair, 1994); not only 'life' but 'work' depends on relationships, informality, extra-organisational networks, and the 'public' role encroaches far more on what might have been considered the 'private' world. Work deals are fostered in out-of-work hours and locations, which include the supposedly personal hours and sites of home, clubs, yachts, and sports fields. These expanding hours of management activity have been constructed in such a way as to exclude women, and limit their involvement and implicitly, their power (Oakley, 2000). Engagement in these activities at leisure sites can be constructed as an incursion into 'life' time or more positively, as work intertwined within leisure. Far from women executives working in a bleak work-life twilight, they are more likely to reframe their lives as enhanced, as they are charged by the power and excitement of a challenging milieu.

I keep saying to myself "It's not a power thing you're interested in." But in actual fact it is. It is a power thing that makes you feel good. (01)

Thus, women executives in this study not only revel in their inclusion in the executive world, many were also concerned to generate comparable feelings of enjoyment and achievement in their staff. These efforts to redefine the workplace are not large changes, but a re-emphasis that takes place within the existing structures, processes and functions of senior management.

## **Conclusion**

Results from our analysis of women executives' representations in this study suggest that, for some at the top of the organisation, the 'work' and 'life' divide is illusory. Their experience is not Hochschild's somewhat cynical version of the new model of family and work life where "a tired parent flees a world of unresolved quarrels ...for the reliable, orderliness, harmony and managed cheer of work" (1997:44). Rather, these senior women are far from being reactive players in a dominating organisational world. They actively negotiate their roles and make conscious work-life choices. They revel in the exciting challenges of senior management, and perceive work as contributing to their life, and for some, their identity. Within this discourse of choice, paid work is a major contributor to these women's lives and holds a central place in terms of time, energy and involvement. The long hours of senior management were accepted and viewed as a condition of success. An overwhelming proportion of these executive women have not selected a goal of work-life balance in their life goals but willingly and eagerly embrace the rigors and culture of senior management.

New Zealand is a country without centralised or systematic child or elder support. Consequently, the women managers with dependents relied on a system of contracted labour to manage their domestic enterprise, some with additional supportive family members. Disengagement by many of these women from the daily lives of their children also led to an unrealistic view of motherhood and the necessity for reframing the good mother discourse. This focus on the challenges and rewards of paid work inadvertently reinforces the lack of societal value given to domestic activities.

As a result of this inquiry into senior women managers' lives, we suggest an another discourse to the work-life balance dichotomy, and its ideal of balancing two [ill-defined] spheres. This counter discourse is one of inclusion through choice, in a management world as it is currently constructed. The experiences of these senior women demonstrate both accept and value senior management life, including the demanding hours plus the status and rewards that accompany that achievement.

The experiences of these 'highly successful' women need to be included in a gendered management literature that tends to focus on the exclusion of women from management. The result will be a more 'balanced' and heterogeneous view, inclusive of women managers not struggling against a tide of relentless masculinity.

## References

Arthur, Michael, Inkson, Kerr and Pringle, Judith (1999) *The New Careers: Individual Action and Economic Change*, London: Sage Publications.

Bailyn, Lotte (1993) *Breaking the Mold: Women, Men and Time in the New Corporate World*, New York: Free Press.

Bailyn, Lotte (2000) Time organizations: Constraints on, and possibilities for, gender equity in the workplace, Working paper, MIT Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts.

Bailyn, Lotte, Rapoport, Rhona, Kolb, Deborah, Fletcher, Joyce et al., (1996) Re-linking work and family: A catalyst for organizational change, Working paper, MIT Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts.

Brett, Jeanne and Stoh, Linda (1994) Turnover of Female Managers, chapter 5 in *Women in Management: Current Research Issues*, Marilyn Davidson and Ronald Burke, London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Clark, S (2000) 'Work-family Border Theory: A New Theory of Work/family Balance', *Human Relations*, 53 (6): 747-761.

Cleveland, Jeanette (1994) Women and Sexual Harassment: Work and Well-being in U.S. Organizations. Chapter 12 in *Women in Management: Current Issues*. Editors, Marilyn Davidson and Ronald Burke. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Else, Anne (1996) *False Economy: New Zealanders Face the Conflict between Paid and Unpaid Work*. Auckland: Tandem Press.

Fineman, Stephen (2000) *Emotion in organization*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London: Sage Publications.

Fletcher, Joyce K. and Bailyn, Lotte (1996) 'Challenging the Last Boundary: Reconnecting Work and Family'. In *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organizational Era*, Michael B. Arthur and Denise M. Rousseau (eds.), New York: Oxford University Press.

Friedman, Stewart, Christensen, Perry and Degroot, Jessica, (1998) Work and Life: The end of the zero sum game, *Harvard Business Review*, November-December, pp.119-128.

Goldthorpe, J. H. (1966) Attitude and behaviour of car assembly workers, *British Journal of Sociology*, 17, (3), 227-244.

Gutek, Barbara (1985) *Sex and the workplace*, San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.

Hall, Tim (1996) *The Career is Dead-Long Live the Career*, San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.

Hearn, Jeff and Parkin, Wendy (2001) *Gender, Sexuality and Violence: the Unspoken forces of organisational violations*. London: Sage Publications.

Hearn, Jeff, Sheppard, Deborah, Tancred-Sheriff, Peta and Burrell, Gibson (eds.) (1989) *The Sexuality of Organization*, London: Sage Publications.

Hochschild, Arlie (1997) *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*, New York: Metropolitan Books.

Jackson, Maggie (2002) *What's Happening at Home: Balancing Life, and Refuge in the Information Age*, Notre Dame, IN: Sorin books.

MacDonald, Heather (1994) EEO and the invisible family, Chapter 6 in *The Vision and the Reality*, Janet Sayers and Marianne Tremaine (eds.) Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.

Lewis, Suzan (2001) Restructuring workplace cultures: The ultimate work-family challenge? *Women and Management Review*, 16, (1), 21-29.

Lewis, Suzan (2002) Work and Family Issues: Old and New. Chapter 5 in *Advancing Women's Careers*. Ronald Burke and Debra Nelson (eds.) Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Liff, Sonia and Ward, Kate (2001) Distorted views through the glass ceiling: the construction of women's understandings of promotion and senior management positions, *Gender, Work and Organization*, 8, (1), 19-36

Linehan, Margaret and Walsh, James (2000) Work-family conflict and the senior female international manager, *British Journal of Management*, 11, special issue, 49-58.

Lobel, Sharon (1993) Sexuality at work: Where do we go from here? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 42, (1), 136-152.

Marshall, Judi (1995) *Women Managers Moving On*, London: Routledge.

McGregor, Judy (2002) Rhetoric versus reality: A progress report on the rise of women's power in New Zealand. Centre for women and Leadership Working Paper 02/1, Massey University.

Oakley, Judith (2000) Gender-based barriers to senior management positions: Understanding the scarcity of female CEOs, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 27, (1), 321-334.

Pringle, Judith and Mallon, Mary Challenges to the boundaryless career odyssey, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15, (4) in press.

Rutherford, Sarah (2001) Organizational cultures, women managers and exclusion, *Women in Management Review*, 16, (8), 371-382.

Sinclair, Amanda (1994) *Trials at the Top*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Wajcman, Judy (1999) *Managing Like a Man*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

White, Barbara (2000) Lessons from the careers of successful women, chapter 11 in *Women in Management: Current Research issues, Vol II*, Marilyn Davidson and Ronald Burke (eds.) London, Sage publications, pp.166-176.

EEOTrust (2003) [www.EEOTrust.org.nz/worklife/docs/](http://www.EEOTrust.org.nz/worklife/docs/)

Work-life balance is one of the biggest challenges for all those working in hospitality. The nature of the industry and its focus on multi-site operations is inescapable. Whilst career opportunities are versatile, senior executives are required to be exible about job locations”and about putting in long hours once they arrive.