

WENDY SUTHERLAND-SMITH

### 3. “YOUR’E ON THE CUSP, BUT NOT THERE YET”

#### *Braving the Promotion Process*

##### INTRODUCTION

Trying to negotiate the promotion process is a fraught task for many academics but particularly for women. The ways in which power dynamics in universities operate can often place women as academic fringe-dwellers on the ‘cusp’ of institutional cultures in terms of recognition and promotion. Many universities have tried to proactively address the issues that can face new staff, or staff appointed to new roles within the organisation, by introducing formal mentoring schemes. The role of the mentor is to assist the mentee navigate the often turbulent waters of academic life and provide guidance in negotiating various bureaucratic processes. As with any other relationship, the success of mentoring depends upon the efforts put in by both parties, sufficient resourcing to ensure it is effective and an evaluation mechanism designed to improve and meet new mentoring demands. It should not be assumed, however, that mentoring is politically neutral. Mentoring is implemented and monitored to enable newcomers achieve success within set institutional frameworks and strategic agendas of both universities and governments. These agendas are primarily built on competitive models of measuring and rewarding academic ‘success’ – traditionally through high research outputs and/or bringing in external funding (Sutherland-Smith, in press). Anita Devos argues that, ‘Mentoring then, is both concerned with *improving* performance, and implicated in the task of *governing* performance in accordance with institutional norms’ (2008, p.202, italics in the original). To date, my experience of formal mentoring programs is that individuals are enculturated into the competitive agenda. They are ‘shown the ropes’ (to varying degrees) to evidence individual performance and achieve recognition and success. Tangible rewards, such as achieving promotion, are one way institutions measure whether formal mentoring has been a ‘success’ or not.

Although formal mentoring may be intended by institutions, managers and academic leaders as a means of supporting staff career development and encouraging productivity, for many women the strategies and techniques associated with mentoring are experienced as marginalising and exclusionary (Saltmarsh, Sutherland-Smith & Randell-Moon, 2011). For example, our research indicates that the promotion documentation requires that university strategic agendas

are addressed, sometimes excluding individual mentee goals for professional development. Indeed, participants from a number of different Australian universities spoke about universities 'pushing' performance agendas to be reflected in mentee goals, particularly in attracting research funding and reaching publication targets. These institutional outcomes were at odds with many mentee goals of achieving life/work balance. Therefore, it is important for women to keep in mind that 'the general politics of truth of mentoring as always good and unproblematic' is steeped in institutional power, with universities holding the upper hand (deDevos, 2008, p.202). This raises the question whether centrally run formal mentoring processes are enabling the academic subject to take control of her professional development, or whether formal mentoring processes merely shape the academic subject's professional development to further institutional goals. In order to understand the strategies of governability, we must examine the spaces in between what institutions *claim* are the desired effects of mentoring and ways in which mentoring is seen *in practice* through the eyes of women. Whilst formal mentoring can be extremely helpful for female academics who have worked out the extent to which they will 'govern' themselves or allow themselves to 'be governed', for a number of female staff, formal mentoring shapes 'invisible' academic selves. Understanding the politics of invisibility and performativity can provide a way of approaching the promotion journey that enables women to strategically negotiate institutionally hidden power relations.

This chapter details my own experience in two different mentoring climates within two different Australian universities. In both cases, my primary aim through university mentoring, was achieving promotion. In one university, the mentoring program was, in my experience, the mechanism to ensure my output served university goals. The mentoring relationship was rarely geared or even interested in my goals or professional development needs, but continually referred to the university key performance indicators and strategic agenda. The drive was to achieve even high rates of publication from all academic staff and increase success in obtaining external research funding. In the other university, the program asked me to list three goals to achieve during the mentoring process. These goals, which included putting strategies into place to help achieve a better life/work balance, were the focus of discussion and action. Whilst the university agenda was part of the strategic discussion, it did not drive it. For me, understanding the lived experience and politics of everyday practice helps illuminate the power relations that live and thrive within universities. Drawing on the works of Michel Foucault (1988, 2002) and Nikolas Rose (1999) the mentoring process can be examined within the discourse of 'governmentality'. Specifically, I explore the role that formal mentoring plays in continually attempting to shape me as a 'governable subject' within the academic workspace and promotion process. I consider the notion of having one's academic identity shaped through the daily discourse of what is seen as academic 'success' particularly apt when examining the promotion process. This is because formal mentoring processes use the language of performance measurement to urge,

guide or direct academics towards central university achievement metrics. This may come at the cost, as Nikolas Rose so ably notes, as academics can be 'urged and educated to bridle one's own passions, to control one's own instincts, to govern oneself' (1999, p.3). One brief example is a colleague who, a number of years ago had a particular passion and substantial track record in a particular field. When told that her area of expertise was no longer considered crucial to the research agenda of the faculty and that she needed to change her research tack if she wanted promotion, she reluctantly surrendered her passion, research trajectory and dutifully complied. Women may find 'governing oneself' particularly true when striving to meet university performance measures, whilst also managing the logistics of their lives outside the academy; with all the responsibilities such a life may entail (Saltmarsh & Sutherland-Smith, 2010). The corporate or enterprise university usually rewards the performative achievements (notably called "deliverables" in many cases) of the high profile 24/7 academic. Less glamorous aspects of academic work are often invisible. Therefore the chapter is shaped around the themes of performativity and invisibility, reflecting my experience of academic life in the twenty-first century university.

#### MENTORING FOR WOMEN – THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

In Australia, mentoring has been widely taken up as a strategy for academic leadership development (Devos, 2008) as well as a means to enhance 'quality of research-led teaching' (Ewing, Freeman, Barrie, Bell, O'Connor, Waugh and Sykes, 2008, p.294). Formal mentoring programs have been adopted by Australian universities since the 1990s (AVCC, 2001). Some programs are funded and run within faculties, while others are funded through central university initiatives and are specifically aligned to organisational goals of staff development and performance enhancement. Institutional formal mentoring program initiatives reflect the enterprise university expectations of work practices. As Anita Devos points out:

They activate the deployment of mechanism of self-regulation as work groups and individuals set about improving themselves in order to improve organisational performance, for example through aggressive grant getting, consultancy and publication behaviours. Managing how workers understand themselves and their work becomes a key priority of the enterprise university, and is supported through the conduct of mentoring programmes. (Devos, 2008, p.199)

Therefore, universities are required to have formal mentoring to aid career development. Whilst some prior research suggests formal mentoring can be beneficial, (Diamond, 2010; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008) other studies indicate that formal mentoring is one mechanism through which relations of power are enacted, maintained and sustained by institutions (Alldred & Miller, 2007; Devos, 2008; Sutherland-Smith, Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2011).

*Governing Female Academics: Performativity and Invisibility*

*University A*

A senior female research academic was appointed my mentor when I took up an appointment a number of years ago at an Australian university. I was honoured that a full professor was my mentor and went to our initial meeting eager to learn strategies of successfully negotiating the promotion process. At our first meeting, she seemed interested in my career path to date but the main focus of her conversation was urging me to become part of her small research ‘hub’. I pointed out that as my goal was to apply for promotion within a year and I had a number of publications to write from my own research agenda (which was significantly different to her ‘hub’) I was not keen to change research focus. I was also starting to build a sound international profile in the area of plagiarism research and was aware that to change publication direction necessitated intensive new reading, meaning delays in publishing data I had already collected. I was quite resistant to the suggestion to join any research ‘hub’ just for the sake of it, but certainly did not want to join a group that had research priorities so alien to my own. Whilst my mentor was mildly supportive of a promotion application *per se* she did not offer any strategies to negotiate the formal promotion application space. I left the first meeting somewhat bewildered, as I had expected direct advice on what to do to achieve my goals from someone who had achieved quintessential promotion as a woman. After this initial meeting, and another similar mentor meeting some months later, I reflected on Michel Foucault’s (1988, 2002) notion of governmentality, which refers to the exercise of power over an individual to direct conduct toward a central goal. In this case, power was being used to ‘guide’ me towards the mentor’s goal of increasing the membership and publication output of her research ‘hub’, rather than helping me reach *my* stated goal of promotion based upon my own research, teaching and service. Upon final indication that I did not choose to join her research hub, or the weekend writing retreats involved and the logistical nightmares that would involve for me, my mentor appeared to lose interest in listening to my career aspirations.

*University A: Lesson Learned; Thinking Ahead*

These irregular mentor meetings were disappointing for me, as initially there was a continuing tussle between the professor and myself about the shape and outcomes of each meeting. Finally, when the professor accepted that I was not interested in abandoning my own goals, formal mentoring consisted of token interest on her part. The lesson I learned was I would get no support unless I was prepared to forsake my own research interests and subject my research trajectory to that of my influential professorial mentor. Although disappointed and somewhat disillusioned with a process that I thought would support my academic development, I was determined to pursue my promotion aspirations. I believed I had the relevant experience and had

achieved the standards required (as set out in the documentation) to be promoted. However, I realised I needed mentor guidance and advice on the promotion process as well as the hidden politics of applying for promotion. I decided I would find my own informal network of mentors. I sought advice and support from an interstate female colleague at a different university who was at the same level as I was, but in the process of applying for promotion. I also sought advice from a senior female academic I respected who was at the same university but in a different faculty. I knew this woman was confident to speak publicly about various 'hot' issues, but extremely pragmatic. She could advise me about the hidden politics operating in such bureaucratic processes. Politically, I decided I would maintain the formal mentoring relationship, as it was a faculty requirement that staff seeking promotion be given formal mentoring, but I expected little formal support. As I reflected upon the duality of 'the game', I considered the travesty of truth in play. Formal reporting mechanisms would indicate to the institution that the formal mentoring process was 'useful, successful and practical' if my application for promotion were successful. At a purely functional level it could be argued that both parties attended and the mentee (me) spoke about her career aspirations and the mentor gave advice, which led to a successful outcome (promotion). Yet nothing could be further from the truth. The advice and support from the informal mentoring process allowed me to craft the application for success whilst the formal process added nothing to my goals whilst continually threatening to hamper my research trajectory. The lesson was that it was necessary to be seen to be engaging in the formal process, and 'supporting the game' as I was too junior to openly challenge the game itself. At the same time, it was necessary for me to build my own trusted network, one that operated invisibly outside the game, but which assisted me reach my promotion goals.

#### *University B*

This university also provided central mentoring programs and participation was strongly advised for staff applying for promotion. My experience in this institution was completely different to University A. Here, applicants were asked to identify three goals that would drive the year-long formal mentoring process, rank those goals in terms of importance and write a paragraph about their mentoring needs. Mentees were encouraged to nominate three mentors from anywhere within the university they felt could help them achieve those goals. This is one key difference between the two universities' approaches. In University B's case, the applicant was given control and ownership of their goals and aspirations from the start, instead of having performance measures mold the application itself. This is not to say that achieving performance measures was ignored by University B, but they were not the primary driver of the formal process. Applicants were required to state how their mentoring would help them push the university's strategic plan forward, but only in the sense that undertaking the formal process would help them improve personal performance in areas of teaching, research, service or personal fulfillment. In University A's case,

however, the mentoring document itself was framed by university goals and strategic targets, rather than addressing individual goals or needs.

In University B, I nominated a female professor who had chaired a working party on strategic change within the university. I was impressed with 'Kate's'<sup>1</sup> no-nonsense approach, her outstanding organisational skills and her ability to quickly recognise the heart of a situation. She was a respected academic, politically savvy and I believed she would be honest in her advice to me. These were the qualities I wanted in a mentor. She, along with the two other mentors I nominated and ranked in order of preference, read the 500 words outlining my goals, mentoring needs and career aims which were attached to my curriculum vitae. She accepted the university's invitation to mentor me.

Our first meeting could not have been more different from my experience in University A. Kate had read the documentation I provided, sent me a copy of her own curriculum vitae (in confidence) as a sample of the discourse needed for promotion at more senior levels. She came to the first meeting expecting me to articulate what I wanted for each of my three goals, discuss any ideas I had come up with about how I would achieve them and what I expected would happen as a result of gaining promotion. Kate gave direct and blunt advice as to my aspirations and suggested a plan to tackle one goal at a time in our forthcoming sessions. She gave me preliminary advice, as the promotion criteria had recently changed, and suggested that, although I was not 'there yet' in terms of an application, that we build a plan of how to fill the gaps in experience over the year, with a view to seeking promotion the following year.

#### *University B: Lesson Learned*

In this situation, I learned that formal mentoring could be exceptionally beneficial where the university facilitated the mentee to articulate their own goals, which the institution then supported. The university provided a match with quality mentors, who did not see it as their primary purpose to push their own or the university agenda but to help plan realistic achievement of set goals. Kate provided a pragmatic reality check for my aspirations, within a practical plan of moving to achieve my goals and succeed. When she said I 'was not there yet', it was in a positive way, meaning that I did not have sufficient evidence to succeed that year, but gave advice on how to address the 'gaps' and potentially succeed in the following year. This was completely different to the statement that I was 'not there yet' in University A. In that experience, the discourse was one of closure, with no path forward suggested, although the professor's initial response had been one of support. She gave no advice as to what had changed her mind, what 'gaps' she foresaw or how to build my application to evidence achievement in those 'gaps'.

#### *The Realities of the Promotion 'Game'*

My informal mentors and Kate gave me practical advice on what they called 'the game' of promotion. Both mentors advised me to start preparing my application well

ahead of the deadlines and Kate advised to use the promotion documentation as a continual point of reference in accepting and limiting my university involvement. All said it was far more paperwork than anyone would imagine and the preparation of the 'evidence' needed took time and planning. This was excellent advice.

The first practical step was to get the latest promotion documentation and read it carefully. I was immediately struck by the extent of 'evidence' needed to accompany the application, some of which needed to be woven into the ten page written application. Some of the 'evidence' was easily obtained in the form of student satisfaction over taught units, but needed to be across a couple of semesters. Fortunately this information was readily accessible, although in some units, satisfaction surveys needed formal approval (which I immediately sought). Other 'evidentiary' material required more planning. For example, I needed to provide evidence of my 'excellence' across the categories of teaching, research and service. My research output and internal grant success easily exceeded the formula provided by the faculty for the required academic level I currently occupied, so I was not overly concerned I would be able to mount the argument that I was performing above my level. I had been involved in a great deal of committee work, and also had several leadership positions within the faculty, so again, I was not concerned that I could demonstrate I gave service to the university above teaching and research. I had been awarded a couple of internal excellence awards for teaching and my student satisfaction surveys were above the faculty and university average, so I considered I could demonstrate I was achieving above my current level also.

However, the application required that teaching excellence also be evidenced by peers in a formal written peer review process. This required more planning, as I needed to approach staff more senior than myself to assess both my teaching performance in face-to-face and online teaching contexts. This was not an onerous task, but required careful thought about which staff to approach to undertake the reviews. I needed to ask academics who understood the critical theory approach to classroom activities I advocated, as some of the more didactic teaching staff would find my classes too student-centred and politically provocative, therefore were unlikely to provide commendation for teaching performance. I also needed a senior colleague to review the online units I taught, which meant arranging information technology access (to review the sites and discussion forums), all of which took time.

Clearly, many months were needed to prepare the 'evidentiary' component of the application and fortunately I heeded my informal mentors and started collecting and amassing the accompanying material at least six months prior to the formal application. It should be noted that, in the case of University A, my formal mentor offered no advice on the lengthy preparation time needed, nor suggested senior colleagues who may act as appropriate peer reviewers, although she was aware I was proceeding with a promotion application.

It is clear to see that this promotion application process is steeped in the discourse of productivity and performativity. The application guidelines include words such

as ‘evidence’, ‘supporting documentation’, ‘tabled metrics’ (of student satisfaction ratings for each unit taught over two years), ‘outcomes’ and ‘deliverables’. Interestingly one requirement was that the metric of overall student satisfaction in teaching for each unit be extracted and included in a table, weighted against the average satisfaction level calculated for each faculty and the university average overall. This metric, used to judge an individual academic’s teaching success, did not ‘measure’ the integral co-dependency of quality and engagement within the pedagogic encounter, but rather the functional aspects of classroom management, such as currency of materials provided. It is important for women to recognise that the elements chosen to judge success in this process are not politically neutral, nor are they free from neo-liberal managerialism for competitive ends (Hey, 2004). The kind of functional evidence requested (attendance, choice of texts, lecture preparation) can be amassed across an institution regardless of individual differences in classroom teaching practice. Many women, for example, put a great deal of effort into the pastoral care aspects of their teaching, which are not captured by university and national ‘student satisfaction experience’ type surveys. These high ‘satisfaction’ ratings then count in national and international rankings standards and metrics used by international bodies to judge and advertise quality of university experience (Marginson, 2010). Therefore, institutions value high metric scores as a means to judge individual teaching performance.

In University A’s promotion process, my informal mentors were invaluable in helping me to articulate innovation in teaching practice, within the discourse of metrics, as I struggled to recast my teaching ideology within the performative language of the application. As I neared the completion of the tables indicating my ‘performance’ as a university teacher, I turned my thoughts towards the ‘service’ component of the application. As I looked around the university workplace, I was immediately struck by the number of female colleagues who undertook an overwhelming service role for the university. Such service included organising and speaking at Open Days, Information Nights, field trips, community liaison, numerous committee roles (such as student services, language and learning support), all of which appeared to count for little in terms of promotion. These contributions did not appear to feature highly within the category of ‘service’ as participation in other committee work (such as Academic Board or university ethics committees). Yet, these tasks were essential to the continued functioning of the institution, but the women who often undertook increased service over many years appeared to be ‘invisible’ in the promotion process. ‘Invisibility’ exists not only in the institution but also in the promotion process.

### *Becoming Visible*

It is often easy to feel invisible as a female academic. There are numerous reasons why this may occur, whether in the teaching, research or service components of academic roles. A form of *physical invisibility* exists for many female academic staff:



those located outside the central campus, those employed under sessional contracts, those placed in clinical or external settings and all who are physically invisible to central decision-makers. These staff members are rarely asked to participate in university policy-making authorities, senior advisory committees or similar powerful groups within faculties. They are 'invisible' as their voices are not heard unless they have strong advocacy through others. This form of political invisibility can mean marginalisation when management reshapes institutional academic priorities. There is also a form of *academic invisibility* which is often linked to the ways in which universities prioritise teaching, research and service roles. As previously stated, those with high research profiles are rarely invisible in university life. Increasingly, those rewarded with national acknowledgement of teaching excellence are also becoming more visible yet those who take heavy service loads continue to remain largely invisible in academic spheres and certainly their task can be more difficult in mounting a case for promotion.

To become 'visible' in the university, academics are encouraged to 'raise their profile', 'become known' or discipline their actions to fit a corporate ideal of a 'good' or 'strong' academic (Devos, 2008). The strategy aims to reward high-profile academics (most often in research) and universities often seek to make them aspirational models for others to follow. The metaphor of the 'rising star' illustrates how such visibility is designed to influence others to aspire to such goals (Sutherland-Smith, Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2011, p.6). However, whilst the institution advocates the excellence of their 'rising stars' in performative terms, some staff, particularly early or mid-career academics may feel even more invisible, as the achievements of those held up as role-models are often unattainable unless staff work almost all the time and have significant support networks at home (Sutherland-Smith, Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2011). The prospect of working nights, weekends and during periods of leave is neither in keeping with workplace relations law, nor sustainable in the long-term now or for future generations of academics. In fact, prior research indicates that many young academics with less than five years post-doctoral work in the sector, are disenchanted with the 'workaholic kind of mentality' and plan to relocate to industry and leave academia entirely (Sutherland-Smith, Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2011, p.8). One young academic said:

Being an academic is part of my identity. It isn't my total identity. And yet when I see a lot of people who have *made it*, who are supposed to be the ones who could mentor me, they're a 24/7 academic – and it's as if that academic identity has taken over. And as an early career researcher, I'm trying to work out is that what *I* want for the future of, not just me, but my family and my children. (Sutherland-Smith, Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2011, p.8)

All academics need to make a choice whether they will actively take part in the competitive visibility of performativity or not. Female academics need to be aware that the measures of success are unstable and continue to alter not only with internal university changes, but when national education policies on productivity metrics

also shift (see Hazelkorn 2011 for a discussion of RAE and rankings in the Europe; Martin, 2011 for ERA in Australia). Each time the metrics of productivity change, universities alter productivity measures to focus on what is newly 'valued' in terms of performativity. This is a crucial factor to consider in the promotion process. What might constitute an acceptable number of publications, research income or degree of teaching excellence in one year, may change for the following year. These productivity demands always rise; they never fall or remain the same. It is important to access and know the 'formula' used by your faculty to determine the minimum standard for research 'active' status. These performativity measures indicate institutional expectations of minimum standards you must meet, but in practice, my informal mentors correctly advised me, you need to exceed them for a successful promotion application. The politics of invisibility are complex, but female academics need to be aware that their promotion applications need to reflect *all* the work they do for the university, not just teaching and research. If female academics consider much of their contribution has been in the area of service to the university, it is important to ensure that it is sufficiently evidenced in a promotion application. Often women consider that 'service', particularly non-committee work, is just something everyone does or shares as part of the job. This is not so, as there are some academics who do not appear to undertake the often 'invisible' areas of service at all. It is important that women take control of their career paths and learn to evidence all they do that contributes to the broad spectrum of university life.

As I continued to collect the documentary evidence necessary to support my application for promotion, I considered what promotion to the next level might mean in terms of university expectations. In both institutions I sought advice from formal and informal mentors based on their experience. Both formal mentors advised that were I successful, there would be additional leadership demands. University A's professor said there would be an increased expectation for research output, particularly in the area of winning competitive grant funding. It reminded me of the corporate stance reported by a research leader who said:

People can be a little complacent and not everyone is desperately active research-wise, in fact, quite inactive. So beefing up the expectation that everyone will be active, or else they simply don't get study leave or they certainly don't get promotion is one strategy adopted. (Sutherland-Smith, Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2011, p.4)

My informal mentors concurred but said it was necessary to be very selective about the leadership roles I was prepared to take, and not to 'bury' myself in administrative work. They advised me to keep the elements of promotion firmly in mind when approached to take on more administration. Kate advised that whilst more administrative work came with the territory of professorial staff, that keeping a balanced approach to life and work was possible, in her experience. All advice given reminded me that if my promotion application succeeded, the institution would expect/demand more of my time and energy. I consider this illustrates the

ways in which an institution can seek to govern the subjectivities of academics by positioning the choice between work and life/work balance as an 'inevitable' cost of rising through the academic hierarchy. In my experience, some academic managers have also likened striving to achieve a degree of balance as a set of 'costs and consequences' in academic life. One assumption is that the cost of reaching university performative measures has the consequences of long hours of work outside campus life. The cost of not reaching set targets can mean a position of 'invisibility' in some cases, but certainly lack of reward, including promotion, in many cases.

### *The 24/7 Academic: Costs and Consequences*

The corporate university has ever encroached into traditional 'family' or 'leisure' time, such as evenings, weekends and periods of leave and 'developed "suffocating" versions of accountability' (Barnett, 2011, p.56). In my experience, demands have been made that staff are contactable when on periods of leave (including sick leave) and expected to be available to work over weekends for 'weekend planning retreats' or research 'writing retreats'. Occasionally attendance at such activities is couched in the discourse of compulsion and an expectation that all staff are willing and able to attend such events. The costs of attendance (time, emotional and financial) for many women are 'invisible' in workload models currently in place. Institutional expectations make it increasingly difficult for women to maintain integrity and balance towards all aspects of life/work.

Time poverty often results in teaching academics pushing research activity to one side to meet the imperatives of teaching, marking and administrative work during working hours (Debowski, 2010; Griffiths, Thompson, & Hryniewicz, 2010). Some have noted that research 'substantially happens beyond our day job' and 'you've almost got to approach research as if it's your hobby because it will inevitably impinge on life beyond the university campus' (Sutherland-Smith, Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2011, p.7). Many academics, cannot envisage how to juggle high teaching, marking and student welfare loads with increasing research or leadership demands advocated in both formal and informal mentoring. A number of early career researchers have reported that they have tried to maintain a 'workaholic kind of mentality' following doctoral completion, but have found it impossible (Sutherland-Smith, Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2011, p.8). Others question whether formal mentoring is simply a mechanism that academics entrenched in the system use to convince younger academic staff to adopt a 24/7 academic identity. There is a belief that a 'tacit understanding' exists that to succeed in academia, early career researchers in particular need to 'sell' the ideals of maintaining a life/work balance. One young academic said:

We *get* the mentoring but it's basically just a knowledge based mentoring. It's not where we sit down and talk about identity constructions and what it is and the tensions that go with that kind of stuff. Particularly if you're trying to have

a work/life balance...am I just being mentored into not having a work/life balance as an academic? Is that what it ultimately is all about? (Sutherland-Smith, Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2011, p.8)

Such comments reflect the grave concern academics have for the sustainability of 24/7 models of working and their conflict in deciding whether to engage in the discourses that underpin the continuation of these models. My mentors (both formal and informal) made it clear that the higher up the academic ladder individuals rise, the more time commitment was expected of people, particularly in terms of leadership and responsibility. Women need to devise, articulate and employ strategies to manage additional leadership and work demands yet maintain a life outside the academy. Some of the strategies I have learned during the promotion process are:

- Manage your email, don't let it manage you! I found I could lose days in responding to email requests. I began to use discussion boards and frequently asked question sections more and made it clear to students I would not answer questions by email if information was already available in documentation. I also learned to open email first thing in the morning – glance through and respond to things that were urgent, or really needed a response, then shut it down until later in the day. Many of the earlier requests had follow-up emails saying the issue had been resolved elsewhere.
- Decide how many meetings you really need to attend (particularly if you have to travel to other campuses). Can these be done by phone, video conference or other means? Time lost in un-necessary travel is tiring and merely adds to the length of your day. It also means you are behind when you next open your email. Some travel is essential, but much of it, in my experience, is not.
- Learn to say 'no' to things that do not help you achieve your direct promotion goals. Be selective about 'service' components and actively seek election on committees that directly service your promotion weightings (e.g. if you heavily weight 'research' then seek membership on your departmental ethics committee, university ethics committee, research committee, research leadership and higher degree research co-ordination)
- If you are considered 'research active' and need to maintain that status, then ensure you set aside one day per week (or more if you can carve it out) to focus solely on writing, reading and devoting yourself to research. During that day **DO NOT OPEN WORK EMAIL** before 4pm. At that time, you can respond to anything before close of business. If you open your email at the beginning of the day and start responding, you will lose your momentum, your focus and at least part of the day in dealing with what I call 'administrivia'. You must allow time for your head to get into the research space and remain there for the majority of the day. Even carving out one day per week will make a difference over a year to your research profile and productivity.
- Adopt a 'look once' policy, where you deal with something once and move it along for action with explicit instruction to the next person about steps to be taken

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or questions to be answered. Do not keep hoarding tasks on your desk/computer to be dealt with later when you have 'more time'. This can cut out the feeling of drowning in numerous 'unfinished' tasks that keep mounting up around you.

## YOU'RE ON THE CUSP, BUT NOT THERE YET": BRAVING THE PROCESS

### *University A*

Having finally prepared my promotion application, I took it to my formal mentor for final feedback. She appeared surprised by my achievements across all areas of endeavour, but said she thought the application 'looked good' and wished me well. Part of the process was that both she and I had to meet with the head of academic staffing in the department, who would also give me institutional feedback. At this meeting, whilst some feedback was constructive, it was apparent that the head of staffing had not carefully read my application. She made comments such as, 'You claim to have excellence in teaching, but where is the evidence'? I pointed out that I had won two internal, competitive awards for teaching excellence within the past three years and that my student numerical grades on satisfaction were not only above the departmental average in each unit but above the university average. I sought clarification on what additional forms of 'evidence' she wanted. She said that 'the numbers didn't make sense'. I went through the numerical columns with her, although the form was a standard template, not designed by me.

She raised similar concerns in the research and service categories. I was getting the impression that I was not considered ready for promotion. My own formal mentor remained totally silent during this time. I had looked to her for supporting comments during the exchanges, but she chose to say nothing, despite having told me that my application 'looked strong' in our mentor meeting. The interview was drawing to a close when my formal mentor finally spoke the words, 'Wendy, I think you're on the cusp, but you're not there yet' and said no more. I was stunned as she had never intimated these sentiments to me before, although plenty of opportunities to do so were given. I asked the head of staffing whether I could incorporate some of her feedback, and revisit my application with her the following day. She agreed. I went home devastated and in tears. I immediately sought help from my informal network. They had read my application and thought it sound. One said:

Well, go for it! Put in the application and let them tell you why they think you're not good enough if you don't get it. If you don't put in the application, you're not even in the game and you make it easy for them to overlook you, as you haven't put anything in the formal channels. And remember, they have to give you feedback on where your application falls short if you are unsuccessful. But at least get into the game!

Both informal mentors advised me to go to the meeting the following day ready to justify every change I made and to put the application in regardless of the outcome.

W. SUTHERLAND-SMITH

I followed their advice. The head of staffing was still cagey about whether she would support it, but by that time, I had lost all faith in University A's formal processes assisting me in any constructive way, so told her I would apply regardless of her level of support. Six months later the promotion list was announced and I was successful. As a 'coda' to this experience, around eight months after promotions were announced, I was approached by a female member of staff who asked me for a copy of my promotion application. When I asked why she sought a copy of *my* application in particular, she told me the head of staffing advised her that the promotions panel said mine was one of the strongest the panel had seen, and it went through unchallenged. This was the same head of staffing who had almost convinced me only months earlier, that I was not really ready or worthy of promotion. This is a valuable lesson about acting on advice from trusted mentors who really have your best interests at heart, and being brave enough to back your judgement despite (women) in formal positions telling you 'you're not there yet' in the promotion game.

#### *University B*

In University B's case my formal mentor, Kate, challenged me to get over the cusp, with strategic advice, giving feedback on my application and providing practical suggestions in the progress towards promotion. There were no hidden surprises and I felt that the formal process has been supportive and focused on helping me to succeed, rather than putting barriers in my way. I continue to seek advice from my informal network and also now provide guidance to others also seeking promotion.

#### IN CONCLUSION

I have learned a number of lessons that about gaining successful promotion:

1. Develop an informal network of colleagues you trust to give you direct, truthful advice about your career trajectory. Include people who are at your own level and those higher than you and engage in open discussion with them about all aspects of your career. Maintaining these relationships (and acting in this capacity for more junior staff) is of crucial importance in making 'the game' more playable and bearable.
2. It is possible to maintain your own research trajectory within the neo-liberal university. However, the cost may be that you do not 'fit' within the 'priority' research areas designated by the faculty or department. This means you are unlikely to gain internal funding. If this is the case, undertake unfunded research and work with like-minded people in other institutions to access external funding opportunities. Such cross-institutional collaboration is important to evidence when 'weighting' the elements of your application: teaching, research and service.
3. Writing the promotion documentation takes enormous preparation and lead-up time. Go to staff information sessions about the bureaucratic elements of

the promotion process and ask pertinent questions. Allow yourself the time to 'amass' the evidence and get several people to read your application and give you feedback. If your formal mentor is not interested or particularly helpful in this regard, ask others inside and outside your institution, but choose people you respect and who have 'made it' at least to the level for which you are applying.

4. Do not be disillusioned by the lengthy, bureaucratic process and the hurdles you have to jump. I believe promotion application processes are designed to be lengthy to deter hasty applications, so be prepared to put in the time to craft the document. Institutions argue lengthy checks and balances exist for risk management and quality assurance reasons and to ensure staff apply on advice, not before they are ready (therefore avoiding the disappointment of being unsuccessful).
5. Do not try to write a promotion application during your busiest teaching semesters or when you have major research outcomes due (for the reasons of time needed, as outlined above).
6. Have faith in yourself and do not allow those who are not truly interested in assisting you tell you that you are not good enough. At the same time, listen and take advice from people you know respect you and your work. Act on their advice – even if this is to suggest you wait for another year before applying for promotion to get more evidence to make a stronger case.
7. Think carefully about how you will assume leadership responsibilities without it 'costing' your life outside the institution. Seek advice from successful senior women (whom you respect and trust) and put strategies in place to continually strive to maintain a sustainable life/work balance.
8. Informally mentor other women and share successful strategies of surviving 'the game' of promotion. Adopt an ethical, honest and truthful position in the relationship. Be clear with mentees that your role is to assist them with their career, not shape them to your likeness or mould them into a compliant, corporate university creature. Encourage them to also adopt ethical and open relationships with those they may mentor in the future.

Promotion is a political activity steeped in the discourse of neoliberalism, competition and metrics. My experience is that universities try to shape academics as governable subjects by implementing work practices based primarily on performativity models. The formal mentoring process *can* be used as a mechanism by which the institution monitors and regulates individual academics and instils performative norms. In many formal mentoring inductions, for example, the 24/7 academic is heralded as a 'model' of success to aspire to, while the realities of achieving such outcomes mean substantial work (usually research) occurs outside working hours. Inevitably, every female academic must decide how she will endeavour to maintain her life outside the academy during, but more particularly *after* promotion. Of tantamount importance is to share these strategies openly, ethically and honestly with other women just starting or struggling in 'the game'.

NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Kate is a pseudonym

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