

**Career Interrupted**  
*How 14 Successful  
Women Navigate  
Career Breaks*

**Norah Breekveldt**

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Melbourne Books

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# Career Interrupted

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How 14

Successful

Women Navigate

Career Breaks

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*Norah Breekveldt*

*Author of Sideways To The Top*

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Melbourne Books

‘How do you think it will be  
different, as a woman?’  
‘I have no idea, I’ve never done  
it as a man.’

Anna Bligh,  
Premier of Queensland  
2007 - 2012

Women work **2/3** of  
the world's hours; yet  
earn **1/10** of the  
world's income

Increasing female workforce participation by **6%** has the potential to add **\$25 billion** each year to the Australian economy

Female graduate  
salaries are **90.9%**  
of male graduate  
salaries in Australia

Average superannuation  
balances of women are  
**42.1%** lower than  
those of men

A study of the top  
**200 companies** in Australia  
found female chief financial officers  
and chief operating officers earned  
**half the amount** of their  
male counterparts



Australian women returning to work after  
12 months' parental leave are subject  
to an average

**7% wage penalty**

(known as the 'motherhood penalty')

**increasing to 12% over the  
subsequent year**



**42%** of women aged  
**25-29** hold a university degree, compared to  
**31%** of men

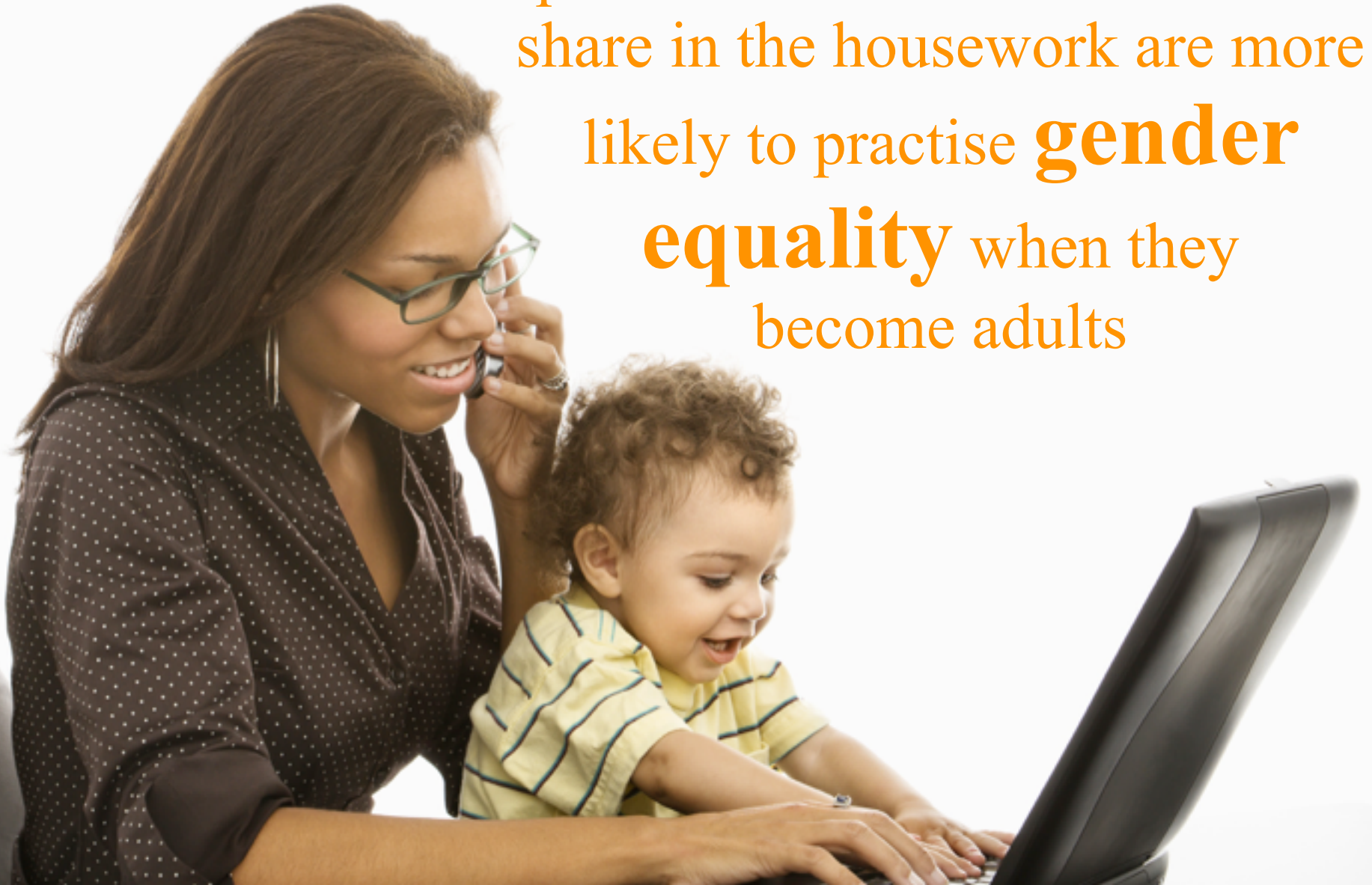
Women make up only **35%** of the full-time work force, compared to **70%** of the part-time work force



**49%** of mothers report experiencing discrimination in the workplace at some point during pregnancy, parental leave or on return to work

Working mothers **improve the**  
**future prospects** of their  
daughters, who become  
**better educated and**  
**earn more**

Children of mothers who  
pursue careers and fathers who  
share in the housework are more  
likely to practise **gender  
equality** when they  
become adults



**80%** of men appointed to ASX 200  
Company Boards had **no previous  
experience** as an ASX 200 Board  
member, yet women have to  
**demonstrate their credentials**  
before being appointed





‘There’s nothing like the visual image of a child standing, nose pressed against a window at seven o’clock at night, waiting for you to walk in the door, to make sure that you finish doing what you’re doing.’

HE Ambassador Frances Adamson,  
Australian Ambassador  
to the People’s Republic of China



‘I would work at work and home would be home. As soon as I walked in the door I’d stop thinking about work and as soon as I walked in the door at work I’d stop thinking about home. It seemed to me not productive to feel guilty in both places, and this way I was able to throw myself into each part of it.’

HE Ambassador Frances Adamson,  
Australian Ambassador to the People’s Republic of China

‘I really wanted to be a mother; I wanted to have a good relationship with my kids. I was willing to take the risk, no matter what the consequences, so I made it work.’

Helen Szoke,  
CEO Oxfam Australia



‘The choice to have a career and a family shouldn’t be up to luck or working in the public sector or having the money to buy in help. The system needs to support them. Women shouldn’t have to do all the heavy lifting on their own.’

Helen Szoke,  
CEO Oxfam Australia



At the end of her  
first year of  
maternity leave: ‘I  
felt like a pile of  
human mush;  
I was just  
so exhausted.’

Jodie Sizer, founder PIC  
Consulting, PwC

‘Every time I leave the house I feel  
guilty and every time I’m away I  
worry about what I’m going to miss.’

Jodie Sizer,  
founder PIC Consulting, PwC

Parenting books are not that much help. Her mother reminded her: ‘The kids don’t write the books, Jodie. You just have to listen to your child and figure it out.’

Jodie Sizer,  
founder PIC Consulting, PwC

‘You’re done for, now that you’re having a child. Really, you’re off our radar now as talent.’

Lucy Roland,  
former marketing executive





I was offered a Special Projects role on my return from maternity leave — a real kick in the guts.

Lucy Roland, former marketing executive

‘If we had been posted to the US my husband would have been more than happy to be the carer of the children. But we never got to have that conversation because the company made the assumption that I would always want a part-time role.

Lucy Roland, former marketing executive

‘It was never an option for me not to work and not to earn an income. I think it’s so important for a woman in a relationship to have her own money and be an equal contributing partner in all aspects of that relationship.’



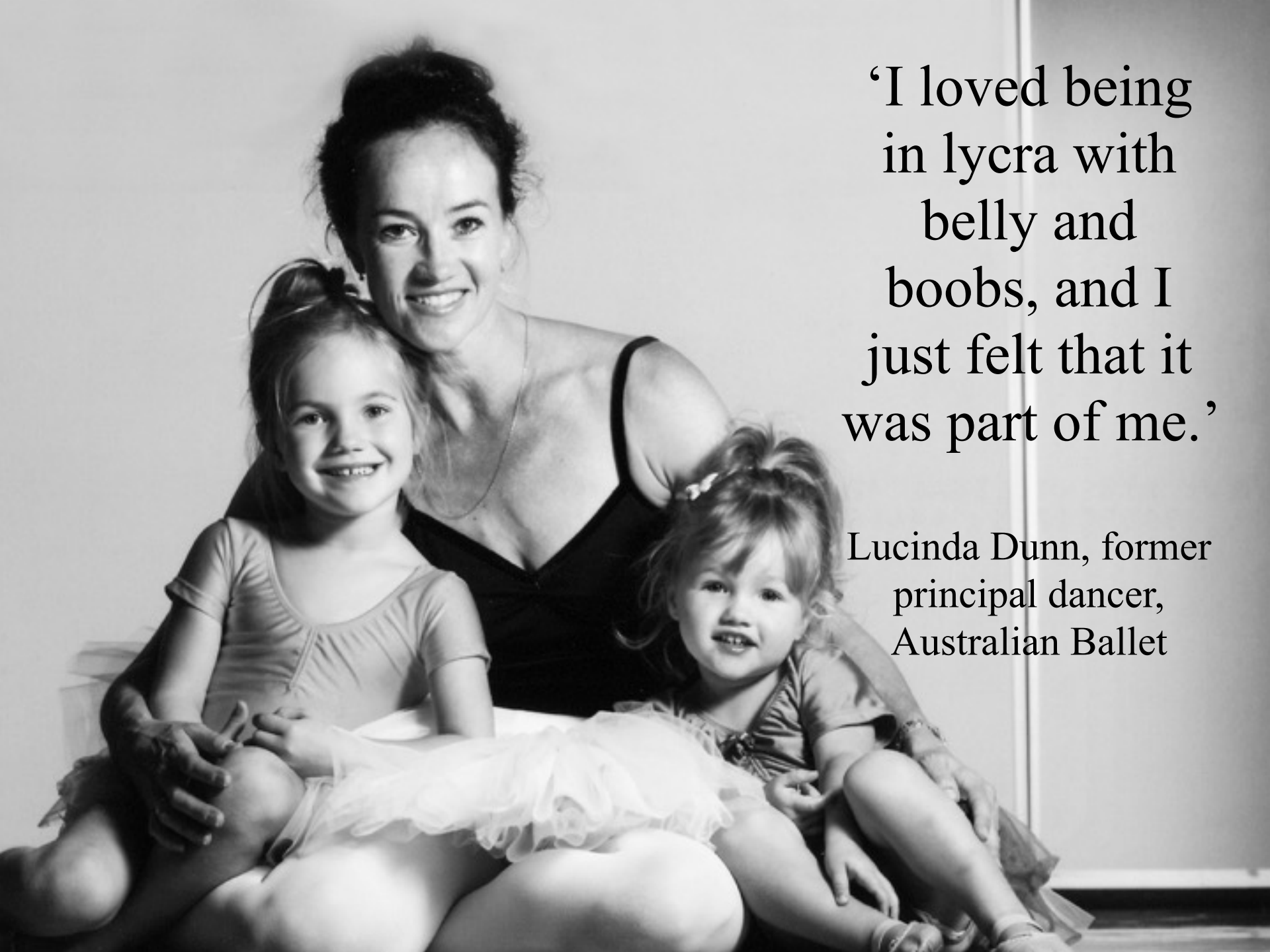
Lisa Croxford,  
Capability Manager,  
Herbert Smith Freehills

‘Don’t be a bystander. Call out inappropriate behaviour or ask someone else to do so if you feel you lack the power to challenge those in authority.’

Lisa Croxford, Capability Manager,  
Herbert Smith Freehills

‘What we need is more  
senior men to champion  
flexibility.’

Lisa Croxford, Capability Manager,  
Herbert Smith Freehills



‘I loved being  
in lycra with  
belly and  
boobs, and I  
just felt that it  
was part of me.’

Lucinda Dunn, former  
principal dancer,  
Australian Ballet

‘I just remember sitting under the barre one day and thinking, *Someone else is at the park with my baby and I’m sitting in this studio, feeling exhausted, depressed, can’t dance, don’t want to dance. What am I doing? I just wanted to be with my baby.*’

Lucinda Dunn, former principal dancer,  
Australian Ballet

‘If you go up to that critical mass of women then the novelty is removed, having a female manager or leader becomes commonplace.’

Lucinda Nolan,  
Deputy Police  
Commissioner





‘Leaders who can personalise flexible work practices for their staff hit the sweet spot of productivity.’

Lucinda Nolan,  
Deputy Police Commissioner

‘Your children give you a different perspective and a different empathy for families and people doing it tough. And having a child with a disability has made our whole family very mindful of exclusion and of difference and a vulnerability, and I think that’s something that’s probably made our family a better place.’

Lucinda Nolan,  
Deputy Police Commissioner

‘You can have it all, but you can’t  
have it all at the same time.’

Lucinda Nolan, Deputy Police  
Commissioner

Comment from  
her supervisor  
about her plans  
for starting  
a family.

‘I don’t  
recommend it; it  
kills careers for  
women.’

Maggie Evans-Galea,  
Scientist,  
Murdoch Children’s  
Institute



After telling her boss about her pregnancy, he replied: ‘I think it’s time for you to finish up, Maggie.’ She was gobsmacked. ‘I felt like someone had taken a cold wet fish and slapped it across my face.’

Maggie Evans-Galea, Scientist,  
Murdoch Children’s Institute

On motherhood guilt: ‘Get some perspective. Your child may not be as traumatised as you are about going to childcare.’

Maggie Evans-Galea, Scientist, Murdoch  
Children’s Institute

‘This is our big plan,’ her bosses said. She replied, ‘It might be your big plan. Doesn’t mean it’s mine.’

Jennifer Keyte,  
Seven News Melbourne  
Weekend News  
Presenter



‘Every time a woman got pregnant we had a cake, we said goodbye and we never saw her again. It was frustrating to see these talented women being lost to the station.’

Jennifer Keyte,  
Seven News Melbourne  
Weekend News Presenter



‘The happiest time of my  
life was when I found out I  
was pregnant.’

Jennifer Keyte, Seven News Melbourne  
Weekend News Presenter

‘Success is where preparation  
meets opportunity.’

Jennifer Keyte, Seven News Melbourne  
Weekend News Presenter

‘I’d made plenty of mistakes. The most important one was losing my sense of purpose. Without a sense of purpose it’s very easy to be knocked off your even keel.’

Moira Rayner, Principal,  
Moira Rayner & Associates



‘At the end of 36 weeks of daily meditations and exercises I had a sense of purpose. I came out of it clear about who I was, where I got the biggest charge.’

Moira Rayner, Principal,  
Moira Rayner & Associates

‘Instead of showing that I was upset, I could have been nice ... and made him a cup of tea, and there’s nothing wrong with that.’

Moira Rayner, Principal,  
Moira Rayner & Associates



Asked if she was planning on starting a family, she replied, ‘Well yes, actually, we’re trying to have kids now.’ Ever since that moment, she heard the sound of doors being slammed shut and opportunities just not being offered to her anymore.’

Tracey Spicer, journalist and newsreader

Becoming a mother, was both the hardest and most wonderful thing she has ever done. But she was, unprepared for the day-to-day reality of interviewing top business leaders and politicians one day, then cleaning up poo, heating up bottles and dealing with a crying baby the next.

Tracey Spicer,  
journalist and newsreader

‘I’ve become a better journalist after becoming a mother. I now have shared experiences and much greater empathy with working families, am organised down to the second and much more productive at work.’

Tracey Spicer,  
journalist and newsreader



‘Clarify your priorities and timing, and have children if it’s important to you because time runs out. Then “fight like hell to get back into the workforce”.’

Tracey Spicer,  
journalist and newsreader



‘After being preselected to contest the seat of Chisholm she told her husband: *‘It’s alright, I can’t win.’*’

Anna Burke,  
MP for Chisholm

‘Answering the Party Leader’s questions around her pregnancy: ‘Of course I’ll take time off, of course I’ll come back, we’ll manage,’ she retorted. ‘Have you got a problem with any of the blokes and their partners? Why isn’t it an issue for them?’

Anna Burke,  
MP for Chisholm

‘Young babies are quite portable.’

Anna Burke,  
MP for Chisholm



On joining the Liberal Party: ‘I remember thinking at the time that she [Lorraine Elliott] was doing a job that had real value and real meaning.’

Kelly O’Dwyer, MP for Higgins

‘People need to make the right choice for their family and for their circumstances. Having freedom of choice is the important element.’

Kelly O’Dwyer,  
MP for Higgins

‘I was “fascinated and rather horrified” by the experience of a friend going through pre-selection many years ago, who was asked about the impact children would have on her ability to fulfil her role.’

Kelly O’Dwyer,  
MP for Higgins



‘This is the  
chicken or the  
egg; if you can’t  
get experience as  
a lecturer then you  
can’t get a  
lecturing position’

Dr. Sharon Lierse,  
Lecturer in Education,  
Charles Darwin University



‘Heading back to Australia from Malaysia, a form of reverse culture shock hit her when she realised she was free to walk down the street on her own without being accosted by men.’

Dr. Sharon Lierse,  
Lecturer in Education,  
Charles Darwin University



‘People are willing to juggle and adjust around women ...it seems less so for a man.’

Interviewee  
comment,  
Samone McCurdy,  
Monash University

‘There is no point having policies for carer’s leave and paternity leave if in practice it is frowned upon for someone to take such leave.’

Interviewee comment,  
Samone McCurdy,  
Monash University

‘The most important role for a man in life is fatherhood. Leave for this needs to be flexible, paid and for a much greater period than currently allowed.’

Interviewee comment,  
Samone McCurdy,  
Monash University

# He Can Do It!



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‘Many women brace themselves for the stigma of the so-called “mummy track”. Women with families are pigeon-holed as women who probably won’t rise to senior ranks.’



Dr. Jen Whelan,  
Director Psynapse Psychometrics  
and Research fellow Melbourne  
Business School

‘Flexible work practices has been siloed as the preserve of women. This has consequences for men – with the assumption that “real men don’t work flexibly”.’

Dr. Jen Whelan, Director Psynapse Psychometrics and Research fellow Melbourne Business School

‘Between 25 and 50 percent of women who have been subjected to domestic violence report having lost a job at least in part due to that violence.’

Dr. Hannah Piterman, Director of HPCG,  
consultant and advisor



‘Family violence continues in the workplace in the form of abusive phone calls and emails and the violent person attending the workplace.’

Dr. Hannah Piterman, Director of HPCG, consultant and advisor



‘I felt partly responsible for John’s [violent] behaviour. I was smarter and more successful and was making John feel inadequate. [I believed] if I could manage everything...while John got his act together and got a job, all would be well.’

Interviewee, from Dr. Hannah Piterman

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