Sexism and gender imbalance in gender-assigned occupations: as exemplified by the Australian music industry

Jennifer Louise Baker

Southern Cross University

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SECTION TWO: EXEGESIS

SEXISM AND GENDER IMBALANCE IN GENDER-ASSIGNED OCCUPATIONS
– As Exemplified by the Australian Music Industry –

by

Jennifer Baker

PhD Candidate
Southern Cross University
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EXEGESIS FOR PhD
By Jennifer Baker

‘Everything is but what your opinion makes it; and that opinion lies with yourself.’
(Marcus Aurelius – Meditations in Staniforth 1964, p. 183)

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Tales and Truth
(Lohs 2001)

I have nothing more than you, I have nothing less I guess
But when it comes to tales and truth tell me, what’s your interest
I have seen more than most, but when my eyes are tight and closed
I feel almost human, almost human

I’ve been bathed in all the seasons, waking up alone
Telling my old demons they can go on home
I’ve been making my own mind up, holding my own hand
Leaving just the hall light on when I’m scared

We have made this all worthwhile, we have dignity and style
And more than ever now I feel like flying
He said, when you’re eighteen you will know, when you’re forty-five you’ll see
When you’re twelve the world’s your oyster, at least it was for me

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INTRODUCTION

Music forms an integral part of this project, so it seemed appropriate to introduce it with a song. One weekend, at the beginning of my candidacy, I was listening to a CD (Here for days 2001, Fruit), and playing my favourite track over and over. Singing along to ‘Tales and Truth’ (Lohs 2001), it suddenly dawned on me that this song encapsulated my project almost perfectly.

The heart of my project is the feminist goal of gender equality; for all genders to be treated as human beings, rather than being forced to submit to the patriarchal male/female binary, where one side (female) is constantly treated as inferior (‘I have nothing more than you. I have nothing less, I guess ... but when my eyes are tight and closed, I feel almost human ...’ (Lohs 2001)).

This is a practice-based project, the creative component of which is a television drama series, set in the Australian music industry from mid-1986 to 1989. The story is very loosely based on my own experiences in male-dominated industries in the 1980s and although the television series is fiction, everything in it could have happened in real life (‘But when it comes to tales and truth, tell me what’s your interest?’ (Lohs 2001)), and some of it did.

At the end of the series the four female protagonists, who have intentionally not been presented as man-haters (as feminists are often labelled), are shown to have succeeded in their chosen profession because they all have the aptitude and passion for it (‘We
have made this all worthwhile, we have dignity and style. And more than ever now I feel like flying’ (Lohs 2001)).

As we age, we often see things in a different light (‘When you’re eighteen you will know, when you’re forty-five you’ll see. When you’re twelve the world’s your oyster, at least it was for me’ (Lohs 2001)). When I was twelve, the world was my oyster; I could do anything I wanted. When I met my best friend’s American aunt, a biochemist, I decided that was what I would be when I grew up; and at eighteen, I began my studies to fulfil that goal. At long-past forty-five, I am now looking back at those younger years, contemplating what might have been, but knowing that you cannot always control where life takes you.

Knaus (2014) writes that Heidegger refers to:

‘coming into Being’; in other words, one is continually changing and has many possibilities of who one may become … others will influence our Being: who one is, and who one becomes within the world. (p. 4)

My formative years were in the 1960s and 1970s, witnessing members of the second wave of feminism fight for and against a range of issues ‘such as reproductive rights, equal pay for equal work, domestic and sexual violence and the sexual division of labour’ (Hollows & Moseley 2006, p. 4), in an attempt to achieve gender equality. Even before I became aware of feminism, my beliefs about gender roles were firmly entrenched, influenced by strong familial female role models and women I read about as I tore my way through the school library. I grew up with the firm conviction that I was equal to a male and this caused me some confusion when I eventually encountered the terms ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’. For a long time I asked myself, ‘Why would I need to call myself a feminist, when I am already equal to a male?’ It
was not until I read *The women’s room* (French 1977) in my early twenties, that the glaringly obvious finally dawned on me: *It is not all about me.* Because of this insight, I am now undertaking a practice-based creative arts project to provide knowledge of the issues I am addressing. By using my knowledge as an ‘insider’ (along with that of other women who have worked in the music industry, who I have either spoken to, or researched) I hope that my fictional version will result in an alternative view of women and men working in occupations currently labelled as ‘other’. Although I am still a novice, I have chosen scriptwriting as my creative genre.

I discovered the joys of scriptwriting when I completed three subjects in practice-led research for my Masters in Writing. For my practice-led research assignment’s creative work I wrote a feature film loosely based on my travels in Europe in the late 1970s. Contemplating a topic for my PhD project, I recalled the period of my life after I returned from Europe, and realised that I spent most of the 1980s attempting to work or study in male-dominated occupations: in 1980 I worked as a research scientist; in 1981 I completed a sound engineering course; from 1983 to 1986 I was the panel operator for a weekly music program at a community radio station (2SER); in 1985 I completed Stage I of an Electronics Engineering Certificate; and from 1986 to 1989 I assisted my sound engineer boyfriend/husband at gigs in Sydney.

The practical classes for the sound engineering course had four students in each and in mine the four were female. An idea began to emerge: What if the four women in my practical class had joined forces to run a PA company similar to the one my ex-husband worked for? This PA company hired out small rigs for gigs in pubs, clubs, halls and so
on, rather than big rigs used for major venues, which is an entirely different side of the business; as is working in a recording studio, or running a rehearsal room. Could I write a script that would demonstrate that women are capable of working in any male-dominated occupation if they are allowed to work free from harassment and in a style that suits them? Could I write a script that would demonstrate that assigning genders to occupations is unnecessary, and that stereotypes are unhelpful? And so, the television series, *Equalisers* was born.

Schippers (2002) writes that when we see others ‘engaging in work, because most people simultaneously do gender we see sex, gender identity, and gender performances neatly matching up; this then re-creates patterns of meaning for jobs as gendered’ (p. 34). To me, it is unnecessary to label jobs as ‘male’ or ‘female’; and women and men should be free to choose any job they feel would suit them. In brief, my project objectives are to demonstrate, through my creative work, that: sexism is inappropriate; feminism (which, by its simplest definition, is the desire for gender equality (Eagly et al. 2012)) is a positive term; and the assignation of genders to occupations is unnecessary. I also affirm that stereotypes are obstructive (Godwin, Stevens & Brenner 2006; Kliuchko 2011), and their perpetuation should be discouraged if progress towards gender equality is to be achieved. Although I have used some stereotypes in *Equalisers*, it is always with the intention to emphasise that they are problematic.

Jacey (2010) writes about ‘Superthemes’, which she describes as ‘the deepest, most underlying core beliefs behind our desire to choose a heroine’ (p. 5). There was never any question that my protagonists would be female, but my core beliefs behind *Equalisers* would place my four heroes somewhere between ‘Fighting Femininity’
‘Your heroine has a major problem with the worse sides of sexism and the “patriarchy” … embarking on “women against the system” journeys … heroines who take on the boys and win’ (p. 11)) and ‘Future Femininity’ (because I ‘want to write a good story in which the hero just happens to be a woman … want to write a story with a strong female character’ (p. 13)).

Not long after I began my project, it became very different from the one I initially envisaged. I changed both the title and the focus of my topic. As Batty (2013a) asserts: ‘new practice-based PhD candidates do not necessarily understand exactly how and where their research will take them, and how theory and practice will be pieced together in the final “package”’ (p. 14). It was only after completing some initial research that a clearer image of where I was heading began to emerge. Originally, the focus of the project was the Australian music industry, but I felt that this was too limiting. I decided the music industry should be presented as one example of a male-dominated and sexist industry, to highlight problems experienced in the majority of gender-assigned occupations. Advocating for gender equality means ensuring balance, so obviously I cannot discuss the problems of females in male-dominated industries without mentioning that males also experience problems in female-dominated industries. In Equalisers I have deliberately included male characters in female-dominated occupations, along with problems they might encounter. The presence of these male characters aligns in some ways with my Supertheme of ‘Future Femininty’ which, according to Jacey (2010), allows me to ‘make a conscious decision to subvert gender roles … Male characters can be nurturing and empathetic without anyone making a big deal of it’ (p. 14). One difference with Equalisers had to be that some people (for example, Aggie’s mother) do make a big deal of it. However, by the end of the series, even Francesca can see that Matt makes a great pre-school teacher.
I had no hesitation in choosing both a practice-based PhD project, and scriptwriting as my creative genre. Although novels and short stories significantly outnumber scripts as the chosen genre for practice-based and practice-led PhD projects, I discovered some recent examples of scripts written for film or television (Law 2009; Sexton-Finck 2009; Batty 2009; Byrne 2011; Ma 2012; Coad 2012; McLoughlin 2012; Waters 2012). I am certainly not sailing into unchartered waters by choosing to write a television drama series, even though most of the cited scripts were feature films or documentaries. I chose a television drama series for two reasons. The first was simply a desire to challenge myself by attempting something other than another feature film (my only other scriptwriting experience). I also felt that a series would give me more time to develop characters and present issues related to my project. It might also potentially retain these issues in the minds of audience members, if they were exposed to them over a longer period. And even if my scripts are only ever read and never viewed onscreen, I will still have had the opportunity to express more than I would have in a 90 or 120 minute feature film script.

Television has always been a much maligned medium, and is often referred to as ‘the idiot box’. Researchers have attempted to blame television for any number of evils (Zavodny 2006; Dennison & Edmunds 2008; Munasib & Bhattacharya 2010; McCarthy 2013). Whether or not researchers have managed to prove their hypotheses that television is to blame for such things as childhood obesity, school performance, cognitive development, unemployment, anti-social behavior and so on (and in many cases they have not been able to prove these theories) is irrelevant. Because there is a perception that television is bad for us, researchers undertake these projects because they think there is a possibility that their premise is true. Despite this, I have been a
constant and enthusiastic viewer since childhood. I enjoy this medium, and eagerly anticipate the airing of my favourite programs. These days, even if I miss an episode or entire series, I am able to watch it later (and from any location), on my phone, laptop or PC. While reading books may be my favourite pastime, watching television might not be all that far down my list. I have read many articles criticising television, but few have convinced me that it is as evil as it is portrayed. Brunsdon, D’Acci and Spigel (1997) discuss how feminists in the 1970s started to view television as ‘more than a bad object’ (p. 1) and cite the emergence of some strong female characters in television programs from the 1990s (for example, Jane Tennison from *Prime Suspect*; and Murphy Brown from *Murphy Brown*) as a positive development.

Maras (2006) discusses the idea of social capital, as promoted by Putnam and writes: ‘For Putnam, social capital is a key element of civic engagement and social connectedness’ (p. 87) and ‘Newspaper reading is associated with high social capital, TV viewing with low social capital’ (p. 88). As Maras points out, not all studies support Putnam’s argument on this topic and therefore more research needs to be undertaken: ‘A partial and mutual reframing of social capital theory and popular cultural studies accounts of television could yield interesting results’ (p. 106). If discussing a social issue covered in the morning newspaper with colleagues or friends is seen as a worthwhile activity then surely, doing the same with an issue covered in a television program (whether fiction, documentary, comedy or reality) should be considered equally valuable. If my audience were to discuss gender issues after watching an episode of *Equalisers*, I believe their conversation would have as much potential to encourage social change as it would if they were discussing a newspaper article about the same issues.
With the recent rise in numbers of creative arts PhDs, Berkeley (2014) questions the legitimacy of filmmaking as research. However, a Special Issue of TEXT Journal (‘Scriptwriting as creative writing research’ 2013) discusses unproduced scripts and encourages their publication. Adding to knowledge is a requirement of all PhD projects, and Beattie (2013) maintains: ‘For me, as a receptive audience for these scripts, I felt that I experienced something I had not known before, or not in quite that light’ (p. 1); and Baker (2013) emphasises that after writing a script as creative writing research the main benefit of having it produced is widening the audience, which of course is desirable, but not mandatory. Defending Creative Writing (including scriptwriting) as research, Batty (2013b) writes:

Understanding that Creative Writing is an activity that does not necessarily have a material (commercial) outcome allows candidates and supervisors to consider that creative practice can in fact be a research methodology, not merely an end product to complement any traditional research that may have been conducted. (p. 15)

Discussing ‘viewing the script as literature’, Maras (2009, p. 47) asserts: ‘By seeing the script as autonomous from the film, the screenplay as literature approach risks painting a poor picture of the relation between script and film’ (p. 48). However, he also argues that:

‘Spec scripts’ can be written and sold without a production deal in place. Scripts can be read, and draw on techniques shared with poetry and novels … A long tradition in the scholarly study of the performing arts has managed to separate the play script from the performance. (p. 48)

I have never thought it possible to instigate social change by writing solely for an academic audience. Brooks (2006) declares, ‘Another way we invite participants into our conversations is by actively translating our work for popular consumption and making it accessible to lay audiences’ (p. 198) and this is one reason why I chose to
undertake a practice-based research project, using scriptwriting (a ‘lay-friendly’ genre) for my creative work. Also defending scriptwriting as research, Berbary (2011) reveals that she found that ‘the screenplay format was more effective in connecting readers to my research … many non-academics … did not realise research could be so accessible’ (p. 195). As Pelias (2005) observes: ‘Any piece of performative writing is a story among many but a story about issues that matter or can be made to matter to the community’ (p. 420); and it is the community (which includes both academics and non-academics) that will bring about change.

As mentioned, Equalisers is very loosely based on my life in the 1980s, fictionalised both for ethical reasons and in order to address the project objectives. It is not uncommon for an author to use their own life as the basis for a work of fiction. As Greene (1991) writes: ‘all writing is a remembrance of things past; all writers draw on the past … Memory is especially important to anyone who cares about change … and it is of particular importance to feminists’ (p. 291). For example: Marilyn French used material from her life when writing The women’s room (1977); Nobel laureate, Doris Lessing’s fictional novels were highly autobiographical; and Helen Garner, in her novels, Monkey grip (1977) and The spare room (2008), draws heavily on experiences from her own life. In The spare room, Garner tackles the issue of caring for someone who is terminally ill. Presenting this issue as fiction makes it no less effective than it would have been as non-fiction. Cooke (2014) suggests: ‘Narrative fiction has the power to open up spaces – imaginary worlds – in which truth appears to particular readers’ (p. 639), where truth is thought of as ‘disclosure’ (p. 639) and this disclosure may differ from reader to reader. I cry and laugh alongside characters when reading or watching fiction, because during that time the characters and their tragedies and joys are real to me. And sometimes what these characters experience may be close to home;
sometimes a little too close.

Over the course of my studies I returned to books, movies and television series I had read and watched in the past, provoking reflection on what I wanted or did not want, for my protagonists in *Equalisers*. For example, I did not want them to hate all men (as much as I love *The women’s room* (1977), it is bursting with so much anger that it is hard to find much balance). And when I re-watched episodes of *Rock follies ’77 Series two* (1977) I cringed. Although the treatment of women in the music industry was probably depicted quite accurately, I wanted to propose a different scenario for my series: If my protagonists showed professionalism and talent as sound engineers, established a successful business in the music industry, and defied any sexism or negativity, would that be so difficult for an audience to believe?

This exegesis is divided into an introduction, six chapters and a conclusion. The titles of the six chapters correspond to the titles of the six episodes of *Equalisers*, with the addition of a subtitle for each.

Chapter One, titled, **Reflections: If I knew then what I know now ...** describes autoethnography and demonstrates how this methodology uses the author’s reflection on her story to encourage audience members to consider their own stories and social attitudes, and potentially contemplate, or instigate social change.

Chapter Two, titled, **Girls Just Wanna (Hazard 1983) ...:** ‘**Feminism: The radical notion that women are people**’ (Shear 1986), considers feminism and its aims. I discuss different waves and types of feminism, and how feminism has been tarnished with a negative image. (Will the day ever arrive when no woman will ever utter the
words: ‘I’m not a feminist – I like men.’?

Chapter Three, titled, **Doing It: Can a woman/man do that? Of Course she/he can!**, verifies how, by showing my protagonists just ‘doing’ a job, despite it currently being assigned a gender, both females and males can demonstrate that anyone with the appropriate skills and inclination, can ‘do’ any job they choose. I discuss truth versus the belief that something could be true, and show that a fictional story can be as effective as a ‘true’ story. I also discuss how harmful stereotyping can be to the goal of gender equality.

Chapter Four, titled, **Hit Me With Your Best Shot** (Schwartz 1980): *Critiquing and rejecting gendered power relations*, explores problems women have faced when entering male-dominated occupations and how feminists have attempted to overcome these, with mixed results.

Chapter Five, titled, **Sisyphus: We’re not tilting at windmills**, discusses the struggles of feminists from successive generations. Despite the illusion of at least *some* progress, gender equality has still not been achieved. Back down the hill that boulder rolls.

Chapter Six, titled, **Bittersweet: ‘A story worth telling’** (Ellis & Bochner 2000, p. 735), returns to my story, and how my re-telling of it as fiction has been cathartic to me and hopefully beneficial to my audience.

*Equalisers* is the story of four women who simply want to work in a profession they have chosen; a profession for which they have the appropriate skills and passion. It is also my story, a fictional version of what I *might* have accomplished if, for example, I
had been better at physics, or less shy, or whatever it was that hindered my success in male-dominated industries.

Much has been written about the value of ‘writing the self’ and much feminist writing begins with self-stories. According to Pensoneau-Conway and Toyosaki (2011), with narrative the writer attempts to:

construct a fragment (or perhaps, several fragments) of the self in order to understand how the self is situated in relation to others – to other people, to other communities, to other social systems, to other histories, to other discourses, and to other identity locations. (p. 394)

And Foucault (1997) asserts that the purpose of writing is ‘nothing less than the shaping of the self’ (p. 211), an idea expanded on by Gannon (2006), who discusses how ‘Writing the self produces transformation of the self and, potentially, of the world in local and particular contexts’ (p. 497). Second-wave feminist writer, Hélène Cixous (1976) urges that a woman:

write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies … Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. (p. 875)

By writing my story as fiction in Equalisers, this is what I have attempted to do.
CHAPTER ONE

REFLECTIONS

*If I knew then what I know now …*

Autoethnography is ‘research (graphy) that connects the personal (auto) to the cultural (ethnos), placing the self within a social context’ (Reed-Danahay 1997, p.145).

Autoethnographers initially struggled for recognition in academic circles, but although there is still a degree of reluctance for its acceptance as a legitimate research methodology (and lack of understanding of it, by some reviewers), it is now well established and is gaining wider recognition. As Ellis (2013) writes: ‘We have moved from defending autoethnography as research to witnessing its explosion in many disciplines and applied research fields all over the world’ (p. 10).

Autoethnography differs from other academic writing, because it requires the use of ‘I’, a practice that was previously actively discouraged. However, academics, like any members of a culture, have stories, and these may benefit others, adding to understanding and knowledge of a variety of social issues. As Sawrey (2005) explains:

> People have always … told self-stories to try to connect the fragments of self to society, to understand how they fit into culture and how culture fits into them … People share plot lines and can recognise their lives in the lives of others. (p. 792)

According to Doty (2010), autoethnography has ‘the potential to change the way we write’ and is ‘bound to affect our choice of words and the way we put these words on paper’ (p. 1050). This has resulted in ‘a current within many academic circles and outside the academy to make scholarly writing more accessible to wider audiences, less dry and boring to read’ (p. 1050). My intention with this project was to follow the lead…
of an ever-increasing number of autoethnographers, who have chosen to write in a more lucid style.

Although it has been criticised for the use of ‘I’ and ‘the self’, and for its supposed self-indulgence, autoethnography made perfect sense to me from the moment I was introduced to it. Other people’s stories add to my knowledge. They teach me things I did not know about the storyteller and issues addressed in their story. Similarly, my story has the potential to inform others. As a methodology, autoethnography evolved when ‘scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines began to consider what social sciences would become if they were closer to literature than to physics, if they proffered stories rather than theories’ (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011, p. 1). Postmodern philosophers started to question the dominance of science in research, with the result that because ‘many ways of knowing and inquiring are legitimated, autoethnography offers a way of giving voice to personal experience to advance sociological understanding’ (Wall 2008, p. 39). Doty (2010) discusses how autoethnography ‘affords us the chance to connect with our readers in ways that may make them care’ (p. 1050) which makes sense if encouraging social change is the researcher’s objective. Achieving social change can be a challenging and slow process, and encouraging members of a society to care about an issue might be the all-important first step.

Using autoethnography has meant recollecting events, people, places, successes and failures that have brought me to where I am today. I have subsequently taken those memories and used the ones I felt might effectively address my project objectives, altering them in my fictionalised version, to create an improved outcome. Hickey and Austin (2007) discuss how autoethnography opens:
I needed to understand this ‘Self’ in order to create my four main protagonists in *Equalisers* because each of them contains, to varying degrees, characteristics of mine.

Reflecting on this ‘Self’ led me to consider why I chose to research gender issues. Loftsdóttir (2011) regards autoethnography as a medium where ‘the researcher has to position her or himself in relation to the subject matter right from the beginning, critically asking why she has selected that particular topic of investigation’ (p. 201). For me there was never any question about my interest in gender issues. I have always deplored gender stereotypes and assigned gender roles, and have tried not to let them affect my decisions relating to occupations or activities. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see gender stereotypes and assigned gender roles either diminish or disappear completely. Although I cannot see this happening during my lifetime, it is not going to stop me from trying to encourage their elimination in the future.

According to advocates of autoethnography, (including Ellis and Bochner 1996; Mykhalovskiy 1996; Tsang 2000; and Vryan 2006) we are all part of a culture, so any self-story is still going to be connected to that culture and others within it. As an autoethnographer, I am divulging information from the position of someone who has experienced (partially or wholly) certain issues, and as Wall (2006) writes: ‘an individual is best situated to describe his or her own experience more accurately than anyone else’ (p. 3). For example, breast cancer has consumed a huge part of my life since I was diagnosed in 2001 and I know, indisputably, that my revelations on this topic will be more authentic than those of an observer. I have seen how ‘outsiders’ react to humour expressed by survivors. I have heard the inappropriate comments and
questions that come from those (friends, family, researchers) who do not understand the effect of their words. These are the types of things that an autoethnographer can expose. An ‘outsider’ researcher can ask questions, but they may not always know what questions to ask, and participants may not always want to reveal everything to someone who has not experienced what they have. The relief shown by Tony in *Equalisers* when he is able to talk to others (and especially when he is able to talk to other male breast cancer survivors), is authentic. I know this because I witnessed it time and again, both as a survivor, and during the eight years I coordinated the exercise program I included in *Equalisers*, and a support group for survivors. Although my experience was not in the 1980s when *Equalisers* is set, I decided to include this part of my story, because of what it means to me. However, to introduce a small plot twist, I decided to give this disease to a male character. It has always concerned me that the small number of men diagnosed with breast cancer do not receive the degree of support offered to women, so my decision served both to highlight this issue, and to assuage my feelings of guilt about it.

Music has always been a big part of my life (studying, listening, watching). Van Dijck (2006) discusses how certain songs can trigger memories for many people, and this definitely equates with my experience. I am aware that if the series were to be produced, I might have little or no say in the choice of songs included, but for the purpose of this autoethnographic project I felt I needed to include songs that meant something to me – my ‘wish list’. If songs trigger memories for me, then any songs from the 1970s and 1980s included in the production might similarly trigger memories for older audience members who remember that era, or for younger ones who are familiar with such songs. (Perhaps their parents played them when they were growing up; or they might have heard cover bands play them in pubs, or on TV talent shows.)
Reflection and more notably, reflexivity, are essential components of any autoethnography. LeClaire (2001) describes how memory ‘slips in before you can catch yourself … Anything can trigger it – the unexpected convergence of a particular sight and sound, a specific smell, a song. Anything. And there is no way to protect against it’ (p. 35). To read my memories could be interesting, but in order to be accepted as academic research I need to reflect on my memories and link them to theory. As Taber (2005) writes: ‘The importance of our everyday experiences cannot be ignored, and are a rich source of data when approached with an integration of theory and reflexivity’ (p. 290). The ultimate aim of autoethnography, therefore, is to tell our stories evocatively and reflexively, in order to encourage social change.

Reflexivity is more than simple self-reflection (Humphreys 2005; Atkinson 2006; Joles 2007; Short & Grant 2009; Cook 2012; Tomaselli, Dyll-Myklebust & van Grootheest 2013). It ‘entails taking seriously the self’s location(s) in culture and scholarship, circumspectly exploring our relationship to/in autoethnography, to make research and cultural life better and more meaningful’ (Berry 2013, p. 212). When I recall my experiences in male-dominated industries in the 1980s, I am aware that my true story would not encourage the social changes I am advocating. As Denzin (2013) explains, ‘I insert myself into the past and create the conditions for rewriting and hence re-experiencing it … I want to invent a new version of the past, a new history’ (p. 126). For my project to be productive, I needed to re-tell my story, put myself back in the past, and construct a story that may have been possible, had I been able to overcome the obstacles that hindered my success at the time. Other women have been successful in male-dominated occupations (and I could have continued to be a successful research scientist if I had chosen to), so why could not my fictional self have been a successful
sound engineer? As Toyosaki and Pensoneau-Conway (2013) assert:

‘Autoethnographers engage the possible rather than settling in the actual’ (p. 563).

Delving a little deeper into reflexivity, and how it relates to me, I investigated one of social theorist, Margaret Archer’s (2003) modes of reflexivity: the ‘meta-reflexives’, described by Vandenberghe (2005) as: ‘idealists who critically reflect on their reflections … and seem genuinely concerned about their concerns … They think and think’ (p. 235). And because they are never quite satisfied, they ‘are contextually unsettled and continuously on the move … searching for a new job, a new career, a new life, a new self.’ (p. 235). I began to wonder if this describes me, with years spent ricocheting from job to job, seeking a new career that will satisfy me, always in search of … and this is what has always been my stumbling block: What exactly have I been searching for? I used to jokingly bewail to others (when I was in my thirties, my forties, my fifties): ‘I don’t know what I want to be when I grow up’. Now, by labelling myself as a ‘meta-reflexive’ it is easier for me to understand my past actions, and persistent thinking, or ‘mulling over’ (p. 260), a term Archer uses. Archer (2003) writes: ‘much of their internal dialogue is concerned with themselves … recognition and nourishing of qualities tending towards the ideal, and the uprooting or taming of those which are antipathetic to it.’ And ‘Since the desired “quality” … is always evasive, in the sense that no one ever feels that they fully and adequately personify it, this is what fuels “meta-reflexivity”’ (p. 266). Archer also mentions that the ‘meta-reflexive’ will quit once they realise that their ‘situations are deemed too disparate from their ideals … they are willing to pay the price and move on’ (p. 293). As this too describes my past actions, it seems more and more likely that I do fit into this mode of reflexivity.

However, being able to label myself as a meta-reflexive does not necessarily mean that I want to be one. Perhaps through the act of writing Equalisers, which incorporates my
reflections but creates changes to those actions, characteristics, or events that hindered me in the past, I can now move on and stop some of this endless thinking. Because I have transformed my ‘real’ self into my four protagonists (all of whom contain parts of me, even though three of them were originally based on other women), perhaps their success in their new career will have beneficial consequences for the next phase of my life.

When I looked back at my life in the 1980s, I noticed a distinct pattern of behaviour. After I reluctantly returned home from Europe in 1980 (having caved in to parental pressure), I walked straight into a job as a research scientist, working for two of my former university lecturers. While I was good at my job and enjoyed it to a certain extent, my heart really was not in it and I quit after about a year. What I do recall from this time was that going to work each day took me back to my childhood, when I would visit my best friend and we would play with her chemistry set; or when I would sit at home, playing with my treasured microscope. To me, working in the laboratory was like playing with a giant chemistry set every day and it was hard to believe I actually got paid to do it. Even so, life as a research scientist can be extremely frustrating, and I just did not feel that it was what I wanted to do for the rest of my working life. If I knew what mind-numbingly boring jobs I would end up taking on over the years in order to feed my children, I might very well have stuck with it. Hindsight: If I knew then what I know now ...

Just before I left my research job, I came up with the bright idea that because of my lifelong obsession with music, and my enjoyment of ‘twiddling knobs’ in the laboratory, perhaps I could become a sound engineer. I found a course and completed it. However, the reality of working as a sound engineer was soon brought to a
standstill for a number of reasons, including the one fact I had conveniently ignored: physics had always been my weakest subject in science (not a ‘female’ thing – males can be weak in physics too); and if I tried to work in a field that required me to work with electricity, I might possibly electrocute either myself or someone else. After a brief stint working in a somewhat shonky pathology laboratory (a job I had always said I would never consider, but unfortunately allowed a friend to persuade me to try) I was back working in yet another boring ‘female’ job so I decided I needed to return to some form of study. With my typical disregard for doing what others might view as sensible, I resolved to look for what would be the hardest subject (for me) to study at technical college.

Consequently, I enrolled in Stage I of an Electronics Engineering Certificate. Aged 30, I was the only female in the class and much older than the male students, the majority of whom were 17 or 18 years old. I surprised myself a little by doing very well, even outshining most of the boys with my soldering prowess. However when I started Stage II I could not understand any of it. Not one word. I remember sitting at my dining room table a few weeks into the new semester, trying to complete some homework problems. I could not solve even one of them. ‘This is ridiculous. What am I doing?’ I muttered. As mentioned, I was always weak in physics, and it was only going to get harder. There was no point in continuing and on the Monday morning I went to the head teacher’s office and dropped out. Although he tried to convince me to stay, with an offer of mentoring by one of the few female students in a higher stage, I am very aware of my limitations, and stuck to my decision.

I look back at my experience at Technical College and recall a number of things: the loneliness of the first couple of weeks during breaks (on one of the first days, when I
was brave enough to ask if I could sit with a couple of classmates at lunchtime they looked at me as if I had two heads and then completely ignored me when I sat down, so it was fortunate that I had brought along a book to read); the relief I felt when finally, one of the cheekier boys yelled out for me to join him and his group during the afternoon break, which immediately broke the ice and led to me becoming part of their group (and occasionally their ‘Aunty Jenny’ when I admonished them for their behaviour, or they wanted advice about girls). I also recall the innate sexism the boys exhibited towards girls in other courses in the cafeteria; and the time I stood up at the end of class and stormed out yelling ‘F--- OFF!’ at the lot of them, and how scared the young teacher looked at the prospect that one of the boys had said or done something inappropriate. (This outburst had nothing to do with sexism; they had simply annoyed me about something to do with our up-coming exams.). But I also remember how much I enjoyed learning to solder and build the types of electronics kits that the boys had been building at home for years; and how resigned I was to the fact that I would never understand electronics, no matter how much I tried – but the satisfaction I felt in having challenged myself to give it one more go.

My having challenged myself in that manner was actually quite an achievement for another reason. I have always been extremely shy and going into any new situation has always been stressful. I still put myself in these positions, and although I manage to mask my shyness some of the time, it is always present and is still problematic. As a school student, when I caught the bus home from my all-girls school each afternoon I had to disembark outside my brother’s all-boys school and walk past groups of boys at their bus stop. I lived in constant fear of comments from these boys, and this has led to a life-time of anxiety when approaching groups of males. Entering a classroom where I was the only female made me nervous, but I made myself do it. When I hear or see
someone refusing to try an occupation or activity for whatever reason (apart from a legitimate phobia), I feel frustrated (even though I do understand, from personal experience, how difficult it might be). If the reason for not trying it is because the person has been negatively influenced by gender stereotypes, it not only frustrates me, it angers me. This is one reason why I needed to undertake this project.

I began to wonder about assigned gender roles and how males and females choose the type of jobs they attempt. Bailey (1999), in her discussions with women working in the film industry, quotes Annie Cocksedge, who claims that women do not go into sound mixing because: ‘It is just the usual female thing of “No I can’t do that, because I’ve never done that, and because I’ve never thought of doing that”’ (p. 116). This attitude is far removed from mine when it comes to trying different jobs or activities (again, I am not talking about overcoming phobias – such as my own fear of heights, needles and moths). My approach is: ‘You don’t know if you can do something until you try, so you may as well give it a go,’ or perhaps ‘Everyone needs a challenge’. I needed to explore this alien (to me) attitude further. If that really is the way some women think, then maybe I could do something to change this. Because people tend to believe stereotypes (in this case, about gender-assigned occupations), many females and males could miss out on occupations that might very well suit them.

It is vital that the impact of stereotypes is decreased or eliminated if workplaces are ever going to become more gender-balanced. If this balance can be achieved, then it may no longer be seen as necessary to assign genders to jobs. Even when women do enter the workplace, Metz (2011) asserts that ‘Perceptions and stereotypes are two of the most commonly reported barriers to women’s advancement’ (p. 287). However, if the influence of stereotypes is lessened, better outcomes are observed. Patterson (2012)
confirms that:

Low endorsement of gender stereotypes, along with other aspects of egalitarian gender role attitudes, is associated with a variety of positive outcomes, including higher levels of educational attainment … academic motivation … and academic performance. (p. 424)

Around the time I was floundering with Stage II of my course, I met a sound engineer who became my boyfriend, then husband, then later, ex-husband. For three years (1986-9) I assisted him at gigs in Sydney, helping set up and pack up the gear. In those days I was very slight (156cm and between 45 and 48kg) and not physically strong (although over time I did get a little stronger). While I could not carry the heavier equipment, I could bring in the smaller gear, run leads, plug in the desk, set up microphone stands and microphones; and I did these tasks well. Sitting behind the effects rack for hours before and during gigs, and hanging around with the bands afterwards, gave me ample time to observe the music scene in Sydney at that time. I am now able to retrieve some of these memories to make use of (or not) in *Equalisers*.

Thinking back to those three years brought back some random memories of gigs, venues, bands and punters, including: the Hopetoun at Surry Hills (just around the corner from my house), where the mixing desk was set up in the kitchen, through the bar, so it was impossible to see the band, and the engineer had to keep running back and forth all night in order to do his job; the sailing club on the north side of the Harbour Bridge where we worked on countless Sunday afternoons, and where the punters were invariably obnoxious (I lost count of the number of people I hit with gear as I tried to carry it out at the end of the gig, because they just would not move out of the way no matter how much I yelled ‘Excuse me!’; and those who would put their drinks on top of, or even inside, the effects rack, despite signs telling them not to); the Light Brigade at Paddington, where we spent many a Saturday night grooving along to
sixties music with the band we liked working with the most (and who played at our wedding); the lesbian pub near Central Railway, where the drummer was seated on a sheet of masonite on top of the back bar, and you had to walk through the band to get to the toilets; the wedding we did, with an eleven-piece band (with too many microphones and not enough power points, the lights kept shorting out), whose three female singers were not all supposed to be there, and kept trying to shove each other out of the way (hilarious). I remember the Three Weeds at Roselle, the Sandringham at Newtown, the Lansdowne at Chippendale, The Trade Union Club and the White Horse at Surry Hills, the Annandale Hotel, the Bondi Lifesaver … all regular venues. There was the gig at Randwick that we ran out on (a punk band had booked under a false name because they had been banned after wrecking gear the previous time; after checking with the boss, we picked up the gear and ran before the band arrived; and then spent an enjoyable evening drinking with the manager of the Lansdowne). So many clubs, halls, parties, and events: the highs and lows of gigs on ferries; the time I had to operate lights on the night a single was being launched and a punter tried to chat me up because I was so clever, working the lights (actually, I had no idea what I was doing, but there was no-one else available); and the night some idiot let off a flare inside a big hotel in Manly which was full of punters having last drinks after the gig. (We had just finished packing up and were sitting backstage with the band, and managed to get outside into the alley at the back of the stage, away from the smoke and the awful smell.)

I cannot say it was all fun and games, but it was always fascinating, especially to someone like me, who has always been more of an observer than a participant. As mentioned, I have always been shy and as I was not the one being paid to work at these gigs (even though I worked hard) I never felt it was my place to mingle with the bands.
and their hangers-on during breaks. If asked to join the band and my boyfriend/husband for a drink at the end of a gig, I did and I would also socialise if we went back to someone’s place afterwards.

Unlike partners, friends or hangers-on who crowded around the bands during breaks, I would sit behind the effects rack on my stool or chair, and watch. Something I did notice was that as soon as a male was up on a stage, or worked as a crew member for a band, they automatically became attractive to women, and whether or not they had a partner became irrelevant to some female punters. Because I did my assigned jobs efficiently and I did not act like a self-important dropkick (like many a girlfriend/wife of a male band member) most of the bands we worked for regularly were friendly and accepted me as part of the team; some even thanked me for my hard work. However there were bands who were, to put it politely, ‘totally up themselves’ (and interestingly, these were often the bands with the least talent); and when we were doing support gigs, there were occasionally roadies who would push me out of the way for no reason except they felt the need to. I would usually just laugh, shake my head and mutter ‘dickhead’ and then go and sit back in my little safe spot behind the effects rack when I had finished what I had to do.

Drugs were a huge part of 1980s culture, but it was different from today: no ecstasy; no ice; no deadly new designer drug every few months; no illicit laboratories routinely springing up throughout suburbia. Everyone smoked dope (well, just about everyone we knew). Other drugs around at the time included speed, acid, magic mushrooms, and cocaine. And of course: heroin. I remember sitting in a park across the road from The White Horse Hotel in Surry Hills one evening, watching a musician friend shoot up; he claimed to only do it occasionally – I hoped he was telling the truth; I watched the
gradual decline of the vivacious tour manager of a very high profile band, when she used to come and watch some friends of mine who played in a folk band (‘I’ve got a cold’ she’d say as she did the tell-tale user’s sniffle each week; tried to borrow money from band members; and just began to look worse and worse); I heard about the addiction of a talented female singerkeyboard player and her boyfriend (they too had been convinced when they started that they could limit their use to ‘occasionally’); and I cried about the death of a talented musician who had long beaten his addiction, only to succumb to an asthma attack. I had seen what heroin could do to friends who started using during the five months I lived in Amsterdam in the late 1970s, and I always thought it was a dumb thing to try.

As can be seen from the above glimpse of my life in the 1980s, my past choices show that I tend to be drawn to what have been assigned as ‘male’ jobs and find the ‘female’ jobs I have been forced to take on, tedious and unfulfilling. The trouble was, although I was good at my original ‘male’ job (scientist), I was not so good at others I attempted.

Reflecting on my sound engineering course, I wondered if I could use this experience in some way, to persuade others to try jobs that they might otherwise have avoided simply because they assumed these occupations were not suitable for their gender. Just because I was not good at some of the jobs I tried, does not mean that others could not succeed. Although greatly outnumbered by males, there have been and are successful female sound engineers, just as there are successful female architects, engineers, mathematicians, builders, train drivers and so on. Conversely, there are successful male nurses, teachers, hairdressers and stay-at-home parents.

As mentioned, the PA company that my former husband worked for hired out small
rigs for gigs in pubs, clubs, private functions and events, rather than the bigger rigs carried in trucks for use in large venues. The small rigs could fit in the back of a panel van or station wagon as long as everything was loaded in precisely the right order. Although major bands (and up-and-coming support bands) usually play in bigger venues, there have always been hundreds of ‘little’ bands that slog away in small venues, requiring smaller PA systems; and this fact plays an important role in Equalisers. And although the live music scene may have been struggling in Sydney in recent years, in the 1980s it was thriving.

When the idea for Equalisers began to evolve, I recalled how well the four of us in my sound engineering practical class had functioned as a group and it seemed feasible that they could have continued to work as a group after the course finished. Jacey (2010) discusses the heroine’s ‘role choice’, which ‘represents your main female character seeking or reacting to a certain kind of life to be true to herself’” (p. 34). My four protagonists chose to enrol in the sound engineering course independently, but then decided on the ‘role choice’ of ‘Sorority’ which, according to Jacey (2010) denotes my ‘heroine’s need … to be part of a group of females … because it represents women’s need to share, empathise, connect, and feel understood’ (p. 47). Because I had four protagonists, their group, or sorority was already conveniently in place. It also meant that when considering a ‘Story Type’, I could relate to the one known as ‘Group Endeavour’ (‘A group of heroines who depend on each other or live together as a community have an experience together in which they are inter-dependent’ (p. 71)).

Cantzler and Leijon (2007) discuss a category of female entrepreneurs labelled ‘Visionary entrepreneurs’ who work in teams and establish networks around their businesses. One female Visionary entrepreneur has run her very successful music business since the late 1970s along with two friends. ‘The business started as a group of
friends … they shared the same ideology and values. They were already a group …

They have created a genuine team and they stick together’ (p. 740); much like the women in Equalisers. A PA company similar to the one my husband worked for would have been ideal, but it needed to be financially viable for four proprietors, and other employees, once they were in a position to expand operations. To enable this, I added a rehearsal room and a small recording studio to Equalisers and allowed the three stronger women to take work on big rigs/tours when they could get it.

How do my memories relate to the project that was evolving in my mind? It is obvious that my project is linked to how I see the world with regard to gender roles, and this in turn is related to how I came to my feminist ideals as a small child. Although I have not been very active (for example, I have never attended an International Women’s Day or Reclaim the Night march), I have always been a feminist, whether or not I was aware of it. Now that I am aware, it is important to me that the feminist goal of gender equality remains in the spotlight, and reinventing my story in Equalisers, and highlighting my social ‘givens’ regarding gender roles, is my contribution to this ongoing cause.

One question that needs to be considered is: How did I acquire these social ‘givens’? When I was very young I saw photographs of both my parents at university, where my mother studied architecture, a supposedly ‘male’ occupation. Consequently, from a young age I was aware that a woman could go to university and she could study whatever she wanted. My first hero was Marie Curie, a scientist with two Nobel Prizes. Not only could a woman be a scientist (another supposedly ‘male’ occupation), she could excel as one. I went to an all-girls school where high achievement was paramount and you were either good at maths and science or you were not. Gender was irrelevant. As a child I was just as happy playing with ‘boys’ toys as ‘girls’ toys, especially my
microscope, my best friend’s chemistry set and my brother’s Meccano set. My brother, being only a year younger than me, was my first playmate. There have been times when I have had groups of male friends, defying the stereotype that adult males and females cannot be platonic friends. Mehta and Strough (2009) refer to ‘the homosocial norm’ which is ‘the understanding that people approve of same-sex friendships over other-sex friendships’ which ‘may contribute to sex segregation by discouraging other-sex friendships across the life span’ (p. 210). This was never my reality. When I first arrived on my university campus to begin my science degree, having spent my school years surrounded by girls (with somewhat limited experience with boys), I just assumed I should treat the males in my classes the same as I treated the females. It did not occur to me that having males as friends was not seen as one of society’s norms. Conversely, I sometimes found it difficult to recognise when a male friend ‘liked’ me, in the same way that Lil and Jack fail to recognise each other’s feelings in Equalisers.

I have never come to terms with the concept of science as a ‘male’ domain. Williams (2010) suggests that ‘Feminist critiques of science … contributed to challenging the objectivity of science by showing that women have generally been excluded from science as researchers and as objects of research’ (p. 202) and this concept is completely foreign to me. When I first attended university and studied science, I never felt discriminated against or disparaged because I was female, or that I was invading a ‘male’ domain. To me science was not a gendered occupation; it was just an occupation I had chosen because it interested me; and the objects of my research project when I did work as a scientist, were women. I never consider gender when choosing an activity or occupation, and it saddens me to think that others might not challenge themselves to undertake something because of unnecessary and false stereotypes. When the idea for my project began to materialise, it was immediately obvious why I would be interested in these
issues. If anyone who reads my manuscript or any publications that stem from it (or watches *Equalisers* if it is produced someday) is persuaded to change their attitudes towards gender-assigned occupations, then this may be of help in some day achieving the ultimate feminist goal of gender equality. My ‘reader’ audience would most likely be academic, or non-academic with an interest in gender issues. My ‘television’ audience could be much wider: female or male; feminist or anti-feminist; or anyone aged from late teens to their sixties, who enjoys music, or who remembers, or wants to know about, the 1980s.

The ethics of autoethnography can be of concern to many researchers, both as risk for the author and for others they may include in their stories (Wood 2009; Berry & Clair 2011). Even when the researcher is sole participant in their research, there are always other people involved. In a discussion on ethnographic reflexivity, when asked about challenges of writing autoethnographies, one of Berry and Clair’s (2011) research participants (Tony) states: ‘To say we need permission from all of these contingencies to tell our stories is limiting, exhaustive, and oppressive … sometimes I don’t want others determining whether I should or should not have a voice’ (p. 199). This was certainly something I had to consider when choosing to fictionalise parts of my story that would involve other people, some of whom I have not seen for thirty years or more.

The four of us in the practical class at the sound engineering course would have made great protagonists, because of our individual characteristics, personalities and background stories. I knew I needed to make at least some changes, for ethical reasons. However, there were some characteristics I just could not bear to omit (for example, Aggie’s love of ABBA and playing the drums, and Teagan’s much older boyfriend and his heroin use) and it did cause me a little concern that the real characters (wherever
they might be now) could recognise themselves if they were to see the series. I then recalled attending a talk at the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP) conference in Geelong in 2012. Catherine McKinnon (2012) spoke about a play she and her students had written and produced. When she described one of the characters (Brainiac) I was astonished: This character was, without a shadow of a doubt, me. After the talk I said to the person next to me: ‘Brainiac was me!’ He replied, ‘No, Brainiac was me!’ As it turned out, when we exchanged reasons for thinking this character was either of us, we both could have been right. It is possible for us to see ourselves in fictional characters even though they may or may not be based on a real person.

Another example was when I was writing the character based on me (Lil). I did not really want to include members of my family in the story for risk of offence. I decided in the end to create the character Nanna, based on my late grandmother, who was very stubborn and somewhat eccentric. I wanted to provide some indication of where some of Lil’s character traits may have originated, such as not letting other people tell her what she can and cannot do. The first of her scenes shows Nanna (aged 80) stuck up a tree in her garden. While my grandmother was constantly gardening and could very well have been climbing trees in her 70s and 80s, we never actually found her stuck up in one. When I showed the script to my supervisors, one of them commented that a friend had found their grandmother stuck up in a tree, just like Nanna. No matter what you write, there is a possibility that someone will recognise either themselves or someone they know in a character and this has eased my conscience a little. Even if I have kept some of the characteristics of the women in my sound engineering course, they would not be the only women to possess them.

When I began to transform the women in my practical class into the protagonists in
I did so with two goals in mind. I needed to think of my project objectives; but I also needed to give each protagonist what Jacey (2010) calls her ‘M-Factor’, that is, ‘the one dominant quality that really stands out’ (p. 23). For example, Lil’s ability to be endearingly annoying/bossy (or even clueless, regarding Jack) or Teagan’s bravado, could be what an audience member either loves or hates about the character.

With the project objectives in mind it was important that Lil was as small as I was because I wanted to address the issue of heavy lifting in male-dominated occupations, which will be discussed later. I also felt free to give characters other than Lil parts of my character and stories. De Freitas and Paton (2009) discuss how one of their research participants found it useful to ‘fragment’ herself into two characters when writing her autoethnography. By giving Aggie the Electronics Engineering Certificate I could develop storylines involving her parents (the characters Yoshi and Francesca were mostly made-up), especially her nagging mother and the pre-school she runs. This in turn allowed me to show a male (Matt) working in a ‘female’ occupation. This character was based very loosely on an old boyfriend of one of my sisters. Another of my sisters’ friends was a male nurse, like Josh. The woman who became Teagan did not (as far as I know) have an Aboriginal mother and Irish-Australian father, but once again, this allowed me to introduce other issues such as racial stereotypes. It also led to a connection between the characters Teagan and Drew. The woman who became Jo was actually Norwegian and she was the one I remember the least. When I am writing a script I hear and see the characters in my head and Aggie and Teagan look and sound much the same as they did all those years ago. Jo was originally going to be English, but every time she said anything in her initial scenes, the words came out in my head as Scottish. Eventually I gave in and let her have her way. It also took me a while to notice that Aggie had stolen my addiction to chocolate. Some of the minor characters are based
on real people, or composites of real people, which might have caused problems ethically, but as mentioned above, people will recognise themselves in characters whether they are based on them or not.

The types of memories I have outlined in this chapter form the basis of my television series and highlight my need to encourage social change relating to gender equality, sexism and gender-assigned roles. Others may feel a similar need; or may be persuaded to change their current views. Some audience members may reflect (as I did with Brainiac): ‘That character was me’; or perhaps some may think: ‘I wish I had the guts to be that character’. If the results of my reflections incite others to reflect on their own stories, then I will have accomplished at least part of what I set out to do.
CHAPTER TWO

GIRLS JUST WANNA … (Hazard 1983)

‘Feminism: The radical notion that women are people’ (Shear 1986)

One of the funniest memories I have of my wedding was seeing my new 12-year-old niece-in-law standing in front of the band (at this stage of the proceedings we were on a ferry on Sydney Harbour), doing an improvised rap version of Cyndi Lauper’s, ‘Girls Just Wanna Have Fun’ (Hazard 1983; Lauper 1985). Never mind that the band was playing something completely different – nothing was going to stop her (including her little sister, who was clamouring to join in). Similarly, in Equalisers nothing is going to stop my female protagonists succeeding in their chosen profession. Girls just ‘wanna’ do what they ‘wanna’ do, even if it is not always what society believes they should do. As Schippers (2002) asks:

Is it not possible for individuals to consciously refuse to follow the rules, not bend to the pressure to do so, and through their persistence have some effect on others, or even on the rules themselves? … By not going along, or by performing an alternative gender display, we can also situate others into gender positions. (p. 84)

To state the obvious: ‘girls’ just ‘wanna’ be able to do or be any number of things, depending on their circumstances. In some countries, girls want the right to an education; or to not be forced into marriage when they are still children; or simply be allowed to drive a car. In many countries, women want to choose to work in a job where they will be paid the same as a male in the same position. Or perhaps they want reproductive rights or the right to a workplace free of discrimination or harassment. Everywhere, women want to be able to walk the streets without fear of being attacked or to live in a home where they are not subjected to violence. My project addresses
issues related to females and males being able to work in any job they choose, without having to ‘put up with’ issues related to assigned gender roles. In short, jobs should not be assigned genders, and no-one should be harassed for their choice of employment. To expand on this, cultural anthropologist, Gayle Rubin (2013) contends that:

the feminist movement must dream of … the elimination of obligatory sexualities and sex roles. The dream I find most compelling is one of an androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one’s sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love. (p. 252)

As a starting point, what do I want in terms of feminism? I have always wanted the freedom to be myself and to choose whatever activity or occupation I wanted, regardless of assigned gender roles. I also wanted to work at something that I enjoyed and that stimulated me intellectually. Unfortunately things have not worked out as I would have liked, and I have spent many years working in jobs that did not fulfil me. I occasionally wonder what would have happened if I had stuck to my original career in science; then I realise that if I had, I would not be undertaking this project and I would not have discovered the joys of scriptwriting: Swings and roundabouts.

In Equalisers, Lil and Aggie have chosen to work in male-dominated occupations and are happy with their choices. In Episode One, Lil is shown to be good at her job as a research scientist, but wonders whether there might be something ‘out there’ that she might be just as good at. She is open for a change if something jumps out at her. Similarly, Aggie is excited about finishing her electronics studies, but needs to decide what sort of work she wants to do. She could do what she originally intended – either work for Telecom Australia (renamed Telstra in 1993) as a telephone technician (which is what many of the male students will end up doing) or work for her electrician father. She would cope well in either situation, but she knows if she works with her fellow students she will have to listen to their sexist banter year in, year out and why would
that be an appealing option? When the opportunity arises to combine electronics with her other passion – music – she is willing to give it a go. She knows that this is another sexist industry, but once she finds she has the support of other women she realises it will be easier to negotiate entry into this male domain. If male- and female-dominated industries were to become more balanced in numbers, then perhaps the degree of sexism and harassment experienced by those of the ‘other’ gender might decrease accordingly.

When *Equalisers* begins the four women do not have much knowledge of feminism. It is only when they start hearing themselves referred to as ‘bloody feminists’ that they decide they want to find out more about it. In Episode Four Lil and Aggie do some research and discover a few interesting facts which leads to varying degrees of feminist activity from the four women. They all participate in the International Women’s Day march, mainly because Kate is performing at its conclusion. Jo and Grace attend a Reclaim the Night march, but the others are working that night. Jo and Teagan work at the Women’s Festival with trainees Stevie and Jess, but Lil and Aggie do not know if they agree with the usefulness of events that are restricted to females. This opinion is echoed by Lea Verou, a PhD candidate in electrical engineering and computer science at M.I.T. who wrote that ‘women-only conferences and hackathons “cultivate the notion that women are these weak beings who find their male colleagues too intimidating”’ (Miller 2014, p. 10). There are arguments for and against women-only events, but it is beneficial for women to have a choice whether to attend such gatherings or not. In *Equalisers* the women decide that Equalisers PA will be all-female to start with, so they can prove that females can be good sound engineers and business proprietors. Once they have proved this, they will start to employ males so *they* will not be labelled as sexist.
As a child growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, there was so much to witness happening alongside the women’s movement. It was a time of huge social change; a wonderful era to grow up in. There was the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, Woodstock, hippies, protest music and just music in general (I remember hearing the very first song on the radical new radio station, 2JJ (Double J), which later became Triple J; and in 2014 I listened to the first song on the new offshoot of Triple J – which has been named: Double J). I read *The autobiography of Malcolm X* (X & Haley 1966) and *Ringolevio: A life played for keeps* (Grogan 1974). I watched the movies *Woodstock* (1970), *The concert for Bangladesh* (1972) and *The strawberry statement* (1970) and played the albums from them over and over. Helen Reddy released her iconic anthem, *I am woman* (Burton & Reddy 1975) and although she is not an artist I would otherwise have listened to, I quite like singing this song – and it was exceptionally right for the time. I recall singing it alongside 200 women at the final session of a breast cancer conference in 2009, and it was unforgettable. And in 2015 a group of Australian singers performed a stunning version of the song as a finale for Judith Lucy’s television program *Judith Lucy is All Woman* (*I am woman* 2015).

As an individual feminist, I want certain things, but what do women and feminists, as labelled groups, want? It is almost impossible to answer this, as there are many types of feminisms and feminists, and ‘women’ as a group is very difficult to define (Ang & Hermes 1991; Brunsdon 1997). On a simple level, feminism relates to equality. The *Macquarie Dictionary* (2003) defines feminism as: ‘a movement or doctrine which advocates equal rights and opportunities for women, especially the extension of their activities in social and political life’. As the slogan says, ‘Feminism is the radical notion that women are people’. I found this quotation soon after I started my project and for
some reason it resonated with me. While I never wear t-shirts with slogans on them, I did on this occasion buy one (whether or not I have actually worn it …). The quotation has been attributed online to Cheris Kramarae and Paula Treichler, but when I saw it also attributed to feminist Rebecca Walker, my suspicions were aroused. I emailed Cheris, who informed me that it was actually Marie Shear who came up with it. Marie emailed me a citation for the quotation and kindly mailed me a copy of the original article. She told me that even though she may have first thought of it in the 1970s (and also commented that she cannot say that she is the only person in the world to have come up with it or something similar), the cited journal (Shear 1986) was the first time the quotation was seen by a large audience. This simple slogan makes it difficult to understand why the words ‘feminism’ or ‘feminist’ incite so much anger, hatred and mistrust.

According to Grosz (2010), feminist theory is ‘directed toward bringing about a future better than and different from the present’ (p. 101) and she describes it as: ‘the labour, the practice, of thinking and locating what is other than patriarchy … the labour of producing new thought beyond patriarchal concepts’ (p. 105). Kolmar and Bartkowski (2013) say that the issue is ‘gender asymmetry – the designation of women and things associated with women as different from, inferior to, of lesser value than men and things associated with men’ (p. 2). Ultimately, feminists ‘just wanna’ live in an egalitarian world. Different generations of feminists (or ‘waves’) have fought for a range of issues, but the common link has always been equality.

What did first-wave feminists want? Although they broached a range of issues, including equal pay for equal work, and access to higher education (Sherrick 1983), their most high profile ‘want’ was the right to vote and this was achieved at various times in different
countries. In Canada in the 1920s, a woman ‘wanted’ to enter parliament, but was told she could not because legally, a woman was not a ‘person’. This led to what became known as ‘The “Persons” Case’ (Dieleman 2010), and resulted in Canadian women being legally granted the status of persons in 1929. Once the ‘want’ of voting rights was achieved, for the most part ‘women’ (as a labelled group) were still perceived as the inferior side of the male/female binary, within patriarchal societies.

The second wave of feminism began in the 1960s, with a new range of ‘wants’ which look remarkably like those that are still being fought for today: reproductive rights; equal pay; safety from violence against women (on the street and in the home); and more equal distribution of household chores and childcare. Despite seeming to have made some progress over the last thirty or forty years, third-wave, post and now fourth-wave feminists are not much closer to achieving equality than second-wave feminists (Banyard, 2010). Galloway (2013) maintains that women are still largely defined as the home-makers and principal child-rearers, and ‘So long as women are perceived according to their place in a family structure their engagement as empowered citizens in political, legal, economic, social and cultural terms is limited’ (n.p.).

One way of decreasing the effectiveness of an opposing group is to continually denigrate it. One reason for the misconception about what feminists want is that second-wave feminists were generally perceived and portrayed as ‘a few white, upper-middle-class, prudish yet bra-burning, man-hating, caricature-like women’ (Harnois 2008, p. 124). Even though it is debatable whether bra-burning actually occurred, (it has been suggested it was something the media invented (Douglas 2007)), negative stereotypes such as this one persist. Rosemary Grey recalls, ‘When I was younger, I
used to think that my mum was a bit hostile towards men and I didn’t really relate to that. But as I got older, I realised it wasn’t a hostility towards men, it was a hostility towards a patriarchy, which is a different thing’ (Maddison & Grey 2010, p. 486). This sentiment is echoed by Law (2013) who explains that ‘Feminism is about despising an idea. And the idea is that women are unequal to men’ (p. 34).

Although some feminists exhibit hostility towards men, many just want to abolish the patriarchy and achieve equality, and this is reflected in Equalisers. The four women just want to work alongside men in their chosen profession, as equals. When they are confronted by sexist attitudes or threatened in any way, they choose to act professionally and get on with their job, or extricate themselves with a minimum of fuss, to a position of safety. Many of the males the women work with are quite happy to work alongside them – not all males are sexist and not all feminists (or all women) hate men, and it was important to emphasise this. As a feminist who believes in gender equality, it makes no sense to me to promote hatred of men, or to claim that women are superior to men. There are many men who identify as feminists or who hold feminist ideals (Katz 2012; Berlatsky 2013; Chesler 2014; Yousafzai 2014), and those who deny them the right to be a member of ‘our club’ do feminism a huge disservice (Bates 2014).

In Equalisers, Lil has more male friends than female (as I often had). Aggie gets on well with the male students in her classes (as I eventually did at the Technical College). In London, Jo worked mostly with males in the recording studio (as I did in the laboratory). And Teagan has been associating with bands in the male-dominated music industry for three years (as I did when I was helping my boyfriend/husband). The four also have no problem interacting with other females. None of the four is a stereotypical feminist (as
described by anti-feminists), yet all of them hold feminist ideals; and while each may individually have initially had some niggling doubts about their decision, they enter a ‘male’ domain with the conviction that they have a right to do so.

Moi (2006) describes how most of her students denied being feminists at the beginning of her seminar on Feminist Classics, but when she explained that feminists just want ‘freedom, equality, and justice for women’, they replied ‘Oh, well, if that’s all you mean by feminism, then we are feminists. But we would never call ourselves feminists’ (p. 1735-6). The reason for this is that ‘other people would think that they must be strident, domineering, aggressive, and intolerant, and worst of all, that they must hate men’ (p. 1736). Of course there are some feminists who profess a hatred of men. Unfortunately this appears to give antifeminists license to falsely label all feminists as man-haters which leads to the misunderstanding of the label as outlined above. Keller (2011) suggests that third-wave feminism’s tendency to try to disguise the term ‘feminism’ by using words like ‘empowerment’ and ‘girl power’ could be detrimental and might both discourage young women from identifying as feminists and ‘continue to perpetuate many of the stereotypes about feminists that are currently prevalent’ (p. 8).

Whereas second-wave feminism was notable for its group consciousness, third-wave feminism became much more individualised and conscious of diversity (Showden 2009; Keller 2011). Being conscious of diversity is of course, not undesirable, but it may have contributed to a slowing down of progress for some primarily feminist issues. Harris (2010) questions the existence of third wave feminism, because young women started to ‘distance themselves from big “f” feminism’ (p. 475), so ‘if young women do not identify as feminist, how can young feminist activity exist’ (p. 475)? Such was the apparent slump in feminism, that in 1998 the cover of Time Magazine asked ‘Is
feminism dead’ *Time Magazine* 1998)? Over a decade later, in an article in the online magazine, *Hoopla*, titled ‘Is Feminism Flatlining?’ sociologist and feminist activist, Eva Cox (2012) maintained that although some progress was made in the 1970s and 1980s, ‘We have not achieved the necessary social and cultural changes to match our new legal rights. Instead, workplaces have become ever more macho, pushing longer hours and more profits, rather than looking at social contributions’ (p. 2). She adds, ‘The revolution has stalled, and we seem to be stuck in a revolving door’ (p. 2).

Feminism has made a huge resurgence over the last few years, and is clearly still around (McLean & Maalsen 2013) so post-feminism is a term that I find a little unsettling. Both McRobbie (2009) and Scott (2010) critique post-feminism, noting its claim that feminism is no longer relevant, as equality has apparently somehow miraculously been achieved, even though nothing has really been done to make it happen. McRobbie (2011) also describes a ‘new kind of sophisticated anti-feminism … [which] upholds the principles of gender equality, while denigrating the figure of the feminist’ (p. 179).

Because sexism and gender equality are linked, if post-feminists feel that gender equality has been achieved, then by the same token, sexism is no longer a problem. When I look around me in my present locale, and at all forms of current media, sexism is clearly still a huge issue; and gender equality is nowhere near being achieved in Australia. (Some countries have made a lot more progress than we have.) Gill (2011) refers to feminist media critic Judith Williamson who commented in 2005 that “‘The problem is that sexism didn’t go away, we just stopped talking about it … One thing we could do, then”, Williamson concluded, “is simply start using the term again”’ (p. 61). And this is what
has happened: feminism (which discourages sexism) has suddenly ‘gone viral’ (Lazo 2013).

Here is just a very small sample of what has happened in the last few years: Julia Gillard’s misogyny speech; Ellen DeGeneres’s amusing rant against ‘Bic for Her’; online sites such as Destroy the Joint, Upworthy, Miss Representation, Feministing, Being Feminist and the Everyday Sexism Project (a site where women can share stories of sexism they have experienced); online petitions to remove sexist logos from Wicked campervans, and t-shirts with sexist logos from several online outlets; the world-wide outcry against Julien Blanc (sexually abusive ‘dating coach’/pickup artist); the Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to Malala Yousafzai for her continuing struggle to allow the education of girls; and on and on. As soon as a social media site (or an individual) identifies something as sexist, it appears online (followed by other forms of media) and efforts are made to either remove the offending comments or items, or to persuade the offender that what they have said or done is not acceptable.

As Summers (2013) writes: ‘Stories can be shared in seconds, protests and petitions organised and huge numbers mobilised’ (p. 163). Of course, the downside of this is the venom (rape and death threats are becoming increasingly common (Benn 2013; Megarry 2014)) spewed forth by those who find sexism and gender inequality to be acceptable; and the rise in the number of anti-feminist sites, such as Australian Men’s Rights Association (2014), Return of Kings (2014), and Women Against Feminism (2014).

Although men’s rights groups originally started to spring up in the 1980s, retaliating
against second-wave feminism, it seems that the relative anonymity afforded by social media has made it easier for anti-feminists to become increasingly vocal and threatening. As Fox et al. (2015) discovered in their investigation of online sexism and harassment: ‘interacting with sexist content anonymously promotes greater hostile sexism than interacting with it using an identified account’ (p. 440). Shaw (2014) discusses online sexism and misogyny from an intersectional point of view, noting that: ‘As feminist theories have long embraced intersectionality, this sexism is compounded with racism, homophobia, ableism, and all other forms of hate’ (p. 273), an assessment reiterated by Foxman and Wolf (2013). Shaw (2014) emphasises that:

Like all racism and sexism, it comes out of a position of privilege that has been created via the same historical events that made ‘tech culture’ a particular form of masculine culture. In other words, people are jerks not only when they are in anonymous Internet spaces, but also when they are in spaces where they can get away with being jerks. This can be a high school cafeteria, a locker room, a bar, a workplace or World of Warcraft. (pp. 274-5)

In other words,

Misogyny, racism, homophobia, etc. were not invented by the Internet, but they are enabled by technology and the cultural norms of the Internet communication in which this behaviour is supported, defended and even valued. (p. 275)

Shaw (2014) also writes that: ‘As feminist theory has critiqued, dominant discourses remain as such because marginalized voices are excluded, histories of outsiders are forgotten, and those with access to the means of cultural production define culture’ (p. 276). Despite this, there is a positive side to the growth of communication through technology: ‘Digital tools allow groups to produce new forms of knowledge and posit counter-discourses in a way that can and has spread widely’ (p. 276).

In December 2013, the Guardian newspaper (UK) published an article claiming the rise of a fourth wave of feminism, one ‘defined by technology’ (Cochrane 2013, para. 3). Walters and Kop (2009) claim: ‘Digital technology is now becoming so all pervasive in everyday life that it is beginning to have a profound effect on individual psychic life and
the wider social milieu’ (p. 278). They discuss Heidegger’s concept of Dasein, or “‘being-in-the-world’” which led him to:

propose that history can be understood as a series of distinct ways of understanding what it is to be human. In his view, the contemporary world is now in transition, from the modern to the technological way-of-being. (p. 280)

Even though Heidegger was writing long before the advent of the Internet, his ideas seem uncannily perceptive.

Expanding on the significance of technology, Halberstam (1991) writes:

Although technophobia among women and as theorised by some feminists is understandable as a response to military and scientific abuses within a patriarchal system, the advent of intelligent machines necessarily changes the social relations between gender and science, sexuality and biology, feminism and the politics of artificiality. (p. 440)

The concept of the cyborg (Braidotti 2013; Haraway 2013) enters the equation and ‘severs once and for all the assumed connection between woman and nature upon which the entire patriarchal structures rest’ (Halberstam (1991). Using the image of the cyborg, the hybrid who is not necessarily one thing or another, Haraway (2006) suggests that this is one way of breaking down ‘troubling dualisms’ (p. 143) such as: woman = nature/ man = culture; woman = body/ man = mind. If these dualisms no longer exist, then women should no longer be distanced from technology.

Sadie Plant coined the term ‘cyberfeminism’ (Luckman 1999, Wajcman 2004), the proponents of which attempt to decrease the sexist nature of the Internet (which, after all, was largely constructed by males). Luckman (1999) discusses how ‘Cyberfeminist discourse gives voice to a particular “women-with-attitude” spirit within computer culture’ (p. 37) and links this type of female to Haraway’s cyborg. Although Equalisers is set in an era before computers, mobile phones, and social media became so all-consuming in our society, my four protagonists have this ‘women-with-attitude’ spirit. They decide what they want to achieve and then they get out there and do it, because
once they discover they all have the technical skills and aptitude for their chosen occupation, they know they have the right to do so. According to Haraway (2006) we all have ‘fractured identities’ (p. 122) and a ‘cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints’ (p. 122). My protagonists do not have to conform to dualisms that have impeded women in the past; nor does anyone else.

What do fourth-wave feminists want? Much the same as second-wave feminists it seems. For example, journalist and feminist author, Kira Cochrane (Cochrane 2013) writes that in the UK once again, ‘The personal is political’; consciousness-raising is in vogue; local feminist groups are springing up; women (and in some cases, men) are marching for a range of issues. These include: No More Page 3; women’s representation on bank notes; racist and sexist stereotypes in music videos; misogynist pages on Facebook; racist immigration laws and propaganda; genital mutilation; Reclaim the Night; and The Everyday Sexism project, to name a few. Many of these issues are similar to those fought for by second-wave feminists, but as mentioned, the action is now often online, or initiated online. Teenage feminist Edelstein (2013) reveals, ‘I am part of communities of young feminists across continents, who write together, laugh together, and learn together … There is a future for feminism in teenage girls, and right now it is being built – through cables, wires and computer monitors’ (p. 54-55). Another difference is that some of the issues raised are more universal rather than specifically ‘women’s issues’, which reflects shades of third-wave feminism’s focus on intersectionality. The fact that the issues of
fourth and second-wave feminism are much the same means that although *Equalisers* is set in the 1980s, those who are familiar with current gender issues will be able to relate to the experiences of the characters in the series.

It is interesting that group consciousness is making a comeback. This makes it appropriate that the four protagonists in *Equalisers* function as a proficient group. They are each capable of working as individuals, but they are willing to offer assistance to each other as needed. For example, Aggie is able to help Lil and Teagan with their understanding of electronics and the group is able to work around Lil’s inability to lift the heavier equipment. Jo visits a radical feminist group and realises it is not for her, but is then invited to a group run by May, for female and male victims of violence. No generation of feminists has yet been able to fully achieve its list of ‘wants’. Now, more than ever, it is vital that the current resurgence of feminism, and rage against sexism, be maintained. It is too good an opportunity to let slip away.
CHAPTER THREE

DOING IT

*Can a woman/man do that? Of course she/he can!*

Soon after commencing my PhD studies I spoke to a woman who had worked as a sound engineer in the 1970s and 1980s. She stumbled into this work after some friends from university asked her to do the sound for their band. She had no experience, but it was a small PA system, and she quickly learned on the job. She then obtained other work through word of mouth and was fortunate not to have suffered the degree of sexism and harassment that other female sound engineers have experienced. When I spoke to her I had not started writing *Equalisers* but had been jotting down a few ideas as they came to me.

When I mentioned to this woman some of the incidents of sexism and harassment I might include in the script, she asked me why I did not just show them ‘doing their job’ (2012, pers. comm., 6 June). At the time I did not fully understand what she meant or why she would suggest this. Later, when I started to write the first episodes, I began to appreciate her words. If I showed the women ‘doing it’ (‘being’ sound engineers and business proprietors) *despite* whatever was thrown at them, then it would demonstrate the women’s capabilities more effectively. I also realised that if my female protagonists reacted aggressively towards negative behaviour, then I might have less chance of changing the attitudes of audience members who were originally against having women in these types of roles. Sly (1993) quotes Sue McAullay, national promotions manager for Mushroom
Records, who suggests: ‘if you’re good at what you do and want to achieve it, just do it. You don’t need to be overly aggressive to do a good job’ (p. 33).

In *Equalisers* the women are shown ‘just doing their job’, without being aggressive, and when others try to obstruct them, it is the antagonists who are shown to be in the wrong.

Because *Equalisers* is based on my story it needed to be fictionalised, because I was not a successful sound engineer or business proprietor (even though other females are and have been) and I could not show a true version of me ‘doing it’. However, before I started writing I felt I should consider if there were any reasons why fiction would not be appropriate for my project. As with any research that relies on stories of researchers or participants, the concept of truth is muddied.

With memory, there is always an element of doubt regarding accuracy. Two or more people can have vastly different recollections of an event but to each their account is the ‘truth’. Truth is not always paramount when stories are told, because how the audience reacts to a story may be what ultimately gives it value. Individuals may gain knowledge or understanding of an issue and this may lead some of them to change attitudes or take action. This is how social change might be achieved using stories, whether fiction, non-fiction, or versions of the ‘truth’. Rolfe (2002) reasons: ‘if we accept my argument that reflection is also concerned with affective or sympathetic understanding, then the whole world of the arts becomes a rich and valuable source of knowledge, a lie that helps us see the truth’ (p. 101). Carolyn Ellis’s (2004) book, *The Ethnographic I* is an example of how fiction can be used to illustrate autoethnography. Her novel is about a fictional class on autoethnography conducted by Ellis using a combination of her real
students, made-up students and composites of real students. The result is a highly
effective teaching tool, even though it is, for the most part, fiction. From my
twenties onwards (and before I began to delve into feminist theory), I gained much
of my knowledge of feminism and women’s issues from the fiction of feminist
writers, many of whom based their works on their own experiences.

Theoretical debate about truth has raged for centuries. Roman Emperor and Stoic
philosopher, Marcus Aurelius, said, ‘Everything is but what your opinion makes it;
and that opinion lies with yourself.’ (Meditations 1964). One could argue for or
against this statement, as with any philosophical proclamation. By writing
Equalisers I am expressing my opinion about a range of issues, and what I write is
from my own perspective, or what I see as ‘my truth’. Others may see things
differently. My ‘truth’ is that assigned gender roles are counter-productive and
unnecessary and this is what I am trying to demonstrate with Equalisers.

According to Tullis Owen et al. (2009), ‘Janice Morse argues that truth is “what a
person perceives to be right” (2006, pers. comm., 6 May). This statement implies
a relative meaning of truth: truth is what a person believes “really happened”’ (p.
183). If I have written a script that is believable, showing that women are capable
of working in ‘male’ jobs and men are capable of working in ‘female’ jobs, then
potentially those who formerly upheld gender-assignations in these jobs may be
persuaded that they were wrong. Also, those who were reluctant to try these jobs
because of those attitudes may be persuaded to enter these occupations – to get out
there and ‘do it’. As mentioned previously, if more women and men enter
occupations labelled as other-gendered, then perhaps this will lead to more gender-
balanced workplaces, less harassment, and a decreased need for labels.
Zangwill (2013) argues that knowledge does not depend on truth. He concludes it is belief, rather than truth that should be focussed on and contends ‘knowledge depends on beliefs plus facts plus something else; truth depends on the facts; but knowledge does not depend on truth’ (p. 4). How involved an audience member becomes in a narrative has been called transportation (Green & Brock 2000), and it was ‘found that it did predict effects of a fictional narrative on beliefs’ (Slater, Rouner & Long 2006, p. 238). Transportation has, in turn, been linked to perceived realism (Wilson & Busselle 2004), which is described as:

how realistic the program is according to viewer perception. This includes the physical setting, characters, dialogue and the situations the characters find themselves in. Current theories predict that the impact of television on a viewer will increase the more realistic its content is perceived to be. (Hale-Wisener 2004, p. 13)

My emphasis is on providing knowledge to my audience by making them believe that what I have written could have happened. I have not written anything that could not have happened in real life. Much of what I have written did happen, although I may have changed the circumstances or embellished a little either for ethical reasons, entertainment value, or to address the project objectives.

My audience will form their own opinions about the story both from the point of view of the characters and from their own points of view. If I am able to even partially achieve my objectives, it will be due to the relationship between writer and reader (audience). As Kaufmann (2005) expounds:

every text I read is interpreted and rewritten as I read it through alternate texts, a reciprocal writing and rewriting … each use of theory is constructed through the autobiography of the researcher and interpreted and rewritten though the autobiography of the reader. (p. 577)

When a group of academics formed a mythic band, ‘The Ethnogs’, (The Ethnogs, Fem Nogs & Tupp 2011) each member presented narratives in a research project.
they labelled ‘automythography’, relating to their experiences as musicians, groupies, road crew and security. A journalist asked how they could claim to be studying social life, if they were making it up. ‘But it is real’ (p. 669) they claimed. Using the concept of gender as a performance, they quoted Butler who claims: ‘Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed’ (Butler 1988, p. 527). They asserted that, ‘If you are studying an affective, imaginative experience of shared desire and collective energies, then you need to immerse yourself in the fantasy. Because that’s what’s real’ (The Ethnogs, Fem Nogs & Tupp 2011, p. 669). In Equalisers, rather than performing as stereotypical women, who are reluctant to step out of their assigned roles (as bestowed upon them by society), the four protagonists perform as female technicians and business owners – and that is what is real, despite my having made up parts of the story.

My four protagonists join forces to run a fictional small business. This business is based on an actual company run by a young male (overseen by his step-father and mother) in the 1980s, so I am able to show the women ‘doing it’, ‘being’ business proprietors, accurately. I also know that a woman can run a PA company, because Faye Reid (former bass player with the all-female band, The Party Girls) set up her company Pink Productions in the 1980s when hiring rigs for the band became too expensive. (The company was still running when I spoke to her in 2012, but ceased operation in 2014.) She was also instrumental in the importation of a bass amp (smaller, and lighter than previous amps) which has become an industry standard. Sly (1993) quotes Reid, who said: ‘When I first went out to the gigs with my system in a four-ton truck I got a few laughs from the crews. But I could do the job
and I got accepted quickly. Whether you’re a man or a woman you have to be good at your job when you’re in a hire situation’ (p. 33). The women in *Equalisers* are good at their job and this is one reason why they are successful.

Despite men being seen as the norm for business ownership, women are quite capable of running a business. Discussing the use of fiction to write about women business owners, Phillips and Knowles (2012) write:

> The usefulness of fictional accounts depends on their apparent truth-to-life in a certain context so that the analysis of the ways in which characters and their fictional worlds are coded and constructed offers opportunities to interpret and re-interpret textual and extra-textual representations of organisation. (p. 417)

My aim was to implant the notion that the fictional business shown in the television series could function in the real world – because I know it could. I know women with the appropriate skills and knowledge, can ‘do it’.

Simpson (2012) discusses Foucault’s later work on *parrhesia*, which is defined as ‘speaking truthfully’. ‘Foucault introduces *parrhesia* as a disposition to speak honestly to both oneself and others’ (p. 100) and ‘in enacting *parrhesia*, one speaks a truth which is often contradictory to the present state of affairs and therefore potentially undesirable’ (p. 101). I have proof, from the literature (Bailey 1999; Saraiva 2004; Smith 2011), from personal observation and from speaking to women who have worked in the industry, that the music and film industries in Australia are male-dominated and sexist. In the fictional world of my television series, my female protagonists run a successful PA company. Although Faye Reid set up her PA company (employing both females and males, as there were never enough females working in the industry to sustain an all-female company), the technical side of the industry has always been seen as a male domain.
*Equalisers* contradicts this notion, but in such a way that, even with the threat of being ‘potentially undesirable’ to some members of the audience, there is also the possibility of changing attitudes. Knight (2011) spoke to a number of Australian authors who claim that ‘truth’ in the sense of writing truthfully is paramount. She discusses how ‘fiction can work to reveal, and create an understanding of, the subjective realities of others’ (p. 48) and suggests ‘authenticity’ as an alternative term to ‘truth’. Mayhew (1999) defines ‘authenticity’ as ‘a concept which conveys assumptions about objects, people and places. If something is authentic it is assumed that it is believable and reliable, that it is genuine and thus acceptable’ (p. 64). In the music industry, males are seen as both authentic performers and technicians (Leonard 2007) with female performers such as Patti Smith and Janis Joplin posing no threat ‘to the masculinity of rock if they are understood in rock history as female performers who were “one of the boys”’ (p. 37). My aim with *Equalisers* was to create protagonists who were authentic technicians, without being depicted as ‘one of the boys’.

Dreyfus, talking to Bryan Magee for the BBC Education and Training division (*Bryan Magee talks to Hubert Dreyfus about Husserl, Heidegger and modern existentialism* 1987a, section 4), mentions Heidegger’s notion of ‘authenticity’, or doing what is deemed suitable in Western society. For example, as technology is deemed ‘male’ (apart from household appliances) perhaps some audience members might deem it unsuitable for a woman to take on a technical role such as sound engineer. These audience members can only know what has been disclosed to them as part of their ‘being’. By revealing to them the ‘truth’ that females are capable of working with technology, then perhaps authenticity will be changed for them. As a
parrhesiastes (speaking truthfully, or what is my truth – that women can be successful technicians and entrepreneurs) I demonstrate through the actions of my protagonists, that gender-assigned occupations may not have the authenticity that has been bestowed on them.

Discussing Foucault’s ideas on ‘truth’ and fiction, Simpson (2012) explores how: ‘For Foucault … fiction holds a decided advantage over “truth”, in that it constructively imagines an alternative interpretation of the present that exploits unexplored potentialities’ (p. 105). He concludes:

> While many have read parrhesia as a primarily pedagogical and external practice relating to the present, when read against Foucault’s complicated conceptions of truth and fiction, parrhesia becomes a way of creating practices which destabilise the present and reveal potentialities for future action. (p. 114)

Although my series is set in the 1980s, issues concerning stereotypes, gender roles and sexism are still confronting Australians daily in a range of industries, as evidenced in mainstream and online media (‘Campese sexist tweet’ 2012; Brissenden & McDonald 2014; Davis 2014; Miller 2014; Winterson 2014). It is still deemed newsworthy every time a woman enters a ‘male’ domain, such as AFL football umpire (Brodie 2012; King 2014). In Equalisers, my ‘alternative interpretation’ is that my protagonists decide to work in a ‘job’, not a ‘male’ job, just a job that they have chosen. They all have the skills and aptitude for this job and they do it well (despite both sexism and harassment, which they ignore or reject). Some members of my audience (who I envisage as covering a broad age range, and all genders) may believe that assigning genders to jobs is how things should be. My alternative interpretation demonstrates that it does not have to be this way. If I am able to persuade some members of my audience to believe my
‘alternative interpretation’ (especially those who originally championed assigned gender roles), then this may potentially lead to some positive changes in the future.

Heilman and Haynes (2005) say ‘stereotype-based negative expectations about women’s performance in traditionally male domains are tenacious – there is a powerful tendency to support and maintain them’ (p. 905). They look at women’s participation in male-female teams, and show that there is ambiguity about performance evaluations, with females often not receiving credit where it is due. They conclude that: ‘Women of talent and promise may be bypassed in career advancement or relegated to noncentral positions’ (p. 916). In Episode Two, Sooty explains he has put the women in the same practical group to avoid such issues and to show that women are capable of ‘doing it’. As mentioned previously, when the women start Equalisers PA, it needs to be all-female to prevent men being given credit for work done by the women. However, in the final episode of the series the women decide that it is time to start employing males because they want to avoid being labelled as sexist. In an egalitarian society, females and males would work together as equals in any job, so after initially demonstrating that the women in Equalisers are as capable as their male counterparts, this is the ultimate message I want to convey.

We only acquire knowledge from what others tell or show us (or what we observe around us). Papadaki (2010) asks: If a male is brought up to believe certain stereotypes about females, then is he really to blame for the way he acts towards them (and similarly for females brought up to believe stereotypes about males)? She suggests that education is urgently needed to rectify this. As an example, in
Equalisers, Rob has told Teagan that women do not belong in technical roles in the music industry and as she has not seen any women in these roles, she believes him.

Wrathall (2002) notes: ‘Two of the best-known features of Heidegger’s thought are his analysis of truth in terms of disclosure and uncovering, and his insistence on the fact that we always live in, and encounter the world out of, an understanding of being’ (p. 217). Bryan Magee, talking with Hubert Dreyfus (Bryan Magee talks to Hubert Dreyfus about Husserl, Heidegger and modern existentialism 1987b, section 2) says, ‘We only become conscious of things in most cases when something goes wrong; when there’s a specific problem’. For example, on a simplistic level, I am a touch typist so my fingers automatically hit the correct keys on my computer keyboard without me consciously thinking about it. I have a ten-inch Netbook that I use when I travel. The keyboard is much smaller than a regular-sized one, so because of this ‘problem’, I constantly hit wrong keys. I therefore become conscious of where my fingers are falling, in order to correct this ‘problem’. Lorber (1994) links this idea to gender, claiming that:

Gender is such a familiar part of daily life that it usually takes a deliberate disruption of our expectations of how women and men are supposed to act to pay attention to how it is produced. (p. 13-14)

In relation to my project, if members of my audience have never seen, or heard of a female sound engineer, being confronted by female sound engineers in Equalisers may constitute a problem for them initially. This becomes even more interesting if we once again consider the female cyborg who, according to Halberstam (1991): ‘exploits a traditionally masculine fear of the deceptiveness of appearances and calls into question the boundaries of human, animal, and machine precisely where
they are most vulnerable – at the site of the female body’ (p. 440). Haraway (2006) maintains ‘The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled post-modern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code’ (p. 130). In Episode One several characters question if female sound engineers exist, and are told the truth; that there are some, but not many. I then show as the series progresses, that these women are perfectly capable of doing the job, despite any obstacles they encounter. The ‘truth’, as demonstrated in this fictional story, is that there is no reason why a female with the right skillset and mindset cannot do the job of ‘sound engineer’. The ‘problem’ for those audience members might therefore be resolved. If this could extend to the ‘problem’ of women who work in IT (and of course any other industry) and suffer ongoing harassment for daring to insert their female bodies into this (for some inexplicable reason) designated male zone, this would indeed be a bonus.

By fictionalising my story I display my four protagonists ‘doing it’, as I was never able to. They function as businesswomen, who ultimately succeed in what has been designated a male domain. Phillips and Knowles (2012) discuss Butler’s concept of performativity in relation to female business owners in three works of fiction. They say ‘fiction can offer a way of challenging, as well as colluding in, dominant constructions of entrepreneurship’ (p. 417). Men are traditionally seen as typical entrepreneurs, with female entrepreneurs regarded as oddities. Ahl and Marlow (2012) say that it is the female’s assumed deficiency that leads to the perception of the male as the ‘normative entrepreneurial character’ (p. 544), even though there is actually little evidence of difference between males and females as entrepreneurs.

In the novels Chocolat (Harris 1999), The shipping news (Proulx 1994) and Back
alternative models of simultaneously doing femininity and doing business ownership are worked through. In order to be accepted by readers as realistic and believable … fiction has to draw on cultural constructions of doing womanliness, and … doing business ownership. At the same time, authors of fiction use their knowledge and experience of the social world to … make us look afresh at the world we live in. (Phillips & Knowles 2012, p. 433)

It has long been contended that gender is learned; it is not something one is born with (Butler 1988; Butler n.d.; Lorber 1994; de Beauvoir 2011). For Butler, ‘gender performativity’ means the repetition of certain acts, which signify to others that one is a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’. Lorber (1994) uses the example of genders other than ‘male’ or ‘female’ to claim that ‘Gender boundaries are breachable … third genders show us what we ordinarily take for granted – that people have to learn to be women and men’ (p. 18). She also contends that ‘the continuing purpose of gender as a modern social institution is to construct women as a group to be the subordinates of men as a group’ (p. 35), which corroborates Tyler and Cohen’s (2010) assertion that ‘performances recognised as successful are those that conform to the binary and hierarchical terms of normativity’ (p. 179). Yancey Martin (2003) discusses ‘gender, gendered’ or ‘gendering’ practices, which are:

activities that are available – culturally, socially, narratively, discursively, physically, and so forth – for people to enact in an encounter or situation in accord with (or in variation of) the gender institution … In a binarily gendered society like ours, one can ‘act like’ a woman or ‘act like’ a man although … not simultaneously. (p. 354)

She differentiates these ‘practices’ from the concept of ‘practicing gender’, ‘which directs attention to the literal activities of gender, physical and narrative – the doing, displaying, asserting, narrating, performing, mobilising, manoeuvring’ (p. 354). To explain this, she cites the example of a male senior executive asking a
female colleague of equal rank, to answer a phone that is ringing as they walk along the corridor in their workplace. While some might debate whether people practice gender intentionally or not, Yancey Martin (2003) assumes that ‘people can and do practice gender both while intending to and without intending to and that others often perceive them as doing so irrespective of their intentions’ (p. 355).

Schippers (2002) discusses Foucault’s work on power, where power is ‘a dynamic, organising feature and outcome of social relations’ (p. 88). So, ‘If gender is viewed as relational rather than as a performance, this opens the possibility that doing femininity might, in some circumstances, shift power relations to the advantage of the individual doing so’ (p. 88). There are times when I intentionally ‘act’ like a ‘woman’ because I think it will benefit me if I do. Other times I feel that I do not conform to society’s idea of how a ‘woman’ should ‘act’: I do not wear make-up or high heels; I would rather wear jeans and t-shirts than get ‘dolled up’; I have never waxed a body part; I am quite comfortable with males as platonic friends; and I have hated all the ‘female’ jobs I have had over the years. Whether or not I am performing as society says I should, there is no doubt in my mind, or I would think, in anyone else’s mind, that I am a woman. And this has always been true, even when I was attempting to enter ‘male’ domains. Like me, my protagonists do not present as particularly ‘girly’, although they can be when they choose to (such as when Lil gets dressed up to go out to dinner with Jack); however neither do they present as masculine. In this sense, they are able to “act” like a woman’ and “act” like a man’ as asserted by Yancey Martin (2003, p. 354), but in this case they are able to do so simultaneously, thereby defying our binary-gendered society.
Jacey (2010) notes that ‘The perennial problem for writers is fear that audiences won’t like the heroine’ (p. 25). My aim was to create protagonists who are likeable and believable, even if sometimes they say or do things that an audience member may not like or agree with. With this in mind, I tried to include small incidents that might not be universally accepted. For example, some might think Jo’s action in reporting Charlie to the Immigration Department was a little extreme.

My aim was also to present alternatives to current social concepts, so that in time, our social world might change. I wanted to show that women can function in a role deemed ‘male’ if they are given opportunities to resolve issues that may hinder progress; and to make adjustments (if they need to) that will suit their style of working and their physical capabilities. In real life, I was not strong enough to carry the heavy gear and I would never have been able to work on a big rig at a large venue. The way Equalisers PA is set up, Lil does not have to work at this type of gig and the women make sure she always has help should she need it. Physical strength has always been used to validate women’s exclusion from male-dominated industries. However, in an article in The Herald Sun (‘Women can hold own’ 9 November 2011) Lorraine Usher, a long-time employee of the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union reveals that when she was told women would not be hired on a worksite because of the heavy lifting required, she found the smallest male on this worksite, and asked what he did if he could not lift something. He said he asked his bigger mates. “‘Why, when a woman can’t do something, is it seen as a reflection on all women when this isn’t the case for men,” said Ms Usher’ (n.p.). Males often hang around the crew at gigs in order to learn the skills needed to enter the industry, so it seemed feasible for some young females to do the same.
In *Equalisers* the women make use of some keen young women to help Lil if no assistance is available from band members at any of her gigs.

Stereotypes are stumbling blocks that hinder progress in many situations. They exist because some members of a particular group exhibit certain behaviours or physical attributes, and these are then taken as true for everyone in that group. For example, some blondes might be dumb, but according to the stereotype, they all are; some Australian tourists are loud and obnoxious, so all Australian tourists must be, and so on. Some people tend to believe stereotypes and others do not. We need to hear stories and reflect on self-stories, to understand how we come to our social ‘givens’, and why these might not necessarily match those around us. Why, for instance, have I never believed stereotypes related to assigned gender roles?

One example of misconception relates to gender in science, technology and maths. Palermo et al. (2008) state: ‘Despite some progress in recent years, achieving gender equality in scientific research remains an important challenge for policy-makers and the scientific community at large’ (p. 494). Science and technology are considered ‘male’ domains in our society, and science and maths are considered to be ‘male’ subjects in schools (despite girls often doing as well or better than boys). Andersson (2012) points out that even in Sweden, a country ‘which is considered one of the most gender-equal countries in the world’ (p. 282), teachers ‘still had difficulty abandoning their stereotypical ideas about girls and boys. They reproduced the notion that there are gender differences in how children work with science and portrayed girls’ activities as subordinate to boys’’ (p. 299). Research by Lavy and Sand (2015) found that teacher bias had a negative impact on girls and...
this could adversely affect later educational and employment choices. Similarly, Shumow and Schmidt (2014) found that both female and male teachers believed boys possessed an innate ability with science, whereas girls succeeded through hard work. Guimond and Roussel (2001), studying gender stereotypes related to maths, science and language, noted that ‘men are seen as more able than women in maths and science while women are seen as more able than men in language’ (p. 277). Even though ‘these beliefs have no basis in facts’ they ask: ‘Why do women not use the evidence from their own successful classroom performance in maths and science to dispel the myth that males are better’ (p. 277)? They conclude that because stereotypes tend to be believed, female students often downplay their strengths, and male students often exaggerate theirs, leading to stereotypical myths being perpetuated. A study by Voyer and Voyer (2014) of school students in 30 countries over the last century (1914 to 2011) revealed that girls achieved higher grades in all subjects, including maths and science, yet it is still common for girls to believe that boys are better at maths, and especially science subjects such as physics (Cervini 2014). And so, the stereotype persists.

Another reason for the persistence of the maths/science stereotype could be that when women have excelled in these subjects, they have often been ignored or removed from historical accounts. For example, I watched a documentary called Top secret Rosies (2010), which tells the story of women mathematicians recruited during World War II to work as human computers. These women did extraordinary work for the war effort (one male in the documentary commented that the war could not have been won without them), and after the war six of them were employed as programmers for the first electronic computer, ENIAC. While
photographs *were* taken of these women programmers, when pictures appeared in the media, they were only of the men involved in the project. The women were erased from this story and the myth that men are superior at maths was preserved.

Similarly, although:

more than 20 Australian women doctors acted as surgeons and medical officers in military base and field hospitals in Belgium, France, Serbia, England, Egypt, Malta and across Europe between 1914 and 1919 … On returning home, they resumed the tiresome and time consuming struggle for professional and public credibility and remain largely absent from the official records in both Britain and Australia. (Sheard 2015, n.p.)

Despite women such as those mentioned above being largely ignored, there have been *some* female mathematicians and physicists who have been acknowledged in recent times. Hypatia, the fourth century mathematician, philosopher and astronomer from Alexandria, was acknowledged in the film, *Agora* (2009) starring Rachel Weisz. Ada Lovelace who worked with Charles Babbage, (‘A towering figure in the history of automatic computation’), is now ‘widely celebrated’ as a ‘visionary of the computer age’ (Swade 2013, p. 36) and it is she who is credited in computing courses as the founder of scientific computing. And physicist and mathematician, Robyn Arianrhod's (2011) book, *Seduced by Logic*, is about the extraordinary self-taught mathematicians, Emilie du Chatelet and Mary Somerville.

Girls are often turned off technical subjects for a number of reasons, including being derided for doing things in their own perfectly rational, but different way. Faulkner (2001) cites a 1990 study of technological design by Turkle and Papert, who found that:

*girls and women tend to adopt an interactive or relational ‘bricolage’ approach, while boys and men tend to adopt a formal and hierarchical ‘planning’ approach. Both approaches ‘work,’ yet the bricoleurs found themselves actively discouraged by their*
teachers, forced to pursue this approach surreptitiously or unlearn it or give up on computing. (Faulkner 2001, p.86)

Faulkner suggests that men’s control of technology may be connected to the dominance of manual over mental prowess in this area. Several factors could have some influence over this: fathers and sons bond while pulling cars apart; boys take up technical hobbies more often than girls; and technical expertise is seen as a power they have over women. Women who do take up technical jobs often leave because of the hostility they encounter from male colleagues.

Ballantyne and Harrison (2005) assert that the gender gap in technology is ‘maintained primarily by computer anxiety, social facilitation, stereotyping, and gender-based performance expectations’ (p. 11) and this gap widens as students get older, so that by tertiary level, very few girls choose computer science or engineering, thus limiting their future choice when looking for jobs. Faulkner (2001) suggests that ‘the challenge of the technology question in feminism means that we cannot transform gender relations without engaging in technology’ (p. 90). Showing a group of women successfully working with technology in Equalisers might just encourage some audience members to overcome their technophobia or reluctance to attempt to enter any other ‘male’ domain.

When engineer Debbie Sterling (2013) started a toy company called Goldiblox in 2012, to encourage girls to become engineers, it was because when she was studying engineering she encountered huge problems with engineering drawing. She realised that this was because she, like many girls, had ‘under-developed spatial skills’ (n.p.) and ‘kids who score better on spatial skills tests grew up playing with construction toys’ (n.p.). She then decided to start a company that
made construction toys for girls, to address this problem. Because reading is high on the list of preferred activities for girls, she combined the toys with books. Rode (2011) questions the need for technology designed specifically for girls such as the Alice system for teaching girls to program, as described by (Kelleher & Pausch 2007). This assumes that girls are not as capable of learning this technology as boys are, and therefore need something to help them catch up to their male peers (which concurs with concerns about all-female events, which I discussed previously). However, perhaps these toys and programs might be beneficial at least until it becomes the norm for girls to play with construction and other so-called boys’ toys. The ultimate goal would be that toys are no longer gender-labelled and toyshops become gender neutral, with children being allowed and encouraged to play with any toy. It was interesting to see the furore that erupted when Greens senator, Larissa Waters launched a campaign called ‘No Gender December’ which highlights how toys are marketed to children and encourages the elimination of gender labels for toys (Medhora 2014). It is difficult to understand why her suggestion seemed outrageous to so many people.

By writing an autoethnographic piece about her fruitless search for a Wonder Woman doll in toy shops, Averett (2009) was able to provide awareness to readers ‘that from a tender age, girls are socialised into their gender role through play with toys that are designed to limit their choices, thinking and roles’ (p. 364). Her friend, Phil, a ‘self-proclaimed redneck’, (p. 364) asked, ‘Surely there is something for little girls to pretend to be other than bimbos or maids’ (p.365)? Averett wrote, ‘Watching Phil become aware of how early young girls begin the struggle to survive our culture with dignity, self-esteem, and power was worth not finding
Wonder Woman’ (p. 365). Similarly, web-writer Faraci (2015) complained about trying to find a suitable female action figure for his goddaughter.

Autoethnographers such as Averett can bring awareness to those who might previously have been unaware of, or may not have cared about the issues raised and this may then promote social change. (Averett and Faraci might be pleased to learn that one of Time Magazine’s top 25 inventions of 2014 was a line of female superheroes called IAmElemental (IAmElemental 2014).)

In order to achieve gender equality it is obvious that ‘male’ can no longer be regarded as superior to ‘female’ as is assumed in our patriarchal society. To illustrate this assumption, Valenti (2013) writes:

What’s the worst possible thing you can call a woman … You’re probably thinking of words like slut, whore, bitch, cunt … skank. Okay, now, what are the worst things you can call a guy? Fag, girl, bitch, pussy … Notice anything? The worst thing you can call a girl is a girl. The worst thing you can call a guy is a girl. Being a woman is the ultimate insult. Now tell me that’s not royally f----d up. (p. 6)

In Equalisers I included Francesca’s pre-school to encourage the elimination of gendered toys and assigned gender roles. Matt gets the little boys changing nappies, taking the baby dolls for walks and other tasks that fathers are quite capable of (and of course, often do). Boys are so often discouraged from doing anything ‘girly’; far more often than girls are discouraged from doing things that are ‘boyish’. Girls learn how to be nurturing by playing with dolls when they are small, so why is it wrong for boys to learn this too? Might it not be easier to achieve gender equality if men were willing and able (and workplaces were tailored to accommodate both mothers and fathers) to take equal responsibility for the
rearing of their children?

Wilbourn & Kee (2010) discuss the problem of gender assignation, asserting that:

In an ideal world, children would be raised in a society free of gender stereotypes. Such freedom from these stereotypes would allow children to exhibit behaviours and acquire skills based solely on their personal preferences devoid of the constraints of the societal norms that surround their particular gender … However, in the real world, from the moment of their birth, children are placed into either a ‘boy’ or ‘girl’ category. (p. 670)

They also mention that while women have for some time been encouraged to enter male-dominated industries males have not, to the same extent, been encouraged into female-dominated industries, sending the message that these occupations (such as teaching and nursing) are ‘less desirable by both men and women’ (p. 680). As I mentioned earlier, in Equalisers I felt it was important to ensure that both female and male issues were addressed. Josh mentions that patients either mistake him for a doctor, or refuse to have him tend to them, demanding a female nurse. Francesca asks him if he was not smart enough to become a doctor, making the assumption that he would have chosen to be a doctor over a nurse, because being a doctor is supposedly a manlier (and therefore superior) occupation. Matt has trouble getting a job as a pre-school teacher, even though he has done extremely well in his studies. When he does begin work at Francesca’s pre-school one of the mothers comments that some parents are not happy having a male pre-school teacher. I saw a story on the nightly news in 2014 about a young man who, at the age of 15, had been given a special nursing apprenticeship (special, because of his young age) at an aged care facility. He loved working there and ended up undertaking study to become a paramedic when he was old enough. The disappointing aspect of this story was that he was subjected to questions about his sexuality when he worked at the aged care facility. Whether he was gay or not was
no-one’s business. As it happened, he was heterosexual, and fortunately the taunts did not have an adverse effect on him regarding his choice of career or his enjoyment of working with the elderly. However, no-one should have to put up with irrelevant and invasive questioning, simply because they choose to work in a particular job.

Von Hippel et al. (2011) add the concept of stereotype threat to barriers for women entering male dominated fields. If women compare themselves to men in these jobs, this may be problematic, ‘Given that men typically earn more, are promoted faster, and are given work that is of greater value to the organisation than their female counterparts’ (p. 152). However, if they compare themselves to a female who has successfully entered the industry, the stereotype threat is ‘irrelevant or can be overcome’ (p. 152). Similarly, Cuny and Aspray (2002) note that the ‘myth that “women are not as good at computer science” is prevalent and particularly destructive. It affects peer attitudes and can thus be a significant, negative climate issue for women’ (p. 171). As Fox (2013) asserts, ‘Women are just as capable of learning maths and science, although tell them often enough they are lousy at these areas and they start to perform poorly’ (p. 153).

If female audience members can observe other females ‘doing’ a ‘male’ job successfully in Equalisers, then perhaps they will think: ‘I can do that too’. And male audience members might similarly be stimulated to try ‘doing’ that ‘female’ job that they were interested in, but had avoided because of the social stigma attached.
CHAPTER FOUR

HIT ME WITH YOUR BEST SHOT (Schwartz 1980)

Critiquing and rejecting gendered power relations

Ever since women began their fight for equal rights, they have been ‘hit’ with whatever can be thrown at them, in order to prevent or delay progress; and these ‘shots’ come not only from men, but also from those women who agree with the status quo – that female is subordinate to male – and believe that is how things should remain. As feminist scholar and writer, Dale Spender (1990) asserts:

the history of women is littered with the patriarchal response to such recalcitrant women who have been described not as disobedient, but as failures. They have failed to become full members of society, failed to see the world the way they should, failed to behave in a fitting manner. The more women have resisted the more it has been suggested that there is something wrong with us: in the view of the dominant group we are abnormal, neurotic, frigid or hysterical, or even bitter and twisted. We are man-haters, and there is the clinching argument that we even fail to have a sense of humour. (p. 2)

One of the more absurd examples of the kinds of ‘shots’ aimed at feminists was made by television evangelist Pat Robertson, who claimed:

The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians.
(Schwartz & Cooper 1992)

Twenty years later, we had the equally ridiculous comment made by radio broadcaster Alan Jones, that ‘Women are destroying the joint’ (Totaro 2012). However, the backlash from this (which I will discuss later), alongside then Prime Minister, Julia Gillard’s ‘misogyny speech’, began a resurgence of feminism in Australia, that reflects
worldwide trends.

Some ‘shots’ are not as blatantly obvious as the two statements above, but nevertheless, have an equally negative impact for feminists and achievement of gender equality. Greer (1999) describes the ‘male preserves’ that women enter as ‘an alien and repellent world’ (p. 295) which women must negotiate. Women are confronted by obstacles such as ‘the men’s room’, where ‘guys repair … and plot their strategy’ (p. 295). There is also the view that ‘women bosses are … tougher and meaner than men’ (p. 300) which she sees as ‘a perception on the part of employees that decisiveness and straightforwardness become stridency when manifested by a female’ (p. 300). Hurdles such as these, along with those associated with women becoming mothers (that do not generally affect fathers) keep women from achieving equality in the workplace and limit the number of women who actually manage to rise to top levels.

Sometimes the ‘shots’ reflect the general politics of the time. For example, Brisbane, during the oppressive Bjelke-Petersen era (1968 to 1987), was a challenging time for any form of activism. As Stafford (2014) writes: ‘Bjelke-Petersen’s rule … was nothing if not iron-fisted. Public displays of dissent were often brutally suppressed; … minorities were treated as simply another obstacle on the path to development’ (p. 2). Cullen (2007) describes how drummer and long-time activist (in particular, for Aboriginal rights) Lindy Morrison left Brisbane in the 1980s,

> carrying with her memories of Springbok protests, the Popular Theatre Troupe, a shared house with Geoffrey Rush, a punk band called Zero and a time when police went to ridiculous lengths to lock down ideas including impounding her drum kit for three months for playing at a pro-choice rally in King George Square. (p. 66)

Although there have been periods of waning interest or reluctant resignation to lack of
progress, the current rebirth of feminism indicates that whatever ‘shots’ are fired now, they will no longer be treated as something that just has to be ‘put up with’, as they may have been in the past. ‘All over the world, women are mad as hell and refusing to take it anymore. Hashtags like #destroythejoint, #everydaysexism and #shoutingback are giving women the courage to speak up and speak out’ (Caro 2013, p. xiii). This growth of feminist online activism may be linked to the rise of all forms of activism seen online in recent years. As Internet use has increased so has the opportunity to access information and join conversations that may lead to different types of activism, either online or offline. As discussed earlier, cyberfeminism battles the inherent sexism of the Internet; and sites such as Anonymous (2004), Causes (2007), and Movements (2011) enable anyone with Internet access to campaign for or against a huge range of issues.

From my own experience, barely a day passes that I do not receive at least one online petition from Change.org (2007). Feedback implies that at least some of these petitions have had successful outcomes. What remains to be seen is how effective this form of activism will be in eliciting lasting social changes.

I never experienced the extent of sexism and harassment that many women in male-dominated occupations have faced; instead I (along with many other female staff members) experienced bullying at the hands of a female department manager and her small group of cronies, in an all-female department. This was in a government institution, where there was supposedly a ‘zero tolerance to bullying’ policy, but nothing was done about it when it was reported. I still seethe with anger over this and wish I had done more to put a stop to it before I left, so I can empathise with anyone who has suffered in the workplace, either due to bullying, or harassment because of gender.
During my original university studies and brief working life as a scientist, I cannot recall a time when I felt I was being treated as less than equal because of my gender. However, many women who have spent longer than me in male-dominated industries tell a different tale. Taber (2005), in an autoethnography about her experience as a woman in the very male-dominated Canadian Forces, is just one of many examples of why stories matter and how they can be used to encourage change. Quoting Bierema, Taber explains: ‘By sharing my story, I can assist others in “becoming aware of gendered power relations … critiquing them and ultimately rejecting them”’ (Bierema, cited in Taber 2005, p. 289).

One problem faced by women who enter what are currently labelled as ‘male’ occupations, is that they are expected to become ‘one of the boys’ (Broyles & Grow 2008; Lester 2008). As Greer asserts:

If women understand by emancipation the adoption of the masculine role then we are lost indeed … Most women who have arrived at positions of power in a men’s world have done so by adopting masculine methods which are not incompatible with the masquerade of femininity. They still exploit the sado-masochistic hook-up of the sexes, in which ‘we have only the choice of being hammer or anvil.’ (p. 108)

In Episode One of Equalisers, when a fellow student comments to Aggie that they treat her like one of them (‘the boys’), she rejects this and tells him she is not one of the boys. She says she is their classmate, but she is a girl just like the girls in the college cafeteria about whom they have been making sexist remarks. In the same episode, when Justin asks the women if they know that there are better ways to meet rock stars than enrolling in the sound engineering course, they react as his equals, and return the question to him. They know they have every right to be there and have enrolled for the same reasons as the male students – they want to see if sound engineering would be a
suitable career for them. Saraiva (2004), a sound engineer, mentions when she started out ‘I overheard somebody in the dressing room say that I was just in it to hang out with the bands, and it shocked me’ (n.p.) and this caused her to adopt a ‘personality of being a tough girl’ (n.p.). In other words, she felt she had to become ‘one of the boys’ in order to be accepted, rather than being accepted for her ability. According to journalist Stuart Coupe (Sly 1993), ‘There is not one job in the music industry, including being a roadie, that an appropriately trained woman couldn’t do as well, if not better than a bloke’ (p. 31). And Bailey (1999) quotes freelance sound recordist Gretchen Thornburn, who says: ‘if you can read you can be technical. I got hold of the manual, the microphones and the machine and worked out how to use them’ (p. 41). The problem is, some men do not want to relinquish their hold on their domain, their ‘boys’ club’. This sentiment is echoed by Fox (2013), who alleges that, ‘Their failure to climb the ladder isn’t due to some mysterious female deficiency that opens the hobs of hell, but plain old-fashioned and lazy discrimination, which relies on familiar models of authority and equates difference with risk’ (p. 155). And Ahl and Marlow (2012) look at how women in managerial positions are in the unwinnable position of being expected to ‘undertake particular forms of identity work to reflect the dominant norm’ (p. 546) (in other words, to act like their male colleagues). And if they do, they are then at risk of challenging ‘the prevailing order and thus, present a gender threat’ (p. 546). Damned if they do, damned if they don’t. Just another ‘shot’ that women have to contend with.

Females are often expected to be better at ‘male’ jobs than their male counterparts before their colleagues will acknowledge their capability (Aggie mentions that the boys in her class only accepted her once they saw that she was better at electronics than they were). Writer and politician, Clare Boothe Luce (n.d.) said: ‘Because I am a woman, I must make unusual efforts to succeed. If I fail, no one will say, “She doesn't have what
Sextism and Gender Imbalance in Gender-assigned Occupations – As Exemplified by the Australian Music Industry

it takes.” They will say, “Women don't have what it takes”’ (n.p.). And Sly (1993) quotes drummer Lindy Morrison who states:

My advice to women is … learn to do everything yourself … you have to be strong to deal with the shit. When things go wrong the first thing men will do is blame the person who doesn’t fit into their peer group and you are the one who will be attacked. You’ll be attacked very subtly because men don’t want to be labelled sexist. Stop saying ‘sorry’ when you make a mistake; men don’t do that. (p. 30)

Walker describes her experience as a young journalist: ‘As a woman wanting to succeed in the news business, I often adopted … the ways of journalism with enthusiasm, including bellying up to the bar and downing tequila shots with the best of them – the guys’ (Walker, Geertsema & Barnett 2009, p. 178). Later, as a feminist academic, she saw things differently: ‘I’ve come to see those traditions … as gendered – not an exciting test of mettle for “equal” entry into the boys’ club but a patriarchal structure built on the language and ideology of the powerful’ (p. 178).

And Taber (2005) recalls, from her experiences in the Canadian forces: ‘it is essential to prove that you can not only do your job but participate in or put up with masculine activities … drinking, swearing, making sexual innuendos, and watching pornographic movies’ (p. 294-5). Germaine Greer (1999) concurs, adding: ‘The servicewoman who capitulates by adopting masculine behaviours and pastimes, in an effort to become one of the boys, will find the inevitable rejection even more humiliating and disorientating.’ (p. 167). Taber (2005) also points out: ‘Crying is seen as emotion, while anger is not’ (p. 296) and that the ’men were free to have children while advancing their careers, but women were not because it affected their ability to work’ (p.297). This inability to accommodate differences is something that needs to be addressed if equality is to be achieved. This is one reason I had Aggie and Josh move to the country to set up a second location for Equalisers PA at the end of the series. In a second series of
Equalisers the couple would be shown working and raising their children in an
egalitarian household. Aggie’s career would not have to be adversely affected by
having children; and similarly, Josh would still be able to continue with his career.
There may have to be compromises, but they would make it work.

Compromise is one of the key factors to achieving gender equality and one of the most
difficult to promote. As Spender (1990) writes:

The critical issue here is that if women cease to be muted, men cease to be dominant and
to some males this may seem unfair because it represents a loss of rights. Clearly it is
the elimination of dominant and muted groups which feminism seeks – for reversal,
with males merely becoming the muted group … would not be a satisfactory end. It is
necessary that there be modifications in male language behaviour as well as female. (p. 89)

Some people (male and female) think that in order for gender equality to be achieved,
‘women’ (as a labelled group – the inferior side of the male/female binary) have to
reach the level(s) currently enjoyed by ‘men’ (the superior side of the binary). If we
imagine these two groups, (‘women’ and ‘men’) sitting on a see-saw, then to achieve
equality the see-saw’s plank would have to be horizontal. If ‘women’ (currently sitting
at ground level) were to bounce up to the level currently enjoyed by ‘men’, then ‘men’
would obviously end up down at ground level. That is not equality. Unfortunately (for
‘men’, who may not relish losing some of their former power) this means that they have
to descend a little, while ‘women’ rise to meet them to achieve that balance. One small
step, for example, might be that where possible, workplaces make it easier for men to
take more responsibility for child care, so that it is not almost always the mother who
takes time off work to attend school events, or look after sick children. Or perhaps these
same workplaces might stop insisting that employees work ridiculous hours to meet
deadlines – allowing parents to go home to spend time with their families. While some
males and females understand this, it is not going to be easy to persuade those who do
not. Benn (2013) cites the example of ‘prominent US policy adviser and academic

Jennifer Baker – Page 77 –
Anne-Marie Slaughter’ who ‘argued … that there is an inherent clash between capitalist
corporate work rhythms and the imperatives of authentic personal relationships’ (p.
226). She writes:

Such is Slaughter’s passion that she was led, at one point, to reproduce, in all capitals, the
demand that we “MAKE WORK SCHEDULES MATCH SCHOOL SCHEDULES”.
When 21st-century US corporate feminism starts to sound like second-wave socialist
feminism, something is afoot, and we need to build on it’. (p. 226)

There are many ways women are thwarted when they try to enter ‘male’ domains. Some
of these relate to differences, both with female bodies and female methods of working.
Much debate has been generated around questions of these differences, ‘whether men
and women should be treated the same as each other, as in liberal feminism, or as
different from each other as in standpoint feminism’ (Nentwich 2006, p. 499).
According to Rosser (2005) liberal feminism (also known as equality or egalitarian
feminism), ‘seek[s] no special privileges for women and simply demand[s] that
everyone receive equal opportunities without discrimination on the basis of sex’ (p. 2).
Liberal feminism therefore presumes that women and men are ‘the same’ and should be
dealt with as such. The problem with this belief, as Nentwich (2006) points out is that:
‘Treating men and women in the same way will only result in equality if they really are
the same’ (p. 501). Insisting that men and women are ‘the same’ is a huge generalisation
that cannot be substantiated. Not only are there differences between genders, there are
differences within genders that defy gender stereotypes. For example: some males are
physically weak and some women are physically strong; some males are technophobes
and some women are technophiles (Uotinen 2010).

Standpoint feminism (mentioned above) uses the differences between women and men
as a basis for its tenets (men as oppressor/women as oppressed, in a patriarchal society).
Explaining that feminist standpoint theory originated from earlier Marxist theory,
Harding (2012) writes: ‘Marx and Engels had argued for a proletarian standpoint … one should start off from the lives of the workers’ (p. 47) rather than from the perspective of the bosses. Developing from these ideas, feminist researchers began using women’s stories as the starting points for their research projects. When consciousness-raising groups started to appear in the 1970s and individual women began to tell their stories, it became obvious that many of their negative experiences were similar. For example:

Individual women had experiences, such as being groped by a male co-worker, which they had previously interpreted as accidental, imagined, or deserved. But, when multiple women in the group reported similar experiences, their individual interpretations became inconsistent with the data. (Intemann 2010, p. 786)

Yancey Martin (2003) maintains that:

Feminist standpoint (and other) theorists argue that different social positions offer different amounts of power and shape their occupants’ experiences and consciousness … Some positions have more power than others to say what is happening, including whether gender is ‘at play’. (p. 357)

Spender (1990) uses ‘motherhood’ to exemplify the way ‘many of the legitimated meanings of our culture are false and misrepresentative because they have been primarily constructed by men’ (p. 58). She notes that although the majority of obstetricians are men, ‘they only know from their specific position as men, and only from the perspective of spectator’ (p. 58). Because of this,

the meanings of motherhood which men have provided are based on the way in which motherhood relates to them. It would not be at all surprising if motherhood meant something entirely different to those who were the participants … there is a completely different set of meanings when motherhood is named by women. (p. 58)

Megarry (2014) establishes a link between second and fourth-wave feminism when she discusses the #mencallmethings hashtag on Twitter, where women relate their experiences of online harassment. She writes: ‘it is through the act of talking about
their lives that women are able to understand and conceptualise their oppression under patriarchy’ and by doing this, they are able to ‘formulate a commonality between experiences that was characteristic of the consciousness raising groups of second wave feminism’ (p. 51).

Although standpoint theory has had its detractors over the last four decades, according to Harding (2012) it ‘appears not only to have survived but also to be flourishing anew after almost four decades of lively debate about and within it’ (p. 60). For the purpose of this project, as well as establishing that there are differences between and within genders, this theory works well alongside autoethnography, in highlighting the importance of stories as a research tool.

In contrast to liberal feminism the aim of difference feminism, ‘is to level out the hierarchical differences between women and men … to achieve this objective, it is important that the differences are not only acknowledged but also valued equally’ (Nentwich 2006, p. 501). Nentwich wonders whether if, by ‘valu[ing] a woman’s way of doing things … and … emphasis[ing] the special skills women bring into society, organisations and the workplace … we might end up reinforcing gender stereotypes and therefore producing the differences’ (p. 502). However, if we accept that males and females are different in some aspects (and that there are differences between and within all genders), and can combine equally useful skills to produce more effective processes in the workplace, then it seems logical to take advantage of this.

The debate between difference and equality feminisms is on-going (Changfoot 2009), with equality feminists being accused of ignoring the needs and interests of some women, for example ‘working-class women, women of colour and lesbian women’ (p.
Scott (2013) asserts that 'equality is not the elimination of difference, and difference does not preclude equality' (p. 399) and abandoning either one is not an option. As she explains: ‘the political notion of equality … depends on an acknowledgement of the existence of difference … if individuals or groups were identical … there would be no need to ask for equality’ (p. 402). It seems that liberal/equality feminism might be somewhat counter-productive to the attainment of equality, and differences (when they occur – both between and within genders) need to be acknowledged and accounted for.

Chisholm (2008) discusses free climber, Lynn Hill, who received little help from male climbers when she took up this male-dominated activity. Subsequently, by establishing her own way of climbing, rather than trying to emulate the generally much bigger body of the average male climber, Hill was able to not only become a good climber, but conquered a climb that no-one else (female or male) had ever been able to. It seems obvious that if there are problems (for example, because of physical differences) encountered by females doing non-traditional jobs or activities, then they should be encouraged to look for alternative ways of functioning. For instance, who made the rule that someone cannot ask for help if they need it? Or, why is it okay for a male in a male-dominated occupation to ask for help, but not a woman? Every time the protagonists in *Equalisers* are confronted by a character who wants to block them in some way, the women carry on regardless, or another character points out how irrational the uncooperative person is being. Australian music industry frontrunner, Vicki Gordon (founder of Australian Women’s Contemporary Music) encourages women ‘to be honest about their abilities and … be positive about using them … It’s important that women find their own way of working’ (Sly 1993, p. 28).
There should be no stigma attached to anyone (female or male) adjusting their working style to suit their individual requirements; and ‘female’ should not habitually be seen as inferior to ‘male’. Ahl and Marlow (2012) reinforce this with their discussion of the male/female binary, and encourage further research ‘which critically challenges the axiomatic reproduction of women’s subordination as normal and natural’ (p. 558). As Spender (1990) writes: ‘In a society where women are devalued the words which refer to them – not surprisingly – assume negative connotations’ (p. 23). We can see examples of this perception of inferiority in the sexist language used as insults, such as: ‘Don’t be such a girl’, or ‘Yer big girl’s blouse’. And as Valenti (2013) discloses (quoted in the previous chapter), ‘Being a woman is the ultimate insult’ (p. 6). In agreement, Greer (1999) discusses how a boy is often ‘told he is about to be made a man of’ (p. 291) which she suggests could align with a boy being told not to be such a girl. Correspondingly, Copp and Kleinman (2008) assert: ‘When we use words and phrases that devalue women, we unwittingly reinforce other harmful sexist practices such as unequal pay and promotions, the second shift, sexual objectification, and the rape culture’ (p. 115). And Megarry (2014), referring to the work of feminist linguists such as Spender (1980) and Penelope (1990) reminds us that ‘The lack of male specific insults … renders it impossible to harass men as men, on the basis of their sex’ (p. 50).

Language used to describe male and female behaviour similarly needs to be examined:

Men have opinions, women are opinionated; men speak, women are outspoken; men are passionate, women rant; men have mouths, women are mouthy; and when was the last time you heard a man called feisty, bitter, sassy or shrill? (Deveny 2013, p 157)

It is often unclear whether those who use sexist language or have sexist thoughts are always aware that they are doing so, and therefore education is vital for eliminating sexism and working towards the achievement of gender equality. Even Lil and Jack
acknowledge in Episode Four of *Equalisers* that they have been unwittingly sexist when they realise that they always thought of breast cancer as a ‘female thing’.

On several occasions in *Equalisers* characters had trouble knowing what to call the women when they turned up at gigs. The person who does sound for a band is generally referred to as ‘the sound guy’. Calling a female sound engineer a ‘sound gal’ or ‘sound person’ just does not seem fitting; but there is no gender neutral term that is the equivalent of ‘guy’, and calling a female a 'sound guy' devalues her gender.

One question that needs to be asked is: Why should a woman have to be more like a man, in order to be considered equal? Kozlowicz (2007) asks:

> Why can’t qualities that are considered natural and unique for women also be considered strong? Why can’t several conflicting styles of communication be accepted? Why are women forced to change their own personality to try to fit a more masculine stereotype in order to be considered a ‘strong woman’? (p.64)

Milne (2013) points out that when male politicians (such as Bob Hawke or Peter Beattie) cry, ‘it is applauded and rewarded. They are deemed to be sensitive, caring and empathetic’ (p. 18). However, when female politicians cry, ‘they are deemed not to be coping … if they don’t cry it is because they aren’t caring or sensitive enough, they are somehow lacking in femininity’ (p. 18). Once again they are ‘hit’ with a no-win position. Deconstruction feminism ‘argues for dismantling gender’s inhibiting polarities of male and female altogether’ (Dietz 2003, p. 403) and ‘In its narrowest application, deconstruction is a strategy for identifying and disrupting binary pairs’ (Gannon & Davies 2012, p. 76), so that, for instance, ‘female’, designated the ‘silent’ one in the male/female binary (as will be expanded on in a later chapter), is now able to speak. If one considers both deconstruction and difference feminism, then if individuals (whether female or male) were allowed to work to their strengths, to express themselves, to create ways of functioning that suit them, and were not regarded as (or made to feel) inferior
Fine (2010) maintains that every time a woman or man does something outside of their assigned gender role, society starts to change, just a little. However, as Fine points out there is still a long way to go:

It is remarkable how similar the two sexes become, psychologically, when gender fades into the background … But it is still the case today that gender inequalities, and the gender stereotypes they evoke, interact with our minds in ways that create inequality of access. (p. 237)

There is no denying that we live in a sexist and misogynist society. And to be fair to those who will inevitably cry out: ‘What about misandry?’ – yes, misandry is equally unacceptable. I have absolutely no hesitation in making such a generalised statement about sexism and misogyny because I have seen enough anecdotal evidence in the media to corroborate it. Some examples of the type of sexism we have been ‘hit’ with over the last couple of years include: the Bic Pen for Her; Fujitsu’s pink, sparkly laptop for ladies (designed, of course, by their ‘lady’ engineers!); and a range of Cottee’s Cordials – with blue labels for boys and pink labels for girls. We had a former Rugby Union player saying female sports journalists should not be allowed to write about Rugby (‘Campese sexist tweet’ 2012). We had a horse named Female Sportsperson of the Year by the Daily Telegraph (Schetzer 2012). We had Alan Jones declaring that ‘Women are destroying the joint’ (Totaro 2012). We had male students at a university college chanting: ‘Yes means Yes! And No means Yes!’ (Sales 2012). Daily Telegraph blogger, Tim Blair held an online poll to elect Australia’s ‘craziest left-wing frightbat’ – a derogatory term he coined for feminists (or so he thought – his little joke backfired when members of Destroy the Joint pleaded with the Facebook site’s administrators to have t-shirts made; another item I could not resist buying) (Farrelly 2014). In 2014 we
had dating coach/‘pick-up artist’ Julien Blanc lecturing men all over the world about how to sexually abuse women in public (to Australia’s credit, he was removed from the country before he could conduct talks here). We have a Prime Minister (and self-appointed Minister for Women) who seems to think that a woman’s place is in the home, doing the ironing. We had a television reporter ask the seventh highest ranked female tennis player in the world to do a ‘twirl’ after a match (Ford, 2015). And we still have stories in television news broadcasts about females working as train and crane drivers, and Australian Rules Grand Final umpires.

Until these stop becoming news stories; until normal objects stop being manufactured as specifically for women; until ridiculous statements about women and men stop being fed to us by the media (or being uttered in the first place); and until everyone can walk the streets safely and live without fear in their homes; and these are just a few of the problems we need to eliminate, including sexism against men of course; our society will still be unacceptably sexist and we will not have achieved gender equality.

There are ‘real’ events and characters in my script, but some of these have been altered for confidentiality and in order to highlight the project objectives. From reading anecdotes in the literature and talking to women who have worked in the industry, it is very clear that many women ‘just put up with’ certain behaviours from males, in order to survive in the music industry; and this is also true of women working in a range of male dominated industries (McLaughlin, Uggen & Blackstone 2012).

A few examples (both anecdotal and from the literature) of the type of behaviour with which women in the music industry have been ‘hit’ include: a female musician was stopped from going backstage to set up when arriving at a gig (guitar case in hand),
after being assumed to be a groupie, and was then confronted with a sign backstage saying, ‘No females past this point’. The same female guitarist was told by a journalist during an interview that women do not play guitar because they have small wrists! A female sound engineer was told she could only use a piece of equipment in return for sexual favours and an all-female band unloading their own gear, had an amp dropped on purpose from the back of a truck by a male crew member working for another band. Leonard (2007) describes how guitarist Marie du Santiago and bassist Emmy-Kate Montrose were thrown out of a venue where they were supporting the Ramones, because they were assumed to be groupies. Similarly, Leonard refers to Smaill’s 2005 research report, in which Smaill describes how a live sound engineer was denied entry to a venue ‘because staff did not believe that a woman could be operating a sound desk’ (Leonard 2007, p. 58). Sound editor Annabelle Sheehan, in an interview recalls being told that she had been recommended for a job because ‘she’s got big tits and you’ll probably like her’ (Bailey 1999, p. 88). After putting up with numerous acts of unfitting behaviour from males she worked for and with, she now regrets ‘not pointing out to them how inappropriate they were’ (p. 88). She also observes: ‘It’s sad that even with a sense of feminism a woman knows she will not easily find work if she complains’ (p. 88-89).

Even after the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 in Australia, the Australian Human Rights Commission webpage states: ‘Despite being outlawed for over 25 years, sexual harassment remains a problem in our workplaces’ (Australian Human Rights Commission 2013). This is unacceptable and I attempt to address the issue in Equalisers by showing how my protagonists react to incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Although I do not condone violence, I do encourage defending oneself. So when Lil uses the only judo throw she knows on Darryl in Episode Two it would be
difficult to see this as Lil as acting like ‘one of the boys’. I know Lil could have defended herself like this because it was based on a real-life (non-threatening) incident: In the mid-1970s I was walking along a beach in North Queensland with some friends and somehow the topic of self-defence came up. One of my male friends (somewhat taller than me, and of a fairly solid build) laughed at me when I said I could throw him – so I did. (I am not sure which one of us was more surprised to see him lying on his back on the sand; but it was actually good to know that I could do it if I ever needed to.)

In Episode Four, I have included an incident borrowed from the tale of the dropped amp (mentioned above). After the incident Aggie repairs the broken amp and the offending roadie is sent home. Interestingly, when I wrote the scene, the response from a male reader was, ‘That’s a bit puerile, isn’t it?’ (2014, pers. comm., 9 Jan). Of course it is. But this is exactly the type of behaviour that women have experienced (have been ‘hit’ with) and ‘just put up with’ in order to work in the industry. And if they complained, it was likely that they would be denied future work. Miller (2014) relates Elissa Shevinsky’s experience which led her to quit the IT company she started after inappropriate sexist tweets from her male business partner, and his defence of an app called Titstare ‘where you take photos of yourself staring at tits’ (p. 1). Among the responses to the app presentation was this one, from ‘White_N_Nerdy’ who wrote:

I’m honestly trying to understand why anyone says that females are ‘needed’ in the tech industry … The tech community works fine without females, just like any other mostly male industry. Feminists probably just want women making more money. (p. 7)

With attitudes such as this, is it any wonder that equality is still out of reach? Miller talks about the: ‘boy-puerile atmosphere’ (p. 7) that females should not have to put up with in order to work in the industry. This is one of the reasons it is important to encourage gender balance in the workplace, so that someday the assignation of genders to occupations will become meaningless.
While the protagonists in *Equalisers* do not become militant feminists, they all support feminist ideals and display varying degrees of activism; and this is shown to assist them in their goal of establishing a place in their chosen profession. In their study, Holland and Cortina (2013) found ‘evidence that engagement in feminist activism may help protect against or remediate some negative occupational outcomes’ (p. 205); which concurs with Eisele and Stake’s (2008) earlier study, which found that ‘Positive relationships have been demonstrated between feminist attitudes and measures of self-esteem and self-efficacy’ (p. 234).

Fine (2010) describes how children are ‘hit’ with gender from birth and asks: ‘How should children ignore gender when they continually watch it, hear it, see it; are clothed in it, sleep in it, eat off it?’ (p. 239). She also introduces the concept that gender is ‘wired’ into us, but ‘the wiring is soft, not hard. It is flexible, malleable, and changeable. And, if we only believe this, it will continue to unravel’ (p. 239). There is, after all, hope.

Young author, Steph Bowe (2013) sums up some of the obstacles with which young women are ‘hit’ as they grow up, wanting to succeed in our current patriarchy, suggesting that:

Young women need to be reminded that they are so much more than their appearance; that their worth doesn’t decline with age. They don’t need to be told that they are soft or incapable just because they are female. They don’t need to be told that men are just biologically better at maths or science or politics, because that’s blatantly untrue. They do not need to be told they are less than, or that they have to put down other women or denigrate men in order to become successful. (p. 218)

Women have been ‘hit’ with unlimited numbers of ‘shots’ for as long as they have been fighting for equal rights. However, there have always been feminists who refuse to give...
up, even when others falsely claim that equality has already been achieved and that there is no need for feminism anymore. Now, with the resurgence of feminism, those who attempt their best ‘shots’ might just be the ones ‘hit’, as these ‘shots’ ricochet off the barricades that feminists have erected against sexism, and other issues that hinder the achievement of gender equality.
CHAPTER FIVE

SISYPHUS

*We’re not tilting at windmills*

The story of Sisyphus (the mythical king condemned endlessly to roll a boulder up a hill) has always intrigued me. Sometimes I feel like I have been similarly condemned (other times, I am far less pessimistic). When I think of generations of feminists and their on-going struggle to achieve gender equality, the one story that pops into my head is Sisyphus and his boulder.

Some people sail through life. They start out with a plan and even if there may be the odd glitch along the way, they reach old age with the satisfaction of knowing that they accomplished what they set out to do. Other people are like poor old Sisyphus endlessly rolling that boulder up the hill only to see it roll straight back down again. No matter what their goal, it never seems to quite work out, and there they are, back at square one, contemplating their next move. Sometimes this is their own fault (Sisyphus was a rather nasty character, who some might say deserved his fate), sometimes not. Sometimes, as Bernard Cornwell (2006) writes: ‘Fate is inexorable’ (p. 2).

Feminist activity and progress has waxed and waned over the last century for a number of reasons. Once first-wave feminists (Sarah 1983) had achieved their foremost goal (women’s suffrage) ‘female’ still remained inferior to ‘male’ in patriarchal society. During times of war, women took over the work of men who were away fighting, but generally, men reclaimed these jobs when they returned, and life went on much as it
had, pre-war. As Sarah (1983) asserts: ‘what distinguishes this chunk of feminist history from feminism before and immediately after is that it involved the emergence, development, struggle, and finally, the demise of feminist movements around the globe’ (p. 519).

When second-wave feminism began in the 1960s, feminists were assigned negative labels (white, middle-class, bra-burners, man-haters, lesbians … and so on) (Harnois 2008; Maddison & Grey 2010) which tended to weaken their influence; as did the ‘“men’s rights” groups and promasculinity rhetoric’ (Schippers 2002, p. 175) that began to spring up in the early 1980s. While second-wave feminists made some progress, they did not achieve their main goal – gender equality.

Progress stalled with the advent of third-wave feminism and post-feminism, in part because the cohesive force of group consciousness (a feature of second-wave feminism) was no longer in evidence (Harris 2010). Despite group consciousness being such a strong and effective characteristic of second-wave feminism, Greer demonstrates shortcomings which tended to thwart advancement. She discusses how diverse groups of feminists have often attacked each other, citing how lesbians would label her as anti-feminist for supposedly only caring about the needs of heterosexual women; older feminists are often attacked by younger feminists; and so on. If a group that is potentially strong is fighting within its ranks, it cannot function as effectively. Currently, with sexism and feminism once again in the spotlight, and a return to group consciousness (Knappe & Lang 2014; Megarry 2014), alongside awareness of intersectional issues (Clark 2014), we may see another period of progress; and maybe this time, the boulder will become wedged at the top of the hill.
In order to prevent the period of waning that often followed any progress achieved in the past, there are the usual obstacles that need to be overcome. Gender equality in the ‘real world’ is not going to advance with the help of online activism, if women continue to be treated as inferior in both online and offline spaces. Megarry (2014) emphasises: ‘equality online is dependent not only on the ability to occupy a space, but to be able to influence it and speak without fear of threat or harassment’ (p. 46). She explains that when it first appeared, ‘it was assumed that the structure of the Internet would implicitly render considerations of gender relations irrelevant to issues of online equality’ (p. 49). Instead, ‘users continue to make judgements about the sex of others in cyberspace, and respond to them on the basis of these gendered assumptions’ (p. 49).

Online harassment is therefore an obstruction to online activism (Megarry 2014). However this type of activism has the potential to be more successful than past methods because:

the Internet is creating a public record of women’s online experiences, and for the first time in history, the silencing and harassment of women is being permanently documented. Online social media platforms thus provide a vibrant resource for analysis by social scientists, and create a unique opportunity to challenge and reveal the extent of male social dominance in the public sphere. (p. 53)

Hinsey (2013) encourages cyberfeminism as a means of transforming the Internet into a tool for championing feminism, becoming ‘an agent in a feminist herstory’ (p. 26). She discusses how cyberfeminism identifies both the advantages and disadvantages of technology (for women), and describes how ‘Cyberfeminism uses theory to address issues found in the online sphere such as: disembodiment, community, and imagined vs. real space to illuminate technology as part of the female experience’ (p. 27). She makes the valid point that if those young women who are being drawn to feminism online are not given ‘the critical tools to understand the foundations of the feminist movement’ (p. 29), then progress will stall. If they are given these tools, and
cyberfeminism becomes ‘more reflective, more critical, and more rooted in the feminist theory that has helped grow our movement’ (p. 29), then ‘we can emerge into a place where young women have the critical consciousness necessary to change the world’ (p. 31). Although *Equalisers* is set long before the advent of the Internet and social media, my protagonists could be seen as forerunners of today’s cyberfeminists. By showing both women and men capably working in areas currently labelled as ‘other’, and not allowing antagonists to deter them, the protagonists in *Equalisers* could provide today’s young feminists and potential feminists, with similar critical tools to allow the movement to keep progressing.

One criticism levelled at online activism is that it does not lead to social change, that it should be more aptly named ‘slacktivism’ (Schuster 2013), by those who argue that ‘online conversations and discussions do not count as political participation in the “real world”’ (p. 17). However, as Schuster writes: ‘young women did not confine themselves to discussions alone; they also used social media to organise events outside the Internet … one-off protests and pickets as well as continuing the work of collectives and groups’ (p. 17). Whether or not online activism leads directly to social change, there is no doubt that it does have positive effects. For example: ‘participants pointed out how the Internet helped them not to feel isolated as a feminist’ (Schuster 2013, p. 17) and ‘Twitter has been positioned … as the new public square … and provides researchers with unprecedented access to online social and political behaviour’ (Megarry 2014, p. 47). And Benn (2013) writes:

> The technology is there to link Twitter to street protests, thinktank reports to parliamentary procedure. Played right, an amalgam of long-established institutional and personal expertise and the energy of the new rebels could present an exciting challenge on the gender equality front. (p. 227)
Everything is set in place to maintain the momentum and progress towards reducing sexism and achieving gender equality. Those who care need to ensure that their efforts do not slacken off once some progress is once again achieved. Some progress is not enough. As I discussed earlier, when third-wave and post-feminists relaxed their efforts because they no longer saw a need for feminism, or their focus was on broader issues, progress towards gender equality stalled.

I never thought my life would turn out how it has. Of course it has not been an entirely negative journey; but I had always imagined a different outcome. I cannot change this, but I have now had the opportunity to create a fictional version of how things might have turned out if I had been able to pursue a career in one of the ‘male’ industries I attempted. There are other, wilder versions I could have made up: I could have become a Nobel Prize-winning scientist (much more far-fetched than me becoming a sound engineer); I could have won Wimbledon (as I often fantasized, when hitting a tennis ball against our backyard wall as a child); or I could have been on stage (I actually could have been on stage with the Australian Ballet when I was four, but my mother would not let me – but that is another issue). I chose to turn myself into a successful sound engineer for a number of reasons. I could use my experience in the music and other industries as a basis for the television series. The music industry, being a sexist, male-dominated industry, was a perfect vehicle for addressing the project objectives.

According to van Dijck (2006),

*Sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural theorists, from entirely different perspectives, regard … music to be part of our collective cultural memory and identity … Shared listening, exchanging … songs, and talking about music create a sense of belonging, and connect a person’s sense of self to a larger community and generation. (p. 357)*

Music is something that can link generations. I still listen to music my parents introduced me to. My children listen to music their father and I introduced them to, as
well as music from their generation, which I also listen to. A television series that involves music has the potential to attract a wider audience because of this generational connection. The final reason was that being a sound engineer was something I really thought I might be able to do at one time; and in conjunction with my awareness that other women have become successful sound engineers and business proprietors, I knew I could write a credible story.

While my attempts at various careers have not been entirely successful, it does not mean that it was all a complete waste of time. I learned new skills, met some interesting people, gained self-knowledge and always felt proud that I had challenged myself. When my attempts were not successful, then I would do as the old song suggests: ‘Pick yourself up, dust yourself off. Start all over again’ (Kern 1936). And this is what feminists have done constantly over the last century.

It cannot be denied that successive generations of feminists have made progress. In Australia: women can vote; they can work after they marry; they can drink in public bars; and they are no longer the property of their husbands. Despite attaining a degree of relative equality, actual equality has still not been achieved. For example: women still do not have equal pay; they are still fighting for reproductive rights; they still do the majority of domestic and childcare chores (Coltrane 2010; Fletcher 2015); and violence against women is still a major problem. In 2014, Victorian politician Geoff Shaw pushed for controversial changes to the state’s already harsh abortion laws (Cook & Willingham 2014). The World Economic Forum (2013; 2014) began publishing their Global Gender Gap Report in 2006. Australia ranked country number 15 in 2006; number 23 in 2013; and number 24 in 2014. It is extremely disheartening, but not at all surprising to see that gender disparity in Australia is increasing. From the Australian
Government’s Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2013; 2014), the gender pay gap stood at 17.6 per cent as of November 2012, 18.2 per cent as of May 2014, and 18.8 as of February 2015 (Sedghi 2015). These figures have not changed significantly since 2004, and were hardly an improvement from the early 1980s, when it stood at about 20 per cent.

In a story for ABC’s The Drum, Rhiannon Cook (2013) suggests a simple answer to the parental leave dilemma: ‘Create policies that include fathers too’ (n.p.). In Australia it is often assumed that the mother will take the primary role of child carer, perpetuating the traditional view that it is the man who is the one likely to earn more and therefore will be less likely to stay at home with the children. It is all linked: pay women less; make childcare so expensive that there is little incentive for women to work; encourage women to have babies by offering them money to have them; and on and on. Like Sisyphus, each successive wave of feminists seems to be fighting the same battles, pushing that boulder up that same hill, only to watch it roll back down again each time. It is possible that the boulder does not roll back quite as far each time; but nothing that has been done so far by successive generations of feminists seems to be able to make it remain wedged at the top.

My aim with Equalisers is to show that gender equality is a viable goal. If I can show that women are capable of working as equals in one currently male-dominated industry, then potentially the audience will be able to transfer this concept to other industries.

It was important not to antagonise sectors of my potential audience if I wanted to persuade them that feminism is not a negative label, and gender-assignation of jobs is
unnecessary. It is obviously much easier to persuade someone to change their mind about an issue if you can get them onside. If I wrote a script that was full of anger and hatred towards men, or that showed a group of inept women trying to undertake work of which they were incapable, then this would serve no purpose. Gervais and Hoffman (2013) describe mindfulness as, ‘non-judgemental attention and awareness to the present moment … In other words … purposefully paying attention to the present in an accepting, non-judgmental way’ (p. 284). Their findings ‘suggest that mindfulness may contribute to less prejudice toward women because it motivates men to think and behave in less sexist ways toward women’ (Gervais & Hoffman 2013, p. 292). And Mingé (2013) calls autoethnography ‘mindful action’ (p. 439), suggesting that ‘Cultivating mindful action happens in three critical steps. First, I act. Next, I reconsider. … Through these re-considerations, I take new – mindful – action that allows me to reflect more broadly on actions in the world’ (p. 439). If I am able to promote mindfulness in my audience, then I am more likely to encourage social change. This is one reason I did not want my protagonists to be portrayed as stereotypical man-hating, aggressive feminists. Kim Frankiewicz, managing director of roo-Art Records relates: ‘I see women behaving aggressively over trivial and unimportant things because they think they have to do that to prove they can do the job. They end up looking like idiots’ (Sly 1993, p. 32). Perhaps by creating female protagonists who are depicted as assertive rather than threatening or aggressive, the issues raised in Equalisers will be more palatable. Mindfulness may also be encouraged by showing that many of the males with whom the women work are accepting of their presence in the industry.

In order for the boulder to remain firmly wedged at the top of the hill, there are a number of obstacles to overcome, for example, as discussed earlier: the false notion that equality has already been achieved; and the premise that if ‘post-feminism’ is a
Coleman and Ferreday (2010) write:

In recent years, feminism has seen the production of a prevailing mood of hopelessness around a generational model of progress, which is widely imagined to have ‘failed’. Feminism has been so successful in achieving particular equalities that young women see it as irrelevant. (p. 313)

Coleman and Ferreday assert that one reason for the apparent failure of feminism is young women’s reluctance to identify as feminists. Other women deny the existence of, or the need for feminism and this begs the question: Do they read newspapers, watch television, use social media? If the answer is yes, then it defies belief that they could hold such an opinion. A prime example of this is in an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (on the eve of International Women’s Day 2014) in which Michaelia Cash, the Minister assisting the Prime Minister for Women, was quoted as saying that while she believed in gender equality, she would not necessarily call herself a feminist (Ireland 2014a). Apparently she does not even think the movement exists anymore, and declares: ‘In terms of feminism, I’ve never been someone who really associates with that movement. That movement was a set of ideologies from many, many decades ago now.’ If Cash cannot see that by believing in gender equality she is a feminist (whether she calls herself one or not) and cannot see the current resurgence of feminism all around her, then how can she possibly be effective in her role? And the same can be said for Liberal Party politician, Julie Bishop, who also denied being a feminist (Ireland, 2014b). I am not suggesting that anyone should be forced to give themselves a label, but in this case, gender equality is not going to be achieved if those in power are so misguided in their understanding of feminism, and are working for stalwarts of the patriarchy. One reason why gender mainstreaming (policies that ‘ensure that *every part of that organisation* becomes gender-inclusive and gender-sensitive’ (Bacchi & Eveline 2010, p. 2)) has never been effective in the countries where it has been attempted (Hankivsky 2005) is that the implementation of policies to introduce it has largely been
Even though Michaelia Cash and Julie Bishop deny being feminists, both women reflect shades of liberal feminism, operating in a ‘male’ domain where they undoubtedly wish to be treated the same as their male colleagues. By operating as individuals and supposedly working as equals, they make it difficult for feminists to make progress. As demonstrated by the headway made during second-wave feminism, which stalled during third-wave/post-feminism’s more individualistic phase, feminism functions more proficiently with a group approach. As Anne Summers (2013) writes: ‘A bitter lesson of the past forty years has been the realization that we have not been able to guarantee that a reform will be permanent’, and this was, in part because ‘We had not amassed a sufficiently powerful external organisation to compel the government to take notice of us’ (p. 37).

Fortunately there are many females and males who still believe in feminism and its ideals, and are ensuring that the struggle for gender equality continues. Amongst those who celebrate and campaign for feminism is writer Caitlin Moran (2011) who inserts her own brand of humour in its defence:

We need to reclaim the word ‘feminism’. We need the word ‘feminism’ back real bad. When statistics come in saying that only 29% of American women would describe themselves as feminist – and only 42% of British women – I used to think, What do you think feminism IS, ladies? What part of ‘liberation for women’ is not for you? Is it freedom to vote? The right not to be owned by the man you marry? The campaign for equal pay? ‘Vogue’ by Madonna? Jeans? Did all that good shit GET ON YOUR NERVES? Or were you just DRUNK AT THE TIME OF THE SURVEY? (p. 80)

No matter what the consensus, feminism never went anywhere (perhaps it just went a little astray for a while) and it is still desperately needed. So how can there be such a thing as ‘post-feminism’? Harris (2007), in an online article for Salon, quotes feminist writer Lisa Jervis (formerly of Bitch magazine) as saying: ‘I’ll be a post-feminist in a
post-patriarchy’ (para. 3). Tasker & Negra (2007) describe post-feminism as based around ‘a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the “pastness” of feminism, whether what is supposedly past is merely noted, mourned or celebrated’ (p. 1). And Gill (2007) explains that post-feminism ‘seeks to mark a time not after feminism *per se*, but after a particular moment of feminist activity and a particular set of feminist concerns’ (p. 251).

Silverberg (2006) discusses how generations of women keep assuring following generations that things have changed regarding discrimination, and tell them ‘That will never happen to you’ (p. 3). She reflects: ‘a decade or so later we always say, “How could we have thought *that* was equality?” Are we serving the next generation well if we tell them that everything is equal and fair when it’s not’ (p. 3)? By telling these younger generations that progress has been made, older feminists have been inadvertently paving the way for the next waning of feminism. There goes that boulder again.

Harris (2010) has a rather disheartening interpretation of third-wave feminism (which some align with post-feminism), stating: ‘More than 10 years after the publication of key so-called third-wave texts such as *Generation f, Listen Up!* and *To Be Real*, the idea of an even loosely organised movement of young females seems to have disintegrated’ (p. 475); and also notes ‘the widespread disavowal of the feminist label’ (p. 475). McRobbie (2011) agrees, and describes a ‘new kind of sophisticated anti-feminism … [which] upholds the principles of gender equality, while denigrating the figure of the feminist’ (p. 179) and asserts that individualism has now replaced the group activism of second-wave feminism: ‘Rather than stressing collectivity or the concerns of women *per se*, this replaces feminism with competition, ambition, meritocracy, self-help, and
the rise of the “alpha girl” (McRobbie 2011, p. 181). This is one reason for having the women in Equalisers join forces as a group. In this way they are able to function more successfully while they establish themselves as equals in their new occupation. I have spoken to young women who feel that all is well because, like me when I was younger, they see themselves as equal to males. Unfortunately, as I eventually realised, that is not how it works. Gender equality is not a reality for all and until it is, returning to the group approach of second-wave feminism (which fourth wave feminism seems to be doing (Knappe & Lang 2014)) may be one way to initiate and maintain progress.

Championing today’s young feminists, Aune (2013) criticises those (and in particular, McRobbie) who fail to ‘recognise that some young women are feminists and are engaging in feminist political activism’ (p. 50). Although they may not call themselves feminists, they still may actively promote feminist ideals. As an example, Clark (2014) discusses hashtag feminism, which she likens to ‘the consciousness-raising circles of the American second wave’ (p. 1109). Hashtag feminist campaigns have the added bonus of being able to ‘attract participants beyond those already interested in feminism … and reach far beyond the feminist community, and … may even enter the realm of mainstream media’ (p. 1110). I can substantiate this idea, because as a self-labelled feminist, I receive information and links to articles on gender issues daily from social media sites that I have selected. Some of these I choose to share with my network. Members of my network may or may not identify as feminists, but may become interested in certain issues when made aware of them. They may in turn share the information with their network, and this is how information spreads, often very, very quickly. Clark (2014) cites the #NotBuyingIt hashtag, as an example of the power of current social media. This hashtag ‘made headlines for harnessing the power of female consumers and for forcing companies to acknowledge feminist critique’ (p. 1109) and
Clark asserts:

Whereas second-wavers were frequently criticised for universalising white women’s experience, hashtag feminism has unleashed a multiplicity of voices that demand recognition of differences across intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and class, so that more effective coalition building might occur. (p. 1109)

As well as the growth of intersectionality, Benn (2013) sees today’s young feminists as being more aware than their predecessors and they are ‘fed up at the contrast between the myth of growing female power and the reality of the demeaning sexism they perceive all around them’ (p. 223). She writes:

What’s most striking about this new wave, however, is how predominantly cultural the concerns are: how issues of representation of women or the lack of representation of women or the grossly distorted representation of women have taken top billing, with violence against women coming a close, and connected, second. (p. 223)

In Equalisers I thought it would be interesting to have the protagonists becoming gradually aware of feminism, even though they all held some form of feminist ideals from the outset. While feminism has always struggled against attitudes which produce irritating statements such as ‘I’m not a feminist, but …’ or ‘I’m not a feminist. I like men!’ it is indeed discouraging to keep explaining to generation after generation that, as Marie Shear (1986) said: ‘Feminism is the radical notion that women are people’. In Episode Four, Teagan realises that feminism is just about gender equality, and remarks to the other women, ‘And that’s not a bad thing, is it?’ It is surprising how many times, when you provide an explanation of feminism, or ask a woman if she likes having the right to vote; or to work after she gets married; or would like to get equal pay for equal work; and so on, you witness that ‘light bulb moment’ as they realise that they are indeed feminists, or have feminist principles. This has frequently been illustrated in the classrooms of feminist teachers, such as Walker, Geertsema and Barnett (2009), and Copp and Kleinman (2008).
One thing that is counter-productive to the achievement of gender equality is the attitude of those who claim that women are in some way better than men. For example, when Beyoncé Knowles, sings ‘Run the World (Girls)’ (Nash et al. 2011) (this video has well over 250 million views on YouTube as of March 2015) it is detrimental to the feminist movement both because it is untrue, and is not the aim of feminism. Vanessa, a blogger on the website, Feministing, ‘calls out’ Beyoncé, saying she is a liar:

I don’t think it’s right that she’s out there promoting historical inaccuracies to impressionable young women, imparting the false belief that they ‘run the world’, thereby lulling them into a false sense of achievement and distracting them from doing the work it takes to actually run the world. Which, by the way, I don’t think female domination is actually the goal. I think the endgame should be a socially egalitarian society. (NineteenPercent 2013)

While it may seem like a positive move to encourage young girls and women to be empowered, Vanessa is quite correct in stating that female domination is not the goal, and that gender equality is nowhere near a reality, which she backs up with facts and figures in her vlog (video blog).

Recently it has been some very young feminists who have been giving me hope that one day gender equality will be achieved. In 2011, four-year-old Riley Maida complained loudly in a toy store, ‘Some girls like super heroes ... Some boys like princesses. Why do girls have to buy all the pink stuff and the boys have to buy different coloured stuff’ (Maida 2011)? And seven-year-old Charlotte Benjamin wrote to the Lego Company in 2014:

I love legos but I don't like that there are more lego boy people and barely any lego girls. today [sic] I went to a store and saw legos in two sections the girls pink and the boys blue. All the girls did was sit at home, go to the beach, and shop, and they had no jobs but the boys went on adventures, worked, saved people, and had jobs, even swam with sharks. I want you to make more lego girl people and let them go on adventures and have fun ok?!? (Samakow 2014)

In Episode Four Matt teaches the pre-school children that fathers are just as capable of
looking after children as mothers; and one mother is delighted when her little boy tells her he is going to teach his father how to change their baby’s nappy when they get home. This is of course extremely patronising (obviously many fathers do change nappies; or stay at home while their partner works; or undertake other supposedly ‘female’ tasks) but I just wanted to reinforce that if we do not teach young children gender role stereotypes, then it will be a lot easier to abolish them in the future.

Francesca’s pre-school is the stereotypical nightmare it needed to be, until Helen and Matt instigate changes. There are people who think that genders should have their assigned roles and that girls should play with supposedly girls’ toys and boys should play with supposedly boys’ toys. Boys in particular are often dissuaded from playing with dolls or ‘pink things’ or from putting on nail polish or other make-up. It is more acceptable for a girl to be labelled a ‘tomboy’ than it is for a boy to be called a ‘sissy’ (Halberstam 1998; Schippers 2002). Showing Matt encouraging the little boys in the pre-school to play with dolls and other ‘girls’ toys, will hopefully send a positive message to parents or potential parents in the audience. Perhaps some fathers will be persuaded to take a more active role in their children’s upbringing or to teach their children or future children to become feminists. If little boys still want to play with ‘boys’ toys and little girls want to play with ‘girls’ toys, that is fine. But toys should not be segregated or labelled with a gender, and children should not be castigated for wanting to play with the ‘wrong’ toys. It is heartening to see that a number of toy shops in the UK have abandoned their gendered aisles; and Hebblethwaite (2011) writes about a pre-school in Sweden that has adopted a gender neutral approach (including the use of a gender neutral pronoun, ‘hen’), an idea which is now spreading. It is interesting to note that despite Sweden being one of the most gender equal countries in the world (World Economic Forum 2013; 2014), ‘the equality discourse hides many existing forms of inequality that continue to mark the everyday lives of many girls and women’
If a country such as Sweden still has these problems, then Australia (ranked much lower for gender parity) certainly has a long, long way to go.

The existence of a fourth wave of feminism:

has been challenged by those who maintain that increased usage of the Internet is not enough to delineate a new era. But it is increasingly clear that the Internet has facilitated the creation of a global community of feminists who use the Internet both for discussion and activism. (Munro 2013, p. 23)

If a fourth wave has indeed arrived and there are young people of all genders (alongside feminists from older generations) expressing positive insights on gender issues, which are widely viewed on social media, then is it possible that this time the momentum will build and society will start to change for the better? Of course, as discussed earlier, for every feminist who makes a comment or encourages activism on social media, there are equal numbers of vicious anti-feminists, attempting to undermine them, so determined are they to force that boulder back down the hill again.

In addition, with the current prevalence of domestic and street violence, Ostini and Hopkins (2015) identify a new form, which they call ‘technology violence’, ‘to highlight the ways technology is used within relationships to assert control and power over another person’ (para. 5). They assert that actions such as accessing bank accounts, ruining credit ratings, installing GPS trackers, posting intimate pictures online, and so on, can have similar devastating effects to other forms of domestic violence (Queensland Government’s *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012*).

Craigo-Snell (2010) discusses Irigaray’s arguments on binary opposition, ‘in which one member of the binary is primary and the other is the lesser reflection, absence, or negation of the first’ (p. 268). According to Irigaray, because ‘Only men are allowed to
occupy the subject-position of speaker’ (p. 269) women do not speak, they ‘merely mimic men’ (p. 269) (as mentioned briefly in my earlier discussion of deconstruction feminism). Craigo-Snell elaborates on Irigaray’s work on binary oppositions, especially two that ‘function within western discourse’ (p. 272): mind/body and speech/silence. Because women are linked more with the body than the mind, they ‘must be silent’, whereas ‘Men, connected to the mind, speak’ (p. 272). Throughout history, women have suffered physically and emotionally for not remaining silent. One of the more high profile examples of this in the last decade is Malala Yousafzai (Malala Yousafzai 2014), the Pakistani teenager who was shot in the head for daring to speak up about education rights for girls. With the advent of the fourth wave of feminism, voices of both women and men are being raised about issues that feminists have struggled against for decades. Citing the example of Julia Gillard’s ‘misogyny’ speech, Galloway (2013) affirms that women are now ‘visible and our experiences have currency. Finally women’s stories were silenced no longer because a woman in power called it’ (p. 1). However, she writes:

there is still a long way to go …The overwhelming representation of men in our culture and polity is supported by the erasure of women, our own accounts of life and our contribution to all realms of society. (p. 1)

As an example of ongoing inequality of voice, Megarry (2014) observes that on Twitter: ‘male voices still appear to carry more authoritative weight than female voices’ while ‘women are disproportionately targeted for harassment’ (p. 49), and it is the ‘women who disobey prescriptive gender roles’ (p. 48) who become the main targets for this treatment. It is women, Spender (1990) asserts, who have the power to change this inequity. She writes:

They can cease to collude, then can abandon their role as willing slaves. The categories of masculine/feminine, dominant/muted, positive/negative – and all those hierarchical dichotomies fundamental to patriarchal order – can be subverted when women start to encode their own meanings, because the dominant
The group is dependent on these categories for their continued, unaltered existence.

(p. 102)

In *Equalisers* the women face sexism and violence, but on the whole, their journey is fairly smooth. They complete the course; they all demonstrate skill in their new profession; and they manage to run the business successfully. All this could have happened, but in real life not everything always runs to plan. For example, in Episode Four when Aggie is confronted by a group of drunks outside the pub, it could have ended badly if Lil had not fortuitously poked her head out of the door in time. Many women and men have been attacked by drunks in the street, often with tragic results. In the same episode, if Drew had not seen Jez drop the amp from the truck, Teagan would have been blamed and the women’s credibility would have been in question. This in turn would have given credence to the unreasonable view that women do not belong in technical positions in the music industry. There are always alternatives to every situation: some may turn out well and some badly. There is no reason why many of the situations in which I placed the protagonists could not have turned out well, so that was usually the option I chose. The audience will still know that a negative outcome was a possibility, but they can also see that it does not have to be the *only* option. In some ways, this could be seen as reflecting elements of framing theory, as explained by Chong and Druckman (2007):

The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and can be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualisation of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue. (p. 104)

Instances of sexism occur constantly in our society, and often the victim does nothing about it or is not in a position to do anything about it. The Everyday Sexism project was started in the UK by British feminist writer, Laura Bates, but has now spread to other countries, and the many stories from Australia highlight that all is not well.
Women can be just as sexist as men, and can also be sexist towards other women (Milne 2013; Bates 2014). As Greer (1971) writes:

We know that such women do not champion their own sex once they are in positions of power, that when they are employers they do not employ their own sex, even when there is no other basis for discrimination. After all they get on better with men because all their lives they have manipulated the susceptibilities, the guilts and hidden desires of men … they are the obligatory woman, the exceptional creature who is as good as a man and much more decorative. The men capitulate. (p. 313)

Dawsie in Equalisers was created to illustrate a type of woman who is successful in a male-dominated industry, but will not assist other women who wish to do the same (Steward & Garratt 1984). In Dawsie’s case, she acts like ‘one of the boys’, but I have tried to show that by doing so she looks a little foolish. In Episode Five Jo steps in at the last minute to work for one of Dawsie’s bands. Dawsie then tries to get out of giving the women further work, even though the band members recognise Jo’s skill. It is only after these band members insist they want the best crew (female or male) and threaten to not renew their contract with her, that Dawsie is forced to capitulate. While Dawsie represents those who would try to push the boulder back down the hill, others are just as determined that it remain at the top.

The way men and women are treated in the workplace has always been a big issue for those fighting for equal rights. Auletta (2014) wrote of the departure of executive editor of the New York Times, Jill Abramson, who was fired (because she was too ‘pushy’) when she requested a pay rise after finding out that her predecessor had been paid more than her. Even her deputy (a man) was paid more than she was. In Equalisers this perceived ‘pushiness’ does not occur because the women work as a team, treat each other and the young trainees with respect, and do not have to contend with male colleagues (within the company) and their associated issues. If there is a second series, with males employed in Equalisers PA, it would be interesting to introduce a little
tension between the genders, to see how it might be resolved.

In yet another example of sexism in the workplace, an anonymous writer was talking to a male who was looking for a new staff member and said ‘he has to interview at least one chick to keep HR happy but he will never hire one because “chicks are nightmares at work”. He would also never work for “one”. This happened today. In 2014’ (Bates 2014, n.p.).

Even though the advent of fourth wave feminism is a positive step towards the achievement of gender equality, its major platform, the Internet/social media continues to present problems that are unlikely to be resolved quickly (Turkle 2011; Fox et al. 2015). In addition, many workplaces still seem reluctant to make changes that would assist both women and men balance their work and home lives. Many men and women still seem to believe feminism is all about ‘man-bashing’ or ‘man-hating’. And there are still those who think we have already achieved equality.

Is it any wonder that Sisyphus and feminists remain hiking buddies?
CHAPTER SIX

BITTERSWEET

‘A story worth telling’ (Ellis & Bochner 2000, p. 735)

… we need a form that will allow readers to feel the moral dilemmas, think with our story instead of about it, join actively in the decision points that define an autoethnographic project, and consider how their own lives can be made a story worth telling.

(Ellis & Bochner 2000, p. 735)

My aim in writing Equalisers was to create a ‘story worth telling’ and to encourage my audience to think about their own lives and their attitudes towards the issues I have raised. As Batty (2013b) writes:

We write screenplays because we want to affect people … As screenwriters our hope is that everyone will agree with what we are saying … but just because everyone does not, it does not mean we have failed. It just means that there are other perspectives out there, which means other stories that need to be told. (p. 112)

At the beginning of Equalisers each of the four protagonists is at a crossroad in their life and, for various reasons are contemplating their next move. In Lil and Aggie’s cases, they are relatively happy but are trying to decide what should be their next move. With Teagan and Jo, things are not going so ‘sweetly’, so their need to change direction is a little more pressing. No matter what the reason each woman chooses to enter the male-dominated music industry, all four are about to become a part of a worthwhile story, albeit with some bittersweet moments.
There are so many ‘pieces of me’ in my fictional drama series that I can still claim it as my story, even if a percentage is fabricated. To encourage my audience to ‘consider how their own lives can be made a story worth telling’ (Ellis & Bochner 2000, p. 735), I felt I needed to at least provide some incentive. If I wrote a story of how I failed in my attempts to enter male-dominated industries, I would not achieve my goal of trying to encourage an end to the gender assignation of occupations and activities. If, as Cocksedge claimed, women do not go into sound engineering because they think they would not be able to do it, or it never occurred to them to try, showing them that it is possible may encourage them to work towards creating a better outcome for their own story. If Equalisers persuades the audience that women can be both business entrepreneurs and work successfully in an industry labelled as ‘male’, then it is possible that someone who has had a passing thought about an occupation, but has dismissed it (for whatever reason) might follow through and end up with a successful career. Their story may then become a ‘story worth telling’ that may in turn encourage others to do the same – the more the better. If anyone is persuaded not to sit back and let what is potentially a dream job pass them by because they are afraid of failing, or because someone has convinced them they cannot do it because of their gender, then my project will not have been in vain.

Stories have been part of many cultures since humans started to speak, and later write, and are an integral method by which cultural ‘givens’ are passed down from generation to generation. Autoethnography does more than just tell stories. As Duncan (2004) writes, ‘It provides reports that are scholarly and justifiable interpretations based on multiple sources of evidence … Methods of collecting data include participant observation, reflective writing, interviewing, and gathering documents and artefacts’ (p. 5).
Much of *Equalisers* was based on self-reflection and information gathered from the literature (Sly 1993; Bailey 1999; Amy 2000; Saraiva 2004; Leonard 2007; Smith 2011), showing how women have negotiated working in male-dominated industries such as the music industry. I spoke informally to some of the few women who have worked as sound engineers in Australia, to gather anecdotes that could be of use for storylines. What I found was that the stories told by these women concurred with what others had written in the literature – any female sound engineer could have experienced the same behaviour, and told similar stories. I contacted Vicki Gordon (Gordon 2011) and met her in a café in the inner west of Sydney. Vicki has done it all – musician in an all-girl band; manager and producer; record label executive; first woman to be elected as a Director onto the Aria Board; creator of women’s festivals (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women’s festivals) and a training program for female DJs; and on and on. Vicki’s story was fascinating and much of the information she provided validated other stories I came across during my research.

Quantitative data can only tell so much. For example, with my project it could have shown: how many female sound engineers have worked in Australia over the last thirty or so years; how many of these had experienced sexism or harassment; how many women had left the industry because of the inappropriate behaviour of males in the industry; and other dry statistics. A qualitative research project such as this one makes use of stories, offering information that statistics cannot provide. Many women have used autoethnography to tell of their experiences in male-dominated industries, or issues related to sexism and gender equality, and sometimes writing these stories is the only way to make others understand. It is also a way for the authors of these autoethnographies to understand their own stories. Spry (2001), Taber (2005), Vickers
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(2007) and Sobre-Denton (2012) are all female autoethnographers who note that it was important for them to have time to reflect on their experiences (Taber, as a woman in a male-dominated occupation; Vickers and Sobre-Denton having been bullied in the workplace; and Spry as a victim of sexual assault) before they wrote their autoethnographies. As Vickers (2007) reveals, it was an act of: ‘sense-making … enabling me to go beyond the emotion that is inexorably tied to those memories’ (p. 224). Reflecting on my story from the distance of time has allowed me to lay some demons to rest, to let go, and look towards the future. And continuing on from the earlier discussion on technology’s role in the current rise of feminism, Schuster (2013) writes:

Online platforms offer spaces where women can share traumatic experiences with others who have similar stories and they can discuss, for example, what a feminist response to rape culture societies can look like … for some people going online might be the only way to engage with such issues. (p. 18)

The heart of both my story and the story of the women in Equalisers is gender equality, primarily in relation to the workplace. Risman and Davis (2013) say that gender inequality is seen at all levels of society – individual, interactional, and institutional. ‘The institutional dimension … perpetuates gender inequality though a variety of organisational processes, explicitly sexist or newly gender-neutral, but with cultural logics still embedded within them’ (p. 747). To counteract this stereotype, when I show Lil working in the laboratory, it is my real story, where I functioned as an equal with my male colleagues. To me the stereotypes that science is a male subject and scientist is a male career are untrue, and it is Lil’s job is to demonstrate this. When I show Lil working as a sound engineer, it is the story I would have liked to be able to tell but never could, because I was not able to work successfully as a sound engineer (or business owner either; but that is another part of my much later story). When I write technical information in the script (pretending to know what I am talking about, but
relying on others for accuracy), I am writing things that I wished I could have understood during my repeated attempts to conquer physics and electronics. Lil, Aggie, Teagan and Jo are telling the stories of those women who have worked as successful sound engineers because they had the talent and the courage to do so. However, instead of ‘just putting up with’ unacceptable treatment, as many female sound engineers did, my protagonists are able to resist having to do this.

While I do not want to divulge everything that is ‘the truth’ in Equalisers, I do want to provide some examples of how I used real events, people and places, to show how my story has been incorporated into the fictional version. While I actually lived on the Moore Park side of Surry Hills (about 3-4 kilometres from Glebe) during most of the 1980s, I pictured Glebe as the locale for the series, because I was able to place Jo’s house, the sound engineering college, the pub, Lil’s, Aggie’s and Teagan’s houses and the café, more plausibly in that locale. The Western Star Hotel is based on the Forest Lodge Hotel in Glebe, where I used to watch my housemate (a talented blues singer) join the Foreday Riders on stage on Wednesday nights (1984-5). (Kate, in Equalisers was inspired by both this woman and another female blues singer from a band we recorded in one of our practical classes.) The Buckingham Hotel is based on The Racecourse Hotel in Randwick, where I used to drink with my boss and co-workers after work in the research laboratory (1980) (and coincidentally was the pub we ran away from a few years later, because of the punk band, as mentioned in Chapter One). Jo’s house is based on a big three-storey house where we did a gig one night (it could have been in Glebe, but possibly Chippendale or Redfern); and the Earthly Delights café could be any one of the many cafes in Glebe. The laboratory where Lil and Jack work is based on the one I worked in when I returned from Europe; and the breast
The cancer project was the one I was working on. The course Aggie is enrolled in is the one I started but did not finish. The exercise program that Tony joins is based on a program that I ran for eight years in the town where I currently reside. The characters Tony and Col were inspired by a gay couple who moved up from Sydney to run one of my favourite cafés in that same town. The gigs on the ferries in Episode Five are based on real gigs. The ‘birthday’ ferry happened almost exactly as it was written. Although we felt really sorry for the birthday girl, it was a really fun night. The ‘grunge’ ferry was a combination of two gigs. On one of these, the grunge band (who, incidentally are still playing, and I cringe every time I hear their name) made me want to jump overboard (like Teagan, I am not a fan of grunge). On the second ferry, the singer of one of the two bands had to be helped down the stairs of the two-story ferry because he was so drunk; and although we were provided with food on most ferry gigs (you arrive hours before the starting time; there may not be any food outlets near the wharf; and if you are not fed, you will be absolutely starving by the end of the night) on this one the only food we could find was as dreadful as Jess scrounged up for Teagan. I included the ferry gigs for a bit of variety and to show how issues like tides and awkward load-ins and load-outs might be hazardous or difficult for anyone working under these conditions.

When someone is fighting for something, they need something to fight against. As mentioned in Chapter Two, when people stopped talking about sexism it was assumed it had disappeared. If no-one is doing anything overtly sexist or anti-feminist, then it is difficult to complain about the ongoing failure to achieve gender equality, even though it is still definitely an issue. It is unfortunate, but in reality, sometimes you need some ‘bad’ in order to have any hope of achieving the ‘good’. For example, when broadcaster Alan Jones declared in August 2012 that women were ‘destroying the joint’ (‘Alan
Jones: Women are “destroying the joint” 2012) his comments spawned a backlash
movement which just keeps growing (Twitter accounts; a Facebook page; a book; t-
shirts) and is one way of ensuring that sexism and gender equality issues remain visible
in the media. Turning Jones’ comment on its head, Maguire (2013) retorts:

When women participate politically joints do get destroyed – joints that treat women as
second-class citizens or property, that deny girls education, that claim democratic status
while refusing women citizenship … women start to lobby and agitate and suddenly all
these violent, sexist, racist, unjust, repressive joints begin to crumble. (p. 88)

One of my crucial aims in undertaking this project was to avoid the stereotype of the
man-hating feminist. Saying that all feminists hate men is a weapon brandished to
invalidate feminist debate. Countering the anti-male discourse, Rubin (2013) explains:

the exegesis of Levi-Strauss and Freud suggests a certain vision of feminist politics and the
feminist utopia. It suggests that we should not aim for the elimination of men, but for the
elimination of the social system which creates sexism and gender. (p. 252)

If those who see feminism as an anti-male movement can be persuaded that it is
actually an ‘anti-social system’ movement, then perhaps change will be a little easier to
achieve. This was one reason why I have stressed that it was essential that the women
in Equalisers were not seen as anti-male or aggressive; and there was a balanced view
of gender equality and sexism. Although I have always been against men who treat
women inappropriately, I have never been anti-men, or considered women superior, and
hope I have reflected this in Equalisers.

My real story has had its share of ups and downs; and some of the worst moments have
led to some of the best (for example, even though my cancer treatment was one of the
worst times of my life, it has led to so many good things that it has definitely become a
bittersweet event in my life). It therefore makes sense that the story in Equalisers also
has its share of ups and downs. For example, the women demonstrate talent for their
chosen profession and begin their business venture with high hopes, yet others in the
music industry would like to ruin their chances. Some relationships blossom, but Rob’s
behaviour causes a growing rift with Teagan, and madwoman Charlie appears on the
scene. Misfortune strikes Tony and Col, but this leads to a strong bond with Gladys
and Betty, who in turn gain a new lease on life. Grace’s daughter Jen finally accepts
Jo, and not long after, tragedy strikes. The pre-school finally becomes less of a
stereotypically gendered environment, but Francesca feels she no longer belongs there.
After the high of the wedding day, the day ends on a low. The business is a success,
and the women have proved themselves, but with Aggie’s move, it is the end of an era,
so it is a little sad for them all. Aggie and Josh, head off ‘into the sunset’ to begin their
new life, but what of Lil and Jack, Teagan and Drew, and Jo?

Life is full of bitter and sweet moments and sometimes we just have to accept that.
However, at other times, when we can see something wrong, we need to attempt to do
something to change it – we cannot just accept the inevitable. In my case, I see gender
inequality and assigned gender roles as great wrongs in my society, and I have chosen
to use my story to encourage these issues to be addressed. Hopefully others will see the
fictionalised version of my story as a ‘story worth telling’.
CONCLUSION

‘Hope, the last fragile thing to exit Pandora’s Box, is a frail creature that is always in danger of being lost.’

(Coleman & Ferreday 2010, p. 313)

Even though I know that realistically, as a novice scriptwriter, the chances of \textit{Equalisers} being produced are slim, I decided that I should write the script as if it \textit{was} going to be seen by my anticipated audience. I cannot imagine many people writing a script without the aspiration of it being seen on screen, and I think it is important to embrace that hope.

Writing \textit{Equalisers} has been a joy. As I wrote in the Introduction, I chose scriptwriting to challenge myself, and as a medium to present issues related to my project. It has been a challenge, but an absolutely delightful one, and I am satisfied that it has fulfilled my objectives: to demonstrate that jobs do not need to be gendered, that sexism and harassment in the workplace are unacceptable, and that stereotypes can be obstructive to the achievement of gender equality. Baker et al (2015) write about: ‘research degree candidates who are using the academy to test and play with ideas, and using research methodologies to both understand and expand their existing writing practices’ (p. 3). By challenging myself to expand my writing repertoire, and ‘playing with ideas’ in the script, I have been able to produce a work that I am proud of, because I feel it has accomplished what I set out to do.
When I began my project and first started telling others about it at social gatherings, I was often confronted by statements about gender equality such as ‘Oh, I think things are much better than they were.’ At first I would smile politely and say:

‘Yes, I suppose so.’

I started to wonder if there was any need for my project; if things were that much better, maybe I was ‘tilting at windmills’. However, any niggling doubt that there was a need for my project soon vanished, not long after I began my research.

I admit to a slight feeling of guilt for yelling ‘Yes!’ and pumping my fist as I sat in my little corner of the PhD room, every time I uncovered a new instance of sexism, misogyny or evidence of ongoing gender disparity. Even on my university campus, I was reminded of my time at the Technical College, listening to my classmates’ sexist comments – I am still hearing similar comments from fellow students (both young and old) thirty years later. Of course I want to see an end to gender issues, and for gender equality to be achieved, but I also needed to know that I was not advocating for something that had already been resolved, or about which no-one cared. And throughout the three years of my project, it became quite apparent that many people are starting to care again.

I began this project full of hope that I could make some contribution to the ever-elusive goal of gender equality and that one day the assigning of genders to jobs would no longer be seen as necessary. Initially, as I researched feminist theory I began to despair and hope began to fade. Much of the literature I was reading (especially on third-wave and post- feminism) was full of doom and gloom about the current state of affairs in feminism – how it had lost its team spirit, and how so many people still disliked the labels ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’.
Discovering a fourth wave of feminism, with so many passionate feminists of all ages and genders actively campaigning against sexism, and for gender equality, caused a complete change of heart, and I feel I owe an apology to some of those I had been criticising. In the same way that water is drawn way out to sea when the giant wave of a tsunami is about to ensue, perhaps feminism had to seemingly withdraw for a while in order for its resurgence to have a greater impact.

Delving into feminism seems to have unleashed my inner activist (either that, or I am just relishing becoming the stereotypical ‘grumpy old woman’). Every time I have uncovered another example of sexism; another statistic that proves gender equality has not yet been achieved in Australia; another indication that feminism is once again on the rise; I exclaim to others: ‘SEE! SEE! I told you …’ or ‘Did you hear about …’ especially when I have uncovered something either really outrageous or really amusing (My favourite amusing news item was: on January 31 2013, it became legal for women in Paris to wear pants in the street – previously it had been illegal, unless they were holding onto the handlebars of a bicycle or the reins of a horse! (Lauter 2013)). I have at times, during the course of my candidacy, become a little incorrigible. I even castigated an ill-informed young man on Facebook one day, because I was so incensed by something he wrote on the Destroy the Joint page (doing this was quite out of character for me; I do not usually make comments to strangers on Facebook, but I just I needed to that day). And if I actually hit my head on my desk in frustration (rather than just wanting to) every time I read a ridiculous anti-feminist comment, or discovered yet another offensive sexist incident that anti-feminists would try to defend, I would probably have given myself a nasty brain injury.
During one of my visits to Sydney I attended an open day at a sound engineering college. One of the male teachers proudly told me that he usually had about twenty-five per cent female students in his classes (this was in 2013). I did not have the heart to tell him that when I attended a course thirty years earlier, about thirty-three percent of the students were female.

As I mentioned earlier, I have sometimes had a passing thought about what might have happened if I had remained in my original career as a research scientist. However, these thoughts had never really stirred me emotionally. One night during my final year of candidature, there was a story on the news showing a group of scientists involved in a project, and I suddenly felt an overwhelming urge to be back in a laboratory, involved in a research project. Although this sense of longing only stayed with me for a few moments, it quite surprised me with its intensity. Had all my self-reflection over the past three years suddenly caught up with me? Would I really have been any happier, if I had remained in my original career? I cannot possibly answer that; but I do know that it is better to accept the choices one has made, no matter what the outcome. It is not that I do not believe in regret, because I do regret some of my decisions; I just do not think these regrets should take control, or make it difficult for me to make future decisions.

Researching this project has taken me back to my roots. My visits to Sydney took me back to familiar places from the 1980s, but many were no longer recognisable; and some did not even exist anymore. I attended a panel discussion on the dismal state of Sydney’s live music industry at the Annandale Hotel in 2013 (was my memory playing tricks on me, or did there used to be carpet on the floor when we worked there?); I felt a little old and out of place there amongst a crowd of students young enough to be my children. I visited Smithy’s, where my ex-husband used to buy music/PA equipment or
get PA gear fixed; the man working there that day had been there since the 1980s, and remembered both my ex-husband and his boss. He had some analogue equipment in a room out the back and he allowed me to potter around, taking photographs. The Hopetoun (Surry Hills) closed down years ago and the Racecourse Hotel (Randwick) seems to have disappeared; the Forest Lodge Hotel (Glebe), the Light Brigade (Paddington), the White Horse (Surry Hills) and the Three Weeds (Rozelle) are all unrecognisable, but in my mind they are still there, exactly as they were when we frequented them. I also visited parts of my city I had never seen when I lived there. I visited two women’s libraries and discovered a plethora of information on feminists from the 1970s and 1980s and I wandered streets I had never been down before (thank goodness for navigation software on phones). Each time I visited I drank in unfamiliar pubs, watched some bands and tried to immerse myself in the city I used to know so well.

During the planning stages for *Equalisers*, I had a vague idea of people and events I might include from my memories of the time, but I had no real notion of where the plot might take me – I quite like surprising myself. When I started writing *Equalisers* the main characters (Lil, Aggie, Teagan and Jo) were set in place, along with some minor characters (Josh, Matt, Jack, Francesca, Yoshi, Rob, Tony, Col, Kate, Charlie, Dawsie and Sooty).

Other characters just appeared as storylines developed. For instance, Grace came into being to add to Jo’s storylines, but her fate was a spur of the moment decision that traumatised me for days after I had written it. Sam became the link between the ‘bad’ experience in the studio and the ‘good’ that came about when Drew appeared. Drew, was created initially as a result of a random comment from one of my supervisors, but
then became integral to exposing Teagan’s identity crisis. Gladys and Betty appeared when I was introducing a big issue in the media at that time (HIV/AIDs) and many people reacted as these women did. There had to be some ‘bad guys’ to show inappropriate behaviour that should be discouraged (for example: Justin, Darryl, Jez, and Gus); and to counter them, there needed to be some ‘good guys’ (the musicians who found it perfectly acceptable to work with the women), to show how women in the music and other male-dominated industries should be treated.

There is no easy solution to the issues addressed in this project. Every time I hear negative comments about feminism and feminists; every time I read ignorant comments from online trolls and anti-feminists; every time I hear a woman deny being a feminist (or denying the need for feminism), and giving a reason that makes no sense; and every time I see more evidence of sexism, harassment, misogyny, misandry, gender imbalance, gender disparity and obstructive stereotypes; I wonder if feminist goals are ever going to be achieved. If progress is made with the current resurgence of feminism, is it possible that this time the momentum will persist?

There obviously need to be some enormous changes if this is to happen – in business organisations, in domestic situations, in education. My intention with writing *Equalisers* was to highlight issues related to sexism and gender imbalance in the workplace and to show that it is unnecessary to assign genders to occupations. This is my small contribution towards the achievement of gender equality. There are many others making their own contributions as: academics; bloggers; journalists; scriptwriters; documentary makers; speakers (I have become completely enamoured with TED talks since starting this project) and so on. If more and more people can be
convincing that the old ways of functioning cannot continue, then perhaps the fight will eventually be won.

‘We’re all part of the problem as long as we continue to reproduce old patterns of behaviour. What women and men need to do is stop behaving in old ways. First, change the way you, as an individual, perform, enact, do gender. Second, call out people who repeat the old sexist patterns, and if possible force them to do otherwise.’

(Schippers 2002, p. 180)
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