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ABSTRACT

The Kaleidoscope Career Model (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) has been proposed as a useful metaphor from which to view women's careers. The model was introduced in an attempt to explain how women attempt to operate relationally in their lives, and why they leave the workplace in mid-career. The model consists of three parameters, authenticity, balance and challenge. Previous research has indicated one career parameter takes on greater intensity at transitional career points, while the other two recede to the background. Women tend to adopt a 'Beta' career pattern of challenge followed by balance, then authenticity. This paper reports on findings from a small-scale interpretive study using hermeneutic phenomenology (Heidegger, 1927/2008). In-depth "conversational interviews" were conducted with a purposive sample of fourteen women working in the education sector (van Manen, 1990). Rich data obtained from the interviews were used to craft phenomenological anecdotes, evocative stories, representing key factors of the women's careers. Findings indicated the three parameters were operational in women's lives in an ongoing way. The influence of the three parameters was not clear cut, rather they melded and fused throughout women's lives. Authenticity was a powerful theme throughout the careers of women in this study of professional women; it was established early and continued to develop. The findings are at variance with previous KCM results, and we argue that the three constructs of authenticity, balance, and challenge are not distinct, rather that they are dynamic and are more likely to interact.

Key words:

Careers, women, kaleidoscope career model, phenomenology

A decade ago wide media attention was given to the "opt-out" revolution (Belkin, 2003). Opting-out is an expression adopted to describe the choice of many highly educated women not to advance their careers to the highest level. About this time, Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) developed their Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) which describes a person's needs for authenticity, balance and challenge, in particular it explains women's desire to operate relationally in their lives. Their model sought to discover and explain the reasons why women leave the work force in mid-career. There has been considerable research to validate the KCM concept and its three parameters, which postulated that authenticity, balance, and challenge are distinct and non-overlapping. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) found distinctive gendered patterns: women follow a Beta Kaleidoscope Model of challenge followed by balance then authenticity, whereas men follow an Alpha Kaleidoscope Career Pattern of challenge followed by authenticity then balance.

This paper reports on findings of an interpretive research study, which sought to determine if using a phenomenological approach, might contribute to research into the KCM. A brief overview of recent research in women's careers is first provided. The study is then introduced and details given of the methodology and data processes. The results provide data at variance with previous KCM results, and argue that the three constructs of authenticity, balance,

and challenge are not distinct, rather that they are dynamic and are more likely to interact. Findings are integrated before limitations are identified and conclusions drawn.

WOMEN'S CAREERS

While progress has been made towards understanding women's careers in past decades, the historic roles and beliefs around women as homemakers and mothers continue to impact on every aspect of women's career choice, and place limits on what women achieve (Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1995; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). Still prevalent is the belief that women's careers are less important than men's, because women experience more paid work interruptions. Interruptions for women are more likely to be from family demands while men's career interruptions more often result from job loss (Betz, 2002; Kirchmeyer, 2002; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

In spite of the increase in career research, much of the discussion on women has repeated the errors and omission of the male-centred literature. There is still very little career research that places women's experience at the centre of career theory. For example there is an over-emphasis on individual managerial and professional women (Burke & Nelson, 2002; Career Development International, 2005; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) and numerous examples of research that include gender as simply another variable in a taken-for-granted construct of career (e.g. Mayrhofer, Meyer, & Steyrer, 2007). A deficit approach to career research on women was discernible in the 1990s. It continues today within a liberal feminist agenda that implicitly (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007a) or explicitly uses male paid work as the benchmark for inquiry. In traditional career theory, women's careers have been conceptualised as interrupted and atypical. They are

characterized by movement in and out of the paid workforce; a series of projects linked by individual women' skills, accumulating knowledge and experience. This norm is no longer distinctive for women, but has become the pattern for careers in general (Woodd, 2000). Career life has come to be viewed as a series of projects rather than continuous service within a single organization or occupation.

The ways in which women have dealt with this style of career life have been largely ignored by mainstream career theory, traditional or "boundaryless." Pringle and Mallon (2003) discussed the degree to which boundaryless career theory carried the "sins of traditional theory" excluded unpaid work, and omitted many key decision-making criteria relevant to women's experience. Career models for women are matched against those of men and carry the assumptions that increasing responsibility and status are the career goals (Burke & Nelson, 2002) within even non-linear models (White, 1995). Family responsibilities are still emphasized as a primary explanation of women's career decisions (Valcour & Tolbert, 2003) in spite of evidence to the contrary (Cabrera, 2007). Unfortunately, "the women" remain culturally homogeneous, western, white and heterosexual (Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003). Recent research is beginning to differentiate the patterns of women and men but it continues to consist of privileged samples of managers and professionals within corporations or the over-sampled MBA students (O'Neill & Bilimoria, 2005; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

Career analysis from a more radical feminist tradition draws on difference theory, particularly theories of women' psychological development. Within this research genre the sex difference argument gathered strength through relational theories of women's development (Jordan, 1997). In Marshall's (1989) landmark allegorical piece she differentiated between

female and male principles to highlight the "othering" of women's career experience. She developed and extended the early meaning of Bakan's (1966) concepts of agency and communion as a sense-making framework for understanding career behaviour. Agency (or "doing") expresses itself through control over the environment and is manifest in self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion and is symbolised as an arrow. In contrast, communion (or "being") manifests itself in the sense of being one with other organisms, is part of a wider context emphasizing interdependence, openness and flexibility to the environment. It is symbolised as a spiral (Marshall, 1989)

The recurring theme in theories of women's development that Marshall elucidates is the central place given to relationships, connectedness and balancing agency and communion. Empirical research (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Cabrera, 2007; O'Neill & Bilimoria, 2005) confirms a quest for balance between agency and communion as centre stage in women's careers. This search for balance is played out differently in the models that have been advanced: explore, focus, rebalance revive (Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003), idealistic achievement, pragmatic endurance and re-inventive contribution (O'Neill & Bilimoria, 2005) and "beta" careers of challenge, balance and authenticity (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007a). The risk in these accounts is that, while generating alternative notions of career, they do so by implicitly essentializing gender differences.

Feminist criticisms of career theory have been fragmentary and sporadic (Gutek & Larwood, 1987), rather than forming an incremental explanatory corpus of scholarship. Nevertheless there is no basis for continuing tentativeness, which suggests that "traditional male models of career development may not apply to women" (Armstrong-Stassen & Cameron,

2005:203, emphasis added by present authors). It is time to accept the scholarship and argument of the past 25 years; women's careers are characterized by interdependence, relationship and fluidity between a myriad of roles (Gallos, 1989; Marshall, 1989; Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003).

THE KALEIDOSCOPE CAREER MODEL

It was in response to a lack of models to understand women's experiences, that Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) introduced their career model: the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM). The KCM was grounded in a wide-ranging five-year multi-method project which involved five studies: an online survey of the career transitions of female members of a network from a professional organization (n = 109); an internet survey of men and women (n = 1647); weekly online conversations with 2 women and 22 men enrolled in an MBA program; a second online survey with women and men (n = 1525) who answered questions about career transitions; and lastly interviews with a purposive sample of 52 people about their careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006).

The KCM model focussed on more accurately capturing the career experiences of women. In particular it sought to explain how women work to prioritise relationships in their lives. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) proposed that individuals make decisions on the basis of three career parameters: authenticity, balance, and challenge. They defined these KCM parameters as follows (Maniero & Sullivan, 2005: 113-114):

- *Authenticity*: Can I be myself in the midst of all of this and still be authentic?

- *Balance*: If I make this career decision, can I balance the parts of my life well so there can be a coherent whole?

- *Challenge*: Will I be sufficiently challenged if I accept this career option?

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) used the metaphor of a kaleidoscope for careers. Rotating a kaleidoscope tube produces changing patterns as its glass chips fall into different, unique and complex patterns. The KCM seeks to explain how at different times of their lives, an individual will change their career pattern and choosing to work towards balance at one time, and towards challenge or authenticity at another. People work to achieve the best fit among demands and constraints of work, relationships, and values. As a kaleidoscope generates a distinctive pattern, by ongoing adjustments, so does an individual, creating a complex and individually crafted career pattern.

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) proposed their model has particular relevance to women's careers. Further, women have used it unconsciously as they cope and respond to discrimination and as they juggle multiple needs of caring. More significantly, the KCM provides a way to examine the questions: "How do women's careers unfold" and "What meaning does career have?" (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005:115).

Empirical research aimed at validating the KCM (Cabrera, 2007; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007b, 2007c) revealed gender differences in career enactment. Men tended to follow what the researchers labelled an Alpha Kaleidoscope Career pattern of challenge followed by authenticity then balance. In comparison, women are described as having a Beta Kaleidoscope Career Pattern of challenge followed by balance then authenticity.

Career patterns of women in these KCM studies differed noticeably from the traditional linear career model. These women rejected linear career progression and created non-traditional self-crafted careers (Cabrera, 2007; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007b, 2007c). Their careers were characterised by the need to seek challenges and learning opportunities yet were constrained by the lack of advancement opportunities and blatant sex discrimination. Women confronted opportunities and blocks and responded in unique ways. The KCM studies (Cabrera, 2007; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007b, 2007c) found that in sharp contrast to men, the career histories of women were relational. Additionally these women's career decision-making processes were more contextual. Their decisions fitted into a larger web of interrelated issues and relationships that came together in a finely integrated package. The KCM women made career decisions strongly weighting relationship needs (Marshall, 1989). They took into account how their decisions impact on others, factoring the needs of partners, children, parents, and colleagues. Their careers were characterised by career interruptions that required attention to non-work needs, but also a quest for spiritual fulfilment, to remain true to and care for oneself (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007b, 2007c).

In one of the first empirical studies to investigate the KCM, Cabrera (2007) conducted a large survey (n = 497) of women's career transitions with business school graduates (length of time). Most participants' ages ranged from 26 to 55 years (96%, 4% were over 55), and most of the graduates (73%) received their graduate degree between 1980 and 1999. The study's aims were to: explore reasons why women stop working; investigate whether women's primary career motives shift over time; and explore the potential barriers faced by women who pursue boundaryless careers. In accordance with the KCM, reasons for leaving were complex with numerous push and pull factors creating the non-linear patterns characteristic of women's

careers. Reasons emerged such as difficulties of having a dual-career family, a partner having relocated (majority of accompanying spouses are women), being laid off. For the majority of women, their career focus had changed over time.

Results showed almost half of these business graduates had stopped working at some point in their career but the majority (70%) had returned to work. Thirty-five per cent of these women identified caring for children as the sole reason for stopping work. Sixty-two per cent indicated their career focus changed over time. Most significantly study findings were aligned with the KCM predictions. A move towards balance was exhibited strongly by women in mid-career, also by many in early career providing preliminary evidence for the KCM proposition that women begin with emphasis on challenge and move towards balance. The percentage of women who moved toward a focus on authenticity grew progressively as their career progressed, movements consistent with the KCM view that in late career women seek jobs allowing them to be true to themselves (Cabrera, 2007).

Another study by Cabrera (2009) used semi-structured telephone interviews with 25 women graduates of a USA business school, aged between 34 to 57 years old (mean age 44 years). Participants had left the workforce at some stage in their career and had subsequently returned to work. The study sought to better understand women's careers to work towards increasing female retention in organizations. One research question asked: Are women's career decisions guided by the kaleidoscope values of challenge, balance, and authenticity? The majority of these women followed a protean career orientation (Hall, 1996) once returning to work. Taking on a protean career orientation—which draws from the Greek god Proteus who could change his shape at will—meant the women could adapt their career package of

knowledge, skills and abilities to retain marketability within the changing work environment (Hall, 1996). Cabrera (2009) reasoned that they were impelled to adopt this to fulfill their need for balance. Approximately a third of the sample identified a need for authenticity in their careers; a small minority mentioned a desire for challenge, suggesting this need was satisfied early in their career, as predicted by the KCM.

Most recently, Cohen (2014) discussed the kaleidoscope parameters of authenticity, balance and challenge with respect to some of the seventeen women in her longitudinal study. These women were all situated in a large northern industrial city in the United Kingdom and had all made decisions to leave the organization in which they were employed and move to self-employment. Cohen conducted interviews with the participants in 1993, returning to interview them again seventeen years later in 2010. At the commencement of the study, the women were aged between 32 and 54 (49 and 71 at the end of the study).

Although challenge was apparent as the dominant parameter in Cohen's (2014) participants' accounts of early career, they also had begun to acquire conceptions of authenticity. The participants established authenticity in early career, which grew and developed in the interim period—of 17 years—between the two interviews. Participants' sense of authenticity "provided a coherent thread through the two interviews" (Cohen, 2014:113). Rather than being distinct from balance and challenge, authenticity was established incorporating both of these aspects. Cohen (2014) commented that the results of her analysis were at variance with Mainiero and Sullivan's (2005) most significantly at mid-career where "the shift to balance did not emerge in the data as the prominent feature" (Cohen, 2014:115). In late career, her findings had synchronicity with Mainiero and Sullivan's as authenticity came into sharper focus. Cohen argued that rather than

"distinct and uncontested parameters" (Cohen, 2014:119) her study findings suggest that there are no extreme divisions, rather there is a melding and fusing of the parameters at various points in women's lives. She commented further, that balance was often expressed as challenge, and that both these parameters were linked to comments about meaning and significance.

The debate as to whether men and women are allies or adversaries in facing the challenge that balancing work and family brings has long been contested. Sullivan and Mainiero (2007a) addressed the recent changes in how dual career couples enact career, and commented that a growing number of men had begun to adopt a househusband role. They encouraged further research to determine the factors that influence this shift, and also whether these men might ever move back into the workforce. They recommended research to identify whether a wife's career is impacted positively when her husband adopts a "househusband" role, in a similar way a man's career is affected when his wife takes on a "housewife" role (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007b).

Recently, Litano, Myers and Major (2014) brought fresh perspective to the "allies versus adversaries" debate. They suggested the answer centres on the degree to which women's and men's attempts to handle work-family conflict and to find balance are synchronous. This "crossover" research addresses the question, "does one partner's positive or negative spill-over affect the work-family balance of the other partner?" Recent crossover research has explored the positive cross over effects in the work-family boundary. Men and women have been shown to be allies towards each other's determination to balance work and family (Bakker, Westman, & van Emmerik, 2009; Kinnunen, Rantanen, & Mauno, 2013). In these studies positive well-being was seen to pass from one person to another in both spheres "initiating an upward spiral of positive transfer" (Litano, Myers, & Major, 2014:372).

In their sweeping review of contemporary careers research over the past twenty years, Sullivan and Baruch (2009) noted the advances achieved in understanding the complexity of emerging non-linear career concepts such as the KCM, and commented such "newer conceptualizations suggest many intriguing avenues for future study" (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009:1558). The advantage of the Kaleidoscope Career Model is how it highlights the importance of gender differences to enact a career path. Sullivan and Baruch (2009) urged more research was needed on emergent theories such as the KCM, to focus on how individuals change their psychological perspectives over time and to better understand the complex relationship between physical and psychological passages.

THE RESEARCH STUDY

This research study responds to the call by Sullivan and Baruch (2009) for more research into the KCM and by using a phenomenological approach it seeks to uncover from an "insider's" perspective how individuals make career decisions and to identify how their motivations and perspectives shift. The study sought to answer the question: "What does it mean for a woman to have a career?" One research aim was to ascertain if using a phenomenological approach might further contribute to Mainiero and Sullivan's Kaleidoscope Career Model (2005). It was a small-scale hermeneutic phenomenological study (Heidegger, 1927/2008) which used in-depth "conversational" interviews (van Manen, 1990) with a purposive sample of fourteen professional women working in the education sector.

Phenomenology is defined as the study of lived experience or lifeworld (Ger. *lebenswelt)* and is concerned with the question, "What is this experience like?" It attempts to distil meanings

as they are lived in everyday experience (van Manen, 1990). The purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (Cresswell, 2013). Such a methodology can provide a deep understanding of the meaning of a phenomenon as experienced for several individuals. The following further introduces the research study and gives an explanation of the methods and data analysis.

Method

The methodological approach of the research required that the participant be reflective about her career and be able to articulate her thoughts in an interview setting. The education industry was chosen to provide a suitable context for the research, with women involved in education being likely to have good communication skills and the ability to relate well (careersnz, 2012). Historically, education has been one of the most significant sectors for female employment in New Zealand (NZHRC, 2012) where the study was carried out, and in other comparable Western countries (*United Nations Statistics Division* 2012). It was a purposeful sample with women chosen who fulfilled the primary criteria (Thomas & Pollio, 2004): to have experienced a career and to be willing to talk about these experiences.

An advertisement placed in New Zealand's largest selling women's magazine contained the two criteria above plus additional criteria of age and industry. Specifically the advertisement stated:

Participants must be:

- Currently involved in teaching within the wider education industry either at primary, secondary or tertiary level

- Aged between 30 and 59 years

- Currently involved in some form of paid employment: part-time, full-time or contract

- Interested in telling their story of how pursuing a career provides meaning in their life

A total of 14 participants were recruited. Half the women (n=7) were recruited by responding by email to the advertisement. A further seven participants were selected to maximise diversity within the selection constraints e.g. sector, responsibility for dependents or not, position, age, geographical location by snowball sampling using referrals from contacts of the researcher and supervisors. The demographics of the final sample are described in the Table below.

Table 1 about here

Each participant was involved in one conversational interview (van Manen, 1990) with the researcher. A minimum of direct questions were used in order that the interview process stay as close to the lived experience of the participant as possible and to build a relationship of trust between the participant and researcher. The interviews ranged in length from one hour to one

hour twenty minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and the tapes were then professionally transcribed.

Phenomenological anecdotes were crafted from the data; these were an organizing tool obtained by analysing the transcripts for relevant incidents and stories (van Manen, 1990). Each anecdote underwent a process of "crafting" until it read well and contained a "notion" rather than a lot of descriptive narrative or factual information. These anecdotes were returned to the participants for review.

In total seventy-four phenomenological anecdotes were crafted and then hermeneutically interpreted against the philosophical writings of Heidegger, Gadamer, Bourdieu, and Aristotle as informed by the human science approach to phenomenology outlined by van Manen (1990). The interpretation, reading, writing, and analysis process continued until what is described as a "hermeneutic circle toward understanding" (van Manen, 1990:32) was achieved.

The next task was to recover the themes. "Theme analysis" is not a mechanical application of a frequency count or coding of terms, or a break down of the content (van Manen, 1990). The researcher plays a major role as the interpretive lens. Phenomenological themes are structures of experience; they are not objects or generalizations. Metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the web of human experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes (van Manen, 1990).

Establishing rigor

Phenomenological research and writing is a project in which the usual scientific requirement or standards of objectivity and subjectivity need to be re-conceived as it does not "accord with the strict tenets" of positivistic research (Pitman and Kinsella, 2012:87). De Witt and Ploeg (2006) conducted an extensive review of published theoretical interpretive phenomenological nursing research from 1994-2004, and identified expressions of rigor used in these studies. These were synthesized and integrated resulting in a new framework for evaluating rigour. This framework contains five components: balanced integration, openness, concreteness, resonance, and actualization, which were criteria for assessing the rigour of this study investigating women's careers (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, findings and discussion are linked and synthesized with material from Mainiero and Sullivan's (2006) Kaleidoscope Career Model research. In particular how the three career parameters of authenticity, balance and challenge changed in intensity over the years are examined. The findings are introduced in three sections—early, mid, and late career—with three women identified in each section. Brief excerpts from the phenomenological anecdotes crafted from the women's transcripts are provided to provide insights as to how these women managed their careers and coped with career transitions. Throughout this section the findings are intertwined with discussion of Mainiero and Sullivan's (2006) KCM.

In early career, having worked in the education sector for between five and fifteen years, women in this study expressed a zest for life and a passion for their career. They spoke with enthusiasm and energy. They told of how important the support and encouragement of key people was in their achievements. The concept of challenge is apparent in many of the accounts they told. The women, typically aged in their early thirties, were building on their skills and described incidents and told stories about having to learn more about both themselves and their limitations. They spoke of dilemmas and challenges they faced at various stages on their career journeys. They were coping with a large amount of work both professionally and personally.

Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) described how in early career, "men and women equally pursue the thrill of the hunt" in their desire for achievement. They commented that in their research this was the time that the "flame of challenge burned most brightly" (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006:119). Some women in this present study described their work as being a calling, "what I was born to do."

Jackie, Libby, and Rachel have all worked in education for between five and ten years. Jackie is a secondary school teacher with management responsibility. She previously worked in marketing and tells how she experienced a defining or "road of Damascus" event when she travelled to Mali—an impoverished third world country—and was forced to reflect on her privileged life back home. She realised "I couldn't keep living the way I was" and that she wanted to pursue another career pathway:

I knew what I wanted to do is do ground breaking work for low socio-economic kids who are so bright yet no one has picked apart what makes them learn. That's the impetus for me. I want to write really good materials for these kids so that they can succeed, so I can

die saying, "I know I've done something good." That's my soapbox. What is driving me so much, apart from wanting to accomplish things is to not make my life a waste of time. That would be the worst thing. Every now and then it flashes through my head, when you're sitting in the old age retirement home and you're boring the nurse, you've got to have some good stories to tell. (Jackie)

The "flame of challenge" burns brightly and impels and drives Jackie in her career progression. She is determined that her life is not "a waste of time." Like Jackie, Libby is also strongly career-driven. She describes how she relishes "the thrill" of attaining a new position. Although having recently returned from maternity leave and with a young child, she jumped at the challenge of a management position:

The same role came up and they don't come up very often, and I grabbed it as quick as I could. The last year has been very challenging, returning to work and being a Mum with a young child, wanting to carry my career on at exactly the same rate it was before I had children. It's very busy but I'm in a role that I'm extremely happy with and I want to carry on and nurture. I'd like to lay roots in this school. I've found my niche. At the start of last year, my Principal asked "Where do you see yourself in the school?" And I said "I would like to see myself in a Syndicate Leader role." I like seeing myself amongst the decision makers within the school. I like to contribute, to feel that I'm making a difference. I want to further develop my leadership skills, how to manage a team. I need to study, do postgraduate work. (Libby)

Libby acknowledges the challenge that taking on this management position has brought, but she enjoys being stretched and busy. She is aspirational and wants to "carry on her career at the same rate," keen to be amongst the "decision makers" in her school.

The women at this stage, Libby, Jackie, and Rachel, seek challenge in early career, and are prepared to juggle not just full-time work and parenting but also, to study and build on their academic qualifications. Libby wants to have a leadership role, but she also wants to begin postgraduate study. Jackie recently obtained study leave, and completed a Master's degree. Like Libby and Jackie, Rachel is aware that she is ambitious and driven. She extends herself as she continued to study while she works full time at an independent tertiary institution. Rachel comments:

> I love studying; I love research. I am very driven and ambitious. It's given me a real sense of achievement to do all this study. I do push myself. Not to the point where I'm absolutely strung out. But I do very much pride myself on having a family and working full-time and studying, and being very organised, keeping the household running. I like academic learning. When I did my degree that was going to be it. But a few years later I got all fired up to do my postgrad. You get a taste for it. The goalposts are shifting.
>
> (Rachel)

About to move into a new job, Rachel's comments resonate with Libby's. She is not content to have just a promotion; she also wants to continue to study:

In my next job, research and on-going study are encouraged. They've got a lot of staff there that are finishing postgrad and starting Masters. And am I going to be content just to do something like this next job, where I'm working with smaller groups? Or is the long-term goal, once I'm qualified, that I will look at going into a lecturing role at a university? Yes, I think it is. (Rachel)

These women in early career, often commented on being prepared to be different, to separate themselves from their friends in what they attempted in their careers. The challenges they took on in their work were also linked strongly with a desire to be authentic. Within Rachel's account, is not only a sense of challenge but also of being true to herself:

I'm really different from all my friends. None of them are academically inclined, have been to university, or are interested in study. They're not bothered with any of that. They all work, and they're happy with what they do. I look at them and think, my perception of what a career is, is different to theirs. For me, having a career means going to university and being qualified in something. They're doing their thing working, and they probably couldn't care less what I'm doing. None of them understands it. It means nothing to them. (Rachel)

Jackie, Rachel and Libby, have worked in education for less than ten years. Their stories are permeated with a sense of agency, purpose, energy and excitement. Strongly apparent in their descriptions is a keen realisation of a sense of purpose and self-actualisation in their desire to be true to themselves, to be authentic. This desire is evident in this early stage of their careers.

Similar to participants in Cohen's (2014) study, for participants in this study the parameters of challenge and authenticity were both to the fore in early career. For the women in this study, their career was often seen as a calling. For Jackie and Rachel, teaching was not their first career, they had worked for a short period in other occupations: marketing and IT. Coming to teaching a little later, meant that teaching was a career they felt strongly impelled to do, keen to "make a difference." By pursuing a career in education they are being true to their calling and to themselves. At this stage of their careers both authenticity and challenge were strongly to the fore, as these women sought to take on fresh challenges strongly driven by their sense of vocation.

Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) discussed how in mid-career women "back off to make room for the more relational aspects of their lives" (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006:120). Those women who had the support at home of another caregiver whether a stay-at-home husband, nanny or family member continued to pursue challenge, but for those in more egalitarian situations the Beta Kaleidoscope Career pattern was followed with a movement towards balance.

One woman in this present study had evidenced the "Beta" pattern of a movement towards balance as she chose to spend extended time at home with pre-school aged children. She was the exception in this research. For the majority of women in this study, having a professional career in education whilst their partner pursued a less pressured and more instrumental career pathway was the norm. Amanda, Tina and Kiri, all in mid-career, work in leadership positions as tertiary lecturer, member of the professoriate, and primary principal. They have highly responsible and challenging positions which demand a great deal of time, energy and skill. These women all commented that their career "took a front seat" to that of their partner.

Amanda describes how she was particularly prescient about her choice of partner. For her, the choice of a partner who had less career stress was a strategic decision so that she could continue to pursue her own career pathway:

> My husband's not a career man… I wear the pants. I'm not trying to insult him. If I need to do something with my job, the two of us ask, how can we make this work? Quite often the reverse is the stereotype. At school, a lot of the Mums are not working much, and their partners have high career stress. I've got a partner who doesn't have that stress. I thought of that when I was dating. He was the third man who proposed marriage to me and he was just right. I thought if I had somebody who was putting on a business suit every day and maxing out at night, worried about getting ready for tomorrow, there's no life for me in that picture. Having his down-to-earth, common sense approach, gives me the freedom to say "Right, my next step for study, or…." I like having someone who can get his hands dirty, dig a garden. I don't feel the pressure of competing with him.

> (Amanda)

Like Amanda, other women in this study testified to being strategic in their choice of partner. They also maintained the attitude that—within their dual-career partnership—when decisions need to be made around career transitions, it was their career, which came first. Their partner's career decisions needed to fit around their own. Tina, a member of the professoriate, attested to such a decision-making patttern:

> My husband is supportive, he has the attitude: "You apply wherever you want, I can find a job anywhere." Being in academia there's limited places you can go so you have to

have someone who can fit around you a little bit. All the decisions I made when I came back to work were my decisions. I talked with my husband about them, but they were all driven by me.   (Tina)

Having a partner who is highly supportive contributed powerfully to Amanda, Kiri, and Tina's ability to continue to seek challenge in mid-career. These women commented that career decisions were made together. Their partner's advocacy helped them progress in their career and also contributed to enabling them to maintain a sense of rationality and stability.

Kiri, a primary school principal, says: The other thing that keeps me going is I've got a wonderful man who says to me, "Don't take it all too seriously." And that helps.

Amanda, Kiri, and Tina commented on the perspective and support their partner brought them. A partner who sees them as a "person not just a worker," enables them to stay focussed and grounded. They attested to the positive influence, support and greater balance that having a partner who had less career stress brought. Further, they benefit from the "cross-over effect" of a partner who was also an "ally" for their career. Although they identified having stress, they described how their partner helped them stay positive and maintain perspective in their careers (Litano et al., 2014).

Often, these women's partners would take a major share of the childcare and the running of the household. The women pointed out that they saw this as the "normal" way of managing the work-home interface. Typically their partner would be available in the weekends sometimes taking on the larger share of childcare and household tasks so that they could study or work.

When these women in mid-career discussed balance; it was not to the fore. It was often mentioned in such a way that it was fused together with both authenticity and challenge.

Tina describes her attempts to come to terms with what "other" women do internationally. She is highly ambitious and speaks widely on issues, is involved in government panels, and is often interviewed by the media. When she discusses her role, she is aware her leadership position is tempered by her family's needs. Her desire to be authentic and be true to herself extends beyond her career and into her family domain. She has agonized over her decision-making but has come to terms with it. She says:

> I want balance. I'm happy being internationally recognised for some things but not being that sort of world-class person that travels every month to speak at some conference. My family would not cope, if I did all that travelling. As it is, my daughter is quite clingy and doesn't like it when I go for my one (overseas) conference a year. So I never want to be that person. I recognise I never do. I used to think I'm never going get there and be a bit depressed, but now I'm happy.   (Tina)

It is apparent that Tina wants balance, she says so, explicitly. Yet she still seeks challenge and she has recently become a member of the professoriate. She also strives to be authentically true to herself. Her career is important it gives her identity and reputation. She says:

> Financially I probably don't need to work, we could manage with my husband's salary, but I like working. I like having my own individual personality, because otherwise I think you get pigeon holed as the mother of so and so, or the wife of so and so. I like

having my own reputation as an individual, "Oh, you're the person who always talks

about such and such on the radio," or "You're the person who does research on this." I

like that. Without my work I definitely wouldn't have that.   (Tina)

The three parameters of challenge, balance and authenticity are all apparent in Tina's

career pattern, and in those of Amanda and Kiri. These women exemplify other women at mid-

career in this study, who continue to seek challenge in mid-career. They do not follow a Beta

Kaleidoscope Career Pattern with a move strongly towards balance. Tina, Kiri, and Amanda are

all career driven. Tina and Kiri have two children, Amanda has three, and all are married.

Without exception the women in this study were not single, they were all partnered and all but

one had children. The women in this study, in mid-career tend more towards an "Alpha" career

pattern which Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) described from their studies as typical of most men

and single, career driven women.

Tina, Kiri, and Amanda, had sought to be authentic and to pursue an individual pathway

throughout their careers rather than waiting to do so until later career. For these women, as with

Libby, Jackie and Rachel, women in early career, the theme of authenticity was established early

and continued to develop. Rather than appearing at late career, authenticity was a powerful

theme throughout their careers.

Mainiero and Sullivan's (2006) Beta Kaleidoscope Career Pattern identifies a trend for

women once "freed from balance issues" to begin to craft their own identities, with a movement

towards authenticity occurring at that late stage of career. In contrast with the women in the

KCM studies, the women in this study sought to craft their own identities from early on in their

career and were strongly agentic throughout their careers. Although they prioritised challenge in early career, there was minimal evidence of these women pulling, "away from their careers for a while to better manage the relational aspects of their lives" (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, p. 131). These women were often disposed towards leadership and they possessed a love of learning; dispositions that were identified early. The issues that primarily constrained them in their early career progression were psychological and internal, rather than relational and external. Their early constraints revolved around the formation of identity and developing confidence.

In this study, the women in later career had worked for over twenty-five years. A feature of this group was they had all experienced periods of extreme stress, burnout, and breakdown. Sometimes both their psychological and physical health had suffered, which also affected their confidence and agency. Some women needed to take time to convalesce or simply to gain perspective on their situation. Extensive skill development meant they had assumed leadership roles. These demands were not always in agreement with those roles they had envisaged earlier in their careers. They described having to be flexible and adjust to new challenges such as when there was a change in their family situation, a redundancy or restructuring in their work situation.

Helen, a 56 year-old manager, in a tertiary institution; Sally, a senior manager in a secondary school; and Debbie a university academic now working full-time on her doctorate were three women in this group. Helen, Sally, and Debbie sought to be there for others, as encouragers and supporters, often in ways they had wanted to have but had not experienced personally. Disappointment was a key emotion in their narratives. They were weary and although they had enjoyed objectively rewarding positions, they looked forward to having more time for themselves and to being able to "smell the roses." The women all indicated that they needed to

achieve greater balance at this stage in their career in order to self-care and re-evaluate their own energy levels and health. Helen comments exemplify the experience of women at this stage:

> I'd actually quite like to just be at home, making bread and knitting my dishcloths, reading, going to the film festivals, and growing the plants. And people say, "Oh, you'd be lonely." But I wouldn't. They have very cozy lives some of my friends. Their husbands are earning tonnes of money, so they do things like be the teacher aide at the school or have lots of holidays, work three days a week and have a cleaner. I'd love that. I'm sick of working. But not much chance of that I'm afraid. Ben would never say. That's okay, I've got another 20 years working, I'll support you. I think I choose people who are not going to say, "Don't worry darling". What I would like, thank you very much, is a lovely 65-year-old who's extremely well off and says: "Darling, you can retire, we need to do a bit of travelling." That would suit me fine. I'd be out of here. I just want to be at home. I go through all the permutations I can possibly think of, of being financially viable to retire. I think about that next transition and how I would do it. I think about it all the time.   (Helen)

Helen is weary, and there is no sign of challenge in her description. She has worked for many years in education and in many different roles, and like many men in Mainiero and Sullivan's (2006) sample she seeks to achieve balance and some time for herself. Helen has been the major "breadwinner," and has supported her partner financially, rather than the other way round. For Helen, work has taken its toll, and lost any sense of "thrill."

Sally too has worked for many years in education with two decades as a Deputy Principal. She describes how a restructuring affected her role:

I was one of the Deputy Principals. I said "I'll put my head on the block." I'm usually a fighter and I could have fought it, which could have been nasty. I could have forced things so all the Deputy Principals lost one management unit. I was willing to make it easier for the Board, rather than have a fight. I didn't go like a timid rabbit; I went on my terms. It was a way of making sure I still had something. I was pretty stretched from being a Deputy Principal, and I wanted to be able to survive somehow in education until I was 65. I didn't want to go out in a box before that. (Sally)

On reflection, Sally is relieved to have a new role after the restructuring, and also to have a role, which has less pressure so that she can "survive" until she retires. Now, she is able to have some balance. Certainly her new role is less challenging, but she feels she has achieved it on "my own terms" and so has not been compromised. She feels she has still been true to herself.

Debbie too has been through a restructuring process, which resulted in redundancy, and she comments:

It was an extremely brutal process, managed in a dreadful way. I was made redundant. I haven't got my PhD. I need to get my PhD finished. I will. I don't know what else to say. It's pretty grim. It does color the lens through which I see things. (Debbie)

By late career, Helen, Sally and Debbie are experts in their field and highly confident of themselves. Although they have experienced difficult and challenging situations, there is no evidence that they need to "define identities of their own" as with the women in the KCM studies (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). However, they are weary and keen to achieve more balance in their lives. Helen, Sally and Debbie all have a partner and children and are therefore not career driven single women as were those women who followed an Alpha Kaleidoscope Career Pattern identified by Mainiero and Sullivan (2006). Their movement towards balance in later career was due to issues such as restructuring, redundancy, stress and burnout.

Limitations

Due to the purposive nature of recruitment of participants in this study, the women who volunteered to be part of this research were by disposition likely to more highly agentic. As a result, these findings cannot be generalised beyond this sample of women in education. Further the research was conducted in New Zealand, which is a country highly ranked on the Gender Equality Index (GII) (*United Nations Development Report*) which includes data on women's workforce participation. New Zealand was the first country to give women the vote and has been a world leader in establishing initiatives and incentives towards encouraging women's participation in the workplace. These factors may limit the application of the findings to other countries. Further this is a small study and there may be a difficulty to replicate the methodological approach of hermeneutic phenomenology.

CONCLUSIONS

Although Mainiero and Sullivan's Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) (2006) can provide a useful metaphor for capturing the career experiences of women, we argue that the three parameters of authenticity, balance and challenge are not distinct in the careers of the women in this study. Rather than a clear-cut demarcation of the three foci with one parameter taking precedence at a particular time, this research identifies that women also pursue careers where the three parameters blur and meld in continuous fusion.

The fourteen women in this study, who often described themselves as "called" to work in education, evidenced a clear pattern of both challenge and authenticity in early career, a pattern that continued in mid-career. During their careers the three parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge, did not retract and shift into the background. They were seen to overlap and fuse at different stages of the women's lives. These women were all involved in dual-career partnerships and their career took "a front seat" role to their partners. Partners' support was seen to enable them to maintain challenge, and continue to seek authenticity throughout mid-career, and to achieve a sense of balance during this period. Rather than opting-out, the women maintained strong involvement in their careers. Their persistence of authenticity emerged as a trademark of the careers of these women working in education. Findings reveal women do not follow the Beta Kaleidoscope Career Pattern of challenge followed by balance followed by authenticity.

The career of a woman's partner is an intriguing and significant factor in the application of the KCM. Women in this study had a partner who they described as having less career stress than themselves. These women's careers took predominance in decision-making. Further, their

partner actively supported these decisions. The Kaleidoscope Career Model (2006) sought in particular to explain how women work to prioritise relationships in their lives. However, a disadvantage of the KCM Beta Career Pattern is that it portrays women's career progress as being held back and constrained by relationships. It thus denigrates women's ability to move with agency in pursuit of an individual pathway in mid-career. This view presents a perspective, which portrays women as hindered and bound by others, seemingly denied the opportunity to progress with momentum throughout their careers. Rather than viewing relationships as a hindrance this present research reveals that they have a positive and impelling function, in particular the influence of a highly supportive partner who is seen as an "ally" to a women's career progression.

The question this research opens up is whether these findings reflect an emerging generational shift. It is possible that women are becoming more prescient in their choice of partner, with many in this study choosing a partner who will remain content to be "behind the scenes" whilst they take a "leading role" on the career stage. Perhaps it may also reflect a change in men's thinking. Whatever the case, more research is needed to determine whether models such as the KCM which have gained traction and recognition over recent years, still retain validity as a useful tool with which to view women's career pathways, or perhaps have lost their cutting edge. It may be that the "winds of change" necessitate a different implement.

Women in this study did not "opt-out." Their accounts reveal they are embedded in a web of relationships, and that their decisions are contextual. This phenomenological study provides rich findings, which have potential to add depth and enhance survey findings and enable further exploration of the tensions in women's career lives. Findings from this interpretive study reveal

how the positive impact and buffering nature of significant relationships and key people are potential influences, which can direct and empower. These women managed the web of relationships they forged to their advantage so that they became "a help and not a hindrance." Further, they were strategic and future oriented as they were pulled towards possibilities by their desire to be authentically true to themselves. Authenticity undergirded and incited these women from the outset and continued throughout their career progression. These women still seek balance, yet their relationships, in particular a keenly supportive partner, mean they are not "pulled out" but rather sustained through their career challenges.

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TABLE 1

Demographics of participants

Pseudonym	Age	Sector	Position (Current)	Status	Child-ren	Relationship status
Libby	34	Primary	Classroom teacher Syndicate leader	Full time	1	Married
Sophie	34	Primary	On maternity leave Contract teaching special needs	Contract	2	Married
Miriama	34	Secondary	Classroom teacher Management responsibilities	Full time	0	Engaged
Jackie	36	Secondary	Classroom teacher Management responsibilities	Full time	3	Married
Tina	37	Tertiary	Associate Professor University	Full time	2	Married
Sarah	43	Secondary	Head of learning area	Full time	2	Married
Rachel	43	Tertiary	Tutor Independent provider	Part time	1	Married
Amanda	43	Tertiary	Tutor Polytechnic	Part time	3	Married
Kiri	46	Primary	Principal	Full time	2	Married
Katie	46	Tertiary	Tutor Polytechnic	Contract	2	Married
Carol	47	Primary	Classroom teacher	Full time	1	Married
Debbie	48	Tertiary	Previously Senior lecturer Completing PhD	Full-time student	1	Married

Helen	56	Tertiary	Manager Recruitment	Full time	1	Partnered
Sally	61	Secondary	Previously Senior manager Currently middle manager	Full time	1	Married