

# **Women's leader identity journeys: The influence of past student experiences on the formation of leader identity in women leaders.**

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# ABSTRACT

Research points to an underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions globally linked to societal gender norms that are espoused by our heteronormative society. These gender norms place women as being less agentic and more emotional than men and therefore not fit to uphold the masculinised perception of leadership. Past educational practices are explored through the narratives of four young women leaders and their New Zealand urban secondary school experiences and how these contributed to their identity as a leader. Exploring how women may form a 'leader identity' during secondary school and how educational practices contribute to that formation is the focus of this inquiry. With a body of research in this area is growing, there is room for further critical exploration of how a student's leader identity is developed during their secondary schooling and how this informs their leadership development. Further exploration into developing leader identity in young women could lead to more young women pursuing leadership opportunities in adult life. Because education impacts and informs young women's self-identity, education can be used to confront gender stereotypes and assumptions and prepare young women for leadership roles in adulthood. This study uses narrative analysis to explore the lived experiences of four young women leaders aged 30 and 31 as they reflect on their time at secondary school; their leadership experiences there, and the impact the secondary school environment had on their career journey. This narrative research is positioned within the interpretive paradigm, taking a feminist perspective through two semi-structured interviews. Between the two interviews, journaling provided the 'narrators' with a tool to reflect and interpret their experiences in their own time to assist with developing a more comprehensive narrative.

# ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

*I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.*



Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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I dedicate this thesis to all the young women who have yet to locate the leader that dwells inside of them. It is there I promise. Keep seeking it out.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

Opening doors for women fosters equal opportunity and can help a society to allocate its human resources optimally. With excellence in leadership in short supply, no group, organisation, or nation should tolerate the losses that follow from unfairly restricting women's access to leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 11).

### **Background to this research - what is the problem?**

The above quote by Eagly and Carli (2007) clearly and succinctly outlines a problem inherent in leadership discourse. Women are held back by a socio-cultural attachment to the masculinised notion of a leader, and restricted to roles that diminish women's value as active participants in our society. Restricting them from the same opportunities as men reduces the worth of those valuable skills that women can easily access to effectively lead others. There is evidence that educating young women, to fulfil leadership roles outside of the secondary school can build self-efficacy and capability to seek out opportunities to lead. Archard (2013b) states that "the societal and cultural constructions of gender continue to impact on women in relation to their ability to be perceived as leaders, as well as their attainment of leadership positions" (p. 52). Past studies have indicated that educational practices may contribute to those gendered views of women's place in society, preventing young women from viewing themselves as leaders (Arnot, 2002; M. Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008; McNae, 2011). While the body of research in this area is growing, there is room for further critical exploration of how a student's leader identity is developed during their secondary schooling, and how this informs their leadership development into adulthood. Archard (2013b) states that further exploration into developing leader identity in young women could lead to more young women pursuing leadership opportunities in adult life. Because education impacts and informs young women's self-identity, education can be used to confront gender stereotypes and assumptions and prepare young women for leadership roles in adulthood.

The focus of this research began as an issue that had come to my attention through my interactions with young women via mentoring and through my own family members. I was noticing that young women were wrestling with the transition from early adolescence to adulthood with one of the key stressors being the pressure to conform to ideals that were

placed upon them from their social environment. Through these interactions, I witnessed high levels of anxiety and depression, self-harm, hopelessness and low self-worth, irrespective of socio-economic status. As students were coming towards the end of school, I was witnessing more accounts of these young women becoming addicted to a lifestyle that seemed to come from their sense of hopelessness and low self-worth. When I questioned why they felt they needed to self-harm or why they were regularly self-medicating, the conversations were often about trying to live up to the expectations of their parents, who wanted them to achieve at the highest levels of achievement at school, while not feeling worthy of their parent's faith in their abilities.

Having worked in leadership development arena for some years, I began to discuss how they felt about the possibility of being a leader in the future. The young women who struggled with their transition into adulthood post-secondary school could not imagine being a leader, and in fact wanted to shrink from the world, not stand out as a leader. It was here that I considered how educating young people into building a career path that first built foundational knowledge of who they are as people, what they value while setting achievable goals for their future, may be as pivotal at 18 years old, as leadership development can be as an adult – perhaps more so.

Through my experiences in leadership development I have witnessed individuals who have transformed into more resilient, self-managing leaders through learning to internalise their leader identity. It could be argued that presenting similar opportunities to students may offer similar outcomes for them. This is the area that I wish to explore. Women are not taking the path to leadership in high enough numbers to affect the gender imbalance in high level executive positions. Young women are more often falling into leadership, through being promoted into those positions, not because they seek them out. Exploring what underpins this issue and how best to address it was a compelling reason to look back at the role education plays in the formation of leader identity. It is an issue that may be addressed in a small way with this research; and so, I chose to speak to young woman leaders and hear their stories that narrate the part of their lives from adolescence to their current roles and how they reached those positions of 'power', and the role their secondary school education played in forming their identities as leaders.

In this way, the inquiry focused on the positive aspects of their educational opportunities and the attributes that resulted in their leadership journey. I chose four women who had established themselves in quite different careers, something that was not crucial to the research, but gave a variety of different experiences based on those differences. Paige is a senior primary school teacher in an urban school in Auckland; Sophie is a self-employed

graphic designer with her own studio; Sharlene is an environmental impact specialist at a large engineering organisation; and Talia works as a leader in a not-for-profit educational scholarship and support organisation. Interviewing these women was an exploration of their experiences and their reflection about how schools could serve their students more effectively with appropriate levels of guidance and support in students' final year at school.

The literature suggests that men are socialised to have different expectations regarding their perceived innate leadership capabilities, and these expectations can restrict women's access to the 'C-Suite' (the highest position in any given organisation) (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Glass & Cook, 2016), and to pay parity for the same roles (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). It was my intent that this issue would also be explored in more detail through the stories of the women that are making their way in their chosen careers.

## **Purpose of the study**

The most important influence during child development, outside of parents and peers, is the environment in which children learn knowledge and individuation (distinguishing self as an individual); that is, the school environment and the school leaders with those institutions. To this end, schools ought to be providing students with adaptive, contextual identity development to promote adaptive learning behaviour (Kaplan & Flum, 2012). Schools need to be just as involved with promoting students voice and agency as focusing on grades and industry readiness (Flum & Kaplan, 2006). Identity exploration and formation is centred around adolescence, a time when the young connect their motivators with their sense of purpose (Yeager & Bundick, 2009). A sense of purpose provides a young person with the motivation to involve themselves in their world and engage with something greater than themselves (Mariano, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to explore women's leadership identity journeys and the part their educational and leadership experiences at secondary school played in their formation as leaders. In this way, I hoped to gain insight into how the educational environment connects students to their identity and how it shapes their leader identity. That is, has the educational environment added to or detracted from their positive identity and their formation of leader identity? In this way, some understanding of the challenges that women face to reach leadership positions may be elucidated, and with this understanding may come a way to inform the deficit of women in top leadership positions (C-Suite). Glass and Cook (2016) put it succinctly thus:

Understanding challenges that may limit women's ability to lead successfully is critical to advancing women's representation in leadership positions because a lack

of success risks reinforcing stereotypes and bias regarding women's leadership capability. By identifying challenges that limit female leaders' success we can inform policy and practice in ways that limit bias and support women's mobility and success (p. 52).

It was not my intention to place blame on any institution for not being able to attend to all the needs of their students. Instead, through analysis of the narratives of these four women, I wished to gain insight into how women intrinsically adopt the socio-cultural context of leadership that is inherent to their gender. If there is a possibility that students in leadership positions can build foundational knowledge of themselves as leaders, while at school, that would be preferred, but not required outcome of this research.

## **Focus of the research**

The following subheadings outline the focus of this research that aims to explore women's educational experiences of leadership through the journeys of the four women during their secondary schooling, and into their later careers.

### **Young women and the formation of identity**

Young women, in their adolescent years, become more aware of their prescribed place in society in regard to expectations of their gender (Archard, 2013b; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; McNae, 2011). For example, Brown and Gilligan (1993) propose that "evidence of developmental progress goes hand in hand with evidence of loss of voice and signs of struggle to ... lend authority to or take seriously – their own experience, their feelings and thoughts" (p. 13). Young women desire authentic connections with others but often find themselves disconnected as they struggle to understand themselves and how they fit into the world (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; M. Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008). M. Hoyt and Kennedy (2008) concur that adolescence is a critical period in which to nurture leadership in women. This period is when women may benefit most from positive role modelling of leadership, validation of their ability to lead and the opportunity to locate their voice and sense of agency. This study, looking at how adult female leaders perceive their development of leader identity, is a way of identifying gaps in their learning.

### **Education and leadership**

From an educational perspective, the influence of the school environment plays a substantial role in developing self-perceptions of leadership capability in young women (Archard, 2013b; M. Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008; McNae, 2011). Arnot (2002) argues that school is likely to model gendered roles that encourage gender stereotypes to be perpetuated. Archard, Morda, and

Waniganayake (2014) report that “since gender stereotypes influence girls from a young age ... it is essential that teachers are intentional in observing, reflecting and addressing these concerns within their learning environments” (p. 326). Archard et al. (2014) argues that forming female leader identity could prepare young women for overcoming the pressures to conform to gendered expectations that they encounter in their journey after school. While it is not the school environment alone that educates a young woman in how to ‘be’, it is a microcosm of our society in which they learn how the world works.

## **Research question/design/plan of the study**

The focus of the research was to explore the formation of leader identity of young women leaders as they reflect on their secondary school experiences and the role the educational environment played in that formation. In this way, I wanted to explore how their leadership experiences at secondary school informed their career pathway, if at all. I wanted to gain insight into how schools can support young women to develop a clear vision for themselves as a leader. Using young women who had relatively recently left secondary school and were leaders in their field of expertise allowed me to identify if there were any specific experiences or attitudes or belief sets that encouraged them to see themselves as leaders. It also allowed me to identify what secondary schools could do differently to develop core leadership competencies and a resilient leader identity. In this way, young women could leave secondary school having been guided more purposively to build self-efficacy and resilience to deal with being a woman and a leader.

The aims of the study were:

1. To critically examine adult female leaders’ perspectives on their secondary school leadership experiences
2. To identify ways in which secondary school leadership experiences inform young women’s future leadership identities and career pathways.

The research questions are:

1. What leadership experiences do young women receive at secondary school?
2. In what ways do secondary school leadership experiences inform adult female leaders’ leadership identity formation?
3. In what ways have secondary school leadership experiences influenced their career pathways?

This research was positioned within the interpretive paradigm, taking a critical feminist perspective through semi-structured interviews.

Using a critical feminist lens enabled the researcher to identify the subjective experiences of the women and the role society plays in the formation of their leader identity. It was the work of the researcher to interpret and critique the common meanings that emerged from the narratives using the participant's perception of an experience (Crotty, 1998). Feminist theory acknowledges and challenges the role gender plays in the control and dissemination of narratives about women in society (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Feminist research also aims to address the imbalance of power facing all oppressed or exploited communities in society. Taking a feminist perspective to frame the researcher's inquiry centralised the themes of the relationship of power to the construction of identity in women (and particularly, in this research, leadership identity); it also addressed experiences of women and their ways of knowing and making meaning, while working to redress imbalanced gender equality (Lichtman, 2013).

The participants were selected using a purposive sampling frame, identifying and selecting four women between 25-35 years of age who had been in a leadership role in their workplace for at least three years. A 'leadership role', in this instance, was defined as being in a position of influence over a team of people within their organisation. This ensured that the women chosen would have experienced being a leader. In order to get an in-depth understanding of how leadership experiences at secondary school informed their leader identity, participants needed to have experienced leadership in some form while at secondary school (i.e. as student leader, leader of a sports team, head girl).

The study involved the participants reflecting on their secondary school leadership experiences and, through the narrative enquiry method of interviewing, identifying and describing the ways in which their school experiences informed the formation of their leader identity. Narrative inquiry was used, with the participants' personal narratives as the core of the inquiry. Analysing the data required me to shape the stories; drawing meaning from the narrative (Lichtman, 2013). Riessman (2008) noted that personal stories are often about constructing individual identities, reflecting that "in postmodern times, identities can be assembled and disassembled, accepted and contested" (p. 7). This method was chosen to assist the participants to build a picture of their experiences in order to share them in a deeper way.

## **Structure of the thesis**

Chapter 2 provides a review and analysis of past and current literature on the acquisition of identity development in adolescence and the role voice and agency play. Also, I examine the role of the school context in the development of identity and explore the possible reasons for the lack of women in senior leaders in society and the discourses regarding leadership in the literature.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology and methods, and introduces the feminist lens through which I have studied the belief sets that underpin the narratives presented by the participants in the study. This chapter also introduces narrative inquiry and analysis as the method of analysis undertaken, chosen for its use of co-construction of the lived experiences of the participants and the researcher. The chapter explores the way this method can positively contribute to the research by navigating the personal history of the participant with their own voice and giving them agency to be the narrator of their lived experience.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research through the narratives presented of the four participants. All four narratives are presented in this chapter with a summary at the end of each narrative that overlays the narrative with a concise precis of what I have taken from the interviews with the women. I then present the narrative themes that emerged from the interviews which gives an overview of the main points drawn from the interviews before Chapter 5 presents the findings in more detail.

Chapter 5 takes the narrative themes and draws out the sociocultural within which these key findings emerged. Overarching themes are presented with subsections providing the detailed contexts within those themes.

In Chapter 6 I take the themes discussed in the previous chapter and explore how these key points can be addressed in the future. I present some practical steps that could be explored that may support young women to step into their identity as a leader and look at ways in which guidance can be provided for young women that identifies their strengths, their values and their abilities to ensure they can access all the pathways available to them.

As mentioned, the following chapter (Chapter 2) presents a review of the literature that specifically represents the research on acquisition of leader identity in adolescents in a school context, the role of education in the formation of leader identity, as well as presenting the literature on societal discourses on gender differences inherent in leadership.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Literature review

While gender stereotypes are well established and self-perpetuating within the social paradigm, educational experiences can be used as an opportunity to confront gendered assumptions and better prepare girls for leadership roles (Archard et al., 2014, p. 321)

### Introduction

The opportunity this research presents is to identify the barriers women leaders face within an educational context in order to look deeper into the limitations and possibilities of women taking their “place at the leadership table” (Kolb, Williams, & Frohlinger, 2010). This aim of this research is to contribute to existing knowledge about the ways in which young women use their formative experiences at secondary school to develop their identity as a leader. According to Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011), leader identity is developed through a “set of relational and social processes through which one comes to see oneself as a leader” (p. 476), tied to a sense of purpose (J. M. Burns, 2010; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Similarly, M. Hoyt and Kennedy (2008) propose that “it is critical that we understand where young women’s beliefs about ... leadership originate, how they are shaped and reinforced, and how they can be manifest in effective and fulfilling leadership” (p. 205). The notion of the “relational and social processes” that Ely et al. (2011, p. 476) put forward will form part of this investigation into how young women develop their leader identity.

This review of literature is constructed thematically, traversing how leadership is acquired, particularly by women. Some relevant discourses within leadership theory are examined, including a consideration of why it might be important for young women to develop as leaders, and how education may influence this development. Because we are specifically exploring young women’s secondary school experiences, it is from adolescence that we mostly view this leadership development. In this review of literature, identity development will be discussed in terms of what research has shown us, along with ways in which women develop leader identity and the barriers to that identity that exist for women.

Most leadership researchers concur that leadership ability is not based solely on inherent traits, but a set of skills that can be acquired and developed over time (Bennis, 1989; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Leadership as a concept has been studied over many years with

thousands of hours' worth of research studies focusing most commonly on how leadership can be acquired, the measurement of leadership in general, and the measurement of specific traits and behaviours (Zacharatos, Barling, & Kelloway, 2000). There are countless research centres, leadership institutes and business schools that scrutinise all elements of leadership and leadership development (Jackson & Parry, 2011). However, most of this scrutiny and the training of leaders focuses on a "narrow set of psychological assumptions that privilege the role of the powerful individual" (Collinson & Tourish, 2015, p. 578; Jackson & Parry, 2011). This leads to a leader-centric, most often heteronormative, male-dominated focus. This focus has led to feminist academics questioning when there will be a 'seat at the table' for women. For example, Ely et al. (2011), Eagly and Carli (2007) and Kellerman and Rhode (2007) all assert that women are underrepresented in leadership roles because of the dissonance between the societal positioning of characteristics associated with the traditional model of leadership – dominance, authority, ambition, and so on. While studies reveal that leadership is not based solely on inherent qualities, there is little space created for women who also wish to develop core capabilities (Kellerman & Rhode, 2012; Schein, 2001). As Collinson and Tourish (2015) submit, the focus is too often on building 'heroic' leaders, which leaves little room for those who do not fit the standard archetype of a hero, with its inherent traits strongly attached to stereotypical descriptors of heterosexual masculinity.

In the past decade the rise of the servant leader, and 'post-heroic' leadership models have been touted as being a shift towards an advantage for women in leadership (Kolb et al., 2010). There is little evidence to substantiate this 'shift', even with mounting evidence that employing women in leadership roles can give an organisation a competitive advantage. Research suggests that women are more likely to promote teamwork through a collaborative, communal style (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Those women who do 'mimic' the leadership traits associated with masculinity are often accused of being overbearing, controlling, bossy or aggressive, having to choose between 'likeability' and being perceived as competent in their role – a double bind (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Kolb et al., 2010; Ridgeway, 2001).

Leadership is a concept with a long, rich history of research and theory, deeply embedded in and informed by normative models and practices. It is a phenomenon that has researchers exploring its multiple facets while failing to completely comprehend its phenomenological status. J. M. Burns (2010) states that "to understand the nature of leadership requires understanding of the essence of power, for leadership is a special form of power" (p. 12). If power is central to the perception of leadership, then it is likely that J. M. Burns (2010) is describing how society ascribes to a more masculine interpretation of leadership. It is these

accepted stereotypes, played out in the boardrooms of organisations all over the globe that dictate the interpretation of leader performance as biased against the view of women having innate leadership capability (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). The view of leadership as being innately masculine is one worth examining further. Exploring the dominant discourses concerned with leadership and leader development will inevitably begin to build clarity around the climate within which women are existing as leaders. Ely et al. (2011) prompts a credible argument for developing women's leader identity, proposing:

Instead of defining themselves in relation to gender stereotypes – whether rejecting stereotypically masculine approaches because they feel inauthentic or rejecting stereotypically feminine ones for fear they convey incompetence – women leaders can focus on developing and enacting identities that advance the values and purposes for which they stand. (p. 488)

This statement questions the need for defining women in such polarising terms that come with gender stereotyping and instead proposes an approach that promotes their innate identities, rather than ones placed upon them. It is important then to look at how these individualised identities are developed.

## **Acquisition of leader identity**

Identity is the meaning attached to oneself within three levels of understanding: individual, relational and collective (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Lord & Hall, 2005). That is, who I am as a unique individual; who I am in relation to another; who I am in relation to a group (e.g. peer group). Ergo, a person's identity is viewed through a lens that is socially and culturally constructed, drawn from the collective activities in which people participate and self-perceptions drawn from lived experiences (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2012). Women's cultural and social identity often positions them in opposition to men in ways that are described in this research. While women may resist the social forces that determine their gender roles and their positioning in society, they struggle to build their own expressions of 'self' through their interpretation of how they are viewed by the world. Instead, according to Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte Jr., and Cain (1998), their identity development is "in the context of power, rather than as expressions of stable interpretations of world and values..." (p. 27). Therefore, acquiring leader identity is likely to be a difficult and treacherous path (Lord & Hall, 2005; Ridgeway, 2001).

Leader identity refers to how an individual thinks about himself or herself as a leader, directly influencing their interactions and their leadership behaviour (Lord & Hall, 2005; Miscenko, Guenter, & Day, 2017). The development of leader identity is acquired over time through relevant experiences, behaviours, skills and knowledge. Positive leadership experiences are

likely to enhance leader identity, increasing self-efficacy and motivating the leader to look for further developmental opportunities (Day et al., 2012). Shamir and Eilam (2005) suggest that 'authentic' leaders have their leader identity as a central component of their personal identities. Further, having a high level of "self-concept clarity" (p. 398), that is, a stable self-knowledge, allows a leader to draw from those positive experiences and values and apply them to their leadership practice (Shamir & Eilam, 2005).

Kouzes and Posner (2012) assert that leadership is about mobilising others and creating a climate where those they lead are motivated to overcome challenges to present their best self for their own sake and the sake of the organisation in which they lead. Van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, and Hogg (2005) describe the connection between leadership effectiveness and identity thus:

Core to the self and identity approach to leadership effectiveness is an understanding that the way that we perceive ourselves, our self-concept or identity ... strongly informs our feelings, beliefs, attitudes, goals, and behaviour. (p. 496)

So effectiveness as a leader depends on the way their self-identity is perceived as, I would argue, any ambiguity or inauthenticity would preclude our 'followers' from endorsing us as leaders. Followers are not "passive onlookers" and will not endorse those that they feel have contravened social mores (Van Knippenberg et al., 2005, p. 498). Skinner (2014) proposes that women, in order to successfully work as a leader within the traditional, masculinised view of leadership, need to understand both who they are as a leader, and how they can succeed in their work context before they can work to destabilise those gendered definitions of leadership for themselves. Simply put, women need to work on their identity as leaders in order to successfully contravene those norms that can shut women out from being a successful leader in their workplace. With the prevalence of male definitions of leadership and gendered expectations of women, it can be difficult for women to internalise their identity as a leader (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

### **The absence of women leaders in society**

Leading feminist academics are not all in agreement as to how women's leadership journeys should be described. Leading academic Alice Eagly (2007) proposed that women are not caught under the popular metaphor of a 'glass ceiling', but instead are forever making their way through a 'labyrinth'. She reports thus: "The glass ceiling metaphor conveys a rigid, impenetrable barrier, but barriers to women's advancement are now more permeable" (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 1). While acknowledging that discrimination still prevents women from advancing in the field of leadership, Eagly and Carli (2007) suggest the labyrinth metaphor is more fitting for the modern woman as it captures the journey women are on to find their way

to leadership. Both metaphors capture the difficulties women face traversing the 'minefield' to leadership. Ridgeway (2001) asserts that women's pathway to leadership is more than just a labyrinth – women are part of a gender system that contains status beliefs associating “greater worthiness and competence with men than women” (p. 637) and are part of gender-related cues that activate the ways in which gender roles are played out in society. According to Eagly and Karau (2002), gender roles are commonly held beliefs about the characteristics attributed to women and men. The activation of these gender-related cues relegate women to roles that ascribe to commonly held beliefs about women's gender roles - that is, concern for others, helpfulness, and other communal attributes that relegate women to being the 'helper'. In contrast, men are ascribed more agentic traits – confidence, independence, dominance – that fit within the parameters of what society considers to be leadership characteristics (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; C. Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

Research on the sociocultural context that forms the gender imbalance in leadership roles points to deeply rooted societal expectations and beliefs preventing women from attaining leadership positions (Ridgeway, 2001; Schein, 2001). In New Zealand, for example, according to a study on women in the workforce, women accounted for approximately 45% of managers in New Zealand but were not given parity in pay with men in the same or similar roles (Ministry for Women, 2017).

The study proposed that gendered stereotyping played a major role in career decisions for young people. Gender stereotyping in career paths have been blamed as one reason for the occupational segregation being present in the roles young people predominately choose, e.g. choosing teaching over science based careers, because they are more socially accepted as female occupations. Evidence shows that women that do reach senior management positions, are in predominantly female-dominated industries such as education and health but are less likely to hold senior management positions in private companies (Statistics New Zealand, 2015)

Despite legislation, and a great deal of debate on how women can break through the 'glass ceiling' or get through the 'labyrinth', women are underrepresented in the upper level of management, and overrepresented in low paying occupations (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). The culpability for this has followed two lines of debates. The first is that there is an incongruity between characteristics associated with leadership and characteristics associated with women (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Kolb et al., 2010). The other is that women are 'leaning back' and not taking opportunities to

step up into leadership, with the competing challenges of building a family rather than building a career often cited as the reason (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kolb et al., 2010). However, Kellerman and Rhode (2012) suggest that women are internalising the gender stereotypes associated with leadership and not advancing themselves as they feel less deserving and less able than men. Their research concluded that women take fewer risks and do not necessarily seek out challenges that would put them in front of leadership opportunities. (Kellerman & Rhode, 2012). The belief that women are more emotional than men is another strongly held gender stereotype in Western cultures with both men and women endorsing this notion (Brescoll, 2016; C. Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). This idea has also fed into the perception that women are less capable of leading because they are unable to control the outward display of emotion, with the link between emotionality and the lack of women in higher levels of leadership “readily acknowledged” (Dolan, 2014). The following quote by Hilary Rodham Clinton recognised how emotionality can be a limitation in her recent run for President of the United States:

...it's a really delicate balancing act - how you navigate what is still a relatively narrow path - to be yourself, to express yourself, to let your feelings show, but not in a way that triggers all of the negative stereotypes (Brescoll, 2016, p. 415)

The importance of making decisions without the distraction of emotions is rooted in the notion that to have rational thought means an absence of emotion. Women's perceived overly sensitive natures precludes them from being seen as rational or competent as leadership is often linked to the need for both of these traits. This need to identify women's lack of leadership capability through their higher emotionality is linked to the notion that women's personal attributes are the mechanism on which they are judged in business (Brescoll, 2016; Dolan, 2014). This 'lack of fit' is linked back to the belief that women are more communal and men display agentic qualities associated with dominance and leadership. This concept of the inferiority of women's capabilities is considered a contributing factor to the lack of women in leadership positions. This gender stereotype threat has caused “disengagement and decreased leadership aspirations” for women in business, especially in specific fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) (C. Hoyt & Murphy, 2016, p. 388).

Glass and Cook (2016) claim that women are often appointed to leadership positions in organisations that are in crisis. The metaphor of the 'glass cliff' is used to describe this phenomenon that predicts the conditions under which women are appointed, with a variety of reasons suggested for its occurrence, including the notion that women's more collaborative style of leadership is highly valued in times of crisis where strong, interpersonal skills are required. Another reason is that women may face less competition from men in

leadership roles that are within struggling organisations. A further idea is that women feel they need to take those positions in order to establish their credibility as leaders. Glass and Cook (2016) observed that once women are in leadership positions, they are challenged with the ongoing gendered assumptions regarding their perceived fit for the role based on the cultural schema that associates masculinity with leadership, as I have already noted (Eagly & Karau, 2002; C. Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). This evaluation of women's fitness for leadership positions can lead to negative evaluation of performance irrespective of a woman's ability or preparedness (Glass & Cook, 2016; Koenig et al., 2011).

## **Building leader identity**

Lord and Hall (2005) posit that developing one's identity as a leader should be a path to greater insight to how it fits with one's own self-identity. "As one's identity as a leader solidifies with increasing experience, a self-view as a leader should become a more central aspect of one's identity" (Lord & Hall, 2005, p. 596). The formation of self-identity starts in childhood and is a convergence of the active participation of parents and family (Schachter & Ventura, 2008). Belief systems inform parenting practice that impacts on the child's sense of self. Other sources of influence such as schooling, (Archard, 2013c; Archard et al., 2014; M. Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008); peer groups, especially within the educational setting (Archard, 2011; Pugh & Hart, 1999); and the media (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008) also impact the building of a child's self-identity. Social identity theory emphasises that the formation of a personal or self-identity is essentially developed from "ongoing negotiation and reflection of the personal, social, past, future and current aspect of an individual's life experiences" (Skinner, 2014, p. 108). Recognising the need for an individual to form their own sense of self allows a person to explore and understand who they are and to build self-awareness around their own identity. Unterhalter (2007) describes identity as the way to distinguish ourselves from others in our lives, this being heightened during adolescence.

Young women reaching adolescence has been described as "a meeting place between girl and woman" (Brown & Gilligan, 1993, p. 13) and as a 'crossroads' where a major development of our identity takes place, informed by close relationships, and societal and cultural influences (Titchen & Hobson, 2011; Unterhalter, 2007). In Erikson's (1968) seminal model of psychosocial development, growth of identity is the stage of defined maturation acquired in adolescence. He explained that this is when the desire for freedom to fully express themselves clashes with the obligations of a maturing young adult and the requirements to conform to that role (Erikson, 1968). This is when the adolescent can develop identity confusion and a heightened need to break away from the expectations of school, parents, and their culture, by rebelling. Gilligan (1993) posited that Erikson's (1968)

summation of freedom and autonomy in adolescence was describing the trajectory for young men, when it can be very different when experienced by young women. For young women, the pressures of emerging from childhood to the rigorous surveillance of their lives heightens risk of anxiety, depression, eating disorders and abuse as they enter their next stage of development. For them, Gilligan (1993) argues it is not about finding individualisation and freedom, but redefining their identity through their relationships with others. Adolescence is a time during which the voices of young women can be 'silenced' and where social pressures can eliminate the ability to challenge and debate (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; M. Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008). Interventions are imperative to assist young women to change this potentially harmful trajectory as they develop an acute awareness of cultural norms, laden with expectations that pervade the development of their healthy self-identity (M. Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008). These expectations of how they should 'see' themselves (and be 'seen' by others), diminishes young women's capability to express themselves fully and freely (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Gilligan, 1993).

One of the pervading issues when developing self-identity as a young woman, is the overwhelming bombardment of expectations through societal objectification (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). The need to be physically 'acceptable' in today's 'mediated' society forces women to internalise a frame of reference that sets them up to be objectified bodies. The concern over the superficial and external (for example: How do I appear?), overwhelms them, relegating their internal traits and knowledge to the background (for example: What can I do?, or, Who can I be?). Battling to comply with societal expectations of the external 'self' results in women being less likely to acknowledge their intellect and character, instead viewing themselves as external object and forever monitoring their appearance in order to comply with the normative standards of beauty (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson, 2011; Daniels, 2009; Grabe et al., 2008). As adolescents, it is difficult to navigate the relationship between the idealised, mediated self, and the need to find an individualised identity apart from the expectations of others (Schachter & Ventura, 2008).

While the process of identity formation is a lifelong exercise (Kroger, 2004), developing a robust identity early in young women may combat societal pressures to look a certain way and to limit their future expectations based on their gender. While negotiating not only what it means to be an adult, it is the opportunity to explore "what it means to be a woman" (M. Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008, p. 203), and is a good time to develop curiosity about how being a leader can be part of that identity. Giving young women the opportunity to delve into these expectations, and giving them a voice against these pressures, may create an effective buffer against cultural messages that undermine development of an independent voice. The

more leadership opportunities can be experienced in adolescence, the greater the accumulation of knowledge and development of self-efficacy as a leader (Avolio, 2005; Lord & Hall, 2005).

### **The influence of the school context on building leader identity**

Leadership does not exist in a vacuum, it is socially constructed and embedded in context (Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002). So too the context in which identity development takes place is important. The interplay between personal, historical, social and cultural factors help shape and form our identity (Erikson, 1968; Gilligan, 1993). In the education environment, which plays such a valuable role in shaping and developing the identity of young students, it is important to explore how the impact of this environment on identity is established and maintained (Faircloth, 2012). There is an absence of literature formed with the input of student voices on leader identity, which provides an opportunity for exploration of this context to allow young women to have an opportunity to contribute to this topic.

The notion that education and the development of identity is inextricably linked is not novel. School is a site of more than just the acquisition of knowledge, it is a site of acquisition of self-knowledge (Kaplan & Flum, 2012) and the development of core identity (Erikson, 1968). The development of identity at school is central to the acquisition of knowledge with education required to cultivate better academic engagement, community engagement, career goals and the ability to be adaptive and collaborative (Lizzio, Dempster, & Neumann, 2011; Rich & Schachter, 2012). Education is also required to build positive coping mechanisms, pro social behaviours, positive goal setting, development of agency, and an ability to question and debate issues and seek out information (Mitra & Gross, 2009).

The classroom socialises young minds to adapt to working within 'communities of learners' and, as such, students shape their understandings of their social worlds and their practices are affected by developing those crucial understandings (Kaplan & Flum, 2012; McNae, 2011). However, there has been a concern over young women's lack of confidence regarding their abilities. Young women are downplaying their abilities in order to be seen as a "proper girl" (Skelton, 2010, p. 134). That is, their desire to be viewed within an accepted societal positioning that places gendered ideals on being attractive, overtakes their desire to be 'smart'. Skelton (2010) researched the relationship between young women and their teachers, with results pointing to a lack of confidence in young women and feeling less important than the male students who may be getting more teacher-student interaction. Skelton's (2010) studies concluded that after studying similar research across different decades (1986, 1994, 2009), the same scenarios played out- female students felt that the

needs of male students were more important, and that being seen as smart contravened their desire to be seen as attractive.

Unterhalter (2007) perceives gender inequality in education to be a human rights issue, particularly in parts of the world where schooling is not a certainty for women. She sought to open up the dialogue on how schools engage with students and, specifically, how they set up the environment where students, especially women and those from diverse backgrounds, can become accustomed to challenge the normative sociocultural expectations:

“... many sociological studies of schools indicate that far from being spaces which fulfil needs, rights or capabilities, they establish complex social relations which sometimes confirm gender inequalities and sometimes contribute to their transformation.” (Unterhalter, 2007, p. 95)

In this country, as in most other countries, school is a site for sociocultural sense-making, power and negotiation. It is the place where students locate their sense of self and how they fit into the world (McNae, 2011). However, whether they identify with the binary descriptor of man or woman (or define themselves in other unique ways) has a significant bearing on their experiences of leadership at school. For example, it influences how they view leadership and their ability to be a leader (van Linden & Fertman, 1998).

Archard (2013a) points to school as being a place where students learn the tools and skills to step into leadership roles after secondary school. It is an opportunity to reach young women and to provide them with opportunities to develop their ability to use their voices to make a change to the way leadership is perceived. McNae (2011) studied the effect of co-constructing a student leadership programme with young women at their secondary school. Her research suggests that the way leadership was presented to the students had a major effect on how the students perceived how leadership should be exercised. That is, the way leadership was modelled by other leaders (either within the faculty or by outside leaders) affected how the women perceived and acted out leadership. MacNeil (2006) offers a similar view, proposing that developing leadership strategies and building understanding of the parameters and opportunities leadership development presents to young people encourages more connection and purpose. Youth leadership opportunities also create an awareness of how young people can best contribute to the world while building intellectual and social competencies.

While the plethora of literature on leadership focuses most commonly on development of leadership competencies in adults, the study of youth leadership can often take an ‘outside-in’ approach (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007). It is perhaps more useful to have youth leadership

development 'co-constructed' as McNae (2011) suggests, giving youth a chance to develop their own strategies and tools rather than having adult development theories applied to youth development. The focus on leader development through an adult lens diminishes the contribution young leaders can make to their own development. It is argued that student leadership development is not only "intrinsic to student engagement" (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007, p. 280), but it is also fundamentally important to building the school culture and the ongoing success of the school as an educational facility.

Arnot (2002) proposed that in the primary and early childhood learning environment, the normative production of the division of labour is reproduced through the specific positioning of female and male teachers in their roles as authority figures. That is, in the early childhood and primary education sectors, there is a large proportion of teachers that are female. At this stage of schooling, a teacher may take on a more paternal figure as they help a child to develop creativity and individuation. With a higher proportion of female teachers in early childhood, a child can see women as a maternal proxy for their mothers rather than a mentor or authority figure. Conversely, in secondary school there is more of a balance of male to female teachers where a more authoritative/authoritarian culture of learning is used, with the learning building industry ready workers and readiness for further academic study, and less about developing individuation and freedom of expression (Arnot, 2002). Even in this environment, with the focus on developing skills for the workforce, by the time the student leaves secondary school they have learned the "principles governing sexual power relations – the equation of maleness and high status, dominance and authority" (Arnot, 2002, p. 47). This assertion strongly indicates that the power relations that prohibit women from attaining high levels of leadership are found, in the first instance, in the school setting where traditional masculine characteristics of leadership are played out. Challenging this normative position within secondary school could develop a more balanced approach to the masculinisation of leadership. It is also likely that students are influenced by the power relations between family members, with parents being active agents in their development of knowledge and understanding of the world.

### **The role of student voice and agency in the acquisition of leader identity**

School is undoubtedly a site for the acquisition of knowledge. Alongside this knowledge acquisition is the issue of other messages that are being disseminated in the formal schooling environment. Mitra and Gross (2009) reported that students often feel disengaged, alienated and without power, with schools teaching students "to be passive participants in a democracy rather than leaders" (p. 523). They propose that giving students a chance to share their views in conversations about reforming processes and challenging embedded

structures and social and cultural injustices, will be both transformative as well as improve engagement. Giving students an opportunity to contribute to decision making seems an appropriate way of developing leaders that challenge the status quo (Bennis, 1989; Mitra & Gross, 2009). Often, however, only a limited number of students get selected to be leaders by the school based on the school's perception of those students' leadership capability. Further, students that engage socially more easily with their peers are more likely to be chosen to represent the school in the limited leadership positions available (Brown & Gilligan, 1993). Those who put themselves forward for leadership positions but do not have the required 'following' are often overlooked, provoking negative self-esteem issues and a mind-set that internalises self-talk around being unworthy, not liked, not good enough.

Denner and Dunbar (2004) studied the experiences of Mexican-American adolescent women, and generalised that young women need to be supported to effectively speak their minds and not feel they have to choose between relationships with others and speaking up. Pugh and Hart (1999) posit that adolescent identities are developed from social interaction with peer groups, co-constructing their identities through peer group participation. The individuals within a peer group identify with the values and norms of the group with which they are affiliated. Brown and Gilligan (1993) caution that any challenge to those values and norms can exacerbate the disconnection and isolation young women can experience as their desire to be liked by others diminishes their capacity to build their own authentic identities separate from their peers. The loss of voice and the suppression of authentic identity in order to keep relationships with peers is referred to as "false-self behaviour" (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1997). Alternatively, relationships within peer groups can assist the adolescent to examine their view and beliefs and provide a forum for discussing their emerging identity in a safe environment (Pugh & Hart, 1999). While affiliation with certain peer groups indicates the acceptance of the groups' values and beliefs, it more importantly, gives the emerging adolescent an opportunity to be part of a community that may provide motivation and participatory traits to emerge.

Not connecting with their authentic identity can also lead to what is referred to as 'imposter syndrome', a relatively recent phenomenon and linked to perfectionism. This concept of feeling like an imposter is attributed to the research of academic Pauline Clance (Clance & Imes, 1978) who studied high achieving women that struggled with internalising success or positively attributing their abilities to inherent traits. The women studied, some of whom were doctoral students, believed that they were not truly successful through their own abilities but externalised success as being the result of outside influences such as luck or having a benevolent leader. Exploring these false beliefs, Clance and Imes (1978) attributed the lack

of self-belief to the “introjection of significant societal sex-role stereotyping” (p. 241). Recently, ‘imposter syndrome’ has been used to describe some inherent feelings of inauthenticity in men and in leaders (Hillman, 2013). However, the term has had much more of an impact on the understanding of women’s perceptions of their unworthiness to claim leadership roles or positive attributions of their own ability. The recognition of ‘imposter syndrome’ has been accelerating as highly competent women leaders cannot not internalise their success. This requires further study to identify how far back into childhood these feelings emerge and to explore the role that the educational environment plays on its development.

### **The role of interpersonal relationships in a school context**

The role relationships play in the forming of identity in adolescents cannot be minimised. The effect of having strong social connections provides adolescents with role modelling and support structures during an intense time of personal growth. Adolescents develop a sense of ‘I’ while seeking who they are compared to others, contributing to building feelings of acceptance and self-efficacy (Collins & Laursen, 2004; Pugh & Hart, 1999). There is a ‘reforming’ of how identity is obtained through adolescence; that is, moving away from a childhood identity derived from parents and close others, to an identity formed through wider relationships that are sources of knowledge of ‘who I am’ (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2004). Understanding how these relationships influence the female adolescent at school and their acquisition of leader identity could give us insight into how these relationships go on to affect their leader identity as an adult.

A student uses peer relationships as mirrors that shape and reflect back their values and norms, effectively using these as a sounding board to understand themselves and the world around them (Dweck, 2000; Pugh & Hart, 1999; Rudolph, 2010). According to Pugh and Hart (1999), peer group affiliations “provide a forum for individuals of equal status to discuss who they are and who they want to be within a supportive environment” (p. 56). Conversely, peer relationships that are conflicting or challenging can diminish wellbeing and school achievement because of the fear of being unpopular (Archard, 2011; Hartup, 1996; Nelson & Debacker, 2008).

Aside from peer relationships, the main source of influential relationships at school are between teachers and students. Having positive teacher-student relationships provides a feeling of belonging which enhances student outcomes, both academic and social (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Hattie (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of research relating to achievement and, as a result, concluded that the teachers that made a difference to their

students (of which there was only a small percentage) had common attributes. Those common attributes were centred around their love of the subject; the relationships they had with their students in terms of how they built positive relationships; how they taught their subject; and how much time they spent assisting their students.

## **Conclusion**

It has been acknowledged that leadership is not about inherent traits, but behaviours and skills that can be taught and development. In order to develop young women as leaders, the literature reviewed indicates that teaching critical elements of leadership development to adolescent women can impact their future choices. The current imbalance of women in regard to men 'at the top' requires us to do more about ensuring young women are able to reach their leadership goals in the future. As Archard (2013a) states "girls must overcome greater barriers in their pursuit of leadership positions and thus they need to be adequately prepared for these challenges" (p. 158). This chapter has highlighted the importance of intra-school relationships to achievement and feelings of belonging, both of which are linked to higher levels of wellbeing in students.

The research reported on in this thesis explored the pathways taken by women leaders and the influence of secondary schooling on their career choices versus their aspirations. Also, it highlights how attitudes and social influences can add to or undermine a woman's ability to reach for goals that are based on choice rather than expectation. The extent to which these assumptions and beliefs are internalised is also explored in this study to elucidate the difficulties faced by young women, and also the ways that barriers have been challenged in order to achieve their career aspirations.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Research Methodology, Design and Method

Researchers who are interested in narratives as individualised accounts of experience tend to be the most convinced of the significance of stories as a way of expressing and building personal identity and agency (Bruner, 1990, p. x).

### Introduction

The main objective of this study was to examine the experiences of young women leaders, the formation of their leader identity, and the role of their secondary school experiences of leadership. It was important that the research design, methodology and research methods selected for this research honoured the personal narratives that would be shared by the young women. When considering a number of qualitative methods available to me, I selected methods that aligned with the principles and values underpinning the critical feminist philosophy. By using a narrative inquiry approach to examine the lived experiences shared by the young women, narratives were developed in order to explore their separate perspectives on the issues discussed during the two interviews. In this chapter, the considerations behind the research design and methodologies and their philosophical underpinnings are discussed. Also in this chapter I illustrate clearly the processes utilised including, the selection of the participants, the ethical considerations, and the methods employed to gather information during the research. This chapter also justifies and critiques the choices made in this research.

### Research methodology

#### Qualitative research

This research study takes a qualitative approach using a critical feminist perspective to analyse and interpret the data. Qualitative research approaches examine “the phenomena that impact on the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural and social context” (Lewis & Adeney, 2014, p. 9). In the context of this study, it was important to use an approach that recognised how our experiences are shaped by the contexts from which individuals come. This approach to interpreting personal narratives allowed the nuanced language, knowledge and perspectives of the participants to drive the chosen method of analysis and interpretation. It was also important that the approach was aligned with the principles and philosophy of the critical feminist perspective.

## Critical feminist methodology

Feminist theory acknowledges and challenges the role of gender in the control and dissemination of narratives about women in society (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Feminist research also aims to address the imbalance of power facing oppressed and exploited communities in society. Taking a feminist perspective to frame my inquiry centralises the themes of the relationship of power to the construction of identity in women (and in particular, in this research, leader identity), addresses experiences of women, and their ways of knowing and making meaning, while working to redress imbalanced gender equality (Lichtman, 2013). While there is no singular feminist methodology, the feminist lens enables the voice of those who are silenced or marginalised to be privileged, challenging the dominant discourse that focuses on the heteronormative stand point. Women, it has been argued, are “overlooked in knowledge production” (D. Burns & Chantler, 2011, p. 71). Feminist researchers advocate for research that is not just *for* women, but *with* women, concerned with social justice and broader social change (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006). Issues of who holds the power and what constitutes knowledge are central to feminist research. In this study these issues were explored in the experiences of young women in relation to their identity as a leader., and how these reflect their self-knowledge regarding leader identity. While I was aware that the challenges facing women are primarily systemic problems, it was important to extensively explore those boundaries that define and confine women and their role in society.

My epistemological framework is social constructionist/feminist with a relativist ontological position. Relativism assumes that ‘reality’ has multiple constructs and is dependent on how someone may come to know it, constantly shifting and dynamic (Braun & Clarke, 2013; O’Toole & Beckett, 2013). ‘Reality’ is dependent on how a person is positioned and the view from that position informs how a person may experience the world. There is not one way of knowing or seeing, but multiple ways, and depending on how a person interacts with their social world, this informs how they see their world. Social constructionists argue that the world is constructed through interactions (discourses) and the meaning made from those interactions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). My critical feminist position sits atop and within the constructionist epistemology and informs how I synthesise my knowledge. My standpoint is that gender normative cues are part of the social world and how it informs society. The lenses through which an individual views their world is informed by patriarchal privilege and heteronormativity, leaving little room for those who are not part of that privileged position (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006). While ‘reality’ is constructed through multiple lenses informed by the social world, the lenses are dominated by the patriarchal position. Through this research, I have endeavoured to explore how this power influences the knowledge production and how

that affects young women at secondary school when forming their identity and in their choices of career pathways.

In terms of this research, I have chosen to use a lens that privileges the knowledge that is drawn from the participants' personal narratives. One of the overarching reasons for choosing the narratives of young women and their experiences at secondary school is to explore in a deeper way the power relations in a school environment. Along with the extent to which this influences how young women value themselves and their contribution to society. Examining, not only their experiences of leadership at secondary school, but women's overall experiences of educators, authority figures and friendships at school gives a deeper account of how schooling at this level treats young women. According to Arnot (2002), secondary school is a place where 'outer work' is privileged over 'inner development', and knowledge valued over personal experience. This 'outer work', is the learning students receive about how to think and consider knowledge, moving away from the inner work that teaches children that their unique views on the world have value.

At a young age children are given freedom to express themselves and be creative, while being taught by predominately female role models. Secondary school has more restrictions and adolescents are often strongly encouraged to subvert their inner development to focus on their intellectual development. It is a place of gendered modelling of authority, that is, where male role models are in greater supply and often more authoritarian in their approach (Arnot, 2002). Cote and Levine (2002) state that "identity has both external (social) and internal (agentic) factors that influence its development, not having individuals as passive recipients, but as capable of agentic behaviours outside of normative social structures" (p. 9). Incorporating narrative analysis into the critical feminist methodology allows us to explore these factors in a way that provided depth to our understanding of the factors at play in the women's lives. As Braun and Clarke (2013) assert:

The strengths of Narrative Analysis include an ability: to reveal the temporal, emotional, and contextual quality of lives; to illuminate experience; and to understand a person as both an individual agent and as someone who is socio-culturally fashioned (p. 198).

Looking at the experiences of the young women that participated in the research, an exploration of their lived experiences of power relations, leadership and authority while attending their secondary school is essential. During this research process, there are questions that have been raised regarding the way the school systems sets up how the principles of sexual power relations play out and whether current pedagogy is more

progressive at abandoning sexual stereotypes. Also, it is relevant to question if male authority figures at secondary school are likely to be seen as more authoritative role models that influence how students acquire their sociocultural classification. Lastly questioning how this affects young women as students.

### **Narrative inquiry research/narrative analysis**

In narrative research, a researcher's role is co-constructing the lived experiences of the narrator, to be shared in a way that facilitates the use of voice and agency through sharing their personal history, to help them make sense of their past experiences (Bruner, 1991; Garvis, 2015). Bamberg (2012) comments that personal stories are excellent ways of constructing personal identity. In this way "individuals learn to position their own values and actions in relationship to established and shared categories and, in doing so, engage in their own formation process as a person" (p. 5). Navigating self-identity through personal stories positions the narrator in relation to others in their cultural or communal group. Identifying their behaviour and actions in terms of being the same or significantly different than others, highlights their sense of self and also about their sense of 'otherness' in their world.

Giving voice to their personal history enables the person telling their story to navigate their identity with agency. The narrator has control of the telling of their story, and therefore the choices they make and the outcome that comes from their action. Bamberg (2012) depicts the narrative choices as agentic in so much as the narrator chooses whether to have 'high-agency' and be the "heroic self" (p. 8), controlling the view the audience has of the narrator to be strong and in control of their actions. Alternatively, the narrator may choose to play the role of the victim and position themselves as having less power, control and blame for the outcome. The depiction of the self at the centre of the story is telling, and indicates how the narrator has navigated their sense of self and their agency during the narrated experience.

In terms of this research, using narrative to understand the formation of leader identity more fully, I endeavoured to reveal layers of meaning that the narrator attached to their stories. I hoped to identify the cultural implications behind the stories; how they were structured, and discover any underlying meaning and the impact of social expectations on the narrator's storytelling (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008). In this research, four women were selected to narrate their experiences during their secondary schooling, their challenges, influencers, choices, and how they navigated their understanding of the implicit messages within their choices. While there is no one method of narrative analysis in the sense of having prescribed steps and ways of analysing the data, I used other ways of knowing and

interpreting the personal narratives through studying the data and 'crafting' the data into stand-alone cases (Lewis & Adeney, 2014).

### **Considerations in narrative inquiry research**

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) succinctly describe the fluidity and ongoing reflexivity of narrative research as 'wakefulness'. That is, continuing to reflect and evolve questions and responses to the inquiry requires vigilance to the philosophical positioning we maintain, our authenticity, and the ability to read-between-the-lines in the storytelling. We should be asking: How can I tell this story to ensure that it is told effectively and transparently?

Another consideration is that the 'truth' we are reporting is not our truth to tell, but are the 'truths' shared through the participants' personal narratives (Lewis & Adeney, 2014). The researcher is the co-constructor of the knowledge that results from the lived experiences of the participants. However, narrative researchers are challenged with maintaining an authentic and reliable form of the narrative they are sharing (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As the researcher, I am compelled to ensure the textual form of the narrative has plausibility, is logically constructed and with disciplined analysis of the legitimacy of the narratives.

### **Positioning**

A researcher comes to their research subject already holding particular views and positions that can influence how they make sense of any acquired data and information (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). To uphold the integrity of the research, it is important to be as transparent about the lenses through which they view our research. It is essential then at this point to acknowledge my feminist position. In committing to this research topic, I will ensure that my positioning is acknowledged in keeping with the expected validity and rigour of this research. Further, the 'selves' I bring to the work will be acknowledged, as are the 'selves' the participants bring to the research. That is, my 'selves' include one as a heterosexual Pakeha woman, a feminist, as a former student of a New Zealand secondary school, a mother, a leader, and an educator. Also my past experiences that influence my positioning must be acknowledged: my personal experiences at school both negative and positive, my personal experiences as a mother of two young women, and my own upbringing and cultural heritage as Pakeha with English and Nordic blood. These different identities come together to influence how I view the world and need to be acknowledged as I draw out the different positions from each of the participants through this research.

## **Research methods and design**

This part of the chapter focuses in on the 'how' of the research; that is, how the participants were recruited, how the research was designed, and the procedures and methods of collecting data. The design of the research was based on the need to gain deep, rich data from the participants that would answer the question raised by the research: How is secondary school experiences implicated in the formation of leader identity in young women leaders? It was crucial that the research had rigour and validity in the strategies used and that the research conducted would comply with Auckland University of Technology's policies and guidelines for ethical treatment of participants and validity in the outcome of the research.

## **Ethical considerations**

I am familiar with the social context of the participants through being a woman and a leader and having worked with groups of leaders in a professional practice. In my career as a leadership development consultant, the leaders I have been privileged to worked with have a rich demographic and ethnic diversity. For that reason, I feel I have some insight into the contexts and issues that face women in many different environments and felt comfortable discussing their personal stories.

I gained consent from each participant in a short face-to-face meeting to ensure they had all the information as to their right to informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw their participation and their data within an agreed time frame. The rights of the participants to have their names changed and other details obscured, ensured that each of them could feel their privacy would be respected. The meeting date, time and venue for the first contact was set up through email. Three out of four women had their first meeting at their place of business, the fourth at a nearby café. During the first meeting, the participants either signed the consent form or did so at another time prior to their first interview taking place. At this stage the rights of the participants were clarified so they did not feel pressured to attend the interviews and were fully informed of their rights.

Data were handled sensitively throughout the entire process through various methods. Firstly, pseudonyms were mutually chosen by the participants and myself to ensure their ongoing confidentiality. Secondly, the transcribing was completed by me on my personal computer, keeping transcripts password protected on my computer and marked with their pseudonyms. Further discussion of the handling and storing of data is discussed in the Data Storage section.

Hard copies of the data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet with consent forms held in separate locations, and all electronic files will be kept on password-protected computer. The hard copy of all data will be kept for six years by the School of Education at AUT University after which time it will be destroyed. All paper copies of the transcripts will be shredded and any digital documentation will be permanently deleted according to the terms of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Ethical approval of the study was granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC), on the 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2016.

### **Te Tiriti O Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi)**

The ethical considerations for this research were compliant with both my professional and ethical standards of care of an individual. Also, the ethical considerations of Te Tiriti O Waitangi, as well as Auckland University of Technology's compliance codes of practice were adhered to. I consulted with an AUT staff member from the Maori community who validated the approach I was taking and the considerations I had made to ensure all protocols, where possible, would be followed. In accordance with the three key principles of partnership, participation, and protection, it was critical to ensure each participant was honoured through engaging in an honest, transparent manner, ensuring there was clarity as to why the research was being conducted, with whom, and to what outcome. I agreed to openly discuss the need to tell their story in a way that did not demean, nor diminish their experiences, nor would the story be shaped to fit Pakeha perspectives. As a Pakeha New Zealander, if any participant identified as being from a culture that differed from mine it was important that I explicitly acknowledged their culture and beliefs, and how it informed their perspectives. While conducting the interviews, I also listened for any verbal cues that indicated the participant was uncomfortable with the question, or that they did not wish to answer for any reason.

### **Participant recruitment method**

The recruitment method used was a purposive sampling of participants selected through my professional contacts, who include a range of young and senior leaders. Purposive sampling gives the researcher an opportunity to gain insight from one particular sample of the population through specific selection criteria rather than a generalised study of opinion across a larger sample. In this study, this method of participant selection enabled me to hone in on the specific demographics that were pertinent to the study. That is, I was looking for women between the ages of 25 years and 35 years, who were leaders in their organisations, and had leadership positions at school (formal or informal). Because I was

selecting a small sample of four women, it was imperative to locate participants that fitted the criteria specifically, chosen for their experience of leadership both in a school environment, and in an organisation. Their age was critical also because they needed to have attended a New Zealand secondary school (to ensure all participants had similar experiences) in the recent past to ensure they could easily connect with their specific memories of school, while having experience in leading others after leaving school. In this way, they could provide insight into how their experiences at secondary school contributed to their current leadership practice.

This involved emailing professional organisations that were known to have leaders that fitted the specific criteria with a flyer outlining the study (Appendix D) and requesting their participation in the study. These organisations then sent the flyer to any potential participants who fitted the demographic required for the study. Individuals from my network then contacted me with any potential participants whom they had identified and approached, and who were willing to have me contact them personally via email.

After I had established they fitted the participant criteria, I then emailed copies of the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) to the potential participants to provide them with an overview of the nature of the study. After they gave consent to use them for the study, a time was set for the first meeting during which the details of the study were discussed, as were setting up a time, place and date for the first interview. During the first meeting I explicitly explained the rights of a participant, and ensured they understood their right to withdraw, and their right to check and agree to the transcriptions before they were published. At the end of this meeting I answered any questions they had, gave them their journal and pen and explained the part journaling played in the study (the use of a journal will be discussed in another section within this chapter).

The process of recruitment worked well for this study due in some way to the need for so few participants. It had been decided that four participants, maximum, would be adequate to gain in-depth, stand-alone narratives that could then be analysed using the richness of the information gathered from the two interviews. All four participants who were contacted agreed to be part of the study, which I considered was because of the purposive sampling method of recruitment that enabled me to contact specific organisations to locate the appropriate person and identify those who would like to be part of the study. If there had been more potential participants than were required, it was my intention to choose the first four women who were the closest fit to the required criteria (age, position, leadership experience, New Zealand educated).

## **Participant criteria**

The criteria for the participants were women between the ages of 25 and 35 years who were leaders in their field of expertise, or in their organisation, and who, preferably, had been student leaders at a New Zealand secondary school. I preferred a mix of participants from different sectors (i.e. private sector, public sector, not-for-profit sector) to ensure a diversity of perspectives was captured. There were no specific ethnic considerations or requirements, except that they had attended a New Zealand secondary school for their entire high school career. In this way, the participants were more likely to have had the same base level educational experiences, in terms of the standard of education the Ministry of Education offers in New Zealand secondary schools. This was also the purpose of choosing an age range of between 25 and 35 years; that is, to increase the likelihood that the participants would have had the same basic experiences and levels of teaching and learning at their secondary schools. Also, the recall of specific experiences would likely be more front-of-mind in the young women without the loss of details that comes with having too many years separating them from the event. Three of the participants were 30 years old and one had just turned 31, which was useful as their experiences of high school were all from the same time period. Further, each of the participants came from large, urban, co-educational schools in Auckland, New Zealand.

People who identified as women were exclusively chosen because it was my intent to specifically identify how young women's leader identity may be formed. Owing to New Zealand and global statistics on the dearth of women who hold senior leadership positions in companies in New Zealand and overseas, it became important to me to identify the reasons for this practice. After looking at current and past research on the topic, I ascertained that, from an early age, young women can be labelled bossy or nagging if they show some leadership behaviours (Archard et al., 2014; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Garvis & Pendergast, 2015). In New Zealand, children spend a large portion of their childhood in the education system and it would follow that those educational environments contribute to how a child perceive their abilities and skills. Identifying how the secondary schools attended by the participants contributed to their identity as a leader may inform how building self-worth and self-belief in young women would benefit their perception of their leadership capabilities later in their careers. It would also seem that identifying how leader identity is formed in young women may identify any issues or negative self-belief early in their lives.

## **Data collection**

The data for this study were collected via interviews and journals given to the participants prior to their first interview. It was vital, in order to fully understand the points of view of the

participants and their lived experiences, that the data collection method honoured the trust they were putting in me to tell their stories in a full and worthy manner. Face to face interviewing was considered the best option with two separate interview sessions which I judged to be the best way to fully engage with the participants and gain deeper insight than may be possible with a single interview. Upon arrival at the venue for the interviews, the participants were made comfortable, offered bottled water and given time to become settled before the interview began. I discussed what was going to happen and informed them of the I would be capturing the interviews on a digital voice recorder but that the recordings would be in the sole possession of the interviewer.

## **Interviewing**

### Journaling

Journals were given to each of the four participants at the first meeting in order to provoke reflective thought. The practice of self-reflection provides an opportunity to critically engage with an event or experience and the meaning that the narrator created from that experience. It can generate new thinking or it can challenge the narrator to step outside the experience and see it from a critical perspective. The use of journals for this purpose is to focus the narrator on “developing a self-narrative for deeper exploration of emerging issues” (Bold, 2012, p. 83). It evokes a deeper connection to the narrative and sets up the expectation of a richness of detail within each of the personal narratives. I used the journals as a tool for self-reflection and exploration of ideas for the participants, rather than as a tool that would later be evaluated and used as data. The reflections held in the journals contributed to the data in other ways; that is, to support the narrative process rather than recording data directly. In that way, I felt the participants may more deeply engage with the questions and not feel compelled to edit their thoughts in any way. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) concur, stating that journals, like any field texts, have a “sense of audience” (p. 102) that tempt the narrator to alter the intent of the journal if the narrator suspects the audience may misconstrue their intentions. The same reflective journaling was required prior to the second interview, when I gave the participants a second set of open-ended questions on which to reflect. These open-ended questions then set the scene for the interviews and were a guide for the participants, who could elaborate on each answer and I could probe for further information during the interview process.

### Semi structured interviews

For this qualitative study, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the best way for data to be collected. As O'Toole and Beckett (2013) discuss, semi-structured interviews “give the opportunity for the unexpected insight to be collected, and for the

interviewer to seek clarification, invite expansion, or explore a response further” (p. 133). Although the limitations of semi structured interviews are acknowledged (Barbour & Schostak, 2011b), the selection is closely aligned with the narrative approach.

The questions (Appendix C) were predetermined and selected to provide a guided approach to eliciting the experiences that would be relevant for the research. However, I wanted a flow to emerge from participants’ storytelling, so prompting and clarifying questions were asked throughout the interview to this end. Semi-structured rather than unstructured interviews allowed some direction to be followed while allowing narrative flow.

It was decided that the first interview would take approximately one hour, to take into consideration the interviewees and their needs outside the interview process. Limiting the questions enabled this time frame to be reached, while permitting an appropriate depth of insight to be reached. I chose to give the participants an initial set of three questions at their first meeting. These questions allowed the participants to consider their response over a one or two-week period prior to the first interview. The first interviews took approximately sixty minutes to complete with a digital voice recorder used to capture all of the discussion during the interviews. I also took notes of any questions or any information that needed to have further inquiry. Each interview took place in a location agreed by myself and the participant. The interviews were to be held at AUT University to ensure a quiet, confidential space was available. However, after discussing this idea with the participants, one participant agreed to come to the AUT City Campus for both of the interviews. One of the participants agreed to attend the interview at the AUT North Campus but changed the location for the second interview to their office boardroom. The last two participants had both of their interviews at their place of business.

It was important to gain the trust of the participants to enable them to have a deep, insightful exchange with me in my role as interviewer. Barbour and Schostak (2011a) posit that the interviewer needs to need to “adopt the pose of the listener” (p. 63) and maintain self-reflexivity to ensure the interviewee felt free to let their stories emerge, not suffocated by the anxiety of meeting the demands of the interviewer. The ‘performance’ of the interviewee requires the interviewer to guard against any overt criticisms or social influences through self-reflexivity and “grounded in the experiences of the interviewee rather than grounded in the demands of the research” (Barbour & Schostak, 2011a, p. 63).

### **Recording of data**

A digital voice recorder was used to record all of the interviews to capture accurate records of the conversations and interviewee answers. This method also records the hesitations and

noises associated with deeper thought or developing a thread of conscious thought. Because the questions were open-ended to allow development of thought and perspective, all of the participants gave their answers only after much thought and consideration which is captured through the use of the recording device. The data was then transcribed by me as researcher, including the hesitations, and the voice recorder files erased. I assigned pseudonyms to the participants after discussing possible names with them to ensure confidentiality of the participants. After the transcripts had been completed, I sent the full, unedited, written version of the interview to the participants, via email, for their comments. I felt compelled to do this to ensure the full story has been captured and no misinterpretation of the interviewees personal stories had been made. Upon receiving the transcripts back from the participants, I began the analysis process.

### Transcription

The transcription was typed into a Word document by me personally using an online transcribing tool. The transcribing was done verbatim including all noises and hesitations represented by either dotted lines (hesitations) or the word 'pause' for longer hesitations where the participant was considering how to answer before answering. Transcribing all the interview verbatim was important to the rigor and the integrity of the research. The methodology of narrative inquiry asks us to understand more than just the words on the page, but also, reading between the lines of the transcript to 'hear' any hesitancy in what they are saying. This could indicate that the answer was being weighed against different choices, indicated by a change of answer in the middle of a sentence. This provided me with insight into the participant's care to answer honestly versus answer 'correctly'.

I contacted each of the participants via email with the transcripts attached and only rudimentary spelling mistakes or typing errors edited and asked them to look over their transcripts, offering alternatives or clarification of answers where they felt I had not correctly or fully captured their intent. The participants were then asked to send back the transcript with their consent to complete the research using that version of the transcript.

### **Data analysis**

The method of analysing data in this research posed a dilemma. Initially it was difficult to represent the participants without relegating them to the role of 'other' in their own stories. It was also important to keep the data intact while seeking to understand how their stories connected them, disconnected them and shaped their identities (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Lewis and Adeney (2014) articulates the considerations that shapes or colours a narrative researcher's analysis thus:

“Narrative inquirers are interested in inclusion in research to enable authentic stories and observations, often those of marginalised populations, to be revealed by participants themselves – the telling of their own stories.” (p. 165)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) consider narrative inquiry to be a way of understanding experience. An inquirer ‘enters’ the participant’s life, with their stories having already been told and retold, influenced by the environment in which they live, or their social world (p. 20). Considering their life experiences as a narrative inquiry required me to focus on how to form their words into an accurate interpretation of their experiences.

Working within the boundaries of the personal narrative sits with the feminist ideals and fits within the social constructionist perspective on truth, power and knowledge. That is, the assumptions about acquisition of knowledge are drawn from not just our own individual concepts, but our sociocultural constituted experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The stories will come to life with the constant reading of the data and returning to it to locate commonalities, connections and patterns that are within the individual’s story and across all the stories. It required me to observe the larger picture they had narrated and also step inside the stories and explore what may be hidden there. Murray-Orr and Olsen (2007) talk of ‘self-discovery’ as a part of the narrative inquirer’s journey for the researcher that is open to it. As the researcher, I was eager to analyse and present the data from the personal narratives in the best way to honour the depth and breadth of their experiences. Different methods and approaches to the data were considered during this study, but I chose case-centred, narrative analysis as a way of keeping the core of the stories intact. I was eager to present the data with a view not to process the information offered, but to co-construct meaning with the participants and present their personal stories in relation to how their identities have been formed and meaning has been made from this process.

The analysis began with note-taking of the core narratives within the answers to the semi-structured questions. The narratives were colour coded into groups that were outstanding and seemed to contribute to their world-view. Using a ‘case-centred’ approach allowed for the four stories to be discussed in terms of how different or similar they were from each other and the key issues and the underlying philosophies that emerged. Chadderton and Torrance (2011) state that in the case-centred approach, the premise is to “privilege in-depth inquiry over coverage” (p. 54). That is, to provide deep, insightful inquiry rather than a broad recognition of the facts. This method does not seek to generalise over a population, but seeks instead to identify issues and points-of-view that sit with each individual participant.

Key questions were used to start my thinking about how to analyse the stories, based on Narrative Analysis questions generated by Braun and Clarke (2013).

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the core narratives within the story and what do they tell us?
2. How is the narrative structured?
3. In what ways does this narrative strengthen or weaken the participants' view of themselves within the story?
4. How are the lives of those contained within the narrative explained/defined/overlooked?
5. In what ways do these narratives enable and/or constrain lives?
6. Who is and isn't part of the narrator's story? Who is outside of the story?
7. What is the response of the listener to the narrative? What is important to consider?

The questions drew out how the individual perceived their identity formation in relation to their place in society and the environment in which they live. The questions posed (Appendix C) related specifically to their experiences in a secondary school in New Zealand. Each participant was asked the same questions in the interviews. This was to gain a balanced, overarching set of themes that could then be explored individually. I separated the questions into two parts with part one discussing their secondary school experiences of leadership; and the second part discussing their career journey after completing secondary school.

Three initial questions were given to the participants at the first set up meeting to prompt the participants to start journaling and reflecting on their stories, and asked:

1. When you think about secondary school, what memories emerge? Regrets? Highlights?
2. How was leadership modelled at secondary school? Who did it best and why? Did women model leadership differently than men?
3. What leadership roles did you participate in? Did you volunteer, or were you chosen?

These questions were handed to the participants to give them a sense of what would be discussed in the interviews. Further, the journals would be a place where thoughts and memories would be captured in order to gain deeper knowledge of their experiences through this reflective practice.

## **Data storage**

Each interview's verbal recording was transferred from the digital voice recorder to a password-protected file on my computer, after the completion of the interviews, but before the transcription. The participants were assigned mutually agreed pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the participants and the confidentiality of the information they provided. As the researcher, I was anxious to complete this procedure in a way befitting the level of trust I had built up with the participants. Their stories mattered to me and I felt that I needed to hold their stories in a place where they would be safe and secure. I was extremely careful to ensure no one, other than myself, had access to the information. This included choosing to transcribe the information myself with the use of headphones, in a completely private setting and on a computer that was for my sole use.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Research Findings

“You have got to fight for your place...it’s not actually about doing a good job, it is about, you know, how loud you are...” (Sharlene, 30)

### Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to critically examine adult female leaders’ perceptions of the influence of their secondary school leadership experiences on the construction of their leader identity. This research focus was chosen in the hope of contributing to existing knowledge in regard to the ways in which young women use these formative experiences to develop their identity. According to M. Hoyt and Kennedy (2008, p. 205) “it is critical that we understand where young women’s beliefs about ... leadership originate, how they are shaped and reinforced, and how they can be manifest in effective and fulfilling leadership” (p. 205).

This chapter is separated into individual narratives, based on the semi-structured interview questions and drawn from each participant’s point of view and personal experiences. The first section introduces the participants and outlines the use of narrative as a means to understand experiences, as well as outlining the backgrounds of each of the women. The four women – Sharlene, Sophie, Talia and Paige – narrate their personal experiences at secondary school with excerpts taken directly from the interview transcript. At the end of each of the young women’s narratives, I have summarised their experiences into an overview of what I considered the salient points of their narratives.

### The narratives and the narrators

While my choice of analytic tools does not necessarily sit squarely in a narrative analytic practice, it did influence how I developed the process of analysing and interpreting the data through informing the type of questions I asked and the way I asked those questions, as well as providing a tool to capture the stories in a meaningful way.

The young women that chose to participate were: Sharlene (30), Sophie (30), Talia (30), and Paige (31). These are not their real names, as these pseudonyms provide anonymity to respect the level of intimacy their stories reached while allowing for consistency of identifying each narrator in this thesis. The following accounts are their stories, compiled into narratives that work as a way to capture the discourse that emerged from sharing their lived

experiences as students. All four women had attended large, co-educational Auckland secondary schools during their teenage years and three of them were Prefects at their respective schools. Since finishing secondary school they have taken quite different career pathways. Their personal narratives focus on their last year of secondary school and the path to their current role.

During the course of the interviews each of the participants were asked to comment on various experiences while attending secondary school, including their experiences as student leaders (except for Paige who elucidated her experience of missing out on a student leadership role); teachers that influenced them and how a negative and a positive interaction with a teacher empowered or disempowered them; and, finally, how they were influenced in their career choices through their social interaction with the school, their peers, and their families. We also discussed their thoughts on whether gender stereotypes were reinforced in schools, either explicitly or implicitly, and how leadership was modelled and taught at their school.

These women are Pakeha with the exception of Talia who is Samoan, and all four have lived in New Zealand their whole lives. It was a privilege to have them open up to me about their fears and their realities of being an adolescent navigating their way through their early adulthood to the beginning of their thirties. The stories presented here give a condensed version of their life at secondary school highlighting their leadership journey there and thereafter to the present day, with further reflections presented throughout the rest of this section. The narratives traverse the following content:

- The influence of teachers, peers and their family on their career choices;
- The guidance they received from their school on the subject choices and the first career options they chose to follow;
- Their reflections on what they did not receive in terms of mentoring and guidance during their final year at secondary school and how this could change; and
- The role, if any, that gender played in the advice received and the experiences they had during school and in their careers.

### **Sharlene's story**

Sharlene went to a large, co-educational secondary school on the North Shore of Auckland which she enjoyed, having both men and women in her social circle. Sharlene comes from a close-knit family, has a strong female role model in her mother, and is, by her own admission, privileged: *"I'm pretty sure I had a good life as a kid ... I went to a really good school ... I was pretty privileged..."*

Sharlene was a good student - driven, outgoing and well-liked - with a large friendship group, whom she recalls were equally as driven to succeed. During her final year at secondary school she was chosen to be a Prefect as well as participating in sport, especially netball, and was captain of the top netball team. Being a Prefect was a busy role with multiple events to organise and run during the year, but Sharlene enjoyed the autonomy of the role which, she says, meant she received little input from the teachers, unless requested. However, she found it difficult to maintain her studies with the responsibilities of being a Prefect. She loved geography, having had a teacher that inspired her through her youthful enthusiasm, passion, and free thinking, and who encouraged Sharlene to see the world slightly differently. This teacher inspired Sharlene to build a deep interest in the environment. When it came to completing her exams she received top marks and a scholarship to university. Sharlene recalls another school leader who was less than inspirational but, upon reflection, impacted Sharlene's life in a positive way, by giving Sharlene the drive to prove this teacher wrong. The story centres around a major injury that meant Sharlene could not play netball while it was healing. The school leader in question, who was a netball coach, was reticent about Sharlene's abilities and challenged her about being in the top team, especially when Sharlene broke her ankle. Sharlene reflects thus:

...she said, you can never come back and be in the top team again, and I was like, yeah I will, anyway I didn't talk to her for two years...then I was the captain of the top team and had to go to the office to get the top sportswoman of the year award, and she told me through gritted teeth, and I thought, how do you still not believe in me after all those years...and I hated her, but she gave me a little bit of grit I guess, to prove her wrong. (Sharlene)

In her final year, Sharlene admitted she spent too much time involving herself in the activities of a Prefect and too little time on her school work. She recalls having her geography teacher confront her on this after she managed to complete her mid-year exams with marks barely above 50%. He told her that even though she was "*brilliant at geography*", she only gained 'average' marks and was likely to fail the end of year exams if she didn't start rebalancing her school life and focusing more on her studies. Sharlene didn't like being 'average' and acknowledged that it hurt her pride. This was a pivotal moment in her year because she worked to rebalance her school commitments and her school work. She then succeeded in passing her 7<sup>th</sup> form (Year 13) exams with top marks and was rewarded with her teacher phoning her at home to tell her how proud he was of her achievement. Sharlene felt that her secondary school supported her in all areas of her school life. She did not ever feel that she was in any way disadvantaged by being a woman; instead she was able to speak up and be

listened to, and to make small changes in the school (for example, successfully starting a women's rugby team).

After school Sharlene went on to university to study geography, and eventually travelled and worked overseas for a number of years. Sharlene is currently working for an engineering organisation in the area of environmental consultancy. She felt her choice to work in this area was largely to do with her achievements in geography, supported by outstanding teachers who mentored her. However, Sharlene reflected on her time at school and how it influenced her choices of career. She acknowledged that with more guidance in her final year she may have chosen a different path, explaining: *"I reflect and I think, yeah I might have thought outside the box a bit more and tried something..."* She qualified the comments by stating that while she enjoys her career choice, it confines her to a desk, which, in her words *"...is not sustainable for me..."*

Sharlene is a leader in her organisation, in an industry that historically has not promoted women in senior leadership positions. She has had to challenge some discriminatory behaviour during her time with the organisation. She feels that she has had to bear the 'rebellious' label as she and other senior leaders challenged the current model of leadership which does not have any women in the executive team. She reflected on a time when she and some other senior women leaders within her organisation challenged a visual representation of an idea that appeared highly sexist. It was during a team meeting when a Powerpoint presentation had visual aids that were offensive to Sharlene and her female co-workers. They were shocked that none of the men were concerned with what the visual aid represented to women. Sharlene explains *"...every single woman in the room looked at each other and was like what the fuck..."* A formal apology followed, but what disturbed Sharlene was that none of the men spoke up:

...no men spoke up because they didn't see it as a problem. Even if they recognise it as a problem, it was like oh ha ha, yeah, they didn't even think that was totally inappropriate...

Reflecting further on how she has developed her leader identity, Sharlene indicated that while she felt she was supported at school as a leader, she was not prepared for how she would be treated as a woman outside school, in her career. She would have liked more guidance in her last year to help her make more informed choices and to be prepared for some of the challenges she faced. Sharlene suggested spending more time on developing core competencies around understanding self and leadership that would translate later to the 'real world' could be beneficial. In her own words:

If you wanted to know what you needed to do engineering, they [career counsellors] could answer that question, but what about holistic conversations about what are your passions? – and where do you see yourself? what are some really interesting, actually conceptual, holistic discussions around that person and where they might see themselves, there is nothing like that.

Sharlene has developed a clear understanding of her approach to leadership which, she attests was developed through the influence of her parents. However, while at school, *“some kids get lost in the system because they are like, I can’t do anything, I’m stupid or whatever, and, what is a leader? I don’t think I necessarily understood the definition of leadership when I was at school.”* Sharlene’s concerns were of how students are not given opportunities to develop leader identity because there is no leadership that guides a student to explore that side of themselves. She argued for spending more time at school engaging a student’s core identity to encourage exploration of those questions about what they are capable of, and how do they get there.

### **Summary**

Sharlene portrayed herself as a capable, determined leader with a solid understanding of herself as a young person working in a gendered environment. Sharlene had to prioritise her time between her academic goals, her sporting goals and her social group. Like the other narrators, Sharlene felt she did not receive the level of guidance she needed to make a fully informed choice about her future options. She was disappointed at not knowing ways in which she could embrace other parts of herself and use this knowledge to make plans for the future. She applauded her upbringing and her school for giving her a strong sense of personal power without any imbalance of gender expectations influencing her choices. She seemed to embrace the opportunities to succeed and ensured that she used both the positive and the negative role modelling she witnessed to propel herself forward in her school career. Sharlene highlighted experiences that appeared highly gendered and sexist in her workplace which made her uneasy. She discussed the ways in which she and other young women in her team spoke up and challenged the lack of understanding of gender issues regarding sexist stereotyping. Through confronting these sexist positions, the young women in Sharlene’s team challenged the status quo in order to create a culture that did not accept negative gender stereotyping.

### **Sophie’s story**

Sophie attended a large, co-educational secondary school on North Shore of Auckland. She reflects positively on her time there, with a large close-knit group of friends and a ‘never-

ending' choice of sports activities in which to participate. Sophie considered herself quite social, participating in a wide range of activities including playing in the orchestra, hockey, and being a student representative for a youth social responsibility organisation. In her last year at school she was made a Prefect, a busy role with multiple events throughout the year to organise. Because of her busy schedule and her academic goals in her last year of school, she stepped back from both music and hockey, coaching hockey instead to continue her involvement in the sport. She was part of a large Prefect group who worked together to fulfil their delegated roles and representative positions. The teachers handed over most of the decision making and responsibility associated with these positions to the students, stepping in when they required support but otherwise leaving it up to the students to complete their roles with autonomy.

Sophie had a close-knit social circle, some of whom have remained friends. She comments on the social cliques that came with being part of such a large school:

...you tend to stick [together] once you found your friends...it was quite cliquey and... when you meet people who go to the school, it still is very cliquey...and I think maybe it was like that because if you didn't [join a clique], you got lost in the masses...you have to fit in somewhere...you had to pick where... and stay there.

Sophie's main passion at school was art, spending significant amounts of time in the art department. She commented that: *"we had a dedicated painting room for 7<sup>th</sup> formers so that sort of [be]came our little studio and I remembered that being my place... of happiness"* However, for the last two years of school, she was directed into studying subjects that could get her into an architecture degree even though she was more interested in painting and drawing. She was encouraged to take up Calculus in her final year, a subject she didn't feel competent in, but one that was a requirement to gain entry to architecture school. She struggled with the subject until a representative from the architecture faculty at university came to the school to talk about architecture as a career path and denied the need for Calculus. Sophie was frustrated that she had spent time and effort on a subject she was not going to need. Sophie commented on the guidance she received at school:

...there was never a mention of being a graphic artist or being an illustrator, they [school] had all the arts subjects and maybe... the career counsellors didn't quite know where that could take you...I mean you are 17 and 18 so you're not sure what you want to do...so you take advice from anyone around you.

Sophie left school and completed an architecture degree. She felt it was the 'expected' option after having been encouraged by the school and her parents to follow this path. There

was no mentorship that provided insight to alternative career options when taking more than one or two arts subjects was discouraged.

If I had been encouraged to take more art subjects...I might have been more open to other career options...and then there was also a mix of career counsellors and parents insisting that you must pick a university course, so it was very much given that I would go to university, so that sort of determined that you kind of fit into one of the course brackets that were available, and everyone seemed to push them more, you know, you are either going to go to law school or medical school, or architecture school...

Sophie comes from a family where both her mother and father work as health professionals. She gave this as a potential reason for why she encountered resistance when wanting to take another path that didn't include university. She encountered further resistance when she wanted some time off from her architectural studies:

I felt by my second year of architecture school, I didn't think [it] was for me and I wanted to take a year off, but my Mum was really against that so it was sort of the whole "you must go to uni, you gotta do this" ...I had always done what I was told...

Sophie did not enjoy her time at architecture school, coming up against sexism and favouritism amongst the male tutors and the male students. She went on to work in an architectural organisation in Australia, which she also found to be both a sexist and racist working environment. However, because Sophie had been studying for five years to become an architect, she felt compelled to continue. During this time, she discussed with friends her need to leave architecture and explore her love of painting and drawing, an interest also met with derision and negativity. By the time Sophie left the field of architecture she had studied for five years and worked in the industry for three years and felt it was time to re-explore her love of art which lead her to enrolling in design school:

...it was a different environment to architecture school, so I think it was much more laid back and creative ... the tutors would identify strengths and then encourage you to research areas you were interested in ... they were designers ... not entirely academic, whereas architecture school were a lot of men, who never worked and were like "this is how it's done by the book" ... and I was like ... how do you know that?

Sophie came back to New Zealand and joined a marketing company that, again, she discovered to be a sexist, male dominated environment. She commented that you had to be "*one of the boys*" and had to "*laugh off*" the sexism to fit in. Sophie struggled with working

there because she felt she had no voice and had to work with clients that were assigned to her. Sophie left the marketing company and, through an invitation from friends, travelled to Italy where she spent the summer taking a week-long calligraphy course in Tuscany. This was a pivotal time for Sophie as she loved calligraphy and the time in Italy had begun to reframe her vision for her career and her future choices. On her return from Italy, Sophie started her own design company, designing for clients that supported her vision for her work. She regrets spending so much time listening to others without having guidance to locate what she truly wanted to become as an artist and as an adult.

## **Summary**

Sophie's reflection on the influence of school on her identity and her career path was highlighted by a lack of voice and agency in planning the next stages of her journey. While she felt that female students were supported as equally as the male students in her school, she was not prepared for the lack of gender equality once she entered the workforce. She commented that mentorship in the last two years of school and in the first years of work would have supported her to find her voice and find her purpose to combat feelings of not living up to expectations of others, and assist her to develop her own path.

Sophie's school life was full and busy with both academic expectations and creative choices, weighing on her throughout her time at secondary school. Her story highlighted the difficulties she experienced attempting to achieve her own and others' expectations of her future pathways after secondary school. She discussed the challenges she faced stepping into an environment where her values were being compromised before finding her place and developing her career as a designer. Sophie's story drew in the role her family, her friends and peers played in her development as well as the guidance she received throughout school to discover her career pathway. She overcame the lack of voice in the first part of her career journey to start her own business, enabling her to choose her clients and to work on her craft in her own studio.

## **Talia's story**

Talia attended a large multicultural co-educational secondary school in the western suburbs of Auckland. Talia's father was a Matai [Samoan leader] for their village in Samoa and continued as a leader in their community in New Zealand, until he passed away. Talia's mother worked alongside her father, contributing to their community as a mediator for couples that were having difficulties in their marriage. They were well known in their community to be a place of refuge for those who had recently arrived in New Zealand from

Samoa. Talia's parents were the first from their respective families to emigrate from Samoa to New Zealand. In Talia's words:

...the whole purpose for my family coming to New Zealand was so that we can be better educated and we have a better chance at gaining professional work ... to live a quality lifestyle, but also to contribute to our cultural obligations.

Talia felt challenged by the academic part of her school life, but excelled outside the classroom as a sportswoman and as a leader in the school. Talia's first experience of secondary school life was far different from her primary school years:

...I recall the first day of high school, and I didn't know anyone at the school ... it was out of my 'zone' and ... I was really, really scared about who I was going to connect with and if anyone would like me, etc ... I noticed immediately the ethnic segregation that occurred and that never happened at primary school and intermediate for me...

Talia recalls that Maori and Pacific students naturally gravitated to each other and gathered in pockets around the school. She comments further:

...I think naturally we, we as in Pacific and Maori, look for each other, and so I think socially it is just natural, just reinforces what our social lives are like...we kind of gravitate...but I didn't realise I was an 'Islander'...I saw myself as a Samoan but didn't realise I was an 'Islander'.

Having this label as an 'Islander' was not the only thing that challenged Talia's identity. During geography class Talia learned that the Samoan population in New Zealand made up only a tiny proportion of the New Zealand population. In her world, she reflects, there were mainly Samoan people in her community, and in her church, providing a view that her community was much larger in numbers than the 'minority' status the official population percentages conveyed.

...I was like, no, this is wrong because there is way more ... because my world was very small and everyone in my world were the same types of people, so I was really shocked...

Talia's start at secondary school was marred by the results of a test that relegated her to the classes for students with learning challenges that may not be able to keep up academically with the students in 'mainstream' classes. Talia's teacher quickly realised she should not have been put in that class and transitioned her back into the mainstream classes. However, having that starting point at secondary school shaped the way Talia saw herself as a learner.

Talia observed that Pacific students were encouraged to take subjects that were 'easier' to pass, but which inhibited their ability to have enough university approved subjects. This fed into Talia's issues of being identified solely by the perceived lack of learning capability bound in negative cultural stereotypes by school leaders, rather than being acknowledged for the capability and potential of both her individual and cultural identity. In the classroom, Talia hid any academic difficulties for fear of being publicly embarrassed or shamed in front of her classmates. Many of her friends were also challenged by the learning methods at their school but preferred to keep silent about their difficulties. Talia reflects:

We talked about everything else, but not how we struggled academically...most of us just struggled silently...we weren't bad or naughty...it was just like, we will just go to class, and sit in class, and wait until the bell goes...but for some of my peers, even turning up to class was a real struggle, because they couldn't engage with the learning, and it got to a point where it became too hard to continue...

Talia continued to struggle in class but flourish outside the classroom, making the vice-captaincy for the premier netball team, and into the school's Samoan performance group that performed at the annual Polynesian festival. In her final year, she was selected to be a Prefect, an honour which, in her words, "*balanced my self-esteem*". Talia's story painted a picture of her as a polite, considerate and trustworthy student, often chosen by her teachers to be given extra responsibilities within the school. However, her academic record did not reflect a student that was successful in her studies and she continued to be challenged by her classes throughout her time at school. It was something Talia carried with her, because she wanted to be successful to honour her family who had travelled to New Zealand from Samoa to have better future opportunities for themselves.

When it came to English class, Talia had no other Pacific friends with her and so she felt more inclined to engage in classroom discussions. This, along with having teachers that made her feel like she mattered and harnessed her learning potential, resulted in Talia achieving good results in English. Her reflection on the different teaching styles was that, while she felt more comfortable with female teachers, she could not distinguish between their quality of leadership apart from the female teachers appearing to practise higher levels of 'emotional intelligence' (EQ), than the male teachers. Her teachers were mainly female, and the only male teachers Talia engaged with at her school were in managerial roles. Talia was surrounded by strong women at home, in her community, and within her peer group. She did not feel that she was in any way inhibited by her gender, but admits that any inequalities or disparities were viewed by her through a cultural lens, shaped by her cultural identity rather than her gender.

As a Prefect, Talia was put into various committees and attended a leadership camp. During this camp, the Head Boy and Girl were selected and different group activities were held. Talia felt like an outsider during this time, believing she had been chosen to be a leader purely to tick the diversity box, trying to be heard amongst the voices of the other leaders. She comments:

I don't know if that is something that I internalised...that distorted my view of how people saw me...that Pacific people were only picked to diversify the group...people would talk over each other and it was really difficult to get your opinion heard...

Talia chose at that moment to silence herself rather than try to be heard above the other voices. She learned that to be a leader you had to be liked and that she would speak up only if she was asked her opinion. Talia's model for leadership was far removed from the one displayed at that leadership camp. Her model of leadership was built from her upbringing and cultural heritage, aligned with service to others, a title that you earn:

[A leader is] someone that aligns their values with their actions...with their lifestyle, and can model that the best way they can, leadership has predominately been shaped by my family...

Talia's family was intricately woven into her life, with her mother and father both modelling leadership through working hard and looking out for the interests of their community. Talia's father taught her to over-deliver, if possible, on any promise made and to value relationships. Relationships were of high value in her family and maintaining those relationships was integral to being a good leader:

"...what we call in Samoan 'Teu le va', that means, look after this space... between you and I...because it is a sacred space...it means tidy this space, keep it tidy, with all our different relationships and responsibilities...so people can see that you are from a good family."

Even though Talia admitted to carrying a lot of guilt and shame for not getting higher grades, she knew her family was not disappointed because of how she carried herself and how she worked hard to achieve good results. Worrying about disappointing her parents was a large burden to carry, and this, along with not feeling clever enough, meant that university seemed to be way out of reach to her. Many of her friends had already dropped out of school, and while Talia completed her final year at school, she left with no formal qualifications.

Talia spent a lot of time in church activities as a youth leader and mentor but felt she needed to get a job that fulfilled her family's wish for her to be 'professional'. The ideal role needed to fulfil her own and her family's aspirations to do something that was meaningful and purposeful that served others. Talia's faith, culture, and family ties were an interconnected source of inspiration and aspiration. She considered training to become a youth pastor, but felt the need for a better way to financially contribute to her family's cultural obligations. Talia worked in an office as an administrator before a short overseas trip with her sister as a transition to possible further study. When her father got cancer, she took time off work to care for him. She reflects on this time:

...you have got to question life ... you know ... our bodies are fragile and temporary ... I got to spend time with my Dad, but also, I got to reflect on what am I doing, because it was kind of a turning point ... what am I doing for my life, is this what my parents came here for?

Talia got a role as a youth mentor and met with students who told the same story as she had experienced; the same sort of learning difficulties and barriers, the fact that they struggled silently in class and found it too hard to catch up, and that some teachers just gave up on them and transitioned them out of high school with no qualifications. As she was hearing this, she was encouraged by her fiancée and brother to apply for a Bachelor of Human Services majoring in Youth Work. Talia had to get special admission, but got accepted, and as soon as she attended the first lecture *"the lightbulbs were going off"* and she felt vindicated being there. The degree was satisfying because it answered so many questions she had carried regarding Pacific students' underachievement. She got an A+ on her first assignment, after hoping for a C, and then *"...I had won ... I didn't have to wait for graduation"*. She lost her concerns about what her peers thought of her, asking questions in class and having them ask her for help. Talia went on to receive an award, achieving in the top four over all her classes. Showing her grades to her family made her immensely proud: *"I would show them and let them celebrate, it just reinforced that my success is my family's success."*

Talia currently works in a not-for-profit foundation that provides scholarships and mentors for students in low decile schools in New Zealand, which has exposed her to other ways of addressing underachievement as a social issue. She works with many different cultures supporting people to achieve their goals through teaching coping strategies, building mentor-mentee relationships and speaking to organisations about the foundation. As an adult she has found her voice, after realising that her quieter, more reflective style of leadership had

tremendous value and power. She knows that she doesn't need to be the loudest in the room to be heard.

### **Summary**

Tahlia's story focussed firmly on the intersectionality of religion, culture and family, exposing her struggles with a lack of voice and the internal battles created by external pressures at secondary school. The story of her battle for eventual success at university elucidated her need to be a successful student. Her beginnings at secondary school and the challenges she faced as a learner created a need for success as an adult learner to redress the lack of self-efficacy she had as an adolescent learner. She felt shame at not reaching the goals her family wished her to reach while at school, so that when she reached beyond those goals at university, she felt that success was as much her family's success as hers. Her story highlighted the need for the education system in New Zealand to perhaps reflect on how our secondary schools can better attend to and support the wider learning requirements of their community of learners.

### **Paige's story**

Paige attended a large co-educational secondary school in Auckland's Eastern suburbs. She was very social at school, enjoyed her friendships and attending special school events. Relationships were a priority to Paige who was concerned about fitting in and standing out. She reflects on this time, saying: *"I remember not feeling ... comfortable with myself, what I looked like, what I was wearing, all that kind of stuff, that now you don't really worry about at all..."*

She had a regular group of friends with whom she socialised that, by her admission, were neither the *"totally cool group"* nor the *"geeky group"*, but somewhere in the middle. Paige enjoyed being involved in school life, especially if her friends were also involved, with school camps and other outdoor activities being a highlight. Geography was a subject that she was enjoyed because she had a good teacher and friends in her class. Her geography teacher made a big impression on Paige because of the way she taught, making her lessons clear and accessible. Being 'seen' was an important part of school life to Paige, and if a teacher knew your name, it mattered. Paige also had teachers that were *"going through the motions"*, while others were highly valued for their genuine interest, an important commodity in such a large school.

One of Paige's major regrets at school was that she allowed peer pressure to take away the pleasure of playing cricket, which she excelled at, as did her father and her brother. Her

social group weren't involved in the sport and questioned her love of it. She gave up playing when she went to secondary school, commenting:

I was too busy and too interested in, like, having the right length skirt and the right boxers on...and so I didn't involve myself in things that perhaps I should have because I was too busy worrying...

Paige missed out on the role of House Captain in her senior year, at a time when many of her friends were either House Captains or in other leadership roles. Having such a strong attachment to her friends meant that not being chosen was initially difficult for Paige.

Attending high school, Paige felt like she was "*churning through a big system*" and was not seen as an individual which affected how she felt about herself. However, having good friends and an underlying confidence diminished that feeling of low self-worth. In fact, Paige met her husband while they were both students at secondary school. He had been in her friendship group for many years and she considered him a close friend. Still, she was unaware of the burgeoning feelings he had for her until they left school and after she had left a long term relationship. Four years ago, after knowing each other for 16 years, they married. She comments that "*...I didn't know that he had just been, like, waiting...for like 16 years or something, he's a patient man...*"

She somewhat regrets going directly from secondary school to university and then into a career, without having investigated other opportunities. Paige would have liked to have had more guidance at school to investigate her strengths and explore her options, but she felt instead that she had to choose from options limited by relying on her own investigation. When Paige left school she had no plans and struggled with what to choose, selecting occupational therapy through the advice of a friend. Paige changed her mind when she was pressed to commit to a programme of study, choosing instead to train as a primary school teacher.

I think I was enrolled in [university], and I thought, nope I don't want to do this anymore, got to do something, so I quickly chose teaching and I didn't even think about it that much, but perhaps that was because I didn't have guidance at college ... that is actually something that needs to be addressed...

She was unsure whether she was going to be successful after so little forethought, but discovered subsequently that she not only enjoys being a primary school teacher, but is also competent in this role. Paige is a teacher at an urban primary school in South Auckland where she has taught since she finished her training. The school boasts a multicultural

community of learners with a high percentage of students from Maori and Pacific Island communities. She enjoys being in the classroom, working with children and appreciates the challenges that working in that community brings.

She has a supportive principal who encourages Paige to take on leadership roles. She is also now a senior teacher with a team of teachers for whom she is responsible. After Paige reflected on what it means to be a leader, she came to the conclusion that leadership should promote a “*shared direction*” in order to “*bring people along with you*”, and requires the leader to model the appropriate behaviour through “*walking the talk*”. Paige has remained at the school because of the opportunities presented by her principal to grow and develop. She reflects on why she has stayed so long in her current school.

...well every year I have had something else that has challenged me and I think that is what I need because I thrive on challenge and, you know, when things are tough, I like that.

Paige has also been encouraged by her principal to step out of the classroom into more senior roles. She has taken on a facilitator’s role supporting teachers in other schools and works to support digital technologies across a number of schools in their ‘cluster’. This role has challenged her like no other role, she comments:

I have this ... role, going into other schools, with other people that I don’t know and working alongside leaders, freaks me out a little bit, and I am avoiding it like the plague...

Despite this innate fear of failure, and not being good enough, Paige has challenged herself to keep taking on more responsibility. She reflects:

I am confident in certain situations, and definitely within this school and within what I know ... but take me out of that and ... I guess I am getting better and if I force myself to do it...in the holidays, myself and one other education leader ran a workshop ... I didn’t want to do it, I really didn’t want to do it and we did it got really good feedback and [I thought], “this is ok, this isn’t so bad”, you know, it is just making yourself believe that actually you do have some skills.

Paige’s school does not have any male teachers on staff, which is not at all surprising to Paige, considering the possible issues and constant stigma for male teachers when working around young female students. She laments the fact that young male students don’t have male role models at that early stage in their identity formation.

...it is disappointing, because I think just how much a male teacher would ... as I said, my bunch of alpha male boys are ... you know, gagging for a good male role model ... it would be the business for them...

Paige has been fortunate to have role models to look to including her principal, and another more senior teacher. This support has caused her to reflect on how important role models are, especially as a teacher of young children, and she wants to be a role model for those young students she teaches. Paige believes that role modelling is the key to teaching young women that they can achieve in whatever area they choose, stating *“I thinking it could be just about having good models for leaders, women leaders and...demonstrating that it is actually achievable.”*

### **Summary**

The core of Paige's narrative focuses on her social world and how her friendship group influenced her self-perception. Temporally, we moved quickly from her experiences at school to her role as teacher with little deep reflection evident. However, while there is less detail in the story than perhaps was present with the other three stories, this could just be due to the busyness that comes with being a teacher and her comfort and competency in finding her voice through this career role. It could also be her natural preference to take action rather than spend too much time in contemplation.

Paige's narrative underlined the stressors that come with being an adolescent in that she was constantly second guessing her choices in case they contravened her friends' wishes. In this way it seems from Paige's story that she, like many other adolescents, was insecure about her appearance and conforming in her lifestyle choices; for example, giving up her sport due to the expectation of getting negative feedback from her peers protected her from further 'retaliation' from her peer group. She also directly mentioned her need for acceptance and not wanting to be different. During this process, Paige reflected on her choices in this way:

PAIGE: “I didn't involve myself in things that perhaps I should have because I was too busy worrying about...”

INT: “What people thought?”

PAIGE: “...yeah, which is part of that whole part of growing up I guess which seems ridiculous now but at the time having the right gear is much more important ... which is stupid...”

The importance of friendship groups and how they influence a student's choices was evident in Paige's narrative. Her friends dictated how she navigated her school life in some instances. Paige's reluctance to stand apart from her friends may have led to her perceived lack of leadership roles at school. However, Paige has been given opportunities at the school where she teaches to lead other teachers and fulfil other leadership roles. While the reason these opportunities have arisen was not discussed with her principal, she is perceived to hold leadership characteristics that enable her to fulfil her role. This perhaps is due to the perceived mentor-mentee relationship that appears to be present between Paige and her principal which was not present during Paige's secondary school career.

## **Narrative themes**

The following section highlights themes that emerged from the interviews with the participants that were common to the women's stories. These themes are:

- The influence of the school context on leader identity and future practice
- School guidance for future career prospects and choice
- The student leadership experience – developing student voice to lead change
- The role of leadership at school for promoting levels of self-efficacy and self-belief
- The role of interpersonal relationships in a school context
- The role of guidance and mentorship for adolescent
- The role of the education environment in setting up gendered expectations for women

In each of the sections, I have specifically discussed the reflections from each of the participants regarding the influence of the school context on their student leadership experiences.

### **The influence of the school context on leader identity and future practice**

Sharlene, Talia and Sophie held student leadership positions at secondary school and discussed how the learning they received from executing their student leadership roles influenced their future leadership experiences:

...probably gave me confidence in the sense that it gave me opportunities to lead in a way that was, I guess supportive, and kind of, protected in some sense. You know, you are not thrown in the deep end, you are supported in the process, whether that's a captain of a team supported by your coach, or leading some other team or organisation or whatever, it is done in a safe way. (Sharlene)

Sharlene went on to discuss how her position as student leader was in effect “*leadership in training*” and has led her to take a more confident stance on her ability as a leader in future role.

When you get out to the big world and you are shoved in the deep end and you maybe don't have the support, you're better prepared or better experienced to deal with it...

The women were asked to comment on how they perceived the ways in which educational environments influence women in their career pathways. Sharlene struggled initially with the question, confessing that she was not sure how to answer it. On further reflection she felt she had been positively influenced by her school to consider herself “equal” to her male peers. At her secondary school she felt she and her female peers were given the same opportunities as her male peers and she was set up to believe that anything was possible. However, she commented that in terms of how women are treated in the workplace, she was not prepared for the inequality she faced:

...I don't think we are equal in society, you just have to look at pay scales, the top women leading companies, or the lack thereof ... so this idea that we are equal, I don't agree with yet. I think we are slowly creeping there but there are still lots of restrictive things in place that limits us...

Paige came from a different perspective - being a teacher herself, she hoped that she would encourage young students to reach for any goals they set for themselves. In her school, she worked with only female teachers so didn't see gender inequality in her everyday situation. Paige reflected on how she had students show amazing leadership skills that she would like to see encouraged as they moved from primary to secondary schooling. She told a story of how she was choosing a student representative for her class and the role was won by a young woman who had given a brilliant speech which had won her over.

Sophie also recalled everyone having an equal role or equal opportunity; there was an “*equal-ness*” in whatever she chose to do at the school. Because it was such a large school, there were plenty of opportunities to take part in whatever sport you wanted and encouraged to start a team if there were enough students interested in participating. She didn't feel that male students were encouraged more or less to be leaders, or in their career opportunities. Instead she believed she was encouraged to do whatever she wanted in her career:

...secondary school ... influenced me to believe that girls are able to achieve anything that boys could because it was very 'equal opportunity' and the roles were equally divided...and through a school like that you probably don't notice the

difference between male and female so much as you do once you enter the workforce.

Sophie reflected on her experience as an architect and observed that as a profession it was profoundly sexist and male dominated. Like Sharlene, Sophie was not prepared for the scale of the dominance of the masculine perspective in society outside of the school environment. The sexism she witnessed in her first few years both at architecture school and later in the design field left Sophie feeling disillusioned with the whole profession.

Talia's experience of leadership had been shaped and nurtured by her mother and father, cultivating in Talia the belief that service is the foundation of leadership. Therefore, at school Talia found her role as student leader sat in conflict with that belief set. Being a student leader seemed to be less about leadership and more about process (e.g. checking for correct uniform) and other tasks that required students to comply. Since Talia had learned that being a leader is more about serving others and being a role model she struggled with these duties and organising events that had no perceived leadership value. Her experiences at leadership camp provided an epiphany of what leadership meant to her. She explains:

...you might get a title but you still have to do the hard yards ... and if that includes cleaning the toilet, then that's like, that's leadership, you have to earn it...

When I pressed her for what leadership meant to her she commented that it was "*someone that aligns their values with their actions with their lifestyle and can model that the best way they can ...*" (Talia). This reflection on what it is to be a leader emerged from Talia's beliefs and values and the strong influence of her father and mother, contrasted with her experiences of feeling like an interloper who was only valued for her cultural capital, not her personal value.

### **School guidance for future career prospects and choice**

The narratives suggest that all four participants clearly recognised how little career guidance they received at school and the effect that this lack of guidance had on their plans for the future. Being given different skills and opportunities to develop their sense of purpose, voice, and understanding of self would possibly have driven them to make different choices, or at least make informed choices. Also, some students needed permission to take their time to choose what came next for them.

Sophie described the career guidance given at schools as "*cookie cutter advice*". This is a commentary on the advice being the same for every student irrespective of their individual

traits and ambitions. Sophie mentioned that they didn't receive any guidance at their secondary school and this concerned her. Had it been available, she might even have changed how she approached her choices after school. Paige commented that while she was happy with her choice of being a teacher, the lack of guidance available contributed to her disappointment at not being given different life choices. For example, Paige, upon reflection, would have liked to have travelled first before going into study. She discusses the overseas travel her husband experienced working and living in England with small amounts of envy, commenting: "...*maybe I regret not doing something like that. I went straight from high school to training to a job.*" With further probing she commented:

I went into my first year of teaching thinking is this what I want to do? I love it now but it wasn't [what I wanted to do] at the time and I don't think I had that guidance at high school, which is a problem.

Sharlene lamented the fact that in her secondary school there was no career counselling to give her help with direction. She commented fervently about the need for better guidance when choosing what direction to go in:

...there was no one really there to give you any direction about where you could go or what you could achieve or what you could do or what was even out there.

She commented further:

You knew what subjects you liked but you didn't have anyone to help you make a plan and to look at you and say these are your skills and these are what you value and let's give you some ideas...I would have liked ...a more structured idea of what I could do...

Having a sense of what is possible, she concluded, is important:

...just to understand a bit more about what the world is, and when you are in high school you don't know what the world can offer you, you are so, so naïve ... starting with your passions and your values and then understanding what is out there beyond that and how that can link to a future pathway...

Like Sophie and Paige, Sharlene wished she had had aspirational goals to achieve, not necessarily relying fully on the subjects that she was good at, but more of a long term and medium term vision for her life. She reflected on the advice she would have wanted thus:

... [guidance would teach you to] take risks... that it is ok to do something different from what your peers are doing...and to tell a kid that in 7<sup>th</sup> form...you can spend a year overseas to try a uni or try another subject and it won't have a devastating

effect on your life...and the outcome might be incredible...I wish someone said that to me...the big picture...especially for women. I think definitely, especially for women.

Talia was convinced she would not be a contender for university. Her experiences at secondary school had taught her that lesson. She felt that while at school she was never able to fully test her abilities because the learning environment did not work for her learning needs. However, Talia stayed at school because of her relationships with her peers and a few teachers. She also enjoyed her extra-curricular activities, especially netball and the Samoan group. At the end of school, Talia left with no qualifications and she, like so many of her Pacific peers, carried the burden of not living up to the expectations of her family.

I carried that for a very long time. I felt I would never be clever enough for ... university was only for clever people, you know?

From the conversations with the four women, it was apparent that they felt they had not received guidance targeted at the opportunities after secondary school. On reflection, these women felt they had missed out on opportunities to explore their world more. Paige commented that she thought giving career guidance was a “*short straw*” drawn by some poor teacher without any expertise in how to develop cognisant, driven young people.

### **The student leadership experience – developing student voice to lead change**

Hearing the stories of the four participants revealed that their leadership experiences at school predominately revolved around roles and responsibilities that fell short of developing their capability for future leadership opportunities. Instead of instilling an understanding of how to lead effectively within their individual capabilities, the three participants chosen to be student leaders spoke of being on multiple committees, leading assemblies, organising events, and checking uniforms. Talia commented that being a student leader seemed to be “...*just a badge really*” and that “*you had to be liked*” to have others follow you.

Sophie and Sharlene were so busy and involved in their roles as Prefect that their grades were affected and they had to choose carefully how to proceed in order to keep their marks high enough to reach their post-secondary school goals. They did not recall any training for their leadership roles and both commented on the plethora of events that they were asked to manage. However, Sophie recalled that the teachers were on hand to assist should there be any difficulties.

...we had student advisors ... the teachers who were very much, very much there to help us through big decisions and oversee meetings and let us know if we are not

doing anything in an appropriate way ... they were always open to new ideas so they liked saying “you guys this is your role and we are here to support you.”

These opportunities show leadership being perceived as highly sought after, formalised positions. The young women all talked about the effect of being ‘chosen’ or, in Paige’s case, not chosen, by their peers and teachers to be in a formal position as leader. When Paige was not chosen to be a student leader, it shook her confidence. She indicated that the choice of house leader was a decision made by the school Deans who would make the choice to suit them. She comments “*well there was a rumour that went around that it was the pupils who chose but, but the Deans would kind of rig the results ... that’s probably why Charlotte got it and not me ...*”

Within her circle of friends, many were chosen to become either house captains or head girl and boy. The teachers tried to pacify her with the promise that she could still take part in events even though she wasn’t in a formalised position, but Paige could not be persuaded, commenting: “*If I don’t have the title I’m not [taking part] ...that’s how I felt*”. None of the young women mentioned feeling as if they had more power than they perceived to have before being appointed or having a privileged position over the other students. However, the positions were sought after and, if chosen, there was a sense of being popular and accepted through being selected by their peers.

In terms of leadership development, Talia commented in her narrative that she attended leadership camp, but indicated that it exacerbated her feelings of being an outsider. The experience seemed to maintain her unease with being considered a leader. Instead she felt as if she was making up a desired cultural balance in the group:

We went to camp, like a leadership camp...I felt like an outsider, like, I don’t know if that is something that I internalised, yeah, that distorted my view of how people saw me...that Pacific people were only picked to diversify the group like, those questions come up, you know? Yep it is so hard to internalise your success as being something you earned, but it is something that was maybe gifted to you in some way for some reason.

Talia’s perception of her experiences as being different was further heightened when she struggled to get her voice heard in the group, discovering, she said, that being the loudest person in the room was conducive to success as a leader. Those reflections, still vividly remembered 12 years or more after secondary school highlighted the deep effect of feeling her ‘other-ness’:

...it was really difficult to get your opinion heard or like given the opportunity to speak and so I remember vividly at camp ... I just decided I'm not going to force my opinion ... I'm going to keep it to myself until someone asks.

Leadership development is about finding your own way of leading, and challenging any negative beliefs in order come to leadership in an open, authentic way. Owen (2007) states that "authenticity lies at the heart of leadership, determining and defining one's own guiding beliefs lies at the heart of becoming a good leader" (p. 93). In the context of the interviews there appeared to be little to indicate the schools were developing knowledge or self-awareness. Rather, the focus was on completing tasks and jobs without identifying that, in order to be a leader, there needs to be 'inner work' that builds resilience, authenticity and self-efficacy, traits that are invaluable in leadership.

### **The role of leadership at school for promoting levels of self-efficacy and self-belief**

The role of teachers, Deans and other leaders at secondary school played a part in the development of the young women's self-belief. Both positive and negative role models at secondary school were used as motivation to succeed. Negative teacher-student relationships were used to challenge negative perceptions and to fuel the women to succeed despite the lack of support. Sharlene, for example, used a poor relationship with one of her coaches to motivate herself to accomplish much more than what was expected of her. That is, she used the negative attitude of that coach as a foundation on which to build strength and resolve.

I played a lot of netball and she just didn't think I was good enough for the top team. And she was very vocal about that...I shattered my ankle and she said "you can never come back and be in the top team again", and I was like "yeah I will" ... I didn't talk to her for two years until I did and then was captain of the top team.

Sharlene went on to get the top sportswoman of the year award:

...she told me [I had won the award] through gritted teeth and I thought "how do you still not believe me after all these years...and I hated her, but she gave me a little bit of grit I guess to prove her wrong.

Sharlene's development of self-efficacy was also supported by a positive teacher who was young and enthusiastic and who inspired her to "*see the world slightly differently*", sparking a passion for geography and the environment. This led to her complete a degree in that subject and go on to work in environment management.

She [geography teacher] inspired me to love the environment and try and want to be better and do better and I took that subject through and got like 95% in seventh form geography and scholarships and that set me up for uni and work and so she was a pivotal point in [the]...start of my career and the inspiration and she really believed in me and really pushed me.

Sharlene also recalled her other netball coach who was a very positive influence on her. When she injured her leg and couldn't play netball, the coach pushed her to "*get back on the horse*" and not give up on herself. Sharlene had this mix of positive and negative role models, with more positive than negative. As a naturally confident, self-motivated woman with high levels of self-efficacy, she saw those negative comments as an anomaly in a generally positive, enriching environment. While Sharlene had positive feedback and a support network to counter negative modelling, it could be disenfranchising in developing that positive sense of self-belief for others that lack that support network.

Talia felt she was not a good learner. Despite often receiving positive comments about her behaviour from her teachers, she still sensed that she was not expected to succeed. She reflected on her teachers and felt that because she was nominated for Prefect by her peers, was vice-captain of the top netball team, and chosen by some of her teachers for special projects, her self-esteem remained intact. When I asked her how this made her feel she responded:

I think it balanced my self-esteem, like when I was in the class I would also be nominated to...like the teacher would say would you do so-and-so...I think I was the teacher's pet for most of my classes. I think that's where I got away with not having such a low self-esteem...

Talia recalls normalised racism through categorisation and low expectations of her and her Pacific peers. Being good at sports and music, they were encouraged to take the less academic subjects and not build their expectations that university was something that could be achieved. While it wasn't openly discussed, the lack of support was an inherent part of the culture within the school.

Sophie's memories of leadership at her secondary school were less specific than Sharlene or Talia. She connected more with the male teachers because they came across as "*a bit more casual, a bit more friendly*". Sophie's memories of the female teachers she had were mostly negative commenting "*If you usually had a nasty teacher or a teacher you didn't like, it was often a female, potentially because of the attitude...*" The perception of the male

teachers as being relaxed and the female teachers being 'uptight' and 'bitchy' sits within a common set of norms that function to separate how genders should act. A strong woman can be perceived as bitchy while the dominant perception of the male teacher is one of being authoritative rather a female teacher who is "*nasty*" (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This comment by Sophie of characteristics of a woman in authority coming across as 'bitchy' or 'nasty' sets up the female teachers as inherently nasty or bitchy as people. Sophie's story does mention one young teacher that took an interest in her who was also her hockey coach. She encouraged Sophie to coach hockey and this encouragement enabled Sophie to take part in an activity for which she might not otherwise had felt comfortable volunteering.

Paige's experience at secondary school was also enhanced by positive role models that made their teaching subject interesting and accessible. Paige discussed one of her geography teachers who was young and who made a big impression on her because she showed interest in her students and spent time preparing them for exams. Overall, Paige commented that teachers who showed care and responsibility for the learning outcomes of their students were held in high regard:

...you could tell the differences between the teachers you had, the ones who were genuinely interested and ones who were going through the motions.

The overarching sense of being noticed and cared for stood out as being indicators of good teaching that worked to build the women's sense of self-belief. Attending large secondary schools may have resulted in the need to feel like they were 'seen' by the teachers as more than just another student. Sharlene stood out as the only participant that didn't appear to internalise negative attitudes from teachers, but, instead, used them to motivate her further to prove them wrong. Both Sharlene and Sophie had coaches that stood out as positive role models that encouraged them to achieve beyond their own expectations. The coaching style of teaching that challenged the student to go beyond their own self-limiting expectations while being supported to achieve those goals, appeared to have positive effect on their sense of self-belief.

### **The role of their interpersonal relationships in a school context**

Childhood friendships play a large role in either enhancing or diminishing self-worth depending on the quality and nature of the relationship (Archard, 2011; Hartup, 1996). Establishing values and expectations with which members of the friendship group must comply, or risk social exclusion (Archard, 2011). Positive friendships can provide protection to the student from feeling unsupported and can work to balance out other pressures from school and home life. The four participants heavily relied on their peer groups' support

during their time at secondary school. Paige disclosed that her friendship group and what they did together was one highlight of her time at secondary school, commenting that maintaining relationships with her friends was a priority at school. Her most positive memories surround the events and extracurricular 'exploits' she and her friends were involved in creating. Conversely, when Paige was "hassled" by her social group for playing cricket, a game she and her family participated in together, she stopped playing. Paige expressed this as one of the examples of regrets she carried from her time at school. She had been challenged when she stepped out to do something not condoned by her social group and she stopped participating to comply and fit in with their expectations.

Talia used positive relationships with her peers as a way to balance out her feelings of disappointment for not living up to her expectations and her perceived expectations of her family. The 'unwritten rule' not to ask questions or speak up in class was, she felt, an expectation that required her compliance. Whenever Talia wanted to ask for clarification or support from her teachers, she traded off her desire to learn against accepting the requirements of being part of her friendship group, and chose not able to speak up for fear of being challenged by her classmates:

we [peers] talked about everything else but not how we struggled academically...most of us just struggled silently and just thought...we will just go to class and wait until the bell goes and go to the next class.

Talia's family had come to New Zealand seeking out a better life. While they never overtly pressured Talia to do better at school, nevertheless, the pressure remained. Talia wanted to do well but found that the lack of alternative ways of teaching to suit Talia and some of her peers' needs and the 'silent struggle' of not wanting to speak up, provided little chance of success. and her peers resulted in feelings of not being smart enough to further their education. Family expectations of success at first were difficult for Talia to traverse when she did not feel that she could live up to those expectations. However, she managed to find her way to attend university through the encouragement and support of family members, and it was here that she rose above her earlier challenges at school.

Sophie comes from a family of high achievers; her mother and father both doctors in their respective fields. This seemed to create a level of expectation that Sophie would go to university after secondary school. This frustrated Sophie, but with a social group that were all self-motivated learners, it seemed a natural progression. It wasn't until Sophie's brother talked to her about taking control of her own life, that she started to consider her options.

Having positive peer role models to copy seemed to work as a buffer for negativity and self-doubt and also to motivate and encourage hard work. When the expectations of those around left school and attended university, you could more easily follow that path. However, when those around you were failing and the environment in which you learnt was not conducive to success, it seemed that it was easier to fail. Talia was well respected by her peers and her teachers, however, the burden of not feeling competent in the school environment for Talia

### **The role of guidance and mentorship for adolescents**

One of the outstanding themes that emerged from the four interviews was the perceived need for a greater amount of guidance for students as they emerged from secondary school. All four participants discussed how they would have made different choices if they had been given adequate guidance to ensure they were fully aware of their choices and to adequately prepare them for life outside the school gates. Sophie discussed the need for school driven guidance that teaches students how to communicate according to how they best interact socially. She commented:

...being aware that [for example] you are essentially an introvert, and that is ok, but work with these skills, you know ... for an introvert it is very hard to get them to throw themselves out there in the same way an extrovert might ... there is some sort of self-acceptance then isn't there?

Sophie discussed the need to teach life skills to students before they left school to build an understanding of their strengths and abilities. In this way, Sophie believed employers would gain an employee that had more valuable 'EQ' in the way they interacted with others and communicated their ideas and any challenges.

Sharlene observed a need to provide "*holistic conversations*" with students to connect with them on a deeper level to allow for emerging identity discussions. Having a conversation with students about what they saw as their passion allowed for them to develop a sense of what is possible for them in the 'real' world. She felt that the teaching focused too much on curriculum and not enough on helping women try some different pathways that they might not have considered.

It's not until you are in the real world a few years down the track, you know, you start understanding what, the opportunities are, but the earlier the better ... just inspiring people, you know?"

Talia worked as a mentor, using her own challenges at school to develop positive methods of assisting young Pacific women to develop skills that will allow them to go beyond the confines of their perceived limitations. She shared how she worked with two young women at university to persuade them to speak up when they could not understand the instructions they were given by their lecturer. She discussed how difficult this was for the young women who lived in a culture where speaking their mind was considered as disrespectful. The young women gained 'permission' from someone who understood their issues and understood their culture to enable the women to straddle both 'worlds'. That is, Talia was able to move the young women to a place where they could cope with speaking up, while learning it is an accepted cultural practice with the Western culture.

### **The role of the education environment in setting up gendered expectations for women**

Some of the questions I had considered regarding whether school can set up gendered expectations were answered. Others remain unresolved. It would seem from the narratives that school did not explicitly reinforce stereotypes or set up gendered thinking about what can be achieved. What I did find, however, is that students were not set up to recognise the possibility of gender stereotyping in their careers. While this was not something that is explicitly required for a school to include, some of the women commented that informing them of some of the gender stereotyping in the workplace could be valuable. This may enable the women to have strategies early on in their careers to push back on those expectations and limitations to their agency.

Sharlene was a strong advocate for having classes in entrepreneurial skills and leadership in secondary schools, as learning and preparation for what can become normative attitudes to women's capabilities in society. Norms can be cemented if they are not challenged while students are still able to challenge, debate and learn in a relatively safe environment. There were classes, she said, that were gender segregated, that is, girls did cooking classes and boys did woodwork. While Sharlene was comfortable challenging those areas of segregation by attending woodwork classes, she felt that these classes cemented the norms regarding how women should act in society.

Sharlene commented on how female students were more confident in some of the classes where women were expected to excel (e.g. English and History) and contrasted this with Maths, Science or Economics where the male students were more dominant, complying with an assumed gender stereotype with no actual basis, "*...that is when boys really dominated classes; girls stood back a bit more...*" The conversation also covered how aspirations of

young women can be changed when some are so dominated by their peers or how they will be perceived and therefore hold themselves back.

...how do you change those perceptions of girls holding themselves back afraid of how they will be perceived and thinking about it. There are [pause] times in high school when you wanted to be in the cool group and so you didn't do that extracurricular thing because you wanted to hang with the cool kids behind H block, you know?

Separating the classes into separate gender classes would, in her opinion, take away that “*I can't answer that question because I will look stupid in front of Tommy, or whatever.*” Having women free to speak up or talk openly without those restrictions, in Sharlene's opinion, would have been an important step forward for women and learning.

Talia had a different approach to the question of whether gender stereotypes were reinforced at school or if she saw gender inequalities. She said she had not really noted any specific examples of gender inequalities, and then made an interesting observation of how she formed this opinion.

I feel like my perspective, would be shaped by my cultural identity, so, if I saw inequalities, that I would most likely be looking at the ethnic disparities.

Talia saw inequalities through a cultural lens which was perhaps so overwhelming to her and her peers that it overtook any other disparities hiding within it. She said that she was always surrounded by strong women and therefore felt a strong sense of confidence as a woman, especially with her mother as a role model. Her overwhelming feelings of being judged more by the stereotypes surrounding her cultural heritage than her gender was a moment of clarity for me about how the education system has not afforded Talia the education she deserved. It had not represented the image of 'multiculturalism' in its best depiction. Instead Talia was held back from reaching her own personal goals because of the cultural appropriation of what was considered the best parts of their culture leaving out the need to give the students an equal opportunity to succeed.

## **Conclusion**

These themes outline the most crucial influences in building self-efficacy, self-belief and future leader identity in the lives of Sharlene, Talia, Sophie and Paige. Their stories were all different yet still contained some similarities as I have described in this chapter. The four women were different in the way they contributed to this knowledge, with some more reticent to share their opinions than others. Still, I learned as much from their hesitations (which I have expressed as dotted lines) as from their words, and I was honoured to have them

express their frustrations and concerns for future students based on their experiences. In the next chapter I draw out some future implications for more research on this area and summarise what I understand was important to the women in terms of their advice and opinions in regard to what they perceive should change in our education system.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Discussion

Adolescence is a critical time to examine girls' developing awareness and response to the meaning of gender (Denner & Dunbar, 2004, p. 301).

### Introduction

As the above quote from Denner and Dunbar (2004) indicates, adolescence is a critical point in young women's lives. The development of identity and the sociocultural exploration of that identity is a key developmental task, particularly for adolescents. This chapter provides a deeper analysis of the sociocultural issues that are at play within the context of the participants' stories, seeking a possible link to how the school leadership experiences have informed their sense of self during their late adolescence and the proceeding leadership journey.

The narratives in this study highlighted many essential insights regarding the ways in which secondary schooling has informed the leadership journey of the four women interviewed. These insights led me to consider the commonalities across their comments and stories. Reflecting on the past educational experiences of the four women, and identifying how their unique experiences influenced their career journey, was only a small part of their narratives; these stories also provided insight into the underlying beliefs that affected their leadership pathways. I have presented this chapter in sections that discuss how leader identity is acquired and the role of education in that process. Also included in this section is a closer look at the influences of perfectionism, one of the possible drivers for the participants, and how mentoring can rebalance some of the negative self-belief that can hamper young women's progression into leadership roles after school. This chapter also discusses the absence of women leaders in society and how relationships and the secondary schooling process sets up expectations for women. Finally, I examine the role of student voice and agency in the acquisition of leader identity and the development of leadership knowledge and aspirational goals.

The next sections of this chapter examines these themes in greater depth. Each section links to the literature review in Chapter 2 and provides context to the themes of: acquisition of leader identity; the role of voice and agency in the acquisition of leader identity; and the absence of women leaders in society.

## **Acquisition of leader identity**

Secondary school, as the context within which this study explores leader identity in young women, is relevant because of the influence secondary school has in forming the beliefs and understandings of young women and their perceptions of leadership and, just as importantly, themselves as leaders (McNae, 2011). Leadership is embedded in context, with the school context, and the ways in which it influences leader identity in young women, an essential aspect of leadership development. It is a site for building an understanding of how students interrelate with peers, friendship groups and teachers.

### **The influence of the school context on building leader identity in adolescents**

This study found that the acquisition of leader identity was not present in all four participants after they completed secondary school and moved on to other leadership positions. While one of the four participants has moved on to be a senior leader, relatively secure in her identity as a leader, the other three participants indicated that they felt burdened by the expectations and perceptions of the role of Prefect, and did not believe their identity as a leader was enhanced by the position of student leader.

Becoming a leader does not need to be part of a formalised position, but can just require someone to 'step up' when the opportunity arises. What seemed to occur in the experiences of the participants supported the notion that being in a formal student leadership role was a reward for being academically and socially gifted. The roles were only given to a small number of students competing to be considered for the limited positions. The roles placed the students in positions of power, taking on the management of school events and providing extra support for teachers in a non-academic capacity, and even patrolling the student body to ensure uniform codes were complied with. However, many of these opportunities did not build the ongoing belief in their ability to lead others, which would more likely have manifested through a combination of personal development and leadership development. Leader identity goes further than management of events, adding self-development to the acquisition of leadership skills and abilities that can transform not just themselves, but others they may lead in the future.

Literature that has researched how developing students as leaders can affect them as future leaders, is scarce (Archard, 2013a; McNae, 2011), and positions the acquisition of knowledge as being from an adult perspective. The need to move from applying adult leadership thinking to building specific pathways for young leaders where their voices are dominant is evident (Archard, 2013c; M. Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008). In this way the school setting could become an opportunity to prepare young women for the challenges facing them

when they head into the workforce (Archard, 2013c). As reported in Chapter 2, it is a difficult path and requires the leader to develop a sense of self-knowledge that, in turn, influences their feelings and shapes their attitudes to others. That is, in order to lead others, you must first lead yourself (Drucker, 1999). A student's perception of themselves, including their strengths and abilities, impacts and influences the decisions they make in the future including their academic choices and their career pathways. The school location seems the most appropriate place to lay the foundations of leader identity - a somewhat protected space where learning is the objective.

Within the study, the participants discussed not being given any core or foundational leadership insights that may have provided a deeper understanding of how to most effectively use their strengths and competencies to lead. Using the opportunities that school leadership roles provide to establish ways of thinking and reflective practices, and to provide student leaders with the space to explore their own sense of self and identity, can be foundational leadership development for current practice and for future leadership roles. Leadership is more than just a title. However, the participants in this study were not afforded the opportunity to explore what leadership means and how a leader can influence, mentor and coach others to succeed. It is more than tasks and processes, but can be a life changing experience that provides support and direction to those they lead.

### **The role of perfectionism in women's leader identity**

In this research, some indicators of perfectionism were present through the need to be the best academically as well as achieve leadership positions, linked to a fear of not being able to achieve to a high enough standard. However, it would seem that to attain success in their academic life and their extracurricular activities, the students were at times competent at using those pressures to achieve to a high standard. While perhaps perfectionism did not always succeed in holding the students back in their pursuit of academic excellence and the glory of being given student leadership roles, what perfectionism did was to stigmatise challenging the status quo because of the fear of being exposed as a fraud. This fear of being exposed was present in each of the four participants, manifesting in different ways - fear of ridicule, fear of not measuring up to the expectations of others, fear of not succeeding. This research indicated that the need to measure up to the standards expected by the school, their own values and those of their parents, placed pressure on the students to conform to those expectations, and to not use their voice to speak out against the social pressure to conform.

While the young women who participated in the study did not perceive any obvious gender bias during their secondary schooling, their schools did not provide them with a balanced view of how society perceives the effectiveness of women as leaders versus their experiences of being in a school environment. This limited their view of the challenges facing them in their quest to lead. Leaving school without having built an internalised framework on which to incorporate a robust leader identity into their self-identity, could diminish their belief that they have the capability to lead when facing challenges they have not been prepared to battle. Women, as a marginalised group, need to internalise the essential components that embody leadership in order to move above the systemic power relations that work to diminish their leadership aspirations (M. Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008).

In this research, the 'perfectionist' label places women in a position of needing to constantly prove their worth. The common theme for the participants who had formal student roles was that they had to keep up their academic achievements as well as be able to provide their services as student leaders when it was required. The need to keep up with everything, alongside feelings of unworthiness (refer to Tahlia and Paige's stories), points to a recurring issue for women that needs to be addressed. Not addressing these feelings of being an 'imposter' or having to be perfect, diminishes self-worth. Giving women the tools and awareness of these potential issues, could provide a more robust sense of leader identity and weaken the hold of perfectionism.

Pedler (2011) reported that women become disenfranchised by the cultural dominance of hierarchical 'heroic' leadership styles, versus their perception of desirable leadership qualities of openness and collaboration. This gap in perceived leadership characteristics can lead to feelings of being fraudulent when faced by this incongruity in their roles as leaders. Having a weakened sense of self was seen as a barrier to being a leader according to research conducted by Archard (2013b). Archard's research approached school leaders (including teachers and principals) to locate the barriers to the development of young women as student leaders. The research findings indicated that female students were often not able to "create an image of themselves as a leader" (p. 57), along with a tendency to "need to be perfect". Further comments asserted "that a major barrier was associated with a student's self-concept and self-development" (p. 57).

Clance and Imes (1978), in their ground-breaking research on developing a diminished sense of self-worth in women, discussed the tendency for some high achieving women to struggle to internalise their success and to view themselves as unworthy of their accomplishments. Their research opened the gate to more studies that have identified and labelled this feeling of fraudulence as 'Imposter Syndrome'. More recently, Hillman (2013)

presented researched on this phenomenon in leaders. Perfectionism and the incidence of 'Imposter Syndrome' are reported to be correlated and have been considered a maladaptive construct linked to negative outcomes such as eating disorders, depression and high levels of anxiety (Gnilka, Ashby, & Noble, 2012; Thompson, Foreman, & Martin, 2000). However, perfectionism can have positive implications for those who can use this construct to strive for improvement and higher achievement without the maladaptive evaluation. In an adaptive form of perfectionism, a student can gain pleasure from stretching themselves through the tasks and does not have a problem with internalising their success. The issue arises where a student may have a rigid belief set that evaluates their work as constantly lacking and goals as unattainable (Gnilka et al., 2012).

### **The role of interpersonal relationships in the school context**

The literature suggests that children form close affiliations with others during their schooling that influence their acquisition of norms and values (Pugh & Hart, 1999), the gaining of skills and abilities (Collins & Laursen, 2004) and how they see themselves and their world (Dweck, 2000). Self-esteem and self-efficacy can be anchored in having stable, positive friendships, building confidence and emotional stability (Archard, 2011).

In this study, the quality of relationships, both peer and student-teacher relationships, were instrumental in influencing how the participants built their self-efficacy. This chapter highlights the different types of interpersonal relationships and how these affiliations affected the research participants' ability to see themselves as competent students and fed into the choices they made, from what they wore, to the subjects they chose, to how competition within their peer group encouraged academic achievement.

#### Student-teacher mentorship

All four women could name 'authority figures' (that is, teachers, sports coaches, etc) at school that influenced how they perceived their ability to acquire specific skills. In each of the four narratives, adult relationships at school were instrumental in building resilience and self-esteem through taking the time to get to know them as individuals. Being part of large urban schools, the four participants would likely have welcomed the sense of mentorship and belief in their abilities and being 'seen' as an individual amongst hundreds of other students, increasing their belief in the school as a positive environment for identity development. Taking a broader view, the hierarchy within the school system arguably reflects a hierarchical social system that sits within the labour market, specifically, but society, generally. In order to create change, providing an opportunity to voice opinions and debate differences in an environment of relative freedom and trust that schools aim to embody, give

women the opportunity and the mandate to continue to challenge those systems when they leave the confines of the education system.

Building a resilient sense of identity at school for these participants was nourished in part by positive relationships, facilitating strong ties and accruing knowledge through positive mentoring by teachers. Especially in adolescence where boundaries are being subverted and identity is being forged, having strong, positive relationships with adult mentors would likely support positive growth in students. In this study, findings indicate that teachers were a source of both positive and negative comments. The participants highlighted their perception of the effectiveness of some teachers as “going through the motions” (Paige), and therefore implicitly regarded as flawed instructors rather than linking that behaviour to being defective as students. It is possible that because each of the students had positive experiences in the main with peers and teachers, the negative criticism placed on them by a single teacher may not have impacted on their self-belief.

The literature suggests that the quality of the learning environments and relationships with teachers impact on student performance and their motivation in the classroom (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Kaplan & Flum, 2012; Lizzio et al., 2011; Rich & Schachter, 2012). Kaplan and Flum (2012) discuss the student-teacher relationship, noting in their research that the perception of teachers as positive role models, increases the chances of students perceiving the educational environment as motivational. Rich and Schachter (2012) similarly noted that perceptions of teachers as caring, along with a school culture that cultivated the whole student, promoted a more secure identity development for those students. This literature concurs with the comments made by the participants, who indicated that they were more motivated to achieve in a subject if that teacher interacted with them positively. Understandably, the motivation to succeed came from positive role modelling more often than if the student felt isolated and invisible.

### Friendship groups

This study found that each of the participants experienced the influence of peer groups differently, and understandably so. However their affiliations were, overall, viewed as a positive influence by the young women. Looking more deeply however, I suggest that peer groups did not necessarily challenge the social norms but complied with them. The desire for belonging and the need to be accepted by their peers was juxtaposed against the need to develop an individual identity free from the confines of other’s expectations. In this research, Sharlene and Sophie socialised with like-minded peers who held them accountable if they did not succeed to the expected standard simply by surpassing them in their work. Their comments indicated that their peers were all vying for similar positions as leaders, and held

themselves to similar standards that was predicated on being a successful student. The two women learned from their peers that the 'norm' was to become a student leader and to work hard to attain high levels of academic achievement. Sharlene and Sophie did not challenge that assumption, potentially because other students, whom they held in high esteem, were role modelling that behaviour, encouraging the students to comply.

My findings suggest that peer groups played a role in the lives of the participants in different ways but each was crucial to their social and personal identity development. Friendship groups provided an outlet against the constraints of academic life. Each participant indicated they were challenged to conform to the expectations of their peer group, whether that was to reach academic goals, or to ensure the normative expectations of their cultural group was not contravened. It could be argued that the relationships of the participants with their peers constrained the participants ways of thinking and being by encouraging the students to keep within the relative safety of the normative expectations of their group, discouraging any action that may put them outside of their friendship group.

The need to stay within the confines of expected behaviour was reflected in the study by all four participants. For example Talia commented on the value of the relationship with her peers who balanced her feelings of inadequacy in the classroom, with feelings of being more confident in her identity within that group through their shared cultural understandings and religious affiliations. Talia was positively impacted by their acceptance of her both as an individual and within the context of her 'Samoan-ness', so she believed the relationships positively affected her formation of identity.

The literature concurs that personal and social identities are influenced by peer groups who are critical in providing emotional support for their affiliates and are an important sounding board for ideas and ways of being (Archard, 2011; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; McAdam, 1997; Pugh & Hart, 1999). Within those relationships, young girls' sense of self, achievement and acceptance is intimately linked and social norms established (Pugh & Hart, 1999). The role of friendships and positive peer group relationships provide a way to move into adulthood in a supportive environment. Stepping outside of those affiliations to evolve as an individual is less challenging if it is attempted with others traversing a similar path of growth (Pugh & Hart, 1999). The opportunities for comparison, discussion and opposition that are provided by peer relationships, provide balance in ego development and are invaluable in healthy identity development (McAdam, 1997).

While each of the four young women had formed strong friendships, there appeared to be regulation of how the peer groups influenced their decisions, based on their reflection of

those relationships. Archard (2011) noted that peer relationships could affect leadership attainment, with the need to be liked and accepted by their peers overwhelming their desire to adopt leadership positions. This study provides evidence of the influence of peers providing motivation to attain leadership positions because of the legitimacy of the role, but also perhaps because of the perceived status of the role of Prefect. The women were compelled to accept or at least vie for the coveted role of Prefect because it was a role that was given to those that were considered academically gifted and also socially connected. The alternative, when not selected for the role, was (in Paige's story) feelings of being left out and almost of social exclusion.

### **The role of student voice and agency in the acquisition of leader identity**

Identity formation requires an individual to locate their unique self, "separate from the expectations of their parent, peers and teachers" (Schachter & Ventura, 2008, p. 452). However, identity formation is also about integrating with the world and being accepted into our sociocultural world by peers, authority figures and those that are stakeholders in our lives. This section delves into the formation of leader identity and the extent to which student voice and agency can play a role, and how these can be accessed. I use some of the participants' own stories to illustrate this development of voice and the disconnection young women, especially, can feel through the increasing influence of societal expectations delivered to them via different paths.

This study indicated that on the surface the participants did not feel disadvantaged by their gender, in terms of having the agency to speak out if it was required. However they did experience a loss of voice and agency because of the lack of power they had in cultivating their career pathways. Whether it was through disengagement because of enforced cultural stereotypes, or through being limited by perceived choice, the participants were not empowered to make informed choices. For example, Sophie spent many years attempting to find her 'voice' amid the voices of the perceived authority figures in her life. At school Sophie was devoted to her art, but when the time came to choose a career path, Sophie listened to the opinions of the school leaders and her parents rather than taking ownership of choosing her post-secondary school journey. Brown and Gilligan (1993) describe this disengagement from self as a common struggle felt by adolescent girls. They define this experience as "profound disconnection" (p. 29) from self while seeking authentic connection with others. Sophie eventually traversed the outer regions of what she needed to experience before she came back to her love of art and her innate ability to create and design, but on her terms, not for or on behalf of any person other than herself.

This study found that there was no sharing of leadership theory, knowledge, or skills with the students which, one could assume, resulted in the status quo being upheld. What this means is that the normalised perception of a leader as being masculine and heterosexual, would have been upheld if these women had not learned any other way of being a leader. Therefore, it is possible that the very act of not addressing the pressure to conform to the masculine – ‘think leader-think male’ trope, was likely to have led to less chance for the participants to see themselves as leaders. The act of have a voice is to challenge the status quo when required, and to internalise an understanding that having the power to speak out is a right, not a privilege for those who have the required power.

These findings suggest that student leadership, while providing learning opportunities to a selected number of students who are chosen for the limited roles, focuses on gaining competency in the management of tasks and duties according to the four narrators. Each participant spoke of their experience of the role of Prefect being about contributing to the running and managing of non-academic events. Being chosen for these roles placed symbolic power where the academically gifted and popular became the first choice of leader. This notion is maintained outside of the school environment where leaders are selected because of their perceived power and giftedness. The ‘mantle’ of leadership is then placed on those imbued with these special ‘powers’, limiting the potential for women specifically to be perceived as worth of this mantle. Further, if students are being selected through some perceived notion of leadership being only for the popular and academically gifted, it follows that the selection process is implicitly retained as a marker for who can and cannot lead.

At this point I am compelled to discuss Talia and her leadership journey separately as a lesson in how denying some of our learners a voice that do not conform to a Westernised style of education (and leadership) can circumvent the development of self-worth. The voice of those citizens who have a different perspective of how to be a leader should be highly valued, but in Talia’s case, was an example of being lost in a system that did not look after the ‘space’. It was obvious throughout the interviews, that with Talia’s deep connection to her cultural values, it was Talia’s close family relationships that provided her with the motivation to attend university. It was the exclusion she felt in her time at secondary school, and her experience as a Prefect, that had prevented her from developing her voice up to that point. She talked in her interview about the loudest voices being the ones that were heard. Metaphorically, as well as literally, this observation relates to how Talia perceived her place in society at that time. It is interesting to note that it was marriage and becoming an adult that fully propelled her to being comfortable to revisit educational opportunities. It could be argued that this ‘coming of age’ paradigm for a woman sits in contrast with feminist

principles of being seen as an individual, rather than being a wife, mother, and so on. However, Talia's principles were firmly embedded in her cultural identity and that alignment to her culture, which included her religious affiliations, developed her identity as part of a community, rather than as striving to be seen as an individual.

Talia's gradual development from her experiences of being labelled as a 'poor learner' at secondary school provoked in her a passion for supporting other Pacific women to re-engage with learning. She discussed how difficult it is for Pacific women to straddle 'two worlds', that is, their Pacific world and the Westernised world. From my interaction with Talia and hearing her story, I would suggest that Talia's Pacific worldview was never heard or valued at school. The Western philosophies and discourse that underpinned her schooling did not provide her, as a Samoan woman, with her own unique space to be heard. The promotion of the Samoan cultural principle of 'teu le va', that is, reciprocal relationships, was explained by Talia as valuing and looking after the 'space' between two people. Anae (2010) describes this principle as being "to value, cherish, nurture and take care of the 'va', the relationships" (p. 2). It is imperative that the wisdom of the Pacific voice that was silenced during Talia's schooling is no longer overlooked. Anae (2010) contends that:

Pacific research in New Zealand has glossed over and ignored the cultural competencies of not only the multi-ethnic nature of Pacific communities, but also the intra-ethnic nuances of the diverse groupings and identities of Pacific peoples in New Zealand. (p. 13)

The 'duality' of the nature of 'teu le va' implores the leaders in education to respect and commit to a reciprocal relationship that requires both parties to 'keep tidy' the sacred space through honouring Pacific voices. This ensures that "diverse Pacific peoples' own narratives gain traction and become the dominant discourse" (p. 14). This will, according to Anae (2010), establish the potential for ownership and productive engagement resulting in more positive educational outcomes.

The deeper connectedness that is present in the meaning of 'va', was not present in the relationships with the students and their educators but was more transactional in nature. The deeper commitment to maintaining those adult-student relationships needed to be reciprocal with both parties working to keep the relationship at a deeper level. Alternatively, those relationships that were remembered, even after being away from the educational environment for many years, were the deeper connections that the students felt were fostered by a genuine care for their wellbeing. The space created for leadership conversation was not available to Talia, who felt she did not have the voice to speak out but

was silenced by the volume of the other voices. The 'va' is not always available for women to give their voice, especially if society primes their citizens to believe that the 'loudest voice', the person with the highest standing in that society, is the one who can be leader. The quiet, reflective person is often not given the space to speak out and is often ignored or drowned out by the heightened voices of the 'hero leader'.

Researching the students more likely to receive the mantle of leadership, Keeffe and Andrews (2011) study indicates that student leadership roles are habitually given to 'elite' students within a hierarchical system imbued with symbolic power and rituals. The symbolic power of the school 'elite' will imbue the mantle of leadership on those who are at the top of the student body. Limiting the engagement of students to positions of authority, based on their popularity and perceived superior academic ability, sets up the notion that leadership is only for those 'ordained' to lead. This sits in contrast to leadership literature in an organisational context that contends that, irrespective of academic capability, leadership can be learned and the appropriate leadership behaviours can be developed (Bennis, 1989; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Student leadership that does not encourage participation by a larger cohort of students ignores opportunities to develop deeper engagement and development at a time when many adolescents need to have an outlet for their potential as future leaders.

Current literature on student leadership, student voice and agency seeks to encourage students towards leadership in order to increase school engagement, better academic outcomes, and civic engagement (Frost & Roberts, 2011), along with engagement with pursuing leadership opportunities (Archard, 2013d). I propose that students (particularly women) also need to be taught to develop leadership capacity in order to develop core skills for self-knowledge and increase levels of self-worth and self-efficacy. Further, engaging with their own leadership potential as part of their identity develops an ability to debate, challenge and speak up. This is crucial for young women who are not only being tested by a social world that disintegrates their self esteem through unrealistic images of perfection, but also their ability to see themselves as something other than the reflection of the male gaze (Calogero et al., 2011). While this may seem to be overreaching, research has shown that young women's 'self-view' affects how they assess their academic abilities and future prospects (Lips, 2004), as well as their confidence and the regulation of anxiety (Skelton, 2010). While young women are potentially able to access the same educational opportunities as men, the social outcomes for women can be different with high levels of anxiety and depression (Skelton, 2010; Zalk, Kerr, Branje, Stattin, & Meeus, 2010).

In conclusion, this research suggests that within the stories shared by the four participants, student leadership positions (specifically in this case as a Prefect), reward the socially and academically gifted student. There is room therefore, for student leadership to move from being an ordination of leadership, to a balanced learning experience for those that wish to learn to lead. Providing a clearer understanding of individual competencies that leaders are required to build, rather than being given the role based on your perceived academic abilities or social standing may go some way to bridging the gap the chasm of women stepping into leadership.

### **Absence of women leaders in society**

This section explores education in terms of how gendered expectations for women are positioned and how this can be changed to meet the needs of both women and men, and to combat gender-related issues. The recurring constructs of leadership ascribe stereotypical masculine traits of authority, dominance and power to the notion of leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Stereotypical feminine attributes are characterised by nurturing and helping behaviours that construct the parameters within which young women can perform roles (Archard et al., 2014). Social and cultural influences inform how young women act out those gendered expectations regarding their role as mothers, wives, daughters and workers.

### **The role of education in setting up or redefining gendered expectations for women**

In this study, notions of gendered difference in the way male and female students are socialised was not explicit in the experiences of school life for the four women. However by not providing opportunities to challenge those gendered norms, it could be argued, sets the participants up to be disenchanted with the gendered workplace environments, as many women encounter in the labour force. To combat this, educators perhaps need to take some responsibility to provide more guidance on this issue. To provide tools to combat a possible sense of disenfranchisement would be an important addition to the toolkit of any student leader. By learning how to be an effective leader, how to recognise the disparities in how male and female leaders are viewed, and how to then challenge those disparities provides opportunity for growth. Further, providing adequate female models of leadership that break down the stereotypes of 'think manager-think male', will develop clear substitutes of positive gender modeling.

The role the school environment plays to either reproduce gendered notions of masculinity and femininity (Arnot, 2002), or to confound those notions, was one of the key issues explored in this research. Educators have the opportunity to expose young women and young men to building understanding around their differences and similarities to support the

healthy formation of their identity. In order to develop leader identity, young women need to view themselves outside of the confines of patriarchal norms (M. Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008). While young women should not be expected to be passive recipients of knowledge, educators have the opportunity to support them to confront gendered assumptions (Archard et al., 2014) through being active, agentic co-constructors of knowledge with an opportunity to explore their innate values and strengths. While not explicit in the modelling of femininity and masculinity, there are ways in which gender roles are set up. When looking at how school contextualises gender it is about how appropriate behaviour for men and women is taught in an environment that is fraught with complex social relationships (Arnot, 2002). Men and women are moving through school already complicit in the gendered roles they are expected to perform outside of school. Other adults, peers and the media set up and maintain these roles, with non-compliance resulting in isolation and division. It is likely, however implicit, that gender roles and norms were in place during the schooling of the participants. It is difficult to draw these out when the person is not consciously aware of the subtle nuances of sexism, racism, and all other antisocial tendencies that they have witnessed throughout their life. Perhaps analysing the role of family culture and school culture on gender identities and how these interconnect would give some insight into how the two work jointly to build compliance in children to adhere to the requirements of their given gender.

### **School guidance for future prospects and choice**

My findings suggest that career guidance needs to increase their offering to students in their last year of secondary school. In New Zealand, career guidance services are provided at most secondary schools, but there are inconsistencies in how this service is provided between different schools (Barclay, Crocket, Kotze, & Peter, 2013). Taking into account the cultural and socio-economic differences in communities, some schools are not giving the level of guidance that their students require (Barclay et al., 2013). The guidance counsellors should be more than just gatekeepers, giving out advice based on their assessment of the intellectual and socio-economic status of the student. As with pastoral guidance, career guidance could mentor students to discover their own path and own their own choices, whilst developing skills and allaying concerns and anxieties. The opportunity exists for schools to employ a 'whole-person' approach to career guidance by providing more than just pamphlets on a variety of career paths and academic institutions. Each of the four young women interviewed provided narratives that showed career guidance to be lacking and gave indications of what could be done to improve the service. Some of the recommendations regarded how the school environment can positively influence leader identity in young women and so needed to provide guidance to shepherd students to make informed choices.

Most of the participants in this study observed that students were given “cookie cutter advice” (Sophie) rather than teachers using their platform as educators to mentor students into the right pathway. Career guidance was often given by teachers who were not trained guidance counsellors or coaches but ones that “drew the short straw” (Paige) and therefore were not trained to discuss options in a competent way. Also, giving “cookie cutter advice” would not allow for those students that cannot fit into this metaphorical cookie cutter. Not giving adequate guidance to students who already feel disenfranchised with the education system, opens up the potential of further embedding negative outcomes into the future for some students.

The stressors present in a young student when contemplating what path to go down after secondary school are immense. The participants alluded to being in a “pressure cooker environment” which could have been alleviated in some way with more mentoring and a more ‘life skills’ based learning curriculum for school leavers. This may help young women transition to their next stage based on what they have discovered as being their passions, skills, and values. Designing learning experiences that bridge the differences between the school environment and the work environment would be valuable for all students transitioning them from the relatively academic environment of school to the ‘reality’ of living in the world (Faircloth, 2012).

Looking through a cultural lens, Talia explained that, for Pacific women, navigating both ‘worlds’ between their Pacific culture and the ‘Palagi’ culture provides difficulties in finding their voice. However, in the same way that Talia ‘transformed’ into being a leader and a mentor for other women, Pacific women need to develop their own career path in their own way provided with the appropriate guidance and mentoring. The lack of understanding of Pacific issues opens up a gap in their educational experiences which culminate in disparities of underachievement. Anae (2010) makes this point when she asserts the need for more research investigating gender differences in educational experiences and more researching regarding the “inequitable access to participation in, and outcomes for, Pasifika learners throughout all educational sectors” (p. 3). Building optimal educational outcomes for all students requires a better understanding of the sociocultural influences that inform their world view. My context is with a lens that is positioned in a Palagi world view, which I have worked to suspend as I interviewed all the women. However, Anae (2010) is right in asserting that there is a need for more ‘Pasifika’ educational researchers that can access the commonalities of their social, cultural and historical contexts with that of the research subject (p. 4).

In effect, the lack of provision of leadership at this level impacted on the choices the participants made on their career choices. While these women were able to navigate their own career paths to leadership roles, I would contend that many students do not have the self-belief, the parental support, nor the strategies in place to effectively manage their choices immediately after their school career has ended. Archard (2013c) asserts that in order to have young women overcome barriers in their pursuit of leadership positions, they need to be adequately prepared for those challenges (p. 158). Since schooling is a shared experiences it seems to be the most opportune place for implementing these preparations.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Conclusions and Recommendations

“Women, with the ability to be critically conscious of the culture, should be able to withstand some societal pressure. However, it is not realistic to expect complete resistance because the rewards for compliance are substantial and salient.” (Calogero et al., 2011, p. 67)

### Introduction

In this chapter I identify conclusions and recommendations that have arisen from this research. A summary of the findings outlines the knowledge gained from the research, including an outline of the specific areas of learning that came from the data presented. Limitations of this research are also discussed. Finally, a summary of some future opportunities for change, drawn from the data collected to ensure a higher level of development of self-leadership to assist future students and educators to build capacity and self-efficacy in their leader identity while also highlighting further research opportunities.

### Summary of the research findings

This research affirms the critical feminist position that situates gender normative expectations as boundaries that confine and define women and their role in society. The education system in these four cases did not work to contravene the limitations placed upon women, however, neither did the schools actively observe those boundaries. With leader identity not a focus of school development, little was done to unravel those social cues that limit how women experience leadership when they start their careers. Some limitations in their learning and limitations in their personal development of understanding were highlighted in the interviews. There were also a number of competencies that would develop leader identity that the participants would like to see implemented to support young women’s transition from school to the next phase of their working life.

The following are the core points that were drawn from the four narratives presented in this research, as well as recommendations for future development of leader identity for students, and young women in particular. From this research the following emerged:

- Student leadership roles at secondary school are more focused on tasks and management of events than of development of leadership capacity and capability. More

whole person development is required to enable women to internalise a leader identity that will promote positive growth and self-efficacy. Further, allowing a wider range of students with different skills and competencies into student leadership roles rather than only those with academic or social prowess, could provide more students with opportunities to be educated as leaders of the future;

- There was no evidence of overt gender disparity in the schooling of the participants; however, there was no preparation for how society shapes expectations in the post-secondary school context. By not catering to woman-centric issues, such as implicit or unconscious biases, there was a modicum of prejudice at play. Focusing attention on how implicit biases can affect the ways in which people perceive the role of difference and diversity, could arm both women and men to be mindful of avoiding those biases;
- Positive student-teacher relationships that promote self-efficacy can lead to healthy future relationships with others as well as enabling the development of positive self-leadership behaviours;
- Guidance at secondary school needs to evolve to meet the needs of the students who leave secondary school without a clear sense of direction and who are often weighed down by the expectations of their parents, their peers, and societal and cultural expectations;
- Development of personal skills is needed in order to create an awareness of individual strengths and weaknesses in students and how this affects their thoughts and behaviours. These core competencies would create a foundational understanding of the different lenses through which people view each other and leadership – not a ‘one size [of leadership] fits all’ approach. Students could then be armed with more self-knowledge and a deeper appreciation of their individual strengths and possible career opportunities.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The following presents the conclusions from this research assembled thematically, as well as recommendations for potential opportunities to develop the area of career development and leader development for senior students.

### **The role of education in setting up or redefining gendered expectations**

Educators have the opportunity and ability to confound the impact of gendered expectations on young women through educating all students to recognise what those expectations are, how they are disseminated, and the limits they place on present and future potential of a student. As mentioned in the previous chapter, school is not a place to set up ongoing biases but a place where diversity should be taught and celebrated, and the social stratification of gender roles can be exposed for open discussion and positive change.

Students are not passive recipients of knowledge but actively involve themselves in the process of learning, so understanding how these limitations impact on their future choices is vital. By building a bridge from school to the next step toward their future pathways may arm students with the ability to change how the world perceives the role of women, a possible antidote for divisiveness and expectations of gender. Developing an awareness of the biases that are woven into our society through dissemination of balanced information and robust conversation can be another weapon against the conscious and unconscious biases that pervade their world.

Further, students need to understand why and how objectification exists and that self-objectification is distorting the way they see themselves and their abilities, in order to disarm the power of that lens. Giving students a forum in which they can discuss and debate how self-objectification can affect people of all genders and how to disarm it is a powerful tool to build resilience and empowerment. School is a place where these conversations can begin to support young women and men to open up about how women are viewed in terms of expectations of how they dress, the equity of power in a relationship and their individual rights to feel safe and free from persecution. The media as a site of inconsistent representations of women versus men needs to be exposed in this forum to remove the unnecessary power the media has to manipulate perceptions of reality.

Through providing robust debate and safe places to challenge and discuss how society influences how men and women perceive their roles and all the factors that feed into gendered expectations, will be a powerful tool to use against negative stereotypes and harmful power imbalances.

### **The role of education in building leader identity in young women**

The opportunity to develop competencies that could have a flow on effect to students' future career choices is one that needs to be embraced by educational facilities. If women can deeply connect to their potency as leaders, as well as the importance of bringing their diverse voices to the boardroom table in a safe and managed environment, this would contribute to the development of citizens who are skilled advocates for the growth and development of others and for themselves. It is also possible too that having education systems that develop these core skills would develop an awareness of leadership as a concept, not just as a role.

This research highlights the need for a change in the model of student leadership development used in schools that centres on managing specific events and tasks, and less

on development for future roles. With women at the higher echelon of leadership in short supply, it is important to tailor specific development that incorporates developing female leaders for future roles. Through a combination of mentoring and guidance, and also through debating and discussing the issues that women leaders are faced with in their future careers, young women in their last one or two years of school would find value in being mentored by teachers and other leaders in their community.

Young women require better quality and in-depth guidance and mentoring that transitions them from secondary school to their post-secondary school life in order to gain traction to lead themselves into positive choices for the first steps of their career. Providing appropriate role models can more effectively reach the female students in need of direction and enable them to engage in proactive behaviours. These proactive behaviours could be centred on discovering their strengths, personal values, goal setting, and understanding the differences and similarities in how they think and learn. In this way, young women would have more capacity to explore their options with a better understanding of who they are and their place in the world. Further, spending more resources on building effective and efficient career guidance that proficiently supplies these young women with a foundational understanding of where they fit in the world, may give them the confidence to challenge stereotypical career pathways and choices.

This research highlighted the influence of interpersonal relationships at school, with peer groups and teachers being an important part of the self-efficacy and development of self-esteem. Developing key relationships during secondary school was identified as influential in developing positive career choices in the future with self-efficacy and confidence. In the context of this research, a mentoring relationship was significant to the four participants' academic success, or at least the effort they put into their subjects. A positive mentoring relationship can also scaffold their success and diminish other areas of their life where they may not be receiving positive feedback and could give students a sense of belonging.

Mentoring young women is a way to benefit their future by scaffolding their aspirations with practical application of their skills. This could be achieved by aligning their goals, strengths, and passions with adults who can advise and challenge the student to identify and apply those talents and skills. A mentor would challenge students to understand where their negative perceptions of ability and future goals originate and to develop understanding of their intrinsic motivators and analysis of their own self-limiting behaviours. This could enable young women to redefine their strategies to attain a successful future career path and challenge the barriers that hold them back from reaching their goals.

The role of education is to build knowledge and develop an awareness of how best to contribute to the world, and how best to live in the world. It is necessary therefore to build a foundation of knowledge about ourselves to foster self-awareness of individual abilities and strengths. In order to facilitate this, there would be value in building into the final year of secondary school a self-discovery programme that opens up students to the dilemmas that may face them after they have left the relatively safe environment of school. Having an awareness of how our actions and our thoughts affect how we function effectively, and an awareness of how that interacts with those to whom we socialise, may have some value.

### **Limitations of this research**

Concerns in narrative inquiry are often centred on ownership of the story and the researcher's responsibility to fully convey meaning and honouring the lived experiences of the narrators. A person's history is their own and sharing that for the purpose of learning more about a subject or perspective requires the researcher to be diligent in their record keeping and their inclusion of the narrators as co-constructors of the narrative within the research. Questions are raised about how the researcher and the narrator negotiate this co-construction with the onus on the researcher to be fully open about how much of their personal story they are bringing. This becomes a discussion about honesty and integrity in the research process, called "relational responsibility" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 177) and the trust between the researcher and the narrator.

In qualitative feminist research, the centrality of the individual experience is the focus, ensuring the research is presented with critical reflexivity and rigour. This study critically and subjectively centralises the narrative, but this enables the narratives to be used in a wider sense to transfer knowledge and build understanding of our assumptions and attitudes. While at the centre of narrative inquiry is the invitation to participants to share their stories, the use of questioning enables the participants to focus their stories around events and experiences that provide relevant accounts of their school leadership practice. The use of this study to provide an opening for other research in the area of narrative inquiry and leader identity in adolescents can be considered of value to educational researchers.

The distinction between what was an actual event and what is a possibly untrustworthy recollection of facts becomes blurred in narrative inquiry. In this instance I was aware of the length of time that had passed between the events I was inquiring about and the story itself. The personal narratives required the narrators to give an example of their reflected event rather than using the event specifically to build the story. That is, each participant gave answers that did not centre around a specific event, per se, but about their interpretation of a

time period or a relationship (e.g. with a teacher or reflecting on their time as leaders). It was important to me that the stories were told in their entirety in as much detail as possible; while still having to summarise the story somewhat, I was aware of the limited amount of certainty in the points raised in the narratives.

A further possible limitation of this design is the use of only four participants and therefore the transferability of the preceding key points that came from the narratives. For example, there are not enough data to definitively ascertain the role educational context played in the forming of leader identity because only three out of four women interviewed had had formal leadership positions in school. However, it is my intention that this research can be a starting point from which to develop ongoing research in this area of study into leader identity in women.

For the purposes of this research, I frame how leader identity is formed in women specifically and so refer only to young women. It has not been the focus of this research to explore leader identity from a gender neutral perspective, as there is no leadership journey that could be argued as being 'gender neutral', but instead all leadership development is loaded with assumptions and expectations of maintaining gender norms. What I wanted to understand was how the educational environment affects women specifically and their journey to leadership. This could be considered a limitation as it has in effect limited the generalised use of the information to only affect how women perceived their leader identity formation rather than across all genders. Further study could utilise this area and increase the participant base to include both women and men to examine the differences in experiences between men and women due to gender.

### **Further research**

Further research is needed to build more knowledge in the area of guidance, relationships, and the role education plays in the formation of leader identity in women. Further studies could increase the number of participants to give greater range of answers and perspectives. Using a greater number of participants could allow the researcher to broaden the types of schools; for example, using single sex schools as a comparison with co-educational facilities. Also, engaging more participants could enable research into the intersection of gender, race and sexuality and the impact on their identity journeys and on leadership journeys, an area that could use more focused research.

There are more career opportunities in this century available to students leaving school than in past generations. The use of social media and more broadly the use of the technology alongside globalisation has increased the amount of job opportunities exponentially. Future

studies may provide us with the understanding of how these new roles affect the perception and engagement of students to have more aspirational career goals than in the past. Having more choice may or may not contribute to higher aspirations for future career pathways, as the number of roles may transition into needing specific abilities and less about university degrees that are more generalised in their potential for application in business.

There is an opportunity to research further into the potential reliance on the learning provided in universities (or other tertiary institutions) without locating in the individual student, their goals and hopes for the future. The expectations placed on high achieving students to follow the university pathway was highlighted in these narratives. It would be valuable to look at this in more depth in future research to enable us to explore the concept of university as an 'expectation' for some students but possibly not all students. Given the impact of confounding pressures that can disrupt a young person from being an effective citizen, it appears to be an opportunity not be missed to give students who do not wish to attend university adequate guidance to ensure they are provided with choices of pathways that are not necessarily academic.

Further research into the ways guidance and mentorship can assist students to build goals and a vision for their future is essential if there is to be a change in thinking about and the practice of mentoring young women to become more informed about their choices. In this way more young women may leave school knowing they have the ability to challenge assumptions around women's ability and their value as leaders in business. These goals need to be more than aspirational, they need to be achievable. While schools do not explicitly reproduce gendered expectations, there is no overt undermining of those expectations which can produce the same result in young women (and men), who are being set up to reproduce gendered roles through their experiences outside of the school environment.

Further research could also explore how education environment affects not just young women, but also young men to build leader identity. The research could study more specifically how effective guidance at school enables young men to follow aspirational career paths rather than expected career paths based on their academic success or failure.

## **Closing comments**

A key point highlighted in the research criticised how the education environment developed women students to be leaders. It is not my intention to position the whole education system as intentionally positioning young women and men to continue the hegemonic, patriarchal system that has been part of the Westernised socialisation beliefs. Further, this research did

not lead to that conclusion, but what this research did uncover was a need to build more resilient and agentic students that are given the resources and agency to resist and challenge those gendered expectations that are still part of our social structure. Coming from a leadership background, my purpose is to locate opportunities that we may not be taking to do the inner work on students as well as the rigorous application of academic knowledge. It is crucial to seek out those opportunities to develop courageous, resilient and inquiring leaders, especially in young women, as they are underrepresented at the highest level of leadership. According to research presented in this study, women are not yet reaching pay parity with men nor are they moving into the higher levels of leadership in large numbers. This is especially accurate in organisations that have not traditionally been a place women seek those roles (for example science, engineering, and technology). Bridging the gap between places of learning and career pathways may provide more aspirational roles being sought out, not so dependent on academic ability, and an education system that continues to align itself with developing students as whole humans with the resources and skills to step into any position or life opportunity afforded them in their future.

This research was intended to explore leader identity through the perspectives of four women who have already begun their leadership journey. It was my goal to provide a voice to women to speak about their challenges and opportunities regarding their leadership journey and, more specifically, how the last year of their secondary schooling impacted on their future leadership choices. The formation of their leader identity, and the ways in which their secondary schooling influence the development of this part of the identity, may then be explored in a more defined way. The barriers that exist for women to achieve gender parity are as valid today as they were decades earlier. However, it is now implicit biases and benevolent sexism that is the vehicle for those gender norms and expectations to be perpetuated. It is imperative that more work is done to unblock the pathways for women to achieve the equality that is still out of reach for most women, starting with our young, and encouraging the systems that build their knowledge and influence their identity be charged with challenging those norms.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **Date Information Sheet Produced:**

12 May 2016

#### **Project Title**

Women's leadership identity journeys: The influence of past student leadership experiences on the formation of leadership identity in women leaders.

#### **An Invitation**

My name is Vicky Pond Dunlop and I am a Masters student studying in the School of Education at AUT University. I am currently working on my thesis in order to gain a Master of Educational Leadership. My thesis will critically examine adult female leaders' perceptions of the experiences of leadership they received while students at secondary school. The purpose of this research is to contribute to our knowledge about the ways in which young women use these formative experiences to develop leadership identity. I will be using a qualitative, semi-structured interview process with journaling to draw out personal narratives from the participants to build case studies focusing on their secondary school experiences of leadership.

If you are a female leader, aged between 25-35 years who has experienced student leadership roles, I invite you to participate to this research by allowing me to capture your experiences through a series of interviews as well as a journaling exercise. I hope these opportunities to reflect on your experiences as a student will benefit you by honouring your experiences in a confidential setting, giving voice to your understanding and knowledge of how you formed your leadership knowledge and identity. Please note that participation is voluntary and, as a participant, you will get an opportunity to discuss your transcribed data with me prior to starting to write up the analysis of the data to identify any points you do not wish to be published. If you wish to withdraw from this research, you can do so up to the completion of data collection (31st July 2016). Please note that to ensure your name will not be attached to any part of the data, pseudonyms will be used to protect your privacy.

#### **What is the purpose of this research?**

The purpose of this research is to contribute to our knowledge about the ways in which young women use the formative experiences found in secondary school to develop leadership identity. Past studies have indicated that educational practices may contribute to gendered views of women as leaders. There is room therefore for critical exploration of how a student's leadership identity is developed through their secondary school and how this informs their leadership development. By drawing out personal stories, it can provide clarity around values, ideals, and beliefs. This may build a more authentic leader through relating their life story as a point of learning, and drawing out moments and events that may have held them back.

As a leadership consultant, I have noticed women are often hesitant to consider themselves as leaders, even when assuming a leadership role. I wish to understand why this exists, even in women who are perceived as successful leaders. Developing a leader identity as a young woman can thus enable women to start thinking of themselves as leaders, which could then see more of them step into leadership roles.

I aim to use the data gathered from my participants to go towards completing my Master of Educational Leadership, as well as using the knowledge gained to inform my future practice within academic research (conferences, journals etc.) and in my professional career as a leadership consultant.

### **How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

I have asked for any potential participants through contacting my professional network and asking them to send this information to any women leaders they believe would be interested in participating in this research. The inclusion criteria for this research is focused on women who have had experience leading others, aged between 25-35 years, and had leadership roles as secondary school students. Due to the in-depth nature of the data to be gathered, only four leaders will be asked to participate in this research. I have excluded any person that is part of my immediate group of friends or known by me directly to ensure the integrity of the research and to reduce possible researcher bias.

No participants will be able to be identified in any documentation relating to the research that is published. All documents will be stored in a locked cupboard in School of Education premises and not accessed by anyone other than the primary researcher or the project supervisor.

### **What will happen in this research?**

The research involves an initial meeting to give an overview of the research process, to answer any questions, to hand out the journal, and to give a beginning question. This will be followed by a second meeting, with the timing agreed by both parties, which will be an interview for approximately one hour. During this session, I will be gathering data through questioning and through listening to the participant. This will be repeated with a second and final interview to follow on the journaling, through questioning if there is anything in the journals that has been prompted by reflecting on their experiences. At this stage, the interviews will be completed but participants will have an opportunity to contact me to ask any questions or bring up any issues. I will then be transcribing all the interviews, which have been recorded, and then the data will be analysed after the transcripts are given to the participants to check for accuracy. The participant has then completed their participation in the research but will receive a summary of findings before the final thesis is submitted for marking.

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

There is unlikely to be any risks at any stage of the research, however, disclosing personal information to a stranger can be disconcerting.

### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

To mitigate this issue, I will be taking time to provide the participants with information about the research and about me, to provide a more relaxed environment. I will be open to stop the interview at any stage should the participant feel uncomfortable.

### **What are the benefits?**

The research is contributing towards a Master of Educational Leadership at AUT University for the primary researcher. Participants will gain insight and knowledge of how they formed their leadership identity through sharing their secondary school experiences. Further, this research may build a more authentic leader through relating their life story as a point of learning and drawing out moments and events that held them back.

In terms of benefits to the wider community, there is a need for women to step into leadership more readily and I would like to contribute knowledge to the growing body of literature that clears this path in some way and builds understanding of how we can influence gender balance in leadership across our communities.

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

Confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms in all of the published documents including published data, and any acknowledgements at the start of the thesis. All paperwork will be kept on a password protected computer file and the hard copies locked in a secure facility at the School of Education, AUT Akoranga Drive. North Shore.

### **What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The investment of time will be the main cost associated with this research. The first meeting will take approximately 30 minutes. The first and second interviews are likely to take one hour each. The amount of time journaling will remain with the participant, however a time of no less than 10 minutes is requested. Any parking costs (aside from fines) will be reimbursed to the participant.

### **What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

The researcher requires the potential participant to inform them of their availability no more than two weeks after the initial conversation.

### **How do I agree to participate in this research?**

The potential participant will be required to complete a Consent Form which will be forwarded to them by the researcher. The Consent Form must be signed and returned to the researcher before any interviews can take place.

### **Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

Each participant will receive a summary of findings from the researcher and be able to access the final copy of the thesis.

### **What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Alison Smith, al.smith@aut.ac.nz, (09) 921 9999, ext. 7363

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext. 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Vicky Pond Dunlop

Email contact: Vfc5304@autuni.ac.nz

Phone contact: 021 764 255

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Alison Smith

Email contact: al.smith@aut.ac.nz

Phone contact: (09) 921 9999, ext 7363

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 9th June 2016, AUTEK Reference number 16/239.

## APPENDIX B

### Consent Form

**Project title:**

Women's leadership identity journeys: The influence of past student leadership experiences on the formation of leadership identity in women leaders.

**Project Supervisor:** Alison Smith, School of Education, AUT

**Researcher:** Vicky Pond Dunlop

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 12 May 2016.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be digitally recorded (audio only) and transcribed.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself, or any information that I have provided for this project, at any time up to the 31st July, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including digital recordings and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one):

Yes   No

Participant's signature:

.....

Participant's name:

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Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on type the date on which the final approval was granted AUTEK Reference number 16/239

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Initial Journaling Questions**

1. When you think about secondary school, what memories emerge? Regrets? Highlights?
2. How was leadership modelled at secondary school? Who did it best and why? Did women model leadership differently than men?
3. What leadership roles did you participate in? Did you volunteer, or were you chosen?

### **Researcher questions**

1. Thinking back to when you were at secondary school, what opportunities did you have to take a role as a leader? How did you feel about yourself when completing the role?
2. How did you feel about yourself after you completed your time as leader?
3. What opportunities were you given to learn how to be a leader? What were you told about being a woman and a leader? How were these messages taught?
4. What would you like young women at secondary school to know about being a leader that you may not have been taught? What would you say to your younger self?
5. Did anyone stand out to you at school as a role model for leadership? Who did you look up to at school?
6. Were there any other events at school that you can remember, that may have nothing to do with leadership, that influenced you in some way – an event; a person?
7. What was the period from when you left school to when you started your first role as a leader? How did you feel about being selected for this role? Why do you think you got this role?

Please note: Other questions will be asked depending on the answer from the participant.

# APPENDIX D

## Advertising flyer

### A STUDY INTO THE FORMATION OF LEADERSHIP IDENTITY IN WOMEN: A CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS



#### STUDY:

Women's leadership journeys: The influence of past student leadership experiences on the formation of leadership identity.

#### Participants:

We require:

- Adult female leaders
- Between 25-35 years
- Experienced in leading others
- Had NZ secondary school leadership role(s)
- A willingness to give their time and discuss their experiences



#### Ethics:

The research participants will have their privacy respected and their participation (including their names) will be kept confidential in according with the AUTECH Ethics guidelines. See <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics/guidelines-and-procedures>

#### RESEARCH AIMS:

- To critically examine adult female leaders' perceptions of the influence of their secondary school experiences on the construction of their leadership identity.
- To critically examine ways in which educators and the education environment can assist young women to build leader identity to inform future leadership practice.
- To highlight the significant underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions globally.
- To explore ways in which we can develop positive leader identity (that is, internalizing the identity of being a leader) in young women in order to have them attain to be an authentic, transformative leader.

The research will be used to complete the requirements for a Master of Educational Leadership for the researcher. It will also go towards a journal article and possible conference contributions.

#### METHOD:

- Data will be gathered using a qualitative approach.
- Participants will be asked to take part in two interview sessions with journaling in between the sessions. The study will involve the participants reflecting on their secondary school leadership experiences and, through narrative inquiry method of interviewing, identifying and describing ways in which their school experiences formed their leadership journey.
- After the data is gathered, the participants will be given the opportunity to see their transcripts and give any feedback. The data will then be produced into individual case studies for the purpose of completing a thesis for a Master of Educational Leadership for the researcher at AUT University.

If you are willing to participate please contact the researcher directly to register your interest.

#### CONTACTS:

Primary Researcher:

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