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# **It's all about relationships: Women managing women and the impact on their careers**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Management

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# Abstract

Women represent nearly half of New Zealand's workforce, making it likely that a woman will, at some stage during her working life, have a woman manager. She may also manage women employees. However, despite this likelihood, very little is known about the nature of women's hierarchical workplace relationships and even less about the impact these relationships have on women's careers. This research used narrative inquiry, relational cultural theory and the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) to explore the relational experiences of 15 New Zealand women and the impact of these hierarchical relationships on career decisions. It was undertaken in two phases. Phase One used a combination of creative methods and semi-structured interviews to explore the participants' experiences. Phase Two brought the participants together in workshops to develop personal and organisational strategies aimed at strengthening workplace relationships.

Phase One found that most of the participants had experienced a negative relationship with a women manager and/or employee. Many of those participants subsequently left the organisation they worked for as a direct or indirect result of that relationship. Conversely, nearly half of the participants spoke of a positive relationship and while these were beneficial, they were not linked to a subsequent career decision. These findings suggest that negative relationships affect a woman's career decisions to a greater extent than positive relationships. The research also extends the KCM by adding the impact of women's hierarchical relationships to the career parameters of balance and challenge.

Phase Two delved further into these findings to determine that women have gender-based expectations of women managers, such as an expectation of a higher degree of

emotional understanding and support from a woman manager than would be expected from a man. In addition, while the participants look to women managers for some form of career support, most were not striving for senior management positions. They were instead motivated by a desire to make a difference and live a balanced life, with the demands of senior organisational roles seen as being in conflict with their relationships and family responsibilities. This raises a dilemma from a gender equity perspective, with research suggesting that a critical mass of women at the senior leadership level reduces the gender pay gap and increases the promotional opportunities of women at all organisational levels.

Phase Two identified a number of personal and organisational strategies to better support women's hierarchical relationships, as one way of enhancing women's careers. Taking a relational approach, an holistic gendered framework is proposed that situates relationships within the broader personal, organisational, societal and temporal context. Strategies are recommended to enhance personal and organisational relational awareness and acceptance, development of relational skills and support, as well as structural change to better align career paths to senior management with women's career aspirations and realities. In doing so, this thesis aims to progress the discussion on the ways in which organisations and women can better support each other to promote workplace gender equity.

# Acknowledgements

*This thesis is dedicated to all of those women from the past who have struggled, fought, and sacrificed so much for the rights that we take for granted today.*

I feel extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to listen to and share the stories of the 15 women who participated in this research. This thesis may be my work, but it is based in their lived experiences. I have learned so much from them and feel very grateful for the generous contribution of their time and willingness to openly discuss their experiences with me.

I would also like to warmly thank my supervisors, Professor Sarah Leberman and Dr Margot Edwards who have inspired, challenged and supported me throughout my PhD journey. I have thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of the supervision process.

Finally, thank you to my wife, Caroline, for believing in me, supporting me, helping me to celebrate my successes, and most of all, reminding me to enjoy and treasure every moment of this amazing opportunity and journey.

# Submission of a Thesis Based on Publications

This PhD was completed by articles for publication. It meets the requirements of Massey University that have been listed below.

Massey University allows the submission of theses based upon published research (or research accepted for publication), providing it conforms to the following:

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- The candidate is expected to have a working knowledge of all parts of the thesis, and to be able to answer questions about the thesis as a whole in the oral examination.
- The candidate is required to complete the form DRC 16 - 'Statement of Contribution to Doctoral Thesis Containing Publications' - for each article/paper included in the thesis.

# Publications

As well as the articles contained in this thesis, I have co-authored the following refereed book chapters.

Hurst, J., & Leberman, S. (2015). New Zealand women in leadership: Opportunities and challenges. In S.R. Madsen, F.W. Ngunjiri, K.A. Longman & C. Cherrey (Eds.), *Women and leadership around the world* (pp. 207-226). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Leberman, S., & Hurst, J. (in press). The connection between success, choice, and leadership for women. In S.R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of research on gender and leadership*. Edward Elgar Publishers.



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## Chapter One: Introduction

*Some of us have great runways already built for us. If you have one, take off. But if you don't have one, realize it's your responsibility to grab a shovel and build one for yourself and for those who will follow you.*

*- Amelia Earhart (1897- 1937)*

As a woman born in the late 1960s, I grew up with a strong awareness of feminism. During my university years studying law I was exposed to the politics of equality and difference and the many injustices women faced because of their gender. I was in equal measure shocked and inspired by the writings of radical feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon. I read the popular feminist books of the 1980's and early 1990's and was inspired by the visit of feminist author, Susan Faludi, to our small university city in the deep south of New Zealand. I identified as a feminist and believed in the promise of the "sisterhood", that if women stood together united, we would achieve equality in the public and private spheres. There were relatively few women who were role models in New Zealand's business world at that time, but I was confident in the promise that with the increasing number of women entering the workforce, they would support each other to reach the upper echelons of power and in doing so, shatter the glass ceiling for the younger women like myself following closely behind.

Over the years a number of women have quietly confided in me that they have found a women manager difficult to work for, in a way that they never seemed to speak of their male managers. This harks back to an experience I had early in my career. As a newly qualified lawyer I worked for a woman who I greatly admired for achieving a

senior organisational position, which was particularly noteworthy in the legal profession at that time. However, I found her difficult to work for and after less than a year, I left that organisation, with my self-confidence severely damaged. My experiences since then of working for women and managing women employees have been a mixture of good, bad and indifferent. Those experiences, combined with the stories shared by other women colleagues and friends, have increasingly led me to ponder the role women should play in supporting each other's careers in order to achieve greater representation at the senior management table. This is the genesis of my research journey.

This research focuses on the experiences of women who have managed and/or been managed by women and the resulting impacts these experiences may have had on their careers. The following sections provide the context and a brief overview of the key conceptual areas relevant to this area of research.

### **1.1 The New Zealand context**

As I approach my 50s, I find myself somewhat less optimistic about the likelihood of seeing true gender equity in New Zealand organisations during my lifetime, particularly given the somewhat gloomy picture painted by the gender statistics. Over the last 50 years, New Zealand has, without question, made great gender equity strides. In the mid-1960s, women represented less than 30% of the workforce (Statistics New Zealand, 2016a). This has risen to 47% in 2016 (Statistics New Zealand, 2016b). In 2005, New Zealand had a woman prime minister, governor-general, chief justice, and chief executive officer of the largest company (McGregor & Fountaine, 2006), which were collectively considered to be the country's top jobs at that time. However, while women represent nearly half of the workforce, they are markedly under-represented at

the governance and senior management level. In 2016, none of the country's top 50 publically listed companies had a woman chief executive (Gattung, 2016) and women held only 19% of senior executive positions in private sector companies, down from 34% in 2004 (Davies, 2016; Grant Thornton International Ltd, 2016). Of the businesses surveyed, 42% had no women at that senior executive level, as opposed to 26% in 2012 and 37% in 2015 (Davies, 2016; Grant Thornton International Ltd, 2016). Overall, New Zealand is now in the bottom ten countries surveyed by Grant Thornton, a sharp contrast from its third position in 2004.

The situation is similarly gloomy at the governance level. While women's participation rate on state sector boards and committees was 43% in 2015 (Ministry for Women, 2016a), the private sector does not fare as well. At the end of 2015, only 17% of the board members of 125 companies listed on the New Zealand Stock Exchange were women (NZX Limited, 2016). Not only are women poorly represented in the top organisational decision-making positions, they are also paid 11.8% less than men, based on median hourly earnings (Statistics New Zealand, 2015a). This is despite 64% of university graduates being women (Ministry for Women, 2016c). Collectively the statistics suggest that New Zealand is a long way from achieving genuine gender equity in the workplace, a situation which is also shared with much of the western world (Grant Thornton International Ltd, 2016).

## **1.2 Benefits of gender diversity**

Gender equity, a principle founded in justice and fairness (Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002), will not truly become a reality in the New Zealand workplace while women remain markedly under-represented in the upper echelons of organisations and continue to be paid less than men. From a business perspective though, it makes

sense to take a more inclusive approach. Research demonstrates that a critical mass of women in senior governance and management positions increases financial performance, enhances innovation and group performance, and improves employee retention and job satisfaction (Badal & Harter, 2014; Catalyst, 2013; Dezsö & Ross, 2012; Joecks, Pull, & Vetter, 2013; Pellegrino, D'Amato, & Weisberg, 2011; Wagner, 2011). Senior management roles also benefit women, with research pointing to a lessening of the gender pay gap (Cohen & Huffman, 2007) and an increase in the promotion of women at all organisational levels (Kurtulus & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012; Skaggs, Stainback, & Duncan, 2012).

### **1.3 Factors influencing the gender gap**

The benefits to business and women of greater gender diversity at the senior organisational levels are known. The educational pipeline is in place and women are almost equally represented in the workforce. However, this is not translating into greater representation at the senior management and governance levels of organisations, nor a lessening of the gender pay gap. The sheer weight of numbers of women participating in the workforce has not brought about workplace gender equity and the statistics suggest a worsening situation for gender equity in New Zealand.

Researchers and organisational practitioners have focused on a number of factors that contribute to this gender gap including for example, the prevalence of unconscious gender bias (Rhee & Sigler, 2015) and the connection between gender and leadership stereotypes and the resulting implications for women seeking organisational advancement and positional leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008; Mavin & Grandy, 2012; Powell, 2012; Prime, Carter, & Welbourne, 2009; Rhee & Sigler, 2015). One area that has received relatively little

focus though, is the relationships between women in the workplace and the implications these have from a career and gender equity perspective.

#### **1.4 Women's workplace relationships**

Relationships are at the core of our lives (Fletcher, 1999; Jordan, 2004b; Jordan & Walker, 2004; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012) with relational cultural theory (RCT), a feminist theory of human development, positing that people grow in connection with one another. Relationships are central to organisational structures, with work being an inherently relational act (Blustein, 2011). With women representing nearly 50% of the workforce, it is likely that women, will at some stage during their careers, find themselves in intra-gender workplace relationships that are hierarchical in nature. Research suggests that in a gendered society, women's experience and expectations of relationships differ to that of men (Blustein, 2011; Brock, 2008; Fletcher, 1999, 2012; Sias, 2009). These expectations are likely to influence relationships between women managers and employees. However, this is an under-researched area, indicating that a closer exploration of hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace is warranted.

Women are encouraged to support each other in the workplace. Relationships structured around mentoring, networking and role modelling by and for women are promoted as ways women can support each other, as well as strategies to enhance women's careers and organisational advancement (Carter & Silva, 2010; Dworkin, Maurer, & Schipani, 2012; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010; Madsen, 2008; O'Neil, Hopkins, & Sullivan, 2011; Tolar, 2012; Woolnough & Fielden, 2014). For example, Sandberg (2013), Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, advocates for women to help each other and to act like a coalition, in order to effect

organisational change. However, research suggests that while these types of supportive relationships are helpful, they do not provide the same degree of career benefit to women as received by men (Carter & Silva, 2010; Ely et al., 2011; Kottke & Agars, 2015; Kumra, 2010).

### **1.5 The shadow side of women's workplace relationships**

Not all relationships between women are positive, supportive and career-enhancing. The theme of the difficult woman manager working against the interests of her women employees has been picked up by the popular press. For example, the Wall Street Journal ran an article in 2013 called "The Tyranny of the Queen Bee" characterising her as follows.

Far from nurturing the growth of younger female talent, they push aside possible competitors by chipping away at their self-confidence or undermining their professional standing. It is a trend thick with irony: The very women who have complained for decades about unequal treatment now perpetuate many of the same problems by turning on their own. (Drexler, 2013, p. 2)

These negative experiences between women in the workplace are often not spoken about openly. If they are discussed, it is done quietly, as if the very mention of them brings with it a sense of shame and disloyalty, as described by one feminist author.

A peculiar silence surrounds woman's inhumanity to woman. Feminists have mainly remained silent: I have remained silent. Is it simply too painful to remember one's own betrayal at female hands, too difficult to analyse the ways in which women – myself included, collaborate in the undoing of other women;

too frightening to face the wrath of women for breaking this particular silence?  
(Chesler, 2001, p. 26)

A small body of research has looked at this shadow side of women's workplace relationships, pointing to a lack of solidarity, competitive behaviours and relational aggression in some cases (Brock, 2008, 2010; Derks, Ellemers, van Laar, & de Groot, 2011; Derks, van Laar, Ellemers, & de Groot, 2011; Derks, van Laar, Ellemers, & Raghoe, 2015; Ellemers, Rink, Derks, & Ryan, 2012; Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mavin, 2006a, 2006b; Mavin, Grandy, & Williams, 2014; Sheppard & Aquino, 2013; Staines, Tavis, & Jayaratne, 1974). While these studies reach different conclusions about the extent of this type of behaviour and the contributory factors, it is clear that not all women managers are supportive of their women employees. Research also suggests these behaviours can have long lasting impacts (Brock, 2008, 2010; Mavin et al., 2014), which are compounded by a sense of betrayal when caused by a woman. This is however, a difficult area to explore, without being seen to blame women.

## **1.6 Women's careers**

Little is known about the impact women's hierarchical relationships have on their careers, particularly when those relationships are negative. However, research suggests that the careers of women tend to develop differently to those of men and are influenced by a complex mix of factors, such as the relational impacts of their career decisions, including the impact on a spouse and children (Cabrera, 2007; Lalande, Crozier, & Davey, 2000; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Rapoport et al., 2002). Women's careers are, for many reasons, often more opportunistic, unplanned and more interrupted than the careers of men (Doherty & Manfredi, 2010; Lalande et al., 2000; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2008). This tends to make it more



difficult for women to reach senior management positions which require systematic organisational advancement through line management positions, with long periods of uninterrupted employment (O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008; Vinkenburg & Weber, 2012).

The Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) recognises the complexities of women's careers by proposing three career parameters, namely authenticity, balance and challenge, which change in relative importance during the course of a woman's working life. The KCM situates a woman's career within her broader life context and emphasises the relational nature of her career decision-making. This is consistent with research demonstrating that women tend to take a more relational focus when defining career success. Rather than taking a narrow view of success bounded within a work context, women focus more on all aspects of life and achieving a balance between their working and personal lives when measuring success (Afiouni & Karam, 2014; Cabrera, 2007; Dyke & Murphy, 2006; Lalande et al., 2000; Lirio et al., 2007; Maddox-Daines, Jawahar, & Richardson, 2016; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neill, Shapiro, Ingols, & Blake-Beard, 2013; Sturges, 1999).

A woman's focus on a successful life, which seeks to integrate work and personal life (including relationship and family responsibilities), is often in conflict with the demands of senior positional leadership, which are characterised by a high level of commitment to the organisation, demonstrated for example, by long hours of work and sacrifice of personal and family time (O'Neil et al., 2008; Sinclair, 2005). These organisational demands are particularly difficult for many women and significantly affect their opportunities for organisational advancement. Women also tend to focus on internal measures of career success, such as accomplishment, achievement and enjoyment,

rather than on the objective measures of position, promotion and pay (Dyke & Murphy, 2006; Sturges, 1999). However, organisations are generally structured around more linear careers, rewarding achievement through pay and promotion, which are aligned to a more conventional and masculine notion of a career, and therefore result in the privileging of men's careers (Kottke & Agars, 2015; Sturges, 1999; Vinkenburg & Weber, 2012). When researching the impact women's hierarchical relationships have on careers, it is essential to understand these gendered factors influencing their careers.

### **1.7 My experiences**

My own experiences in the workforce mirror some of the issues discussed above and canvassed in this research. I am 48, a lawyer by profession and work as a policy, strategy and governance consultant in the public sector. My passion in life from a very young age was music and I trained as a classical pianist. However, after becoming crippled by performance anxiety in my late-teens, I eventually decided to become a lawyer instead.

My first job as a lawyer was in a large law firm, working for two partners, one of whom was a woman, Lyn (name changed), who had a reputation for working exceptionally hard and being a major income producer for the firm. As a young woman partner, in a male-dominated profession, she was an inspiration to me. However, early in this working relationship she crossed a significant personal boundary, which seriously affected our professional relationship. She stopped giving me work and I spent several months staring at my office wall. No one seemed to be interested in helping me. After less than a year I took the first opportunity available to leave, with my self-confidence severely damaged. A few years later I applied for a position at another large law firm.

I was shortlisted and interviewed, which went very well until the male partner asked me who I had worked for in my first law firm position. When I mentioned Lyn, he told me she was his wife. At this moment I knew I would not get the job. Even though he had said that I was the leading candidate, I never heard back from him. My poem describes my relationship with Lyn (Figure 1.1).

Young and eager, wanting to learn  
A pocket rocket to look up to  
A beacon of success in a man's world  
Full of hope, dashed so cruelly  
By boundaries overstepped between  
Personal and professional, a flick of a switch  
The flow of work turned off, ostracised  
Hours spent looking at a wall  
Feeling dismayed, bitter, angry, disillusioned  
Betrayed by her role model, no option left  
But to leave.

**Figure 1.1: My poem about my manager, Lyn**

For most of my subsequent career I worked for men and in a male dominated environment. In my mid 30s I started a public sector consultancy practice with a colleague, Dave (name changed). In the space of three years we grew from the two of us to a staff of 16. We had a reasonably even mix of men and women employees. I found the pressures and responsibility of managing staff and being the main provider of work for the business difficult. In my late 30s my personal life changed and I found myself needing to reduce my hours of work for a period of time. I recall one woman employee being upset with me because she thought I was letting them down and that I had a responsibility to them to be bringing in work, even though this was also part of

their job. I decided that I needed to leave the consultancy firm. I negotiated an exit with Dave and faced a degree of animosity from some staff.

Since this time I have continued as a self-employed consultant with no staff responsibilities. I continued to work on some major projects alongside and supporting public sector employees. I worked for a number of clients but one, Virginia (name changed), stands out as a senior woman manager I have worked closely with for a considerable period of time and developed a strong working relationship with, based on mutual trust and respect. With Virginia, I have found a strong, caring woman, who understands my strengths and respects my intellect, who thinks strategically, and who can stand firm on matters of principle when needed. I admire her management style and her support for her women employees. The second poem describes my relationship with Virginia (Figure 1.2).

A strong woman, making a difference  
Yet quietly successful, caring and professional  
Trust earned, respecting each other  
For who we are as much as what we can do  
Friendship forged through challenges faced  
Together, an enabler of self-belief  
To reach for my dreams, a role model  
A mentor, a friend.

**Figure 1.2: My poem about my client/manager, Virginia**

When I reflect back on my experiences, there is little doubt in my mind that some of the women employees I had at the consultancy firm would have categorised me as a “Queen Bee” and that many people I have worked with as a consultant would describe me as hardnosed and tougher than many men. While it has never been my intention to hinder a woman’s career progression, I can see that my high expectations, frustrations

with managing staff and my lack of interest in developing more personal relationships with them may be perceived negatively.

Reflecting on a varied and successful career, I am struck by how opportunistic it has been. I have never had a plan. I have been able to see and seize opportunities that have presented themselves and can cope with a high degree of uncertainty, which is essential to being a successful consultant. My career has never been traditional or linear and as I age, I find myself increasingly motivated by a desire to do challenging, meaningful work, which provides me with flexibility, and allows me to be true to myself and my values.

### **1.8 Research aims and approach**

My own experiences of managing and being managed by women and those shared with me by other women have led me to this research. While there is some literature exploring hierarchical workplace relationships and the careers of women, there is a noticeable gap, namely the interconnection between these two areas. This research seeks to explore that gap by examining the experiences of women who have managed and/or been managed by women and the impact, if any, that those relationships have had on subsequent career decisions. By gaining an understanding of both experience and impact, personal and organisational strategies can then be developed which aim to strengthen hierarchical relationships and the careers of women, contributing to the ongoing gender equity dialogue.

This research uses narrative inquiry to explore lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Combining creative methods, interviews and workshops, it focuses on the following questions.

**Research Question One:** What have been the experiences of women in New Zealand who have been managed by and/or managed women?

**Research Question Two:** How have these experiences influenced their career decisions?

**Research Question Three:** How can organisations encourage women managers and employees to support and promote each other's careers?

This is an exploratory investigation and raises a number of areas for further research, as well as recommending personal and organisational strategies, making it relevant to academics and organisational practitioners. Two phases were adopted. The first phase aimed to explore each participant's relational experience, situated within the context of her life. The second phase aimed to identify personal and organisational strategies designed to strengthen relationships. Further detail on methodology is contained in Chapter Three.

While this research is essentially feminist in nature, it is not situated within a particular feminist paradigm (such as feminist standpoint theory or third wave feminism). Instead, it brings together gender theories in three areas, namely gender equity, relational cultural theory (RCT) and gendered career theory (including the KCM). This is situated within the framework of narrative inquiry, which is not only a research method, but also a way of thinking about phenomena, based on a narrative view of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The emphasis is on exploring and understanding experience, as lived, within the many contexts of a person's life. This theoretical framework emphasises relationships and careers within the personal, organisational, and societal context. As with all research, decisions must be constantly

made on the theoretical paths to be explored. As a result, I made a conscious decision to not undertake an in-depth exploration of certain gender issues, such as those relating to gender stereotypes or unconscious bias. This is not to render those issues unimportant. Rather, they are not the focus of this thesis.

## **1.9 Terminology**

Language is important, particularly where it involves labelling. Jordan (1997, p. 21), an RCT theorist, usefully comments that “we must be very cautious with our language, for in naming, we give form”. While this was written in the context of psychology, it is equally relevant to the use of language in other contexts. In writing this thesis, I have contemplated the language of “woman/women” and “female”. It is grammatically correct to refer to a female manager, in the same way we would refer to a male manager. However, this is not terminology that sits comfortably with me. I prefer to say a woman manager. The word female, in my view, reduces women to their biological sex. In the context of being a manager, it is more than our biology that is important. It is our gender, which is the combination of our biology, and our socially and culturally developed identities (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992; Tong, 2009).

While I cannot find any literature specifically on this issue, I have canvassed two women academics for their views. Professor Susan Madsen, who has a particular interest in women in leadership responded that, “I do use ‘female’ occasionally, but not very often. I just think women and woman is so much warmer and more applicable than female” (personal correspondence, April 10, 2014). Professor Catherine Mackinnon, a well-known legal scholar and feminist, responded that:

I definitely have thought extensively about this. Women are not a biological group. We are a social group. The term "female" is a biological term referring

to sex. The combination of sex and gender defines “woman” and “women”. Including as an adjective. I urge you to stand your ground on your usage (personal correspondence, April 18, 2014).

Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis I use woman and women, rather than female.

### 1.10 Thesis structure

The structure of my thesis is detailed in Table 1.1. The table summarises each chapter, including four journal articles. The articles were submitted to specific journals in their specified format. In accordance with the Massey University requirements, the format and referencing in each article has been standardised to ensure consistency throughout the thesis.

**Table 1.1: Thesis structure**

<b>Thesis Structure</b>
<p><b>Chapter 1 - Introduction</b></p> <p>This chapter sets the scene for the themes, concepts, and ideas to come.</p>
<p><b>Chapter 2 - Literature review</b></p> <p>This chapter reviews the literature on gender equity, relational cultural theory, and gendered career theory. It then brings the literature together in the following published article.</p> <p><i>Article 1:</i></p> <p>Hurst, J., Leberman, S., &amp; Edwards, M. (2016). Women managing women: Intersections between hierarchical relationships, career development and gender equity. <i>Gender in Management: An International Journal</i>, 31(1), 1-14. doi:10.1108/GM-03-2015-0018</p> <p>Chapter 2 synthesizes the literature that underpins the thesis. It is also supplemented by literature review sections in each of the subsequent three articles.</p>



### **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

This chapter describes the research design and methods used to address the research questions. These included a combination of semi-structured interviews, participant-generated creative materials, and participant workshops. It details the two-phased research approach, participant selection, the data analysis methods, and limitations.

### **Chapter 4 - The participants' stories**

As this study is based in narrative inquiry, the experiences of each participant were explored within their broader life context. This chapter tells the participants' stories. It concludes with a table summarising the participants' experiences with women managers and/or women employees.

### **Chapter 5 - Exploring lived experience – hierarchical relationships and career impacts**

This chapter contains the following article which has been accepted for publication in the Australian Journal of Management.

#### *Article 2:*

Hurst, J., Leberman, S., & Edwards, M. (in press). The career impacts of women managing women. *Australian Journal of Management*

Article 2 presents the findings from Phase One of the study, which used narrative inquiry to explore the lived experiences of the participants and the impact their hierarchical relationships with women in the workplace have had on their career decisions.

### **Chapter 6 - Relational expectations**

This chapter contains the following article which has been accepted for publication in Gender in Management: An International Journal.

#### *Article 3:*

Hurst, J., Leberman, S., & Edwards, M. (2017). The relational expectations of women managing women. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 32(1). doi:10.1108/GM-02-2016-0016

Article 3 draws on findings from Phase Two to specifically explore the relationship expectations the participants have of their women managers and/or employees.

**Chapter 7 – Strategies for strengthening relationships**

This chapter identifies personal and organisational strategies aimed at strengthening hierarchical relationships between women.

This chapter contains the following article which has been accepted for publication in the Journal of Management & Organization.

*Article 4:*

Hurst, J., Leberman, S., & Edwards, M. (in press). An holistic relational approach to managing relationships at work. *Journal of Management & Organization*

Article 4 draws on findings from Phase Two to specifically explore strategies to manage strained hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace.

**Chapter 8 – Conclusion - Bringing the threads together**

This chapter summaries the research findings, the contribution to theory and practice, and identifies areas for further research.

The following chapter explores the literature relevant to women’s workplace relationships, gendered career theory and gender equity, and examines the intersections between these areas from a multi-disciplinary perspective.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This research is essentially feminist in nature. In their article on feminist mentoring and relational cultural theory, Alvarez and Lazzari (2016) defined feminists “as those who focus upon and advocate for the rights and needs of women, with an understanding of the complex intersections of their diverse characteristics and life circumstances” (p. 44). Feminist research focuses on power imbalances, listening to and privileging the voices and experiences of women and in doing so uncovering hidden or subjugated knowledge, respecting difference, diversity and intersectionality, and recognising that there are multiple pathways to discovering knowledge (Beckman, 2014; Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2010). It seeks to empower women and promote “a more just society for women and other oppressed groups” (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 129). This research is not though, grounded in a specific feminist paradigm, such as feminist standpoint theory, post-structuralism, critical theory, post-modernism, or third wave feminism. This was a conscious and considered choice for two reasons. First, by reading broadly across a range of feminist theorists, I am able to draw on insights from different feminist approaches (Beckman, 2014). Second and consistent with the approach of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to narrative inquiry, my preference was to start with the experiences of my women participants and let those experiences in large part guide the theoretical inquiry. This privileges experience, while acknowledging the importance of context. It also reflects my own feminist views which are not captured by any one specific paradigm.

This research focuses on the intersections between hierarchical relationships, career development and gender equity. It brings together gender theories in three areas: gender equity, relational cultural theory and career theory as it relates to the careers of women. Each of these are canvassed in this chapter, which concludes with a

published literature review article, that draws together the theoretical threads and lays out a research agenda. This article was written early in my research journey and reflects my understanding of the literature at that time. It framed and informed the fieldwork and analysis processes, which in turn encouraged me to delve further into the literature, forming a “conversation between theory and life” that is a key feature of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41). It also brought greater focus to the theoretical framework, resulting in a conscious decision to not include an in-depth exploration of gender issues relating to the nature and influence of gender stereotypes and unconscious bias. While these issues are important and are referred to in the literature review article, they are not the focus of this thesis.

## **2.1 Gender equity**

The term “gender” has been the subject of extensive academic consideration and is now generally understood to mean more than a person’s biological sex. Gender is a combination of biology, as well as socially and culturally developed identities (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992; Tong, 2009), and is an “organizing principle of society” (Rapoport et al., 2002, p. 10). The terms gender equality and gender equity are commonly used in women’s literature, often interchangeably and without discussion as to their meaning. However, the two concepts are not interchangeable and the definitions and appropriateness of each to the debate regarding the rights of women are contested. There is surprisingly little written in this space and my search for clarity of terminology has taken me into the realm of public and international law.

### **2.1.1 Gender equality**

Gender equality broadly consists of two concepts: formal equality and substantive equality. Formal equality focuses on procedural consistency by treating like with like and providing for consistency of treatment, with every person being equal before the

law (Fredman, 2011; MacKinnon, 2011). Formal equality, or equality before the law, was responsible for the major gains in areas such as the right to vote and a married woman's right to own property (Thomas, 2015). However, "consistency in treatment of two individuals who appear alike but in fact differ in terms of access to power, opportunities, or material benefits, results in unequal outcomes" (Fredman, 2011, p. 2). Equality based in consistency of treatment requires a point of comparison, which with respect to gender equality, becomes the male norm, resulting in formal equality being androcentric (Fredman, 2011; MacKinnon, 2011).

The concept of gender equality has moved beyond a formal interpretation, to more substantive approaches such as equality of results, which is concerned with a fair distribution of benefits and prohibiting discrimination in results, and equality of opportunity, which seeks to equalise the starting point rather than the end result (Crespi, 2009; Facio & Morgan, 2009; Fredman, 2011). However, Fredman (2011) has criticised both approaches. An equality of results approach "does not necessitate any fundamental re-examination of the structures that perpetuate discrimination" (p. 16) and may in fact result in women being assimilated into male working patterns. Equality of opportunity may equalise the starting point, but once this is achieved, the focus shifts to individual merit, rather than seeing equality applied in a substantive and ongoing sense throughout the course of a woman's career.

Fredman (2011) recommends a principle of substantive equality based in four concepts. First, the redress of disadvantage, rather than a focus on equality of treatment. Second, the promotion of equality of respect and dignity for all individuals, based on their humanity. Third, valuing and accommodating difference and changing social structures that bring about detriment that is attached to difference, while respecting and protecting the difference itself. Fourth, providing for social inclusion and a political voice, ensuring that all people have the ability to fully participate on

equal terms in society. This approach to substantive equality is similar to that advocated by the National Council of Women (2015), which defines gender equality as follows.

Equality between men and women, entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices.

Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. (p. 3)

### **2.1.2. Gender equity**

The concept of gender equity, which is based in notions of justice, fairness and respect for difference, has been recommended by some as a better concept than gender equality (Facio & Morgan, 2009; Hammarström et al., 2014). Rapoport et al. (2002) use gender equity because of its focus on fairness.

We emphasize fairness rather than equality partly to honor the reality that different life goals and priorities, as well as differing capabilities, shape individuals' wants and needs at work, as in life as a whole. In addition, we have seen how a focus on equality can promote sameness in ways that lead inadvertently to unfair outcomes. An example is women gaining equal access to jobs that require long hours at work without complementary changes in social

norms around sharing of household responsibilities – a phenomenon that has made home life into an onerous “second shift” for many working women. (p. 11)

The National Council of Women (2015) has defined gender equity as “fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs” (p. 3), and advocates that gender equality must also be accompanied by gender equity. However, the use of gender equity is contested. For example, Facio and Morgan (2009) highlight how gender equity was first proposed by fundamentalist countries to justify limiting women’s rights, based on an argument that it is just and fair in their society to do so.

The concept of gender equality has a long history in human rights legislation (Facio & Morgan, 2009; Hammarström et al., 2014). It is a strong concept if it is understood and applied in a substantive way, such as that proposed by Fredman (2011). However, in our society, with its focus on individualism, self-management and merit (Dean, 2010), it is arguable that equality is generally misunderstood as based in the notion of women being treated equally with men, which many would maintain has been achieved. When the concept of equality is understood and applied as a principle of sameness and meritocracy, it seeks to level the playing field by providing access to the same opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender (or other factors such as race). As will be discussed later in the context of career theory, women’s careers evolve very differently from those of men due to a complex mix of factors. Applying the concept of gender equality, in terms of employment and career opportunities, will arguably only be truly equal for those women who are able and willing to follow the same career path as men (Bailyn, 2003). As many women do not do so, notions of equal employment opportunity effectively reinforce organisational structures that favour the traditional career pathways of men (Greer, 1999; Schein, 2007; Wajcman, 1998). In contrast, equity, based on notions of justice and fairness, does not seek to treat everyone in the same way, or adopt the male norm as the comparator, but rather to ensure all are

treated fairly. Gender equity is, in my view, a concept that is more open to accommodating difference and is capable of being understood and applied in a more substantive way than the concept of equality. Therefore, I have chosen to use the term “gender equity” throughout this thesis.

## **2.2 Relational cultural theory**

My thesis draws on relational cultural theory (RCT) as a theoretical framework. RCT is a feminist theory of human growth and development (Creary, Caza, & Roberts, 2015), developed initially in psychology from listening to, reflecting on and valuing women’s experiences and stories (West, 2005). RCT places relationships at the centre of human development and posits that individuals grow in connection with one another, emphasising the importance of interdependence and mutuality between relational partners (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Hartling, 2008). Mutuality is comprised of three elements: authenticity, empathy and empowerment which require relational skills such “as empathy, listening and emotional competence as well as skills in relational inquiry and the ability to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty” (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003, p. 28). When mutuality is present, a growth-fostering relationship occurs which produces five outcomes (coined the five good things in RCT), namely zest (or increased energy), empowered action, increased sense of worth, new knowledge, and a desire for more connection (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Hartling, 2008; Miller & Stiver, 1997; West, 2005). Relational power is also attended to by RCT theorists, with the focus on the exercise of “power with” or mutual power, rather than “power over” others, with the emphasis on empowering mutual growth and development (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Surrey, 1987; West, 2005).

Relational cultural theory places relationships within their personal, cultural and societal contexts (Jordan, 1994; Jordan & Walker, 2004). As a feminist theory, it



situates relational practice within the social construction of gender, maintaining that women are assigned the primary responsibility for creating the relational conditions within which human growth and development can occur (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003). This relational competence is not a function of biology (Jordan, 1999, 2004c). It is a socially constructed and gendered concept, or a way that women “do gender” (Fletcher, 2004a; Mavin & Grandy, 2012; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Women are expected to hold the responsibility for maintaining and developing relational growth, primarily through their role in the private sphere. However, this responsibility has largely been rendered invisible through unequal gendered power systems (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003).

While RCT has been extensively applied to therapeutic settings, its principles have also been applied to organisational research. Central to this is a study by Fletcher (1999) examining the relational activities of women in an engineering firm. Grounded in feminist poststructuralism, the social construction of work, and RCT, her research found that women were acting relationally in the workplace. The women employed a relational practice of interdependence, were mutual empowering, demonstrated collectivity, and exhibited personal and professional growth grounded in connection to others. However, in a masculine workplace which privileged separation, independence and self-promotion, these relational practices were not only rendered invisible, but were “disappeared”. They were associated with being “nice” or “nurturing”, seen as something expected of women, and as a result were unrewarded.

New models of relational leadership, such as transformational leadership, may be seen to include the relational strengths generally associated with women. However, Fletcher (2004a) maintains that if the relational skills proposed by these new leadership models are simply added or adopted without systemic changes to organisational structures and work practices, then existing gender/power systems will continue. This argument is

supported by research that suggests women who exhibit the characteristics of transformational leadership do not get the same credit as men because the behaviours are perceived to be feminine and are expected of women (Wolfram & Mohr, 2010). The “body in which we do something influences how it will be perceived” (Fletcher, 2004a, p. 654), demonstrating how the biological sex of the person affects interpretation of behaviour. Simply having more women in leadership positions will not effect change (Anyikwa, Chiarelli-Helminiak, Hodge, & Wells-Wilbon, 2015). Significant institutional and cultural change is required, which builds awareness of gendered work practices and the value of relational work, as well as creating the conditions and networks to support and reward relational work practices and mutually empowering relationships (Fletcher, 1999).

## **2.3 Gendered career theory**

### **2.3.1 Overview**

A career has been defined by Arthur, Svetlana, and Celeste (2005) as “the unfolding sequence of a person’s work experiences over time” (p. 177). This has been extended by Sullivan and Baruch (2009) to a more holistic approach to include “an individual’s work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside organizations, that form a unique pattern over the individual’s life span” (p. 1543). This situates a career within a broader life context and recognises the range of factors influencing a person’s career over their life course. It also includes both objective markers of a career, such as observable organisational position, and subjective elements, including how an individual interprets and perceives his or her career (Arthur et al., 2005; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

Careers are significantly influenced by gender. For men, their careers are generally linear, planned and unbroken (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006; O’Neil et al., 2008; Sullivan,

Forret, Carraher, & Mainiero, 2009). In contrast, the careers of women tend to be more opportunistic and unplanned, and involve more career breaks and interruptions than the careers of men (Doherty & Manfredi, 2010; Lalande et al., 2000; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2008). Senior management positions require long periods of uninterrupted employment, combined with a systematic progression through more senior line management positions (O'Neil et al., 2008). The non-linear and interrupted patterns of women's careers therefore, can make it particularly difficult for women to reach these senior organisational positions.

A complex mix of factors influence women's careers. These include pull factors such as the needs and demands of family and personal relationships and push factors, like discrimination, lack of organisational advancement opportunities, and the impact of masculine organisational cultures (Cabrera, 2007). Various different career models have been developed in recent years to explain non-traditional and non-linear careers and these models are useful in shedding light on the complexities of women's careers. They include the concept of the boundaryless career, where a person's career is developed outside traditional hierarchical organisational structures and beyond the boundaries of a single employer (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Another model is the concept of a protean career, where the person's career is self-directed based on individual values and subjective success measures (Cabrera, 2009).

### **2.3.2 *Kaleidoscope Career Model***

A further career theory, the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM), developed by Mainiero and Sullivan (2005), is particularly relevant to the study of women's careers. The KCM uses the metaphor of a kaleidoscope as a different way of thinking about careers.

A Kaleidoscope Career is created on your own terms, defined not by a corporation but by your own values, life choices, and parameters. Like a

kaleidoscope, your career is dynamic and in motion; as your life changes, you can alter your career to adjust to those changes rather than relinquishing control and letting a corporation dictate your life for you. (p. 111)

The KCM is relevant to the careers of men and women. However, it does put gender at the foreground, recognising the complexity of the interconnection between women's careers and personal life, including their personal relationships (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). This makes the KCM particularly relevant to understanding the careers of women.

Three career parameters are proposed by the KCM, namely authenticity, balance and challenge. Authenticity is described as being genuine and true to yourself, and extends to the alignment of organisational and personal values (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Balance focuses on the interplay between work and personal life and views these as a coherent whole rather than separate elements (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Finally, challenge has been defined in relation to work that is stimulating, as well as career advancement (Sullivan et al., 2009). The KCM recognises that these three career parameters shift and change in importance over the course of a woman's life, with challenge often favoured in the early career years, shifting to balance, and then authenticity later in life (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006).

The KCM's three career parameters have been extended in recent research by Shaw and Leberman (2015) into the experiences of women CEOs in New Zealand sport. Their research extended authenticity to include the concept of passion, balance by recognising self-awareness as its starting point, and challenge by encompassing the concept of seeking out and learning from challenges and opportunities as they arise, even when they result from negative experiences.

The KCM emphasises the relational complexities of a woman's career and situates the notion of a career within her broader life context (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). It proposes that women are making career decisions from a relational lens, and take into account the potential impact of those decisions on their relationships, primarily those situated within the private realm. This relational component was extended in the research of Shaw and Leberman (2015), to include working relationships. Their research identified that building good working relationships, based on personal values and passion, enhanced career authenticity. It also identified the importance of mentors to the development of work/non-work balance, adding another important relational component to the KCM.

While KCM research includes a relational component, it has not considered the impact of the manager/employee relationship, including good and bad relationships on the parameters of authenticity, balance and challenge. As women make decisions through a relational lens, it is to be expected that these manager/employee relationships would influence their career decisions. In addition, given the gendered nature of careers, it is also likely that a manager/employee relationship involving women would bring with it different relational dynamics and potentially have differing career implications than a male/female relationship. Research into the relationships between women managers and employees has the opportunity to extend the KCM and understanding of women's careers.

### ***2.3.3 Challenges with contemporary career theories***

Contemporary career theories, such as the KCM, have been reviewed by Baruch and Vardi (2015), who identified two key problems. First, they maintain that contemporary career theories have largely shifted career responsibility from organisations to individuals. Second, these theories tend to take a positive focus that, "with the right

approach, everything is possible, that things will eventually work out, and that a successful career will eventuate” (p. 356). However, Baruch and Vardi (2015) suggest that negative experiences may have more influence over career paths than positive ones, because people learn more from failure than success. When researching the careers of women, it is important therefore, to consider more broadly the organisational context, as well as the impact of both good and bad experiences, including relational experiences.

Baruch and Vardi (2015) also commented, in reviewing the KCM, that while balance may be good for individual women:

It is inevitably rare that people who look for balance will make it to the top of the organizational and wealth echelons, although they may achieve internal career satisfaction. (p. 366)

The concept of balance has also been subject to some scrutiny and criticism, on the basis that it suggests women will give equal weight to the work and non/work aspects of their lives. Rapoport et al. (2002) have reflected that “not everyone wants to give equal weight to work and personal life, but this should not mean that choosing one requires sacrificing the other” (p. 17). Balance, they maintain, suggests a separation of work and personal life. Instead, the focus should be on the concept of integration of both work and personal life, an essential component of gender equity.

Balance is linked to the way in which career success is defined. Research suggests that men tend to focus more on external factors, such as organisational position and pay when defining career success (Dyke & Murphy, 2006; Sturges, 1999). Sturges (1999) found that while these types of external factors are still relevant to women, they are not key career drivers or determinants of career success. In contrast, women often look to more internal factors such as accomplishment, achievement, and enjoyment

when defining career success (Sturges, 1999). Many women also take into account factors such as the balance between their working and personal lives, emphasising the primary importance of personal relationships and family wellbeing (Afiouni & Karam, 2014; Cabrera, 2007; Dyke & Murphy, 2006; Lalande et al., 2000; Lirio et al., 2007; Maddox-Daines et al., 2016; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neill et al., 2013; Sturges, 1999). Women who seek the flexibility and balance to accommodate both their work and their personal lives view this as living a successful life, even though their careers may be detrimentally impacted in terms of organisational advancement and remuneration.

#### **2.3.4 Organisational structures**

Organisational practices and policies are generally structured around conventional and traditional career paths, definitions of career success and career goals (Vinkenburg & Weber, 2012). They typically recognise and reward achievement through levels of pay and promotion, which are aligned with the more masculine and conventional notion of careers and career success (Kottke & Agars, 2015; Sturges, 1999). These rewards come to those who can meet the organisational work demands developed around the concept of the ideal worker, defined by Rapoport et al. (2002, p. 5) as “someone who is willing and able to put work before all other considerations”. Meeting these organisational demands can be particularly difficult for women with relational commitments (Eikhof, 2012). There is also often a lack of genuine workplace flexibility, which is detrimental to women’s careers (Eikhof, 2012). Women who take advantage of flexible working arrangements, such as flexi-time, job sharing, and part-time arrangements risk being seen as less committed by organisations which favour long working hours, are assigned more routine tasks, and are less likely to be considered for promotions and pay rises as a result (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Eikhof, 2012; O'Neill et al., 2013; Sprung, Toumbeva, & Matthews, 2014). Women pay a very real career

penalty, in terms of organisational advancement and pay, for accommodating non-work factors at the expense of the level of commitment required by the ideal worker norm.

### **2.3.5 *The myth of choice***

While organisational structures and practices influence the careers of women, this is largely hidden behind a discourse of individual choice. Women who are managing the competing interests of work and personal life are often less willing and unable to exhibit the level of commitment required of positional leadership, demonstrated through long hours of work, travel, and the sacrifice of personal and family time (Cabrera, 2007; Lalande et al., 2000; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Rapoport et al., 2002). In contrast, men are more likely to place their primary focus on their work, be more able and willing to work the hours required by the concept of the ideal worker and maintain a clearer separation between work and family (O'Neil et al., 2008; Sinclair, 2005). However, balancing the demands of work and family for example, is presented and interpreted through a lens of personal responsibility and choice (Lewis & Simpson, 2015).

Working women are presented with having a choice between a life focused on paid work and career or alternatively, a life that prioritises personal and family life through, for example, taking a job that requires a lower level of commitment and responsibility in order to provide greater attention to family (Lewis & Simpson, 2010; Wharton & Estevez, 2014). In this way, it can be maintained that women are not advancing to more senior organisational positions due to their own choice to prioritise a balanced life, rather than place the responsibility on organisational structures that are biased towards those that can and are prepared to meet the expectations of the ideal worker (Anderson, Vinnicombe, & Singh, 2010; Wharton & Estevez, 2014).

Research suggests that women themselves make sense of and justify their lack of advancement to more senior organisational positions through this discourse of



personal choice (Anderson et al., 2010; Simpson, Ross-Smith, & Lewis, 2010).

However, even when women put career first, they still experience structural barriers to advancement (Kumra, 2010). While many women may not be choosing to aspire to senior management positions, that “choice” must be examined and understood within the context of the gendered organisational structures, practices and culture which continue to privilege the careers of men (Simpson et al., 2010).

Women are encouraged to support each other in the workplace, to show solidarity, and to promote the careers of other women as a way of enhancing career prospects and encouraging more women into senior leadership positions (Madsen, 2008; Sandberg, 2013). Mentoring, role modelling, and networking by and for women are seen as important ways to advance women’s careers. However, given the personal and organisational factors influencing women’s careers, particularly those associated with achieving a balanced life, it is unlikely that these mechanisms will result in a significant increase in women at the senior management and governance levels. This is supported by research suggesting that while women receive valuable technical, psychological and social support from these mechanisms (Fowler, 2015), they do not help women and the development of their careers to the same extent as men (Carter & Silva, 2010; Ely et al., 2011; Kottke & Agars, 2015; Kumra, 2010). In addition, not all relationships between women in the workplace are supportive with research highlighting the incidence of senior women working against the career interests and progression of more junior women (Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2016; Mavin, 2006a, 2006b; Sheppard & Aquino, 2013; Staines et al., 1974), together with relational aggression exhibited through behaviours such as insults, putdowns and career sabotage (Brock, 2008, 2010; Mavin et al., 2014). However, little is known about the impact positive and negative intra-gender hierarchical workplace relationships have on the career paths and decisions of women.

## **2.4 Summary**

This chapter has explored the literature on gender equity, relational cultural theory and gendered career theory. The next section brings these areas together in a published literature review article, which is reproduced in full (including the abstract in the format prescribed by the journal).

**Article 1: Intersections between hierarchical relationships, career development and gender equity**

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Hurst, J., Leberman, S., & Edwards, M. (2016). Women managing women:

Intersections between hierarchical relationships, career development and gender equity. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 31(1), 1-14.  
doi:10.1108/GM-03-2015-0018

**2.5 Abstract**

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine the intersections between the way women’s careers develop, the hierarchical relationships between women and the resulting implications for gender equity in the workplace.

**Design/methodology/approach** – While a considerable body of research exists on gender in the workplace, the intersection between the way in which women’s careers develop and the influence hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace have on that career development are under-researched. This paper examines existing relevant research, discusses the implications of these intersecting areas and raises areas for future academic research, as well as the development of organisational practice.

**Findings** – The nature of the hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace is an important but under-researched factor when considering the career development of women. Delving into the experiences of women managers and employees, both good and bad, enables a deeper understanding of the role these relationships play in shaping the careers of women. From this, personal and

organisational strategies can be developed that enhance workplace relationships and the career development of women.

**Originality/value** – This paper encourages academics and practitioners to critically consider the connections between hierarchical workplace relationships and career development as part of organisational practice and further gender equity research.

**Keywords** Gender, Career development, Hierarchical relationships, Internal barriers, Queen Bee, Second-generation gender bias

**Paper type** Literature review

## 2.6 Introduction

Feminism has traditionally embraced the concept of the “sisterhood”, the notion that women will stand united and support each other to confront sexism and inequality (Richards, 1994; Tong, 2009; Wolf, 1994). This includes an expectation that women in positions of power within organisations will support, nurture and act as role models for their women employees and, in doing so, will bring about more equal representation at the senior leadership level (Mavin, 2006b). However, while women constitute nearly half of the New Zealand workforce (Statistics New Zealand, 2015b) and a proportion have reached the senior executive and governance level, women continue to remain noticeably under-represented at the top echelons of organisations (Grant Thornton International Ltd, 2015; McGregor, 2012; NZX Limited, 2014).

Globally, only 22 per cent of senior management positions in the private sector are held by women (Grant Thornton International Ltd, 2015). New Zealand, the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote in 1893, has traditionally fared better. In 2004, women held 31 per cent of New Zealand's private sector senior management positions (Grant Thornton International Ltd, 2014). For the past decade,

this percentage has remained reasonably consistent, although New Zealand's place against other countries surveyed has been dropping. The 2015 Grant Thornton Women in Business survey reported a significant drop to 19 per cent, placing New Zealand 28th of the 35 countries surveyed (Davies, 2015). Alongside this, 37 per cent of the businesses surveyed do not have any women in senior management, placing New Zealand in the worst 12 countries surveyed against this measure (Davies, 2015). The situation is worse at the governance level, with women representing 14 per cent of board members of companies listed on the New Zealand Stock Exchange (NZX Limited, 2014). Combined with a gender pay gap, which, in New Zealand, currently sits at 11.8 per cent based on median hourly wages (Ministry for Women, 2016b), equity for women in the workplace is a live issue.

As a first world country, which has been a world leader in advancing the rights of women, it is concerning that New Zealand is now falling behind in the advancement of women into senior management positions. While women undoubtedly exercise leadership in many different ways in their daily home and work lives, irrespective of their position in an organisational hierarchy, the presence and visibility of women in senior roles is important. Research has shown that not only does a critical mass of women in senior governance and management positions benefit business, through, for example, increased financial performance (Badal & Harter, 2014; Catalyst, 2013; Dezsö & Ross, 2012; Joecks et al., 2013; Pellegrino et al., 2011; Wagner, 2011), it can also benefit women in the workplace by increasing the promotion of women at all organisational levels (Kurtulus & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012; Skaggs et al., 2012) and decreasing the gender pay gap (Cohen & Huffman, 2007). Encouraging more women into senior management roles is good for women, and it is good for business.

So why, despite these benefits and the high percentage of women in the New Zealand workforce, are we not seeing a greater representation of women at senior

organisational levels? There is no simple answer to this question. It brings into play a complex mix of personal, organisational and societal factors, many of which have been the subject of considerable academic research. One factor that is under-researched is the link between women's hierarchical workplace relationships and the resulting impact these relationships have on their careers. Given the percentage of women in the workplace, they are likely to work for a woman manager, or themselves have women employees, at some stage during their careers, particularly at the lower levels of the organisational hierarchy. What, if any, impact are these relationships having on the careers of the women involved, and how could these relationships be leveraged to strengthen career development and increase the representation of women at the senior corporate and governance levels? An extensive and iterative multi-disciplinary search has been undertaken into the literature on hierarchical relationships between women generally, and within the workplace, as well as the theories and research relevant to women's career development. This has identified a small body of research considering various aspects relevant to women's hierarchical relationships from different academic disciplines, such as management, psychology and women's studies. Likewise, some research has investigated the ways women's careers develop. However, there is a noticeable and important gap: research linking these two significant areas, along with the subsequent implications for gender equity, a concept grounded in fairness for all people irrespective of their gender.

This paper examines the research into each of these areas and critically considers the interface between them. The paper then discusses the implications of these intersecting areas, raising a number of important questions for future academic research, as well as organisational practice. It foreshadows a theory-building study being undertaken by the lead author, using narrative inquiry, into the lived experiences of 15 women living in New Zealand, who are being managed by and/or managing

women and the impact these relationships have on their careers. The research aims to develop personal and organisational strategies to strengthen the hierarchical workplace relationships between women and enhance women's careers, as well as the role of women in building successful twenty-first century New Zealand businesses.

## **2.7 It's all about relationships**

### **2.7.1 *Relational cultural theory***

Relationships form the cornerstone of human existence. Relational cultural theory, developed by the Stone Center at Wellesley College and grounded in relational psychology (Fletcher, 1999), recognises that connection between people is at the core of human growth and development (Jordan & Walker, 2004), with the desire for connection a central organising factor in people's lives (Jordan, 2004b). Relational cultural theorists posit that the primary responsibility in the Western world for maintaining relationships and undertaking relational activity has been assigned to women, traditionally within the private realm of the family and, more recently, the public realm of the workplace (Fletcher, 1999; Miller, 1986). It has been culturally stereotyped as a feminine activity. However, these relational activities and strengths are often undervalued, not recognised or "disappeared" in a gendered, patriarchal society (Fletcher, 1999, 2012; Miller, 1986).

This relational gender role affects the expectations women, as a gender group, have of their relationships with other women in the workplace, including their women managers and subordinates. Research suggests that women place more emphasis on relationships and are more relational than men, with women managers more likely to focus on personal relationships as opposed to the more task-orientated focus of men (Brock, 2008; Sias, 2009). Relationships between women are characterised by a desire for emotional and social support, particularly when under stress or where the

relationship progresses into the realm of friendship (Brock, 2008; Jogulu & Vijayasingham, 2015; Litwin, 2011; Mavin, Williams, Bryans, & Patterson, 2013; Morrison, 2009). However, research by Litwin (2011) suggests that women rarely discuss their relationship expectations, raising the potential for misunderstanding and conflict. Her research also found that women expect more relational behaviour from their women managers than from men, creating difficulties for women who have a more “masculine” leadership style.

### **2.7.2 Women and solidarity**

Litwin’s (2011, p. 3) research into women’s relationships at work found that good relationships “provided support, validation, mentoring, and empowerment – all of which have been shown to be essential to women’s mental and emotional health in male-dominated work environments”. But do these supportive relationships enhance a woman’s career prospects?

Networking and mentoring, by and for women, are seen by many as central mechanisms to improve the career prospects of women. Formal mentoring programmes and networking organisations are one way of promoting supportive relationships between women. Sponsorship is another type of support, involving active advocacy for a woman’s career advancement by a senior manager or executive (Carter & Silva, 2010). Women also develop informal mentoring and networking relationships, with both women and men. In her research on women in leadership, based on in-depth interviews with ten women university presidents, Madsen (2008, p. 207) concluded that, “effective networking is foundational for successful long-term leadership”. As one of her participants said:



[...] women's groups can be very candid and collegial, and there really is a kind of sisterhood. It doesn't matter where you are from; women from all backgrounds, races, classes, and ages really connect well (Madsen, 2008, p. 199).

However, not all networking and mentoring programmes are helpful to all women. Women often have less access to influential mentors than men (Ely et al., 2011) and are also less inclined to network, feeling it is inauthentic, and uses people (Ely et al., 2011). In a 2008 online survey of more than 4,000 Master of Business Administration (MBA) alumni, Catalyst found that mentors definitely had a positive effect on the career advancement of women, but the rewards of mentoring were greater for men than women (Carter & Silva, 2010). Even where women had support from senior management, they were not promoted to the same extent or paid as well as men. Men who had a mentor were, on average, paid over \$9,000 more in their first post-MBA job than women who had a mentor. Catalyst concluded that while mentoring is important and does help women's careers, it is not enough to bridge the gender gap. Women are also less likely than men to receive active sponsorship, and "just when women are most likely to need sponsorship – as they shoot for the highest jobs – they may be the least likely to get it" (Ibarra et al., 2010, p. 83).

When faced with these types of barriers, it could be assumed that women would develop a greater degree of solidarity, leading to collective action. Feminists have long held the view that by collectively working together and showing solidarity, women can effect real organisational change. Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, stated, "the more women help one another, the more we help ourselves. Acting like a coalition truly does produce results" (Sandberg, 2013, p. 165). Sandberg also acknowledges though that while women often expect support from other women in the workplace, it is not always provided. Solidarity behavior expects women to act as a

collective, and it places an expectation on women in senior management positions to assume the mantle of supporting other women within their organisations (Mavin, 2008). However, this is not valued as a mainstream strategic role. Women are at risk of being labeled as “the token feminist”, and even the “threat of this label leaves senior women feeling uneasy” (Mavin, 2008, p. S79). As such, while collective action can bring about a real and long-lasting change, it may not be an option for many women working within organisational structures.

### **2.7.3 Queen bee syndrome**

Although support from women managers cannot be assumed, evidence also suggests that some women managers actively work against the interests of other women within organisations. A small body of research points to a phenomenon of vertical conflict, aggression and competitive behaviour between women managers and their women employees (Sheppard & Aquino, 2013).

Seminal research by Staines et al. (1974) explored the attitudes women had toward their success, sex roles and other women. They found a phenomenon of successful women who were antifeminist, did not support group action and exhibited behaviour they coined “the Queen Bee syndrome”. These were women that had achieved success in a male-dominated environment, did not actively support other women to succeed and had the attitude that “if I can do it without a whole movement to help me [...] so can other women” (Staines et al., 1974, p. 55). Staines et al. (1974, p. 60) found that the queen bee relished being one of the few women in the senior organisational ranks, was competitive and maintained that the organisational system was fair, with success based on individual talent. They exposed the irony “that the queen bee, because of her access to power and male favor, is in the best position to advance the cause of women, but is the least inclined to do so”. Not only do queen

bees fail to advance the cause of women in their workplaces, they can also seek to block their progress (Sheppard & Aquino, 2013).

There have been relatively few published studies on the extent of and reasons for the queen bee syndrome (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Derks, van Laar, et al., 2011; Ellemers et al., 2012; Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mavin, 2006a; Rindfleish, 2000; Sheppard & Aquino, 2013). Those studies that have been conducted provide conflicting evidence on its extent. For example, a 2011 South African study of 25 executives and senior managers from five national banks confirmed the existence of queen bee behaviour, finding that such women were not inclined to assist other women and that they compete with each other and “felt a need to protect their achievements and retain their power” (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011, p. 52). Conversely, research by Catalyst (Dinolfo, Silva, & Carter, 2012, p. 7), based on a survey of 742 respondents who had attended fulltime MBA programmes and had worked fulltime in 2008, suggests that it is far less ubiquitous than the popular media may have us believe. They found that “women were more likely than men to be developing women” and that “the majority of women are not vying to be the Queen Bee while holding others back”.

Different theories have been advanced to explain the queen bee phenomenon. One theory, based on a binary view of gender, suggests that women have had to act like men, to take on masculine characteristics to achieve within a male-dominated environment and, in doing so, alienate themselves from their women employees. In essence, queen bees take on male traits such as brash, harsh and aggressive behaviour (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011). A differing view is that organisational gender bias is the cause, where gender stereotypes prevail to define successful leadership. Male leadership is focused on task and performance outcomes. In contrast, female leaders are expected to focus on interpersonal relations (Ellemers et al., 2012). To succeed in male-dominated organisations, queen bees display counter-

stereotypical masculine competencies and behaviours in a hope of being judged as an individual. This leads to behaviour where women in leadership positions distance themselves from other women and do not support them into positions of power and authority (Ellemers et al., 2012). For these researchers, the focus is on changing organisational culture, so that women do not need to lose their gender identity to succeed (Derks, van Laar, et al., 2011). A further view suggests that we interpret behaviour differently dependent on the gender of the person involved. In its 2012 research, Catalyst found that while some women were not developing other women, men did not always support and develop other men. However, they concluded that while a lack of support by men is not attributed to men generally, the “failure of some women to pay it forward, however, is used to negatively characterize women’s behavior as a group” (Dinolfo et al., 2012, p. 7).

#### ***2.7.4 Female relational aggression***

A different approach has been taken by Dellasega (2005, p. 7), who maintains that aggressive behaviour between women is because of “female relational aggression: the subtle art of emotional devastation that takes place every day at home, at work, or in community settings”. She characterises women who participate in relational aggression as queen bees (the bully), middle bees (the bystander and the sidekick of the bully) and afraid-to-bees (the victim), all playing roles in the subtle, devastating behaviours between women that are learned at a young age and can be carried on through adulthood if not addressed. Underlying this behaviour is an undercurrent of competition, which, in the workplace, can result in covert forms of aggression between women, such as undermining, manipulation, betrayal and an underlying struggle for power.

Indirect aggression in women can take many different forms. It can involve attempts to sabotage another woman's career, the holding of grudges, ignoring and refusing to cooperate, spreading malicious gossip, subtle insults, putdowns and denigrating messages (Brock, 2008; Brock & Grady, 2009; Mavin et al., 2014). It can be constant and have a significant impact on the self-esteem of its targets. Mavin et al. (2014) found that its impacts were compounded because it was caused by another woman, which brought with it a sense of betrayal.

Research into relational aggression between women emphasises the importance of a woman's life history when considering her work experiences and relationships. Girls are socialised to be nice, cooperative and to avoid conflict, making covert and indirect forms of aggression more prevalent (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Brock, 2008). Her early socialisation and childhood experiences shape her and follow her throughout her life and raise important questions about the ability to change internalised patterns of behaviour later in life when they have been conditioned from such an early age.

Damaging relationships between women in the workplace are often not spoken about openly. They are discussed quietly, as if to even mention it brings with it a sense of shame and disloyalty, as well as an inference that women are being blamed (Chesler, 2001). Feminists focus on giving women a voice, enabling their lives and experiences to be heard, to stimulate discussion and bring about societal change. This is a difficult area to explore, without being seen to blame women. However, as uncomfortable as it may be to openly discuss these negative experiences, it is important to do so to effect positive and lasting change.

## **2.8 Women and their careers**

### ***2.8.1 Factors influencing women's career decisions***

Many factors influence people's career decisions over the course of their working life. Research has identified some that are particularly relevant to women. Traditionally, men's careers have developed in a linear, planned way (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). While this is changing, particularly for the younger generation (Sullivan et al., 2009), men are typically more likely to follow traditional and linear career paths (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2009). In contrast, women's careers often tend to unfold without any planned strategy, in a non-linear fashion, and with more career interruptions (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Sullivan and Mainiero, 2008). More senior leadership opportunities often arise as the consequence of working hard and performing well, rather than being intentionally sought or planned for (Madsen, 2007).

Women's careers are influenced by many competing factors, and a woman's career path and decisions need to be considered within her broader life context, both past and present, as well as her envisioned future. Women are relational and consider the impact work has on significant relationships, such as her spouse, children and elderly parents who she may be caring for, when making career decisions (Cabrera, 2007; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Women seek to balance the competing interests of their personal and work lives, including finding time for themselves. Their lives outside work need to be managed alongside their work commitments, and as a result, their career decisions are often affected by this work–personal life tension (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Rapoport et al., 2002). In contrast, men tend to be more goal-orientated, with work their primary focus, and maintain a clearer separation between work and family (Sinclair, 2005).

Women are also susceptible to under-predicting how others perceive their abilities, including leadership abilities, at a rate far exceeding that of men (Sturm, Taylor, Atwater, & Braddy, 2014; Taylor & Hood, 2011). Reasons for this have been found to include a lack of confidence, a belief that they are not as qualified as men and a tendency toward humility (Sturm et al., 2014). Women's career decisions can also be influenced by internal self-doubt (Institute of Leadership & Management, 2011; Kay & Shipman, May 2014), to which even highly successful women are prone. Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, has been quoted as saying, "there are still days I wake up feeling like a fraud, not sure I should be where I am" (Kay & Shipman, May 2014, p. 4). Research indicates that women tend to need more feedback and reassurance (Sturm et al., 2014), are generally less likely than men to apply for jobs where they do not feel they meet all of the specified requirements, are less likely to initiate salary negotiations, and when they do, they ask for less money than men (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013; Institute of Leadership & Management, 2011; Kay & Shipman, May 2014; Ross-Smith & Chesterman, 2009). This is a very real problem, given that organisations often write job descriptions based on the capabilities of an ideal candidate. As a result, "women may be unintentionally undermining themselves by assuming they are not qualified enough and by failing to ask for raises or promotions, even when they are deserved" (Sturm et al., 2014, p. 672).

Organisational gender bias is another factor influencing women's careers. Although women rarely face overt sexism and discrimination within the workplace, it still exists in more covert forms, now commonly referred to as second-generation gender bias. This affects the likelihood of women reaching senior management positions. Organisations are filled with gendered concepts and stereotypes, and leadership is no exception. Senior management roles are stereotypically associated with masculinity or agentic traits such as independence, assertiveness and decisiveness (Prime et al., 2009;

Rudman & Glick, 1999). However, although these behaviours are accepted and admired in a man, such as being assertive and confident, women risk being labeled bossy, arrogant and unsympathetic when they act in similar ways (Clerkin, Crumbacher, Fernando, & Gentry, 2015; Prime et al., 2009; Rudman & Glick, 1999). Women are expected to adhere to the feminine stereotype based on relationship concepts such as caring, friendliness and sensitivity (Fletcher, 2012; Prime et al., 2009), which are not seen as leadership traits (Rudman & Glick, 1999). Women who exhibit the same behaviours as men are judged less favourably, but they are also seen as less effective leaders if they exhibit stereotypically feminine traits, leaving many women in a double bind (Catalyst, 2007; Ely et al., 2011; Prime et al., 2009; Rhee & Sigler, 2015).

Organisational work structures remain based in the concept of the ideal worker, a gendered assumption, which favours an employee who prioritises a commitment to work and does not allow interference from external responsibilities (Cabrera, 2009; Rapoport et al., 2002; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2008). Positional leadership is often exhibited through long hours, personal sacrifice, particularly of time with family, and rarely taking time off work (Sinclair, 2005), which can sit uncomfortably with women, particularly those with family responsibilities. Women pay a real penalty in the workplace when they accommodate factors outside work in their career decisions. If they are not prepared to work long hours or they seek the flexibility needed to care for dependents, they are seen as less committed (O'Neil et al., 2008; Sinclair, 2005). If they take time out of their careers, this interruption has a significant impact on their career prospects when they return to the workforce. Particularly affected are the networks needed to support career development, as well as the lost opportunity to improve technical skills and expertise (Cabrera, 2007). It is difficult for women to advance on a career ladder, which favours continuity of service and a systematic



progression through more senior line management positions (O'Neil et al., 2008).

Many women do not want to pay the price of advancement to the upper echelons of organisations, given the impact long hours and a highly pressurised work environment may have on them and their families (Cabrera, 2009). As a result, the structures of work remain biased toward men who put work first and who maintain a clear separation between work and family (O'Neil et al., 2008).

Understanding the seemingly ad hoc way women's careers develop is particularly important for organisations that favour a more traditional, linear and uninterrupted career path when selecting senior executives. Women may have gained a wealth of experience during their careers by taking a more opportunistic and unplanned approach. However, if the benefits of this are not valued by organisations and they are not prepared to accommodate a more flexible approach, many highly qualified and experienced women will continue to be excluded from senior management roles. These barriers are not detrimental to only women. They also negatively impact organisations, which lose the many benefits of gender diversity at the senior executive level.

## **2.9 Discussion: Drawing the threads together**

Despite significant gains over the past 50 years, women remain under-represented in senior management positions throughout the world. A significant body of research has developed, seeking to understand and address the contributing factors. However, this research tends to consider discrete areas, such as the impacts of unconscious organisational gender bias, the benefits of mentoring or the nature of relationships between women in the workplace from the lens of a specific discipline such as management, psychology or women's studies. There is a noticeable gap in the research, namely, a multi-disciplinary consideration of the interconnection between

women's hierarchical relationships, the factors influencing women's careers and the resulting impact this may have on women's career paths. There is also a dearth of research in New Zealand, and worldwide, on the relationships between women in the workplace and the way in which women's careers develop, as well as the interconnection between these areas.

Taking a relational lens to this research gap grounds the inquiry in the relationship between a woman manager and her woman employee. Relationships between women are situated within certain societal gender-based expectations, developed from childhood, yet these are often unspoken (Litwin, 2011), and the limited research to date provides little insight into these expectations within the context of workplace hierarchical relationships. Some important questions warrant further examination. For example, what do women expect from their women employees or managers and how do these expectations impact on relationships? If these expectations can be better understood, it can open up a dialogue, at both the personal and organisational level. This is important to the development of not only self-awareness, a key component of personal growth, but also relational awareness, essential to building growth-enhancing and mutually empowering relationships (Jordan, 2004b). Given that women are now almost equally represented in the workplace and, as a result, are at some stage likely to have a woman manager, particularly at the lower and middle organisational tiers, it is imperative that practitioners gain a greater understanding of these relational expectations if they are to encourage mutually empowering and supportive relationships between women managers and employees.

A greater understanding of the nature of hierarchical workplace relationships between women also enables connections to be drawn with other influencing factors which shape a woman's career. For example, does a supportive relationship with a woman manager enhance a woman employee's self-confidence and encourage her to seek

more senior management positions? The research to date suggests that mentoring, networking and sponsorship do make a difference to women in general, although they do not benefit women's careers to the same extent as men. At the individual level, how does this type of support from a woman manager influence career decisions when weighed up alongside the other factors women consider, such as the impact work has on their personal lives? If, for example, organisations remain structured around the concept of the ideal worker, then arguably no amount of support from more senior women managers is going to substantially change the number of women at the top of the organisational hierarchy. These jobs, which require years of dedication to long work hours, a clear separation between work and family, and a bias toward masculine ways of interacting, are unlikely to be attractive to the vast majority of women. This suggests that programmes to promote supportive and empowering hierarchical relationships between women must also be accompanied by a major shift in the culture and structure of organisations and work if there is to be a marked change in the representation of women at the senior management level.

Conversely, do damaging and disempowering hierarchical relationships between women have a detrimental impact on their careers? Although, for example, research has sought to determine the extent to which the queen bee syndrome exists, as well as the reasons for it, there is a lack of research exploring the impacts these types of experiences have on the careers and employment decisions of women. Given the research, it is expected that these relationships, characterised by indirect aggression and unresolved conflict could potentially undermine a woman's self-confidence, making it less likely that she would put herself forward for career advancement. Further research is needed to determine whether women are making decisions that result in a career penalty because of these types of relationships, and if so, what strategies can be developed at the personal and organisational level to better recognise the potential

for a damaging relationship and intervene early before significant damage occurs to the women involved?

The hierarchical relationships between women must also be considered within the organisational context in which they are situated. Factors such as organisational culture, the degree of support available, organisational structure, the impact of change and the pressures and demands on employees all influence interpersonal relationships. When considering the hierarchical relationships between women, further research is needed into the types of organisational factors which encourage supportive and mutually empowering relationships between women and, conversely, the factors that are more likely to exacerbate difficult and disempowering relationships. Empirical research is needed to inform the development of organisational programmes and interventions that facilitate more supportive relationships between women in the workplace. While further research is needed, it is also important that organisations recognise the benefits of and challenges faced by women supporting each other in workplaces and the importance of enhancing hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace as a strategic management priority.

The organisational context is a fundamental consideration when researching the link between hierarchical relationships and women's careers. However, relationships are also situated within a broader personal and societal context. In organisations, where a clear separation between work and personal lives is encouraged, there is a temptation to focus solely on the work realm, something that is replicated in much of the research discussed in this paper. However, the lives of women, and their relationships, are complex and multi-faceted. Multi-disciplinary research, which is situated within a broader personal, organisational and societal context, will enable a greater understanding of the range of factors influencing relationships within the workplace and the resulting impact this may have on career decisions. Researchers and practitioners

alike are encouraged to look at this broader context when devising research and organisational programmes.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

There are undoubtedly many women in senior management and governance positions who seek to support and encourage the careers of other women in the workplace by, for example, acting as role models and through mechanisms like informal mentoring. However, there is also evidence that some senior women are unsupportive and act aggressively toward their women employees. Given that women have a more relational focus, the quality of the hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace is likely to have an impact on their career decisions. However, the connection between these areas is under-researched, both in New Zealand and internationally, and is currently the subject of a study being undertaken by the lead author, seeking to understand the experiences of women managing and/or being managed by women in the New Zealand workplace and the way these experiences impact their careers.

Delving into the lived experiences of women managers and employees, both good and bad, enables academics, organisational practitioners and individual women alike, to gain a greater understanding of the role these relationships play in shaping the careers of women. Not only does this add an important component to the research on women's career development, this deeper understanding of workplace hierarchical relationships between women, situated within the broader context of their lives, will enable more focused personal and organisational strategies to be developed that better respond to the relational opportunities and challenges encountered by women in hierarchical relationships. Although this alone will not bring about a greater representation of women at the most senior organisational levels, it is an important part

of the gender equity equation. This is particularly important to New Zealand, which is slipping behind much of the Western world in the representation of women in its upper organisational echelons. It is also relevant to policymakers and organisations worldwide in their quest to bring about gender equity for women in the workplace.

### **2.11 Chapter summary**

This chapter has reviewed the literature relating to gender equity, hierarchical relationships between women, relational cultural theory and gendered career theory, including the kaleidoscope career model. The next chapter sets out the methodology for this research.

## 2.12 DRC 16: Statement of contribution to doctoral thesis containing publications

DRC 16



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

### STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION TO DOCTORAL THESIS CONTAINING PUBLICATIONS

(To appear at the end of each thesis chapter/section/appendix submitted as an article/paper or collected as an appendix at the end of the thesis)

We, the candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

**Name of Candidate:** Jane Ann Hurst

**Name/Title of Principal Supervisor:** Professor Sarah Leberman

**Name of Published Research Output and full reference:**

Hurst, J., Leberman, S., & Edwards, M. (2016). Women managing women: Intersections between hierarchical relationships, career development and gender equity. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 31(1), 1-14. doi:10.1108/GM-03-2015-0018

**In which Chapter is the Published Work:** Chapter Two

Please indicate either:

- The percentage of the Published Work that was contributed by the candidate: **95%**  
and / or
- Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the Published Work:  
The candidate undertook the literature review, manuscript writing and revision. The co-authors (supervisors) provided feedback on the draft manuscripts.

**Jane Hurst**  
Digitally signed by Jane Hurst  
Date: 2016.11.23 13:55:30  
+1300  
Candidate's Signature

**23 November 2016**  
Date

**s.i.leberman@massey.ac.nz**  
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s.i.leberman@massey.ac.nz  
Date: 2016.11.27 14:38:27 +1300  
Principal Supervisor's signature

**27 November 2016**  
Date

## Chapter Three: Methodology

*Current research on women often focuses on a single aspect or stage of life.*

*Dissection is an essential part of scientific method, and it is particularly tempting to disassemble a life composed of odds and ends, to describe the pieces separately.*

*Unfortunately, when this is done the pattern and loving labor in the patchwork is lost.*

*(Bateson, 1989, p. 10)*

### 3.1 Philosophical underpinnings

I am inspired by the work of anthropologist, Mary Catherine Bateson, who wrote *Composing a Life* (1989), in which she followed and analysed the lives of five career women, each a friend of hers, through a creative lens. She reflected on life as like “an improvisatory art, about the ways we combine familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations” (Bateson, 1989, p. 3). Our lives and our careers are created through improvisation in response to events and experiences, rather than by pursuing an overarching clearly defined vision, purpose or goal. It is a creative endeavour.

I am a classically trained pianist and this musical background has influenced my research approach. My thesis is a creative endeavour. It is like the creation of a symphony, which starts with the genesis of an idea and is then developed into a complex musical form, based on an established musical framework or structure. This structure is set by musical convention, in much the same way as academic research is structured. It provides a framework to guide the author/composer during composition, as well as giving the reader/audience the familiarity needed to enable the work to be accessible and comprehensible. The structure guides creativity, but it does not overly constrain it. There is tremendous flexibility within a symphony for the development of



musical ideas, exploration of themes, experimentation with different voices placed in juxtaposition to each other, the use of consonance and dissonance, and a multitude of variations in rhythm, modality, volume, tone and intensity. A symphony is complex, layered and with many musical elements, developed over a number of different parts or movements. Its meaning must be discovered by the listener over time. This process of discovery, and the meanings ascribed to a symphony, like any piece of music, is personal to each individual and is influenced by the knowledge and circumstances of the listener at any given point in time. The way a symphony is heard and understood changes over time and is never the same, even when played by the same orchestra, under the baton of the same conductor. Even a recording is heard differently with each playing, as the context within which it is heard by the listener changes.

My research is developed around the framework of narrative inquiry, which brings its own epistemological and ontological perspectives, as well as approaches to data collection and analysis. Narrative inquiry is interested in understanding a person's lived experience, situated within multiple contexts. By listening to each participant's voice within the context of her lived experience as understood within a continuum of time, the researcher can begin to make connections between experience, drawing together narrative threads that weave through and resonate across stories. It is like a conductor bringing together a diverse range of musicians within an orchestra for the performance of a symphony.

The research study's participants, all with their own stories, experiences, backgrounds and voice, are like the musicians in an orchestra. Each woman has a voice, an instrument, that has its own tonal quality influenced by a complexity of factors. She also brings her own musical style to the way she plays that instrument, developed from her training, personality, musicality and experience. Each instrument has a part to play, a voice that at times will carry the melody, and at other times will provide harmony

or dissonance. Sometimes it is silent. No one voice is more important than another. Each plays an equally important role, although some voices may be heard more often than others. Collectively, the instruments of the orchestra bring the musical ideas of the symphony, the notes on the page, to life. This is done under the guidance and musical interpretation provided by the conductor. The conductor brings the orchestra together, interprets the composer's music, and creates unity amongst the individual musicians that collectively make up the orchestra. The conductor is the researcher, the interpreter of the research, the person who brings the themes together into a coherent whole.

As a narrative researcher, and like the conductor, I do not independently discover and present research findings as if they are immutable facts. Instead, I listen to the voices of my participants, the stories they tell and the context within which those stories are situated. I then seek to bring the voices together, searching for the common threads, the points of harmony or consonance, as well as those of dissonance. From this interpretation I have sought to bring those common threads together into a unified and coherent whole, while recognising that it is an interpretation, drawn together at one point in time, rather than a generalisable statement of objective truth. This approach situates this research within the paradigm of narrative inquiry.

### **3.2 Research strategy: Narrative inquiry**

This is exploratory research, grounded in the lived experiences of women who have managed and/or been managed by women. Qualitative research is “ideal for revealing constructions of the meaning of work relationships and negotiation of lived relational experience within the organizational context” (Fritz, 2014, p. 462), making it well suited to this research, with its focus on hierarchical workplace relationships between women.

This research focuses on the stories participants tell of their experiences as a means of gleaning understanding and delving into meaning. It is situated in narrative inquiry which, based in the approach of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is more than a research method. It is a way of thinking about phenomena, based on a narrative view of experience (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013). It is the study of experience as lived and “proceeds from a ontological position, a curiosity about how people are living and the constituents of their experience” (Caine et al., 2013, p. 576).

A narrative approach to exploring and understanding experience has, at its central point of focus, the lived experience of a person as narrated by her. Narrative inquiry not only collects stories about lived experiences, it also situates them within their social, cultural and personal context (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). This sits well with RCT, which similarly situates relationships within a gendered societal and cultural context (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003) and recognises that the stories people tell of their experiences are not exact records of events, but are instead partial and situated (Bold, 2012). A person’s understanding of and narrative about an event is dependent on their particular perspective and “each person witnessing the same event will tell a slightly different story, depending on what captures their attention and how they make sense of the event in relation to their own experience” (Bold, 2012, p. 18).

Stories of our experiences are not fixed (Caine et al., 2013). They change over time, depending on how, when and in which context they are told. Experience is temporal, continuous in nature and grows “out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). Life events have a past, present and future meaning and relevance (Clandinin, 2013). The way in which a woman understands and narrates her experiences will change depending on when in her life it is situated and when and where the story is told. Her past experiences will influence how she perceives current experience and how she envisions her future.

Narrative inquiry enables each woman's voice to be heard fully, deeply and richly (Everett & Barrett, 2012), recognising the multiple layers of meaning and multiple ways of knowing and telling stories. This privileges women's voices and experiences, a core tenet of feminist research (Beckman, 2014; West, 2005). It involves a relational process, with meaning co-constructed between researcher and participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), enables participants to help shape the direction of the research (Everett & Barrett, 2012) and empowers participants as "active collaborators" (Beckman, 2014, p. 169). This "relational quality of narrative inquiry is viewed as a strength of the research as through relationships, rich understandings of the meaning individuals ascribe to their life experiences are made" (Everett & Barrett, 2012, p. 33).

A research approach based in narrative inquiry focuses on the meaning stories have individually and collectively and contextualises those experiences rather than seeking to generalise (Mensinga, 2009). The approach also recognises that people's lives (including their work relationships and careers) develop within multiple contexts (Richardson, 2012) and that the "interpretation of events is always contextual and is influenced by many factors" (Fletcher, 2004a, p. 654). This contextual approach enables an exploration and understanding of areas of difference and commonality, rather than seeking to simplify and generalise women's experiences into a single common meaning or essence. Such simplification would undermine the complexity and richness of each woman's life. As such, basing this research in narrative inquiry recognises that there is no single truth, but instead an interpretation based on many varied and complex factors.

### **3.3 Insider perspective**

Narrative inquiry places a strong emphasis on researcher reflexivity. Many qualitative research approaches require the researcher to suspend personal judgments and

bracket him or herself out of the study (Creswell, 2013). I bring with me my own experiences, perspectives, and values, all of which will have an impact on the various stages of research. I am not an outsider. Narrative inquiry allows me to openly reflect on the role I play, as a researcher, in co-constructing meaning with the participants (Bold, 2012).

Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather need to find ways to inquire into participants' experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process. (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47)

My experiences of working for women managers and employing women in my own business, and the impacts these have had on my career, are relevant to this research. I did not disclose my specific experiences to any of the participants. However, it helped me formulate relevant research questions and enabled me to better understand many of the participants' experiences. I am also cognisant of the potential for a researcher's perspective and personal experience to colour or influence subsequent research analysis and findings. While it is arguably impossible to fully guard against this risk, I mitigated it by remaining closely aligned with and true to the stories of the participants. Wherever possible, their voices have been privileged in this thesis, including the journal articles reporting on the research findings. Stories of their experiences were constructed from their interview transcripts and, to the maximum extent possible, used their own words and creative materials. Each story was sent to the relevant participant for review and amendment, as she saw appropriate. Finally, I did not include my story in the analysis process.

### 3.4 Creative methods

Qualitative research, which is now widespread and accepted in organisational and management research, primarily relies on linguistic methods, such as participant interviews and focus groups. However, management research is beginning to turn to other research methods, particularly visual forms, reflecting a growing understanding of the different sources of knowledge people have about an experience or phenomenon (Bell & Davison, 2013; Broussine, 2008; Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & van Leeuwen, 2013; Riessman, 2008). Creative methods involve the use of metaphors, symbols, analogy and allusion, “processes which are well-known to elicit new awareness of hidden relationships and patterns, which may lead to their articulation” (Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999, p. 4). Artistic understanding also focuses on a person’s senses and intuition, all of which create a wealth of meaning that is not easily accessible through rational, conventional techniques (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009).

Encouraging participants to use creative or arts-based approaches provides an opportunity to tap into their feelings and emotions to tell their stories and in doing so, to explore the way in which these colour their experiences, decisions and understanding of the world around them. This enables sharing of emotional information (Bell & Davison, 2013) and the development of an emotional connection and understanding (Leavy, 2008). This in itself is relatively uncharted territory in the business world, where the predominant focus is on the rational and analytical (Broussine, 2008). Emotions “arise and flow between people” (Bondi, 2005, p. 443) and are as such, relational in nature (Spowart & Nairn, 2014). Methods that encourage the exploration of emotional information are particularly important therefore, to research exploring relationships between people, such as the hierarchical relationships between women.

Creative materials can either be researcher or participant generated. In this research I encouraged the participants to create their own materials to explore their hierarchical relationships with women in the workplace. Methods which focus on participant-generated material provide an opportunity for a deeper, richer, more individualised response and enable the communication of complex ideas and multiple meanings that may be difficult to convey in an interview alone (Bell & Davison, 2013; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). Through the preparation of creative material, participants are able to reflect on and connect with their experiences in a different way, providing not only a different perspective but also an invaluable reflexive opportunity (Spowart & Nairn, 2014).

Where the creative material is prepared prior to an interview with the researcher, the participant is better able to manage the subsequent interview agenda, by controlling the extent and manner in which experiences are disclosed (Spowart & Nairn, 2014).

This goes some way to addressing the potential for power imbalance between researcher and participant and privileges the voice of the participant.

The use of creative methods is not without its difficulties. Developing robust ways to analyse participant-generated creative materials is perhaps the biggest challenge (Leavy, 2008) and remains an area for further development for researchers. The approach I adopted was to combine the use of creative material with more traditional methods by using it to inform a subsequent interview and to supplement written research findings (Leavy, 2008). This recognises the research benefits of both creative and verbal/written material (Höykinpuro & Ropo, 2014; Leavy, 2008; Meyer, 1991; Spowart & Nairn, 2014) and enables methods “to inform each other”, add “depth, dimension, texture”, and provide “an integrated approach to research” (Leavy, 2008, p. 258). However, the use of creative methods has the potential disadvantage of ruling out participation from people who are not comfortable with producing some form of art as part of their involvement. This potentially privileges the voices of those who are

comfortable with creative expression. While not a complete solution, one approach is to allow participants to select their own medium for creative expression, rather than restricting it to a particular type, such as a drawing, photography or poetry. Finally, when determining the appropriateness of any research method, the researcher must be satisfied that it is an appropriate way to answer the questions posed by the research. This is equally true when contemplating using creative research methods (Leavy, 2008).

### **3.5 Ethics**

The research fell within Massey University's requirements and guidelines for a Low Risk Notification. The documentation for Notification of Low Risk Research/Evaluation Involving Human Participants was completed and confirmation was received on 29 May 2014 that the project was recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (see Appendix A). In undertaking this research, the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants was complied with. All participants were sent an information sheet (see Appendix B) with full information about the research and including statements of their rights. All participants completed a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix C) and a Confidentiality Agreement was signed by the transcriber.

### **3.6 Participant selection**

The snowballing method (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Saunders, 2012) was used to identify participants for my research. I sent emails to 49 people in my personal and professional networks setting out a summary of my research purpose and process. Respondents then contacted people from their networks, and in response I received emails from 32 potential participants. I then sent the full information sheet (see Appendix B) and invitation letters to those potential participants containing details of



my research purpose, methods, and process. Of the 19 people who subsequently confirmed that they would participate, four withdrew for personal reasons (three had family issues and one was too busy at work) leaving 15 participants in Phase One.

Sample size and what constitutes sufficient data is a particular issue in any research. However, there are no fixed rules in qualitative research (Saunders, 2012). Creswell (2013) states that one or two individuals is sufficient for narrative inquiry “unless a larger pool of participants is used to develop a collective story” (p. 157). In phenomenology he recommends around 10 participants and in case study research he concludes that four or five participants are sufficient to identify themes for a thematic analysis. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) specifically considered the issue of sample size using data from a study with over 60 in-depth interviews. They found that six interviews were sufficient to derive overarching and meaningful themes, while data saturation was effectively achieved after 12 interviews.

The focus of this research is on depth of understanding, rather than breadth (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The sample size was intended to provide a focused and in-depth exploration of experience, with rich data enabling a depth of understanding of the complexities associated with hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace. While I initially aimed to recruit 20 participants, I found the wealth of data provided by the 15 participants to be sufficient. I had obtained a large amount of field data and while it is not possible to say I had reached saturation (Saunders, 2012), as each person's story and experience is unique when viewed within its own context, I was confident that I had traversed sufficient issues and gained more than enough data to address the research gap and form relevant conclusions.

I allowed my participants to self-select into the study (Saunders, 2012) based on the criteria that they had experience either managing or being managed by women and

that they felt they had something relevant to say in terms of the research purpose as set out in the information sheet (see Appendix B). I did not want to bias the data collection process by requiring that participants had certain types of experiences, good or bad. The fact that I ultimately had participants who had good, bad and indifferent experiences suggests to me that this was the right tactic.

I did want to ensure that I had a varied cross section of participants in terms of age, ethnicity and work experience. The 15 women who participated in the research represented a range of ages (from 25 to 54), ethnicities (New Zealand European, New Zealand Māori, Samoan, Chinese, Zimbabwean, Romanian, Australian) and occupations (including the public sector, health, financial services, the defence force and the beauty industry). Further information about the participants is presented in Chapter Four.

### **3.7 Research design**

The research was structured around two phases. Phase One sought to explore the experiences of each individual woman through a combination of interviews and pre-prepared participant generated creative materials. Phase Two brought the participants together to collaboratively develop strategies and approaches to promote relationships and the careers of women. Figure 3.1 provides a map of the data collection and analysis process.

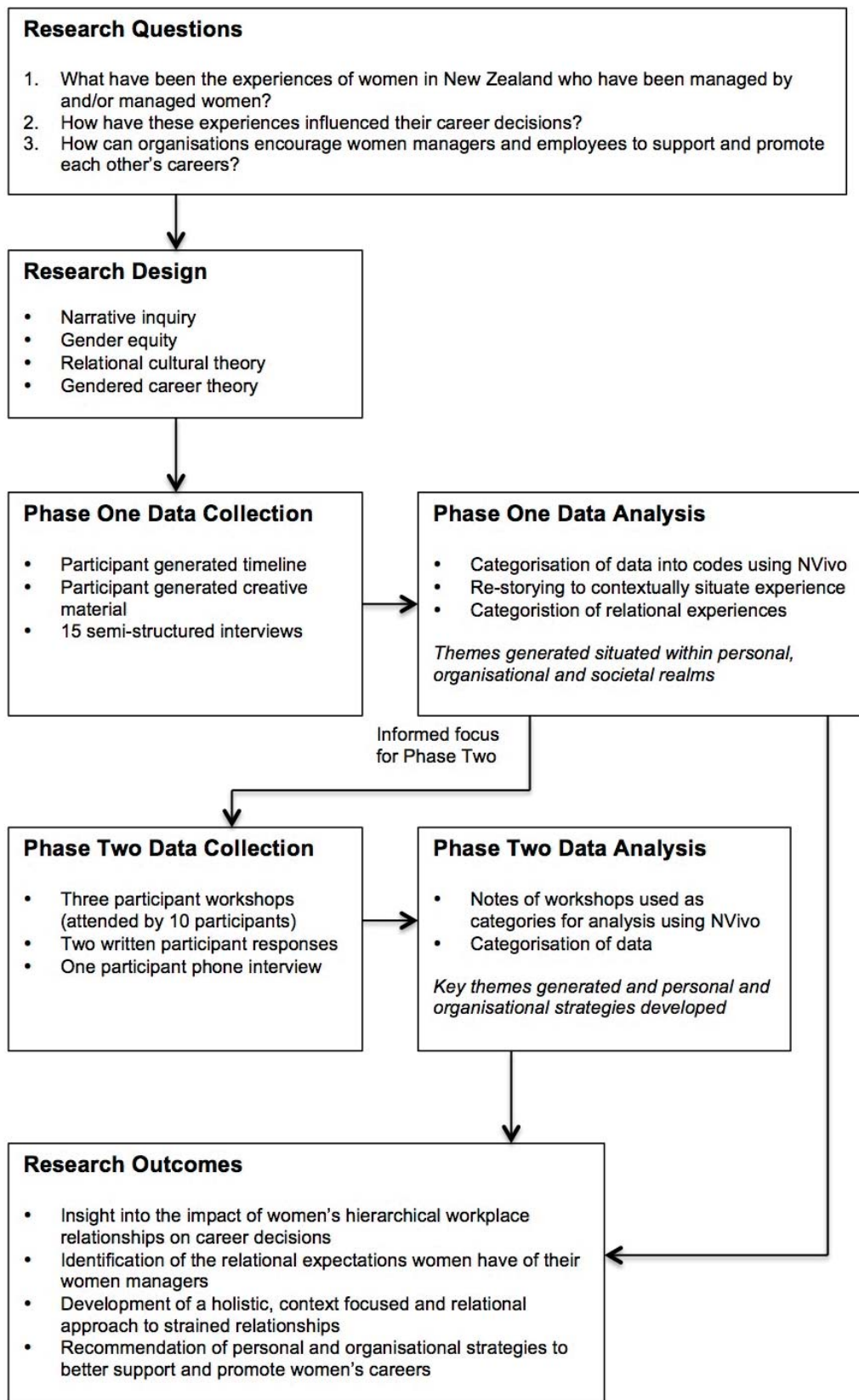


Figure 3.1: Research design

### 3.8 Data collection and analysis

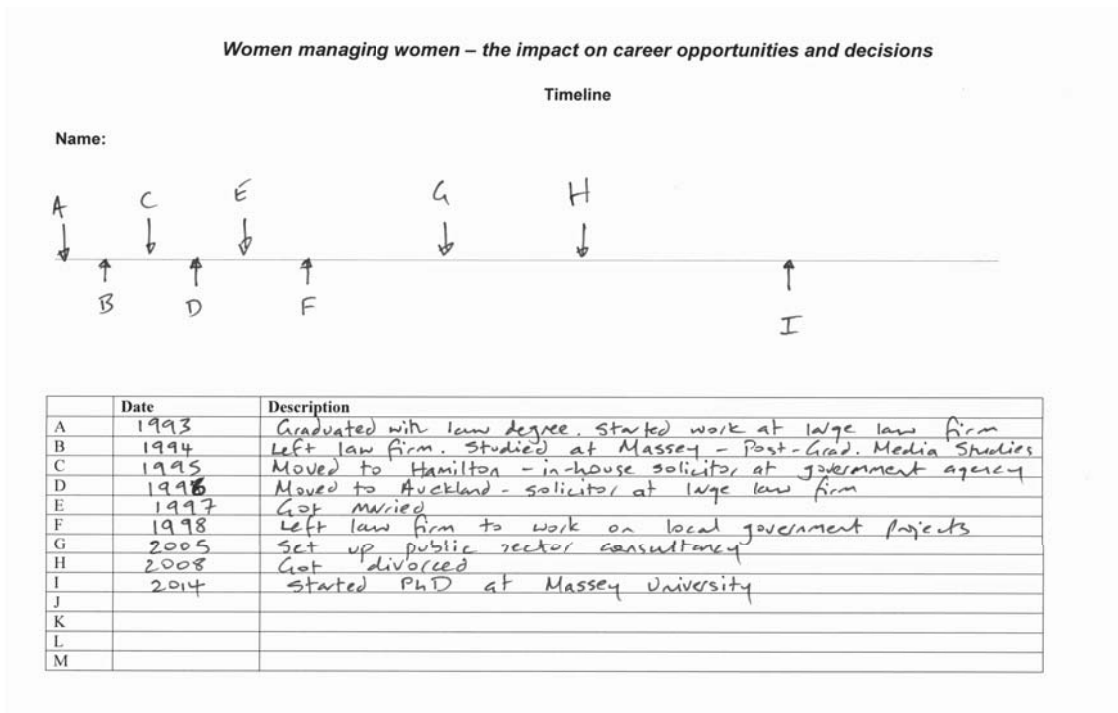
#### 3.8.1 Data collection: Phase One

Phase One data was collected from three sources: a pre-prepared participant generated timeline, pre-prepared participant generated creative material, and a semi-structured interview. Table 3.1 summarises the Phase One data collection process, which is discussed in more detail in this section.

**Table 3.1: Summary of Phase One data collection**

	<b>Process</b>	<b>Product</b>
1.	Pre-prepared participant generated timeline	Timeline of career and any life events the participant felt were significant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informed subsequent interview</li> <li>• Informed re-storying of participant's story</li> <li>• Assisted in developing a rapport between participant and researcher</li> </ul>
2.	Pre-prepared participant generated written or visual creative material	Creative material depicting participant's experience(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informed subsequent interview</li> <li>• Informed re-storying of participant's story</li> <li>• Assisted in developing a rapport between participant and researcher</li> </ul>
3.	Semi-structured interview	Transcribed verbatim interview notes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informed re-storying of participant's story</li> <li>• Used in data analysis</li> </ul>

Participants were requested to prepare two pieces of information prior to participating in an interview (see Appendix D). The first was a timeline of their career as well as any life events that they felt were significant. This was used to place their relational experiences with a woman manager and/or woman employee into the context of their work and life history. A template, containing general milestone information from my life (without including any reference to my experiences with women managers or employees), was provided as a guide (see Figure 3.2 below).



**Figure 3.2: Timeline template**

The second pre-prepared material was a creative piece describing or showing their experiences with women managers or women employees (either generally or of one or more specific experiences), how they felt about those experiences and relationships (now and/or at the time), and what impact (positive or negative), if any, those experiences have had on their career. In selecting the types of creative material to be prepared, I focused on the following criteria. It must:

- be easy for participants to prepare
- provide options so that participants with a particular skill (such as writing or drawing) are not privileged
- be simple, uncomplicated and ideally, easily replicated by other researchers (Knowles & Cole, 2008)
- encourage and enable the participants to describe the significant relationships they have had with women managers and/or women employees, where it sits within their life experiences, and the impact they believe it has had on their employment and career opportunities and development.

Instructions were given to participants regarding the preparation of the written or visual material (see Figure 3.3).

*Please choose **one** of the following options.*

**Visual:** *On a piece of paper no larger than A3, show your experiences visually in one of these ways:*

- *draw or paint*
- *do a collage*
- *use scrapbooking techniques (using photos, words and images)*
- *prepare a photo montage of photos you have taken or found*

**Written:** *Prepare a short written piece, either in handwriting or typed, using one of the following techniques:*

- *write a letter to either a real or fictional woman employer or woman employee (the letter will not be sent)*
- *write a poem*
- *write either a fictional or non-fictional short story*
- *write a summary of your experiences*

**Figure 3.3: Instructions for creative materials**

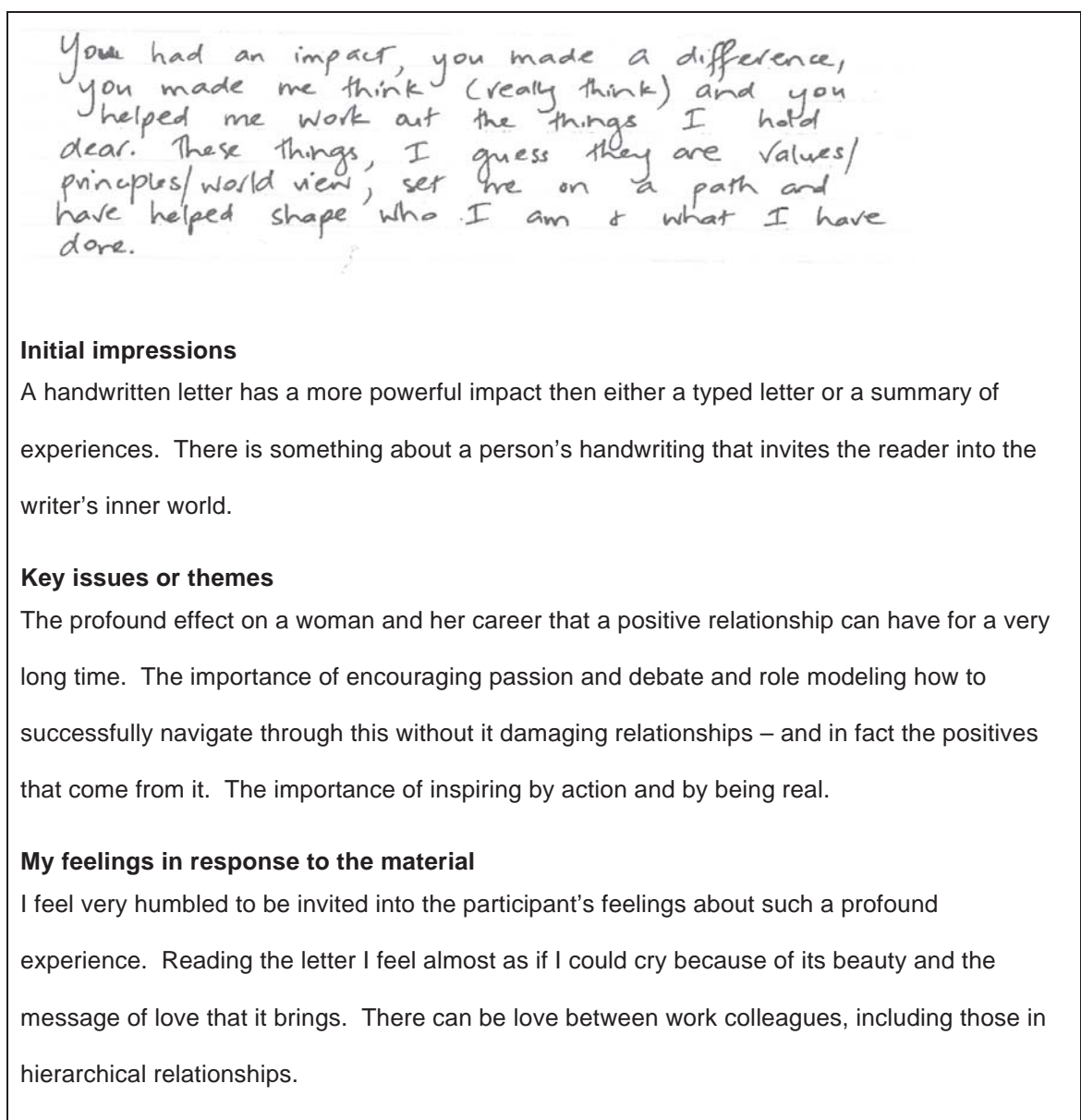
The intention was to provide participants with a range of options so that those with a particular skill (such as writing or drawing) were not privileged. I conducted a pilot phase to test these instructions. I asked two women who would not form part of the study but had experience with either a woman manager or woman employee to review the instructions. They both said the instructions were clear and understandable and they gave me examples of the type of material they would prepare. This provided me with the assurance to proceed with this aspect of the data collection for Phase One.

All of the participants prepared a piece of written or visual creative material in line with the instructions. Table 3.2 contains a summary of the types of creative material prepared by participants. Examples of this creative material are presented alongside the participant stories in Chapter 4.

**Table 3.2: Summary of participants' creative materials**

Type of creative material	Number of participants
Written summary of experiences	5
Poem	2
Letter	2
Fictional short story	1
Collage	2
Line drawing	1
Photomontage (using image from the internet)	1
Mindmap	1

Thirteen of the participants prepared a timeline. These have not been included in the thesis for confidentiality reasons. I reviewed each participant's timeline and creative material prior to the interview and documented my pre-interview observations (see template contained in Appendix E). Excerpts from one of my pre-interview observations (relating to a participant who wrote a handwritten letter to a former manager) is set out in Figure 3.4 below, along with an extract from the handwritten letter.



**Figure 3.4: Example of pre-interview observation**



I subsequently interviewed each participant at a location that was convenient for them. For some, it was in their home or at their work. Others met at my office. Two participants could not physically attend an interview so were interviewed by FaceTime and by phone respectively. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature and broadly covered a series of pre-prepared interview questions (see Appendix F). These were developed based on the research questions and literature review. I sought to develop a collaborative approach with participants, in order to develop a rapport and reflecting the way meaning is co-constructed between researcher and participant. The interviews took the form of guided conversations rather than structured interviews. A guided conversation:

consists of a give-and-take dialectic in which the interviewer follows the conversational threads opened up by the interviewee and guides the conversation toward producing a full account of the experience under investigation. (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 142)

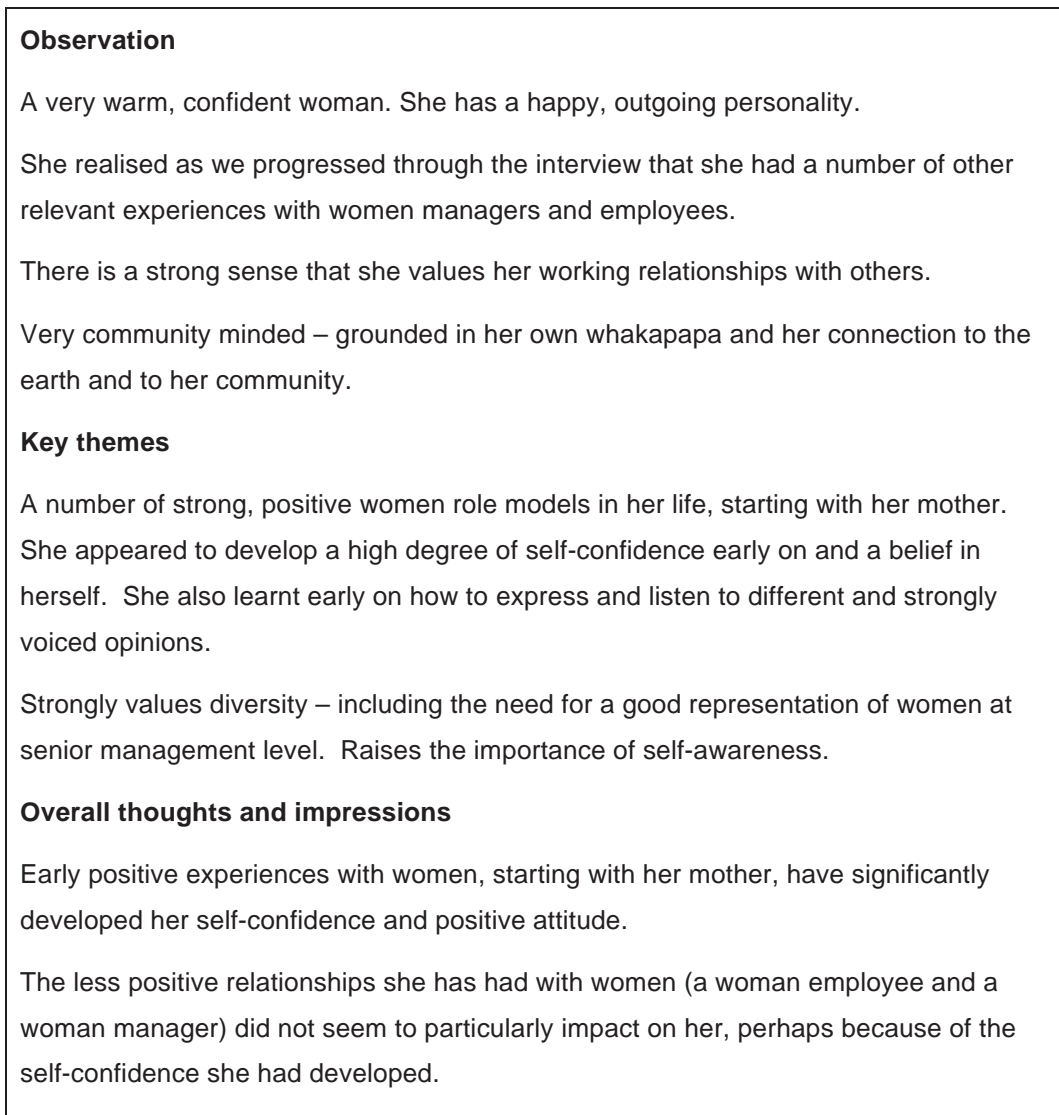
I also took the approach that it is “the interviewer’s emotional attentiveness and engagement” (Riessman, 2008, p. 24) that is the most important aspect to the conduct of the interview, rather than the specific wording of questions.

Preparation of the timeline and creative material provided a number of benefits for the subsequent interview. It provided the participants with the opportunity to think about, intellectually and emotionally reconnect with, and reflect on their experiences prior to verbally discussing them at the interview (Spowart & Nairn, 2014). They had taken time to reflect on their experiences and were able to communicate how they felt about those experiences in a well thought out, creative and emotional manner. This facilitated a depth and richness of factual and emotional information that may not have emerged through interviews alone.

The preparation of the timeline and creative material also enabled the women to give voice to their relational experience in a way that was meaningful to them, something that is particularly important in the women's voice literature (Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011). By enabling the participants to describe their experiences through different media, it did not privilege those participants who were articulate or literate for example, or those that were good artists. It also allowed the participants a much greater degree of control over the research process. Each participant had the opportunity to decide in advance which experiences she wished to share and the detail and depth of information and emotion revealed. This approach also gave more opportunity for the participant to control the pace and direction of the interview.

The pre-prepared material also provided a sense of rapport between the participant and myself as researcher. I was given a prior insight into each participant's relational experience through rich creative description, which enabled me to be more connected with the participant during the subsequent interview. There was a strong sense that I was sharing in their stories, rather than simply listening to, or recording, them. This rapport assisted in creating a trusting environment, which fostered participant openness, honesty and self-reflection when discussing their experiences.

After each interview I documented my observations and reflections (see template in Appendix G). Excerpts from one of my post-interview observations (the same participant who wrote a handwritten letter to a former manager in Figure 3.4), is set out in Figure 3.5. The interviews were transcribed and sent in draft form to participants for review and amendment, if they so wished. All identifying personal and organisational names were changed.



**Figure 3.5: Post-interview observations**

### **3.8.2 Data analysis: Phase One**

The data analysis predominantly followed a thematic approach focusing on the content of the participants stories, rather than the structure of what was said (Riessman, 2008). I adopted a three-pronged approach to data analysis as summarised in Table 3.3 and detailed below.

Table 3.3: Phase One data analysis

	Process	Product
1.	Coding of interview transcripts used using NVivo	Categorisation of data into codes  Enabled identification and comparison of emerging key themes with re-storied accounts of participant experience
2.	Chronological re-storying of each participant's story using a combination of the participant's and my words	Participant experiences contextually situated  Identification of key themes  My reflections on key themes and points of relevance for the research
3.	Categorising of all relationships discussed by participants	Over 50 specific relationships categorised as positive, mixed/ambivalent, or negative  Impacts of relationships categorised

Firstly, I entered each interview transcript into NVivo and coded them inductively (see Appendix H for a list of parent nodes). This was an important first step for data categorisation. I discussed the initial findings with my supervisors. This method of data analysis was a helpful organisational tool. However, narrative inquiry emphasises stories as contextually situated. While this method of data analysis enabled comparison of emerging themes, it has a tendency to fragment data. As such, it was only one method used to analyse Phase One data.

Secondly, I re-read (several times) and reviewed each participant's transcript, creative material, timeline and my pre and post interview observations. I made marginal

comments on key themes and points of interest as I read and highlighted relevant sections of text. I then re-told each participant's stories chronologically using a combination of the participant's words and my own (Maitlis, 2012), an approach referred to by Creswell (2013) as re-storying. I concluded each story with my own reflections, recognising that narrative inquiry and the composition of a narrative account of experience is a relational process between participant and researcher (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Figure 3.6 contains an example of my reflections on one participant's negative relationship with a woman manager. I also shared these stories and my reflections with my supervisors.

This relationship had a significant impact on her. Her confidence and self-esteem were damaged by this negative experience. She came close to leaving but didn't feel able to because of her financial situation and also because of a sense of injustice and a desire to prove her manager wrong. She has been able to rebuild her confidence through the increased support of subsequent women managers, including one who helped her to address the performance issues. Resilience is an important attribute when considering the possible impact of negative experiences. She has, with the benefit of time, also been able to find the positives in and learning from, her negative experience with her woman manager. I wonder if she had stayed with the same manager or perhaps had less resilience, whether she would have eventually left the organisation, irrespective of her financial situation. The implications for her confidence, career and emotional wellbeing could have been significant.

**Figure 3.6: Example of my reflections on a participant's experience**

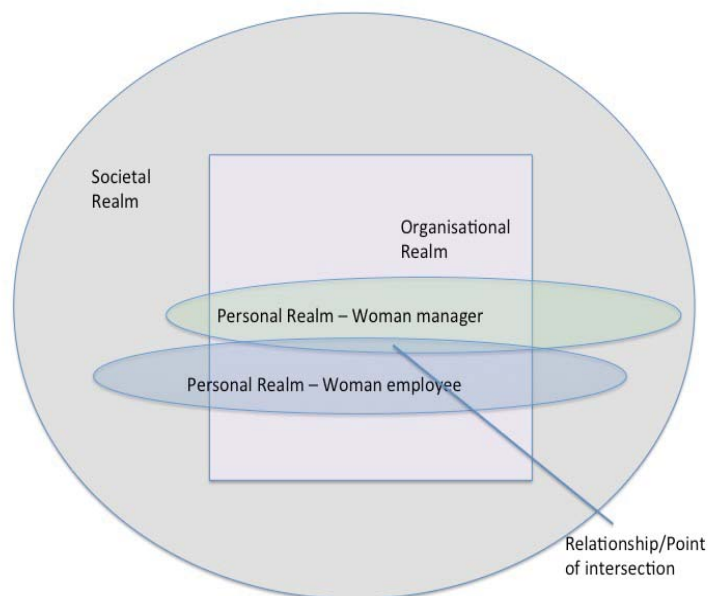
Thirdly, I re-examined every hierarchical workplace relationship with a woman manager or woman employee discussed by a research participant, identifying the characteristics of that relationship, any contextual factors, and any action taken in response, including the impact on the participant's career. I used RCT to broadly categorise the relationships into three categories, based on the participant's description: positive, mixed/ambivalent, and negative (see Table 4.3 in Chapter 4). I also documented the participant's views generally on gender (whether she expressed a preference to work with a male or female manager for example) and her career aspirations and drivers. An example of this categorisation of relationships is set out in Table 3.4.

As previously discussed, analysing creative materials is challenging. I did not seek to analyse the participants' written or visual work in a formal way. Rather, it was used to prepare the participant and myself for the subsequent interview, where she discussed her creative work. This discussion formed part of the transcribed interview, which was used in the data analysis process. The creative work is also presented alongside the findings to encourage the reader to connect with and draw his or her own meanings. It aids understanding of the participant's stories about her experiences and in many cases, adds an emotional element that may not be apparent in a more traditional presentation of findings. This recognises that creatively representing experience has the "capability to evoke emotions, promote reflection, and transform the way that people think" (Leavy, 2008, p. 255).

Table 3.4: Example of categorisation of relationships - Steph

Woman manager or employee	Positive, negative, ambivalent	Description of behaviour	Impact	Extenuating circumstances/ Context	Action taken
Manager	Negative	Wanted things done her way Not supportive Abrasive manner Put Steph on a warning	Felt out of her comfort zone Confidence impacted Snowball effect to management of her team (reactive and not supportive)	On deployment Lack of organisational or external support Financial pressures Subsequent supportive woman manager rebuilt confidence	Tried to talk to manager – didn't help Has stayed with defence force Longer term: looking for new career that is meaningful
Manager	Positive	Explained what was needed to improve performance	Felt supported Regained confidence	Manager was from the same trade so could explain things in a way Steph could understand	Came off her warning
Manager	Ambivalent	Moved Steph into a different role without discussion Now comfortable discussing issues	Felt angry Now feels supported		

Using the data obtained from these approaches, I developed a summary of key themes, which I shared with my supervisors. Reviewing this summary, it became apparent that the key themes fell within three main realms: personal, organisational and societal. This situated the themes within the organising structure set out in Figure 3.7.



**Figure 3.7: Organising structure**

I then reviewed the data based on these three realms and the identified key themes. I re-read the interview transcripts and creative material to capture what each participant had said about these themes and presented this information in a table format. I tried to keep as much of each participant's own language intact as possible. Once I had captured each participant's comments on a theme, I reviewed and reflected on these comments and provided my own thoughts and conclusions (see for example, Appendix I, which contains my reflections on the impacts of negative experiences on self-confidence). This produced a series of findings on the nature of women's experiences of hierarchical workplace relationships, the impact this had on their careers, and the



personal, organisational and societal contextual factors. The Phase One data analysis led to more specific questions and areas for further exploration in Phase Two.

### **3.8.3 Data collection: Phase Two**

Phase Two brought the participants together for collaborative workshops designed to explore the findings from Phase One and develop personal and organisational strategies to enhance hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace.

While this research is not framed within action or participatory research, it does draw on the collaborative principles contained within those more collaborative styles of research. It focuses on the creation of knowledge as relational, being a joint undertaking between researcher and participant (Broussine, 2008; Bryman & Bell, 2011; Shani, Mohrman, Pasmore, Stymne, & Adler, 2007). It is consistent with a feminist research approach, which seeks to involve and empower participants in the research process (Ackerly & True, 2010).

A collaborative approach to knowledge creation enhances the participant's personal understanding and awareness, making it a learning and potentially transformative experience for the individuals involved (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It is respectful of the participants' individual knowledge and recognises the value of discovering, exploring and developing ideas, issues and options collectively, enabling the participants to assume ownership for outcomes and incorporate them into their lives more quickly, which is consistent with a feminist research agenda (Beckman, 2014). This is consistent with relational cultural theory, which advocates for the development of self and relational awareness through dialogue and cooperative effort (Jordan, 1999; West, 2005). It is also consistent with the more collaborative approach to investigating gender equity in the workplace advocated by Bailyn and Fletcher (2003), which emphasises the importance of listening and mutual inquiry as part of the data collection process

necessary to effect change. Finally, a collaborative approach helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice, because it focuses on practical outcomes as well as developing theoretical understanding (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

All participants were sent a summary of the findings from Phase One (see Appendix J) and the questions to be discussed at the workshops. These were as follows.

1. *What do you expect from your relationship with a woman manager (or woman employee)?*
2. *Reflecting on your own experiences, what were the characteristics that made your relationship with a woman manager (or woman employee) either good/empowering or bad/damaging for you?*
3. *How do you think a woman manager could best promote and support the careers of her women employees?*
4. *Reflecting on your own difficult relationships with a woman manager or woman employee (or relationships you may have witnessed), what could have enabled you to cope with that relationship better? What, if anything, could you or the organisation you worked for have done differently?*
5. *What, if anything, would encourage you to strive for a more senior management position and why (or if not, why not)?*

Thirteen of the original 15 participants agreed to participate in Phase Two. Three workshops were arranged on different days, locations and times to enable participants to attend a workshop that best suited them. Ten participants attended workshops (two workshops were attended by three participants each and one workshop was attended by four participants). Although three participants could not physically attend the workshops, they were able to participate, with two participants providing written responses and one participant giving her response by telephone.

At the beginning of each workshop participants were reminded of their rights relating to participation in the research. I outlined the workshop structure and process and summarised the findings from Phase One. Each participant was given the opportunity to introduce herself. Each question was then discussed during which I took notes on large pieces of paper that were visible to each participant. An example is shown in Figure 3.8.

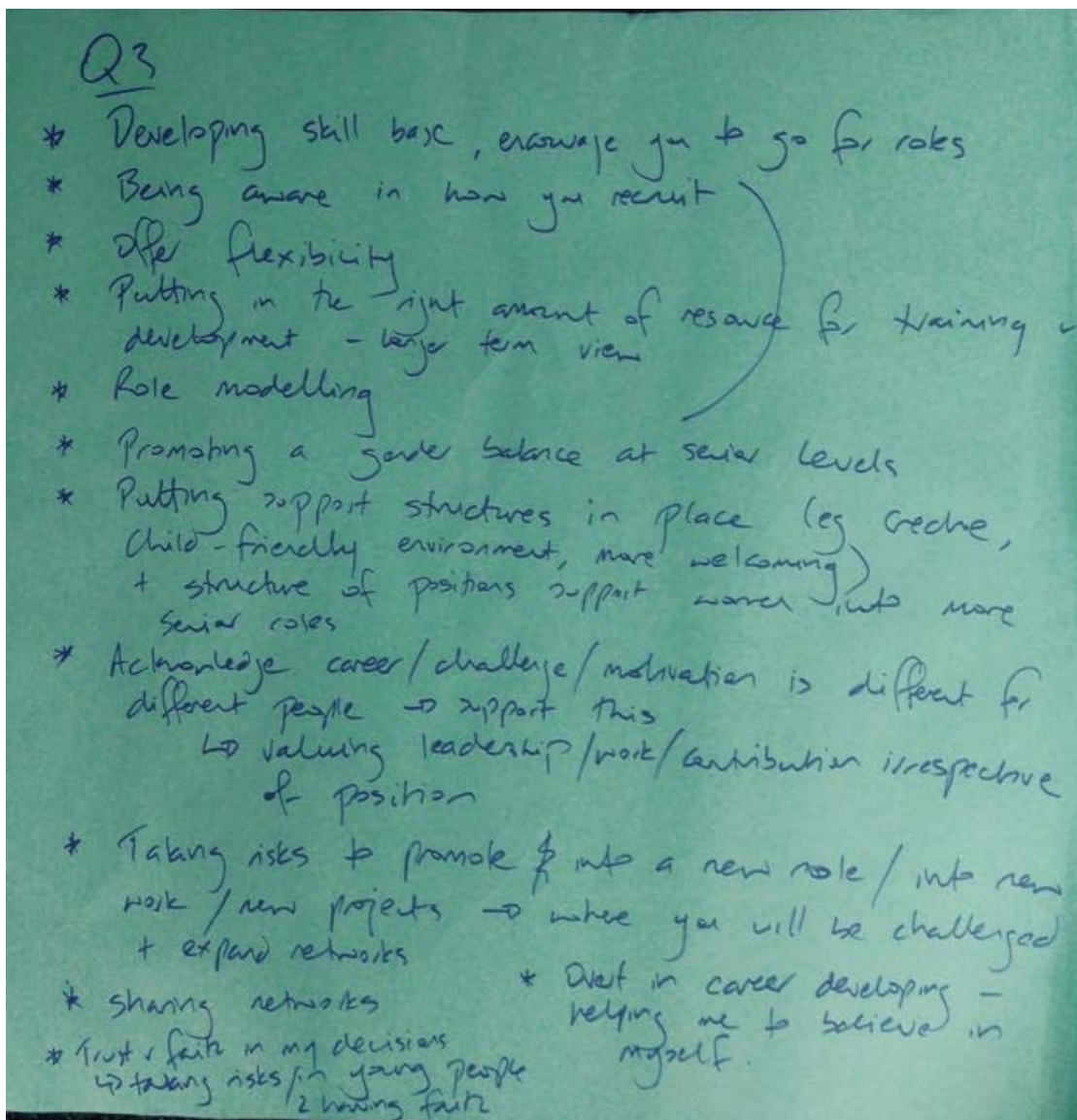


Figure 3.8: Example of notes taken at workshop two

While I guided the discussion, I generally did not provide any specific direction to the participants or suggest strategies or ideas unless the conversation stalled. I also ensured that every participant had the opportunity to respond to each question. All participants actively engaged in the discussion, it flowed freely and no participant dominated the discussion. The workshops took no longer than 60 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed. This enabled me to re-listen to the conversations, obtain a more detailed record, and use any particularly relevant quotes when reporting on the findings.

#### **3.8.4 Data analysis: Phase Two**

The notes of the discussions from each of the workshops (along with the written responses and transcript of the telephone interview), were collated against each of the five questions. These were then used to create categories for analysis using the software programme NVivo. This was supplemented by a careful reading and re-reading of the notes, workshop and telephone interview transcripts and written material. From this process, key themes and areas of commonality were developed for each question. I then re-read the workshop and phone interview transcripts and written responses to capture what the participants said about these themes. I re-presented this information in a table format, keeping intact each participant's own language as much as possible. Once I had captured each participant's comments on a theme, I reviewed and reflected on these comments and provided my own thoughts and identified areas of relevance for the research (see for example, Appendix K). This produced a series of findings, which are discussed in Chapters Six and Seven. Table 3.5 summarises the Phase Two data analysis process.

**Table 3.5: Phase Two data analysis**

	<b>Process</b>	<b>Product</b>
1.	Notes from workshops collated into categories	Used as nodes for analysis (using NVivo)
2.	Workshop and telephone discussion transcribed verbatim Written responses	Analysed using NVivo nodes created from workshop notes and compared to identify areas of commonality
3.	Re-presentation of data to create key themes and areas of commonality using participants' own language as much as possible	My reflections on key themes/areas of commonality and points of relevance for the research

### **3.9 Validity, reliability and trustworthiness**

Validity and reliability have been a key focus throughout this research. A number of approaches were used. I clarified my own position in the research by documenting my own experiences, I obtained data from different sources, I included participants' own words wherever possible throughout the articles and in this thesis, and I used my supervisors as peer reviewers throughout the process (Creswell, 2013). For example, my supervisors reviewed the research approach, including the rationale for the interview and workshop questions. They reviewed the data at a number of stages and in different formats. They also reviewed and provided guidance and comment on each of the articles contained in this thesis, as well as reviewing the thesis as a whole.

By using narrative inquiry, this research acknowledges that “the very nature of the data we gather and the analytic process in which we engage are grounded in subjectivity” (Morrow, 2005, p. 254). The experiences shared by participants are their own subjective versions of events. Those events would undoubtedly be viewed differently by other people involved or if told by the participants at a different time in their lives. I have also acknowledged subjectivity by recognising my role as a co-constructor of meaning, through the re-telling of the participants stories, the data analysis and interpretation process, and through my role as an insider (Morrow, 2005). As a means of addressing this, I undertook a literature review prior to entering the field. This informed my first phase of data collection. I then delved back into the literature after my initial analysis of the Phase One data, ensuring that the data drove the investigation and this opened up avenues of investigation and inquiry that were not apparent at the beginning of Phase One. For example, the literature review article contained in Chapter Two was not completed until after the initial analysis of the Phase One data. The data encouraged me to focus much more closely on relational aspects and led me to relational cultural theory for example. This is consistent with the approach proposed by narrative inquiry, where research is grounded in “experience as lived and told in stories” by the participant, rather than in theory (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 128), and with the research becoming more theoretically focused and positioned as the data is analysed and converted into research texts. Literature is weaved throughout this thesis as part of each article in an attempt to better integrate it with and explore participants’ lived experiences, making it “a kind of conversation between theory and life or, at least, between theory and the stories of life contained in the inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41).

In order to let the participants’ experiences drive the conversation between theory and life experience, I sought to keep the data analysis within the context it was told as far

as possible. I also analysed the data in multiple ways. While a series of themes emerged from this research, which drove the development of recommended personal and organisational strategies to strengthen workplace hierarchical relationships, it is not the intention of narrative inquiry to make claims that can be generalised (Mensinga, 2009). The experiences of participants remain context bound. While questions of validity, reliability and replicability are important, one narrative researcher maintains that “validity lies within the relevance of the lives explored” and “replicability is not in the ability to repeat the research and find the same conclusions, but in the comparisons that readers make with the lived stories that they know” (Bold, 2012, p. 145). The purpose therefore, is not to discover truth, but to explore meaning (Mensinga, 2009) and experience.

### **3.10 Limitations of the research**

As with all research, this study has strengths and limitations. The main limitation relates to the selection of participants. While the snowballing and self-selection methods ensured motivated participants who were interested in sharing their experiences, it potentially encouraged participation by those who had experienced a particularly strong or memorable positive or negative relationship. In addition, the use of creative methods may have discouraged some women from participating in the research, effectively privileging those who felt more comfortable with using other media as a form of expression. As a result of these limitations, the participants’ experiences may not be truly reflective of women’s experiences in general. However, consistent with narrative inquiry, my research sought to undertake a contextually situated exploration of lived experience. The focus was on uncovering areas of commonality and difference between the participants’ experiences as a way of adding to knowledge, rather than seeking to develop generalised findings that can be broadly applied.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

The research design and methods chosen to collect and analyse the data for this study were driven by the specific aims of the research, namely to explore the lived experiences of women managing and/or being managed by women, to understand the ways in which those experiences had influenced their career decisions, and to develop strategies that would encourage women managers and employees to better support and promote each other's careers. The next chapter contains a summary of each participant's experiences, using their own words and creative materials wherever possible. It concludes with a collective summary of their experiences.



## Chapter Four: The Participants' Stories

Fifteen women shared their lived experiences of managing and/or being managed by women. They told their stories as situated within their life contexts, starting with their upbringing and childhood through to their current lives. Demographic details of the participants are contained in Table 4.1 (pseudonyms used). All fifteen women participated in Phase One of the research. Thirteen of the Phase One participants chose to participate in Phase Two (Nicole and Fiona did not participate).

Using the interview transcripts, the participants' creative material and their timelines, I re-storied their experiences chronologically, with their voices privileged by using a combination of their words and my own. Each participant was provided with a draft of her story and given the opportunity to make amendments, which some did.

The re-storied accounts are too extensive to include in this thesis in their entirety. Instead, a re-storied excerpt of their experiences that are most relevant to this research is included here. The participants' creative materials have also been presented alongside their re-storied accounts, with the exception of the five participants who provided a written summary of their experiences. These generally contained a considerable amount of identifiable information and so have not been included. I have also not included the participants' timelines for confidentiality reasons.

The participants stories (contained in this chapter) and the data obtained from the collaborative workshops collectively form the data set for this thesis.

Table 4.1: Demographic details of participants (pseudonyms used)

Name	Age Group	Ethnicity	Occupation & Sector	Has had a woman manager?	Has managed women?
Steph	30-34	New Zealand European	Chef Defence force	Yes	Yes
Lucy	35-39	New Zealand European	Lawyer Public sector	Yes	Yes
Nicole	55-59	New Zealand European	Business owner Hospitality	No	Yes
Kate	50-54	New Zealand European/Māori	Policy and governance Public sector	Yes	Yes
Talia	45-49	Samoaan (Born in New Zealand)	Administrator Health	Yes	No
Karen	25-29	Chinese	Accountant Financial services	Yes	No
Helen	40-44	New Zealand European	Planning and policy Public sector	Yes	Yes
Susan	35-39	Zimbabwean	Therapist Health	Yes	No
Mary	35-39	New Zealand European	Product manager Financial services	Yes	Yes
Cathy	25-29	New Zealand European/ Māori (Born in Australia)	Hairdresser	Yes	No
Tracey	55-59	New Zealand European (Born in Scotland)	Policy and governance Public sector	Yes	Yes
Fiona	30-34	New Zealand European	Lawyer Public sector	Yes	No
Amy	45-49	Australian	Community support worker Health	Yes	No
Sarah	40-44	Romanian	Community development Public sector	Yes	No
Emma	40-44	New Zealand European	Lawyer Private sector	No	Yes

#### 4.1 Steph's story

Steph is 31 and is a chef in the New Zealand defence force. After over a decade of steady career progression with the defence force she was put on a warning for poor work. She had a woman manager at the time who “wanted things done her way” and did not support her. She told Steph she was not being effective or efficient. It was “you know what you need to do, just hurry up and do it”, “why isn't it done, why isn't it done” and “this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong”. Steph felt under constant pressure.

Steph was on deployment at the time which meant she “couldn't really escape” from the environment she was in and it was difficult to get support. She felt outside her comfort level during this time, which was illustrated in the first of the two drawings she prepared (Figure 4.1).

I constantly felt like I wasn't allowed to be at a comfort level within my job that I had to keep pushing myself and pushing myself and that's why I did the picture of someone behind me but also pushing me. It wasn't really that comfortable because I always felt like I had to meet their expectations that they were expecting me to keep pushing myself. I did that square on there because I thought that was kind of like my comfort level and why can't I just sit here and do my job and get things done.

Steph was managing a team of about eight people and this experience impacted not only on Steph, but also on her team. The second drawing (Figure 4.1) depicts Steph's view of her management style.

My management style, I see myself more as a supporter. I'm helping people get the tools to come up and develop themselves as well. It's not just showing

them what they need to do, it's being that support to make sure they're getting all the information and they're doing it right and things like that as well.

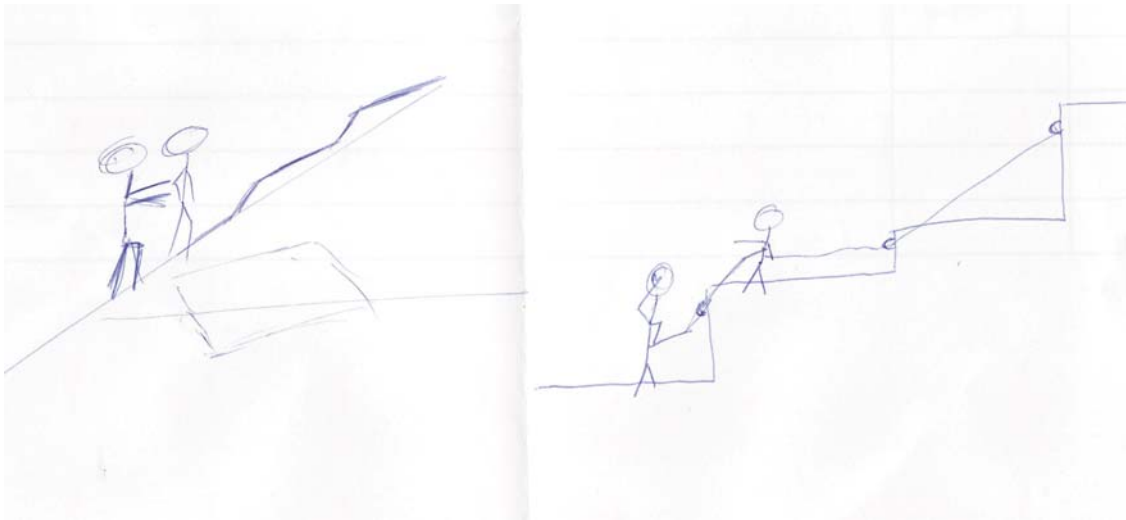
As Steph was under pressure, her team was getting a lot of her stress, and "unfortunately it kind of had a snowball effect". By the end of the deployment, Steph felt like she "was treating them like I was being treated, a roll-on effect of "this needs to happen, this needs to happen", which didn't make them work better for me".

Steph was close to leaving the defence force when she returned from her deployment, but couldn't because she had just bought her first house and had a mortgage. She also had a "desire to prove them wrong", believing that despite the issues, she should not have been on a warning. However, once her deployment was finished, she transferred to the supervision of a different woman manager, who helped her to address the issues with her performance. When she was placed on the warning, her confidence in her work was "bashed down and bashed down until I could come ashore and work with these people to rebuild those tools properly so that they worked. That rebuilt my confidence". While it remained a difficult time for her, she felt more supported by this woman manager. She also noticed the flow on effect to her team, because she was under less stress, she was "able to support them better as well".

Steph has regularly changed work areas during the last four years, partly due to organisational decisions and partly by her own choice. She is not in a rush to progress into more senior management roles and is considering a future career outside the defence force. She could be a manager in the catering industry, but is considering studying to be an occupational therapist because she likes "helping other people and being involved in people's lives".

**Drawing 1**

**Drawing 2**



**Figure 4.1: Steph's creative material – line drawings**

## **4.2 Lucy's story**

Lucy is 39 and is a lawyer. After several years in private practice, she took a management role in a public sector organisation, being attracted by “the variety of work and the opportunity to manage a team”. She initially enjoyed this role, working for a male manager. The organisation then went through a significant re-organisation. Lucy was supporting her team through a period of uncertainty about their jobs (including her own), while also “trying to keep the boat moving forward and everyone still engaged and supported and being productive”.

As a result of the reorganisation, a new woman manager, Marion, was appointed, who Lucy found very challenging to work for. Marion was under significant stress and it felt to Lucy that she transferred that to her team. She tended to have better relationships with men than women and “seemed to challenge the women or question them” and “make their lives harder generally”. Lucy noticed this behaviour in Marion's dealings

with others in the organisation. Her relationships were better with men, even those that challenged her. She observed Marion in a robust conversation with a senior male manager, where she still treated him with respect and maintained a good relationship. Conversely, Lucy saw Marion's "conversations deteriorate very badly" with some other senior women.

During this time, Lucy had to take part in a restructuring of her team, with two roles being disestablished. Lucy did not believe there was enough information to justify cutting both roles, but "they happened to be people that Marion clashed with as well, so it was a bit of a convenient restructure". Despite this, Lucy felt very supported by her team and felt that they understood the difficult position she had been placed in, even though she never discussed that aspect with them. However, even with the benefit of time, Lucy still becomes upset when she thinks about it.

Marion was a very strong and influential manager. Her view would always prevail and she would rarely change her position, even if it seemed wrong or risky. She also did not want to show any signs of weakness. At times Marion would try to be supportive of Lucy, coaching her about leadership style.

Then often when we were one on one she was quite supportive and she would coach me around my leadership style. Her style was very assertive and she told me that I was too soft, I smiled too much in meetings and I just had to be tougher. My voice wasn't strong enough, I don't have a deep voice. She gave me a fair bit of coaching, but at the time I took it as part criticism, I felt a little bit inadequate, but at the same time I thought this is what I need to do to be able to step up. I think as a result though, it did undermine my confidence in my abilities. I think towards the end of my time there I just wasn't sure if I was cut out for it. I thought I really enjoyed the sector and I would like to work in other

leadership roles, but by the end of my time there I thought, god I need to get out of this place and I don't think I'm cut out for managing teams.

Overall, these experiences significantly undermined Lucy's confidence and had an impact on her health. She was able to gain some support from a female peer, but she felt it was futile to raise her concerns with anyone else in the organisation.

Lucy left the organisation to work in the private sector, but subsequently returned to a role in the public sector. She does not manage a team and is not yet sure if she wants to in the future. Looking back at her experiences working for Marion, while it still upsets her, she does not feel resentful. While there were a lot of negative aspects, she has "taken the learnings", which include looking for support from outside the organisation much earlier in future. Lucy sees her career as opportunistic with all of her roles being opportunities she has walked in to. She does not think the experience with Marion has harmed or stunted her career. She feels she has "been quite lucky, doors have opened and I've walked in".

### **4.3 Nicole's story**

Nicole is 58 and runs her own small food court business. In 2006 she employed her first secretary and over time this role developed into that of a manager. Lisa, her first employee was loyal, honest, trustworthy, and able to keep accurate records. Having a reliable manager is essential to the operation of Nicole's business. She "wouldn't have been able to run it without them, I would have probably sold it long ago if I didn't have reliable people".

Nicole has had several women managers who she has been able to trust. Recently though, she employed Betty who "proved disloyal, dishonest and lazy".

I had her for 2-3 years and I kept her because it was only a part time position and I was nervous about getting rid of her in case I couldn't find anybody better and she lived locally so I knew she wouldn't quit but the more I looked at how she was behaving in my business behind my back, she was being quite two-faced and she was running her own business. She had an online business selling clothes and handbags and I would come to work and see stacks of them sitting there ready for her to post them. She'd be flicking out of screens when I walked in the door. She'd go to the bank, which is 5 minutes away, and come back an hour and a half later and she was a liar. I kept thinking it was going to be really hard to replace her because she's not going to train the next person so how are they going to manage it.

Morale in the food court dropped, Nicole was not getting any respect from the tenants, and she was having difficulty being paid on time. Nicole was going through a period of ill health and was not able to give the business the same degree of focus. After being spoken to by Nicole's accountant about her inaccurate record keeping, Betty quit. Nicole has since employed a new manager, Sally, who was trained by Nicole's first manager. Nicole is now concentrating on rebuilding her business, which suffered during the time Betty was in the manager's role. Nicole's current manager, Sally, is proving to be loyal, a good manager, and is largely left to manage the day to day issues.

Nicole does not see management as her calling. While she has definitely improved over the years, she sees herself as "more of a creative type" and being a manager is "not what I would choose to do for my life". Her passion and vision for the future involves running a natural therapies clinic (which she has done in the past) and writing.



#### 4.4 Kate's story

Kate, in her early fifties, is a tier four manager in a public sector agency working in a community-focused role. Thirty years ago Kate worked alongside Megan in a community-based organisation, which undertook government-funded projects based on community need. While not strictly her manager in title, given the flat structure of the organisation, Megan was an influential management figure in her early career. Megan was a strategic thinker, loved to come up with new ideas, and encouraged debate and discussion. Kate explored her relationship with Megan through a handwritten unsent letter (Figure 4.2). At the interview, Kate spoke fondly of Megan, describing how she encouraged debate on issues.

She'd often come in and plant a bomb in the conversation just to test people's different views and then she'd try and draw you out about what you thought about it. Usually with great humour. That's one of the things I really admired about her because some people are very defensive about difference of opinion but she genuinely loved to challenge stuff but loved to hear your point of view. She'd often invite you, if you had an opinion, to make the case really. "Why do you think that? What evidence have you got to back that point of view?". She'd often test those things out with you.

In her letter, Kate describes how all of this was done with *aroha* (a Māori concept which roughly translates to love, care and respect).

While Kate's relationship with Megan ended when Kate left that organisation two years later, she has carried with her a "fundamental respect for people and teams", the importance of seeking feedback and becoming self-aware, attributes that have stood her in good stead throughout her career. This early working relationship with Megan, 30 years ago, highlights the influence a strong role model can have over the course of

a woman's career. While this positive relationship did not directly influence Kate's subsequent career decisions, she learned some very significant skills, such as the importance of fostering debate, genuinely listening to the views of others, doing what you say you will do, being positive, and doing everything with "aroha" or care and respect for others, which she has taken with her into future roles.

In her current role in a public sector agency, Kate manages a number of staff, who are predominantly women, and has a woman manager. She has a lot of respect for her current manager who she described as strategic, values teamwork, is constructive, and a good leader. She is "able to inspire by painting the picture with words", a characteristic she admired in Megan 30 years ago. She feels very supported and allowed to do her job "without too much micromanagement or interference".

Kate doesn't have aspirations associated with climbing the career ladder. Instead, she is motivated by wanting to enjoy her work.

Kia ora Megan

I so valued our time together – your laugh, your presence, our talks, your energy.....

You had an impact, you made a difference, you made me think (really think) and you helped me work out the things I hold dear. These things, I guess they are values/principles/world view, set me on a path and have helped shape who I am & what I have done.

We'd talk (a lot), we'd set things right with the world. I know what's important to you at "your core" and you know what's there for me.

We'd disagree (often, vigorously, loudly), we'd debate differences in opinion with passion and still be great mates at the end of it.

I admire your strength, commitment, zeal and how no one is ~~never~~ left in any doubt on where you stand (on anything).

You have been a marvellous colleague, friend, mentor and I have valued that you:

- do what you say you will do
- paint pictures with words that inspire
- invite a verbal stoush & make it easy to dissent
- excite us to action and invite us to do stuff
- do everything with aloha
- are so much fun to be around

It would be wonderful to reconnect after 30 years so I can thank you.

Alohanui, Kate

Figure 4.2: Kate's creative material – unsent letter

#### 4.5 Talia's story

Tahlia is 48, a team administrator in the health sector and is Samoan. After leaving school, Talia completed a secretarial course and began work in the health sector. She has continued to work in this sector for over 30 years. Talia travelled in the mid 1990s to the United Kingdom and the United States. On returning to New Zealand, she worked as a medical personal assistant in a hospital and had a woman manager, Tina. During this time an organisational restructuring took place and Talia was seconded into a medical transcription centre, in a different location, against her wishes, as were a number of other secretaries.

It was a horrible, horrible time in the hospital. I saw so many of my colleagues have terrible breakdowns. I'll never forget it. They were really experienced women. It was a waste of talent and it still angers me to this day.

Talia was hurting that she didn't have a say and was angry with management about this restructuring, including with her manager, Tina, for not fighting to keep her. However, Tina said "she didn't have a choice and it was this team above her which was the redesign team and their directive was to create a transcription centre and it was out of her hands". The impact of the restructure was made worse because Talia had just separated from her husband and was organising custody of her young son.

I did my job because I didn't have the luxury of saying "screw you". I had bills and a commitment in my kid. I stuck it out and just kept applying for roles back here.

She never contemplated leaving the hospital sector because she had a good network of friends and "a really good rapport with a lot people".

Two to three years later another restructuring saw Talia working again for Tina. On her first day in the team, Talia had an open discussion with Tina.

I went in and I said to her “Tina, I’ve found myself caught up in another reshuffle, I’m here purely because I need the job and that’s what I’m here for”. She was good. I had to get over what’s happened in the past because I need the job. I said to her “I’m not happy but this is where we sit again” and she was fine, she understood. I said “we’ve got to start from square one again” and we did. I was up front with her right from the very beginning. That made a difference. If I came back and kept it to myself, we wouldn’t have gone forward.

While it took Talia time to trust Tina again, a decade later they are still working together and have reached a place of mutual trust, understanding and respect “for the experiences and knowledge that we both bring to the table”. They work in a team environment that encourages loyalty and flexibility, as well as creating a mood that is light, which Talia believes is particularly important when working in a sector where people are facing some very serious health issues.

Talia is happy in her current role and is not interested in career progression. She wants to enjoy her work without being stressed, recognising that “the more you go up the ladder, the more stress comes with it”. She also wants to keep her interaction with patients and their families, which comes with her current role. As well, she wants to maintain her current balance between work, family and friends and acknowledges that she draws a lot of strength and support from her family.

#### 4.6 Karen's story

Karen is 25, an accountant working in the financial services sector and emigrated from China to New Zealand when she was 6 years old. After completing an accounting and finance degree at university, Karen worked for a larger accounting firm. During her time at the accounting firm, Karen had two women managers. The first “was really empowering”, would support her to find the answers, and gave Karen career advice. Karen found the second woman manager to be moody

Work wise it was fine but I found her quite moody. Some days she would be chummy and happy but other days I sat next to her and she ignored me...

Maybe she was stressed, I don't know. She definitely felt a bit moodier.

Karen left the accounting firm to work in a large finance company. Karen initially worked in a team of predominantly men. She enjoyed this role and found it a supportive environment. Three months later the finance company went through a significant restructuring and Karen was moved into a team of two people, herself and a woman manager, Susan. Susan had been recruited from outside the finance company and went through a handover period from the outgoing manager. Once this had been completed, Karen began to have difficulties working with Susan. She found her to be very pedantic. Karen felt she couldn't do anything right and described how Susan “would compare me to her previous employees and other people around the business”. She also found her to be moody. Some days she would be fine and other days “she'd be like ‘you don't know how to do this, this, this and this’”.

In a short space of time, Karen's work environment started to have a significant impact on her. She was miserable, felt sick because she didn't “know what today was going to be like” and “was losing confidence”. She lost her appetite, “was dreaming about work”, was making simple errors, and everyday when she got home she was crying

because of the workload. She tried a number of strategies to cope including breathing exercises, going for a run, trying to lower her cortisol levels, all of which made her feel better until she was back in the work environment. Karen talked to her parents and saw a psychologist and was advised to try to “block her out, but I couldn’t do that”. She also had no one she could talk to in the organisation. In the end, on a particularly bad day, Karen handed in her resignation. She immediately felt happier and surprisingly, she felt she was being treated better by Susan.

Karen appreciates Susan for the things that she has taught her and was aware that Susan was also under a lot of stress and Karen believes that Susan was not getting much organisational support.

I think she was trying to push me but in the wrong way, in a way that doesn't work for me. I think she was very stressed. We sat next to each other and I could see her getting told off and therefore the frustration must've built up and maybe slight resentment that I'm not at the level that I should be at for this role. I told her that when I joined. I didn't lie about my experience and [the company] promised they'd train me up. It's not my fault they went through a restructure and now there's no one to train me up. How can I do something I've never seen before?

As a child, Karen dreamt of being a CFO of a big bank. She wanted “to sit in a tall building signing some papers and manage a whole bunch of people”. This dream was inspired during a trip to a big bank in Hong Kong with her father.

I remember thinking this is the coolest building ever and everyone is in their suits walking around looking busy and important. I wanted to work there. He'd be like “if you study hard, one day you can sit at the top in an office and be

everyone's boss and make the bank go forward. Make lots of money while you're at it." Oh yeah, sweet, that's what I want to do.

Her experience with Susan has changed Karen's career aspirations. She just wants to be happy and right now doesn't "have much aspirations of climbing the ladder". She is not resentful though that this experience has changed her career plans as she is now happier. She is also about to embark on overseas travel, which was part of her medium term plans.

Karen depicted her career and experiences through a collage depicting a river through the different seasons (Figure 4.3).

The river representing my career, sometimes I feel like I'm flowing and doing really well and other times I feel like I'm stuck there frozen like the winter. Other times it's just slow and other times I feel like I don't know where I'm going. That's the river element and then these four, the four seasons, represents how I felt dealing with women. I guess the experience here would be winter with my current manager although now, after I resigned, it's probably more spring and summer. Whether it's my own mentality or whether things have changed, I can't figure it out.

She describes her time at the accounting firm, working for a supportive woman manager, as like spring where she can "see the potential". When she started at the finance company, and once she resigned, it felt like summer when there wasn't a day she dreaded going to work.



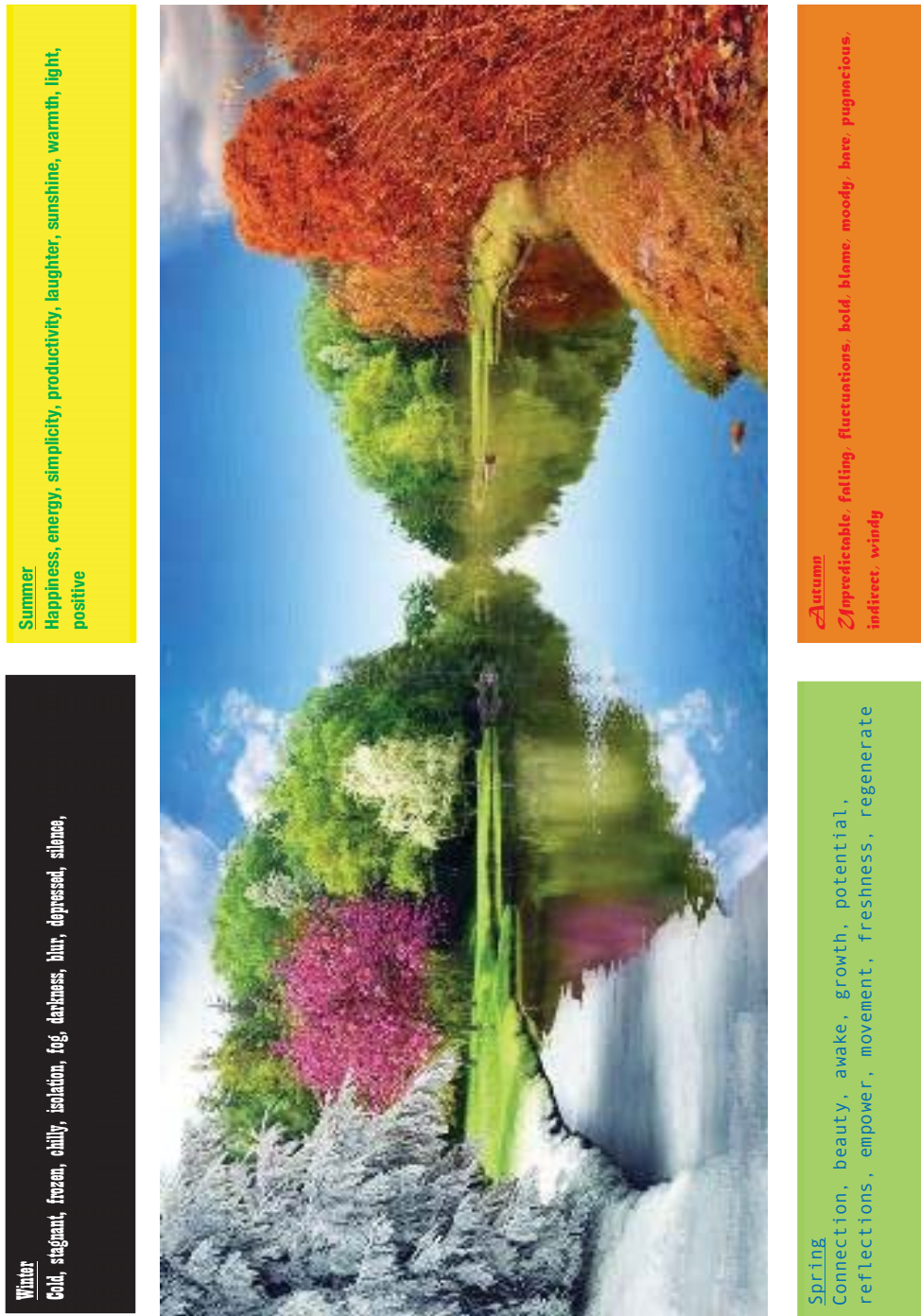


Figure 4.3: Karen's creative material - collage

#### 4.7 Helen's story

Helen is in her early forties and is a tier two manager working in the public sector. At the beginning of her career Helen had her first significant working relationship with a woman colleague, Amanda, in a self-managing team. She found it a collaborative environment where everyone was empowered to seek the views of others. Amanda was very supportive, helped her develop her self-confidence, had belief in her intelligence and “without being a manager in title she was the best manager and coach and encouraged me to develop my potential”. She “took time to get to know me as a person as well and draw out my personal strengths as well as the intellectual and work-focused ones”. It also opened Helen's eyes to the importance of drawing on the strengths of others and understanding their complementary skills.

In a subsequent role, Helen worked in an organisation where the CEO was a woman, Margaret, who was influential in Helen's career. Margaret helped Helen resolve a difficult issue that Helen was having with her manager. She found Margaret to be practical, looking for solutions, not swayed by emotions, and she was strong, logical and analytical. She said what she thought, was challenging, was willing to share her knowledge and experience and would trust her staff.

In her late twenties, Helen left New Zealand to travel and work in England. In one role, she found herself struggling to understand a poor performance appraisal and negative comments from Meg, the woman manager of her boss. Helen approached a senior woman manager who agreed to be her mentor and she opened Helen's eyes to the struggles that women managers were having within a male dominated organisation. She got Helen to look at why Meg was acting in the way she was and that:

She was struggling in the male environment that she was working in. She had to fight to get her voice heard. Her boss was seen as the guru and she wasn't.

She was working on things that were really important and having success but her boss and her staff member were getting the success and the credit for it, not her. My close working with her boss and my immediate boss cut her out of the loop so she felt she was cut out... For me, I realised there was so much going on in her life that she's struggling with and I'm just making things harder.

Helen moved back to New Zealand for family reasons and took a position with a public sector agency. During this time Helen had difficult relationships with two women employees. The first was with Ange, who filed a personal grievance against the organisation, negotiated a pay-out and left. Helen was left feeling like "a crap manager". She knew that Ange's issues were with the organisation and not with her, but looking back she reflected how she "should've probably been more sympathetic but I just saw her as this person who was crazy".

The second difficult relationship was with her employee, Claire. Helen and Claire developed a friendship, based initially in the common ground of their dislike of another woman manager in the organisation. They had a good working relationship. However, this began to break down after their personal relationship deteriorated. This relationship breakdown culminated in Claire making a personal grievance claim against Helen. While the investigation eventually cleared Helen, it left her feeling shattered and despondent with the organisation and she eventually resigned. Helen prepared a collage depicting the stages of her relationship with Claire (Figure 4.4) and is rich in metaphor. Table 4.2 contains a summary of some of the notable elements, which were discussed during the subsequent interview.

Helen left the organisation. She felt like her advice was not being trusted or valued and that her personal ethics and values were being compromised. She moved to a different public sector agency, a considerable distance from where her family lives,

which requires a long daily commute. While Helen is in a management position, the damaging relationship with Claire has left Helen questioning her career aspirations.

The one thing I don't want to do is grow old and to have had work come first the whole time. I really want to enjoy the work that I do and the family life that I could have. I guess for the moment I've decided that the title doesn't matter.

She is taking the time to reflect, and "do a bit of a stocktake". She is "sitting back a little bit from being totally career orientated".

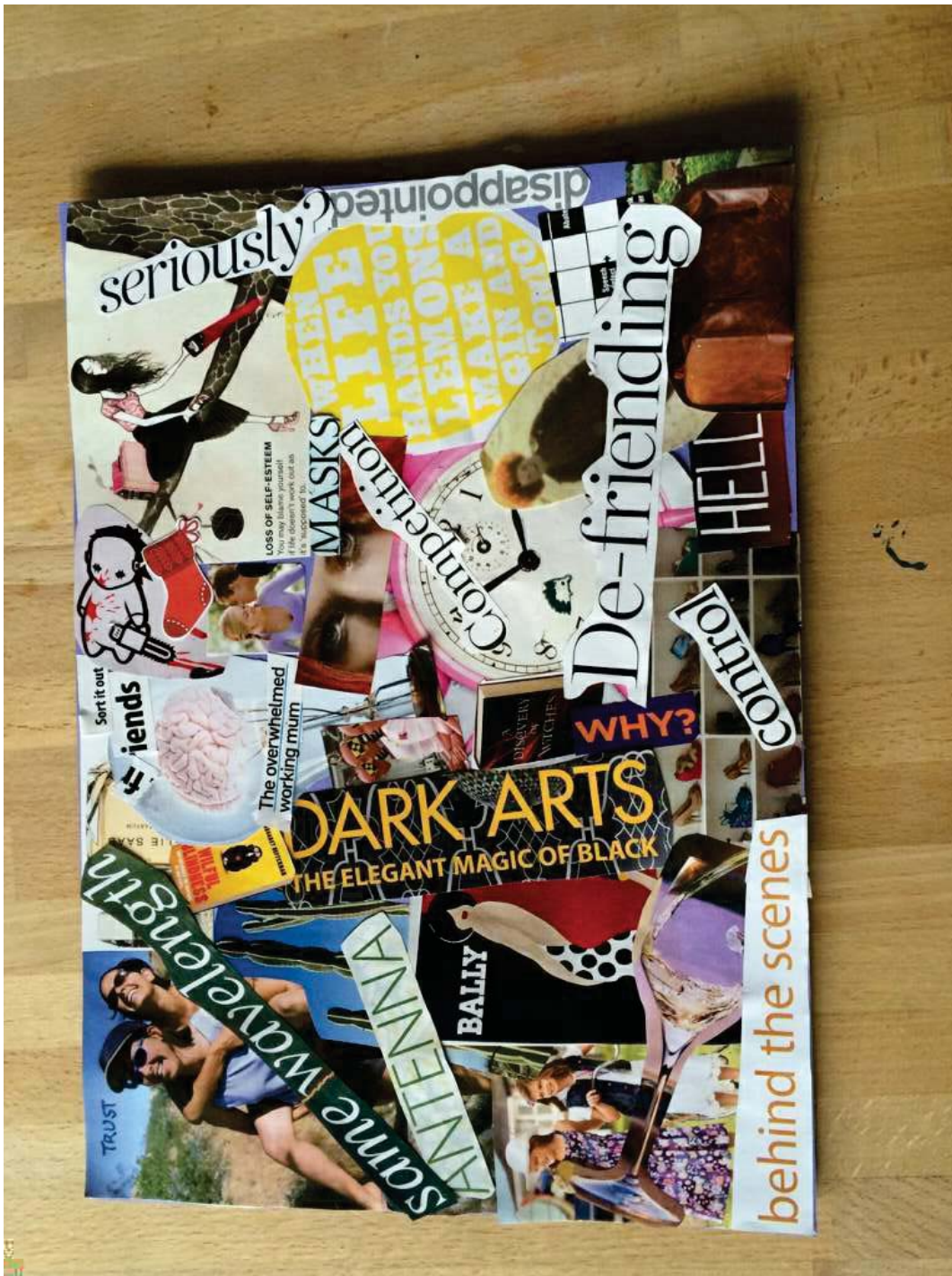


Figure 4.4: Helen's creative material - collage

Table 4.2: Summary of elements from Helen's collage

Collage Element	Participant Explanation
<b>Picture:</b> two little girls (bottom left)	"...there's two little girls that look like they're playing nicely and in a way it was like looking across at the kid that they've excluded. I felt that we were a little bit united in our experiences with this other person."
<b>Words:</b> "same wavelength"	"I thought in the beginning we were on the same wavelength about the type of management and type of organisation that we wanted to be part of."
<b>Words:</b> trust <b>Picture:</b> two women (top left)	"I trusted [her] in the beginning. We were trying to do things together when she was working in my team."
<b>Picture:</b> glass of wine	"We enjoyed a good wine together. We enjoyed socialising."
<b>Picture and words:</b> Bally poster	"We seemed to like the same sort of art and that particular poster there, we had an affinity for some similar things."
<b>Picture:</b> cactus	"I did see a prickly side of her and that's the cacti in the background. I did see that you might not want to get on the wrong side of this person."
<b>Picture:</b> bottle of perfume	"... she had these amazing obsessions. She'd collect perfume and all her socks we one type of brand... You'd nearly say some obsessive compulsive things going on."
<b>Words:</b> behind the scenes	"...over time I thought there was a lot more going on for her than you could see on the surface."
<b>Words:</b> dark arts <b>Picture:</b> book titled discovery of witches	"she always wore black and grey and very little colour. Also I do think in another life she would've liked to be a voodoo priestess or someone pulling the strings behind the scenes. I think she actually quite enjoyed watching people do what she wanted and said."
<b>Picture:</b> shoes <b>Words:</b> control	"Everything has to be right and it has to look right. "
<b>Picture and words:</b> book title wilful blindness	"I reckon I was in that space."

Collage Element	Participant Explanation
<p><b>Picture:</b> light bulb and brain</p> <p><b>Words:</b> fr/iends and de-friending</p>	<p>"I had my light bulb moment with her when she was around at my house in the weekend and I had one of my daughter's friends over and the mother of the child came in, a lovely simple salt of the earth nice person, and I watched the way that my staff member/friend spoke to her. It was belittling and had a tone and a nastiness to it..."</p>
<p><b>Words:</b> the overwhelmed working mum</p>	<p>"I was also the overwhelmed working Mum."</p>
<p><b>Picture:</b> Christmas stocking</p>	<p>"Just before Christmas, on my last day of work, I got the complaint letter so I was just devastated."</p>
<p><b>Picture:</b> man and woman (below the stocking)</p>	<p>"...is that movie Cruel Intentions - I just don't even know if the timing of it was actually part of the mass manipulation or whether she had got to the point herself that she couldn't cope and so going into Christmas she needed to get it off her chest..."</p>
<p><b>Picture:</b> clock</p>	<p>"Subsequently I have found out that it was probably only a matter of time."</p>
<p><b>Words:</b> loss of self-esteem</p>	<p>"My self-esteem took a huge drop. I did blame myself that I hadn't managed this situation that I'd found myself in..."</p>
<p><b>Words:</b> seriously</p>	<p>"I couldn't believe the complaint, I couldn't believe the situation."</p>
<p><b>Words:</b> hell</p> <p><b>Picture:</b> bag</p>	<p>"I really felt like I was in my own little hell and dealing with someone else's baggage..."</p>
<p><b>Words:</b> when life hands you lemons make a gin and tonic</p>	<p>"What I mean by that is to deal with it I had a bit more to drink."</p>
<p><b>Picture:</b> crossword puzzle</p>	<p>"I played kids iPad games and anything to distract myself from what was actually going on. I'd sit there puzzling over it. Really puzzling about how I'd found myself in this situation."</p>
<p><b>Words:</b> disappointment</p>	<p>"The sheer allegations of it just shattered me to be honest. The fact that everyone didn't take it seriously."</p>

#### 4.8 Susan's story

Susan is in her late thirties, grew up in Zimbabwe and spent her early working years in England before emigrating with her family to New Zealand. She is a self-employed health professional, who has had mixed experiences working for women. Most notable was her relationship with Kerry, a woman manager she had when she was employed by a public sector organisation in New Zealand's health sector. Susan wrote a poem about Kerry (Figure 4.5). During her interview, Susan described her relationship with Kerry as someone who would keep invading her personal boundaries "and she was just horrible".

Susan was a new immigrant to New Zealand, with four children and became pregnant with her fifth during the time she worked for Kerry. Her immigration status, personal situation and enjoyment of the client group she worked with influenced her decision to remain in that position, even though she was unhappy about her relationship with Kerry. Susan's poem reflects a time when Kerry told her "I need to reign you in". Susan eventually left the organisation, in part because of her relationship with Kerry. Two years later she still feels anger towards Kerry.

When I think about it, I am sad, but the hurt I've made room for. It's nothing more than just something that's happened in life that's unfair, which is life but I think I'm still actually quite pissed off and that's where the tears come from.

During the interview Susan commented that she was surprised by how teary she got when she wrote her poem about her relationship with Kerry. She had not realised the impact it still had on her. She was grateful for the opportunity her participation in the research provided to "see what issues were still there".



Susan is now self-employed and would “find it really hard to be employed”. She also reflected that her worst experiences in the workplace have “always been with women” and she believes that a gender mix is needed in a workplace.

If you stick too many women in one place, it's not good. It's better if you have men to balance it out but if it's mainly women I think it's really bad. When I think of my worst experiences that I've had employment wise, it's always been with women.

*I have often described myself as someone who has a habit of jumping off cliffs. I throw myself into new situations with enthusiasm and curiosity, and trust myself to fly. I have come to the realisation that I enjoy flying. There is a sense of freedom and liberation in trusting myself and the wind. Trust in the certainty that when it is time sturdy ground and rest will find me.*

*In your own words, you tried "to hold back my wings"*

*Stop me flying*

*What hurt(s) the most is that you made me doubt that I could fly.*

**Figure 4.5: Susan's creative material – poem**

#### 4.9 Mary's story

Mary is 35 and works in the financial services industry. During her time working for a finance company, she worked for Julie. She was a little older than Mary, who describes their relationship as being like sisters.

I think I kind of looked at her like a big sister and she might've looked at me like a little sister. We would get along like sisters but then we could fight like sisters as well. The times I'd get frustrated with her was when I felt like she was protecting me a little bit too much and holding me back a little. Maybe she was fearful to let me go that next step up.

Mary found that Julie was not a good delegator. However, this improved after Mary raised her frustrations about this with Julie.

The team during this time was very busy and Julie worked very hard. Mary admired her work ethic but found that "when you have a manager who works that hard, it's like an unspoken expectation that you need to too." Interestingly, after having managed her own team, Mary now recognises that she did the same things: working weekends and late nights and being so busy that she could not be strategic and spend the time to look at how she could grow her team members.

After nearly 11 years with the finance company, Mary was moved into a management role without any choice, as part of a major organisational restructuring. She felt she was not ready for management and felt overwhelmed. She had planned to stay in a non-management role until her youngest daughter was at school, in three years time. So she felt "a good deal away from being ready". She had to recruit her new team, something she had never done before. She "didn't know how to put together a team" and did not get any help or support to do so.

She was reporting directly to a general manager, Janine, who was very busy and rarely available to provide Mary with support and guidance. She was always in meetings and unapproachable because she was so busy. Mary didn't want to ask her for help. She started to doubt herself and suffered from "negative self-talk", that "I was more of an inconvenience and that it was probably better if I just try to get on with it and sort it out myself rather than going to her all the time". She felt that "everything was imploding and nothing was on time, things were not accurate". She tried to work harder. Mary was finding it very hard to get time with Janine and was briefing her on the way to important meetings. She suggested to Janine that "it would be really good if you could sit with us as well so then we can all be closer and more in touch with what's going on".

She just outright said "oh well, you'll never get me sitting there because I've just got things to do and I'll never sit around there". I was like OK, loud and clear, she doesn't really want to deal with us.

Mary felt "gutted" and that Janine didn't care. She "just went into a little hole and didn't quite know where to go". Mary had usually formed really good and long-lasting relationships with the people she had worked with and had "never had to deal with someone that transactional before. There was nothing else to it, it was all about 'what can you do for me' and nothing else."

During this time, Mary had a team of three. As her work day was so pressurised and she mostly had meetings all day, she felt that she did not have the time to give her team feedback. Her work environment and relationship with Janine was also having a significantly detrimental impact on her family. After eight months, Mary went on stress leave and then subsequently resigned. She resented the finance company for putting her in that position before she was ready and without good support. She does not like Janine and would "be quite happy if I never come across her again". However, despite

being very hurt and suffering from a loss in confidence, Mary doesn't blame her as "she is a busy mum too and she was doing what she needed to do and it's not her fault that the finance company did the restructure" and "she was just as much a victim in it as I was".

After a three month break, Mary has started work in a similar role in a bank, without management responsibilities. This was one of the attractions of the role. She wants to find her feet and focus on regaining her confidence. Mary does think she will manage staff again but doesn't think she wants to be a general manager.

In her creative work, Mary prepared a collage which drew on her positive relationship with Julie for inspiration (Figure 4.6). The relationship, like the tree in the collage, was well grounded and with the solid trunk representing "being strong in that trust and the knowledge that you support each other and you had each other's back." Despite the challenges that she has faced, the sun in the collage shows an outlook that is bright.



Figure 4.6: Mary's creative work - collage

#### 4.10 Cathy's story

Cathy is 28, a hairdresser who is currently a fulltime mother. She moved from Australia to New Zealand with her family in her early teens. She aspired to be a hairdresser and after a year at hairdressing school, she became an apprentice at a salon. When she first started she was treated really well. As well as the salon owner, Jess, there was a manager, Chrissy, who was responsible for the day to day running of the salon. She "was awesome so everything was really smoothly run". Chrissy was "cruel but kind", treated all of the salon's staff in the same way and was also "really good with praising" and would provide incentives.

A major change occurred at the salon when Chrissy left. Cathy didn't know why she left, "but assumed there had been a disagreement" between Chrissy and Jess. While Jess tried to recruit another manager, Chrissy was not replaced. At the time the salon had about 10 staff and really needed a manager.

It just got worse and worse and worse as time went on because we had new staff coming in and we'd moved to the bigger shop by then. It basically ended up each for themselves. It got really bad. Nobody knew what jobs were supposed to be theirs and what was to be done. It got really messy really quick.

Cathy had an aspiration to be the manager but was not asked by Jess.

Cathy's relationship with Jess was mixed in the early years and it deteriorated when Cathy became pregnant with her first child. The salon still didn't have a manager and Jess offered the position to Cathy.

I turned it down because I said I'm only coming back part time. There was no point. I was gutted that she asked me that, I was so upset. It was too little too

late.... If she had asked me once the old manager had left, absolutely I would have dived at the opportunity.

Cathy returned to work part-time after her son was born. She found that the work environment had changed. She was “pushed aside” and “out of the loop for everything”. She was being treated differently to the other girls, who noticed the difference, as did some of her clients. Jess was unapproachable and unfriendly towards Cathy. She did try to discuss her concerns with Jess.

I asked her cos I wanted a pay rise because all the girls had got one and I'd missed out on two which has now turned into three. I asked her about that and asked her what I had to do to get a pay rise and what she wanted out of me now. She just said she'd work out some sums and never got back to me. I don't know what I did wrong. I asked her and she said “no, no, you're doing everything fine”.

Cathy went on maternity leave after having her second son, but at the end of that leave decided not to return to the salon.

Cathy's career aspiration had been to manage a salon. For now, she is focusing on being a mother. She is hesitant to go back into hairdressing in a career-focused way, in part due to her experiences. However, at some stage she might like to run her own business, with only one or two staff, “so you can have a closer bond with them so that they can open up to you and feel like they can tell you anything”. She would “just do things differently to how I've been treated”. She has learnt from her experience with Jess the importance of being approachable, open communication, being organised, and finding ways to get staff to express how they are feeling and not procrastinating.

#### 4.11 Tracey's story

Tracey is 55 and is a policy and governance manager in the public sector. She began her professional career as a town planner in a local authority. These early years were very rewarding for Tracey. She worked with senior planners who had considerable experience and gave her a lot of opportunities. The team was "like an extended family" and she "loved going to work because we did so much interesting stuff". It was "a very nurturing but also educational environment" where Tracey gained not only a good grounding in planning and technical skills, but also a lot of confidence.

A new CEO was appointed to the council Tracey worked for. He wanted to make major changes to the structure of the department she worked in and brought in Lynda, who had no local authority experience, to make these changes. At this time, someone Tracey had worked with for a long time committed suicide. Tracey did his job for a while and asked Lynda if she could stay in that role.

I just said "I know the team, I know what we've been trying to achieve, could I go for that job?" and she just emphatically said no.

Lynda didn't listen or "even think about what I was asking and why I was asking".

Coming back from a family holiday Tracey realised she didn't want to go back to work, something she had never experienced before. Her husband was willing to move and she applied for jobs.

It made me realise actually I am dispensable. I love this place and I'm really committed to the area but it was changing and I wasn't sure I was ready to cope. It was the big first change that I wasn't ready for. I thought if I'm going to change I may as well change, I may as well go and do something completely different.



She took a job with a different local authority in a different part of New Zealand for the location and the lifestyle, acknowledging “it wasn’t a leap up, it was more of a move for change”. While this event happened over 17 years ago and Lynda was only Tracey’s manager for a very short time, it was a significant relationship for Tracey, who wrote an unsent letter to Lynda (Figure 4.7).

While the experience was negative at the time, it changed the course of Tracey’s career and her life. Interestingly, several years later Tracey met Lynda, who said if Tracey had stayed, she would have had the role she had asked for. Tracey felt really annoyed.

I don’t think I could even say anything. I just remember thinking “you’ve got to be joking”. That was what I felt, she was there to do a job and not to be a leader or think about why she was doing what she was doing.

Tracey has subsequently worked for a number of organisations. She applied for her current role after the organisation she was working for underwent a major restructuring. She seriously thought she might have to retire, but was successful in obtaining a management position working for a woman she respected and which allowed her to work close to home, something which she really values.

My relationship with Penelope is not a really close one but we have a good managers’ relationship. I admire her amazingly and have lots of respect for her in terms of the way her brain works. She can just stand up and do the things that she does. That’s really important to me to have someone that I respect.

We have a good honest relationship.

They are able to work collaboratively on issues and Tracey feels able to talk to her about “pretty much everything”.

For much of her career, Tracey has worked with men. She now has a team that has a larger proportion of women. She has found she needs to treat them differently.

I'm used to saying to guys "have you thought about doing it this way?" Women like to be taken out of the context and talked to privately. Just handling it a little bit differently. I'm pretty open about stuff and I didn't consciously realise that perhaps some people felt it was criticising them in public. That's not what I'd intended it to be but just acknowledge that I needed to do some things differently.

Her experience is that there can be a lot more sensitivity with women and "unfortunately women can be quite bitchy at times", something which Tracey is not used to. In response to feedback from her team, she is working to make changes, such as giving more responsibility to her senior managers. Tracey feels supported by her team, although, at times she thinks they forget about how things will impact on her. She is encouraging her team to be more conscious "about how they affect the other people around them".

Tracey is at a stage where she is not looking for major career challenges. She recently became a grandmother and is enjoying having more time to spend with her family. She has some experience in governance roles, an area which she is interested in developing further.

Dear Lynda (Name changed as requested)

When I worked as District Planner at the Council I requested if I could have an opportunity to change roles and moves permanently into the Consents Team as their Manager (I'm sure you recall it was after the sudden loss of Peter (name changed) that I filled in that role while we considered the options for recruitment). I was at a stage in my career that I felt the need to work on the consenting rather than the district planning side of planning to round off my experience so I could have experience across all aspects of city planning.

As I explained at the time we had all been through a stressful few years with the preparation and notification of the proposed district plan. I was mentally exhausted and didn't have the energy or inclination to keep working on the district plan. The City Planning department was also being set up for some significant changes and it was a good time to look at options.

At that time I did resent the fact that you said no. You wanted me to stay where I was as you thought it was better for me to stay doing what I had been doing for the previous 5 years. You were brought in as the person to bring about changes. We didn't really get to know each other and as you came from a non-local government background there was an element of distrust.

Your decision forced me to look at my role and I recall vividly driving back to [the town] from our Xmas holiday and I turned to my husband and said "I need to leave my job; I don't want to go back." From that point I started to look at my options. I don't think it was because I didn't want to work for you. I think it was because there was change coming at us and I wanted to be in control of that change or have some say in what would happen next to me and my family.

The decision was tied up with the sudden death of my long-time colleague Peter (Name changed) and when other key staff started moving on it was a department ripe for change and I just added to that by leaving too.

You, in essence sent me on my new path and looking back it was the right decision for me and my family. It enabled me to take a bold step to take my husband and family north. It's not as if there wasn't a comfortable future in [the town] but staying wasn't going to give me and my family the same life and career opportunities.

I can look back at that decision (and others) since leaving [the town] and each one has tested me and created a part of my career, which has given me new opportunities (and stresses). All of that has been what makes me who I am; a very lucky and fortunate wife and mother (and more recently grandmother), and secondly a successful planner, manager and leader.

The continuing successes of my children are my foundation. My husband and I take great satisfaction in having the opportunities for our children that has seen them grow into great people. Family is all important to us both and while we all may have achieved similar things in [the town] the opportunities were greater here in the north.

In looking back over my career I knew your decision was a point in time that changed things but I probably didn't really appreciate how defining it was. Looking back it was a decision that was right at that time. I often wonder what I would be doing if I hadn't let when I did. Who knows?

What I have come to realise and value is that every decision we make sets you on a journey and if you had said "Yes" that journey would have been very different. As I think about who in my life has given me knowledge, inspiration

and the things that make me who I am, you were part of those things in my life that define me.

You were one of the first woman manager's that influenced me. Up until that time my managers were men and they had a very strong influence on my career and what I have become. It was only a short period in my career (probably only 10 or 12 months) that I worked with you but it was life-changing and that has made me think that we only get small opportunities to influence people who we work with, manage or lead.

I can only hope that I have and can create opportunities for women I work with that helps them make choices for their lives and careers. Those things that signal or influence a decision a person makes. The conversations we have, the advice which we give. Women I work with often say they wanted to work with me and that makes me feel good. I think that I can influence the choices and future careers and if they are as rich as mine then they will be successful.

So thank you for the choices you led to.

**Figure 4.7: Tracey's creative material – unsent letter**

#### 4.12 Fiona's story

Fiona is in her mid-30s and is a lawyer in a public sector organisation. She has had mixed experiences working for women with different types of management style. During her early career, Fiona followed her partner to Australia and worked in public sector organisations. In one role she worked for a woman chief executive who was not only a technical expert, but also a good manager and a role model. Professionally, Fiona felt supported by her but she didn't get any mentoring from her and neither did she expect it.

After three years, Fiona returned to New Zealand to a policy role in a small team in a government organisation. She worked for Susy who had a different management style than Fiona was used to.

She's a very strong personality and to me it seemed like a lot of her decisions were quite personality driven. I don't mean that as a criticism but it took a bit of getting used to I think because I'd come from more of an analytical background. I did feel that she wanted to be quite close and I don't think I was automatically in that space of moving into a friendship, not because of a difference of opinion, but just that wasn't the model I'd come from or was expecting to work with.

Fiona subsequently returned to private practice but was not comfortable with:

how much schmoozing goes into relationship building. You'd have to be nice to people that you wouldn't ordinarily choose to be with. That made me realise I didn't really want to do that.

Another career move saw Fiona working for a public sector organisation for Rachel, who was a technical expert as well as a manager. Fiona found this relationship

daunting at first, but after an initial period of feeling intimidated by Rachel, this quickly moved to respect and she felt well supported.

She had regular one on one meetings every week and she was always on time and prepared for them. It made me realise the importance of that mutual thing. You felt like she was making time for you and that you were important and she was very aware of her job as a manager and also professionally.

Rachel had a “high set of ethics”, which Fiona really admired. After Rachel left the organisation, she has become more of an informal mentor to Fiona.

When Rachel left the organisation, Fiona applied for the management role but was unsuccessful. Rachel was replaced by Mary, who was not an expert in this area of law. Fiona has found this an interesting dynamic and has been “more alert to how my statements could be taken than what I have been in the past”. People within the organisation come to Fiona first for legal advice and this, combined with the fact she went for the job means she is “also super-sensitive of not ever appearing to not be a good team member”.

While Fiona gets on reasonably well with Mary, she does not feel well supported by her and looks for support from other sources. Fiona’s idea of support is “identifying opportunities, giving credit and that’s a pretty big part of my ego”, rather than developing a friendship. She does though, feel well supported by the organisation and by the new head of the legal department, Penny, who she works directly with on particular pieces of work.

Fiona is looking for leadership opportunities to develop the skills to operate in a management space and is “getting more attracted to being in a senior role”. Since Mary’s appointment, Fiona has noticed that she is more competitive with women than

men and reflected that “I think as I progress up the chain it's something I'm going to watch because I don't think it's helpful”.

Historically, Fiona has viewed the differences between male and female bosses as personality rather than gender-based, “but when I noticed my reaction to the women not being consistent with my reaction to other men I had to rethink that”. This is something she is still working through. These concepts, as well as her experiences with women managers, are explored in her creative work (Figure 4.8).



Whitten Component

Summary

Manager 1 (Director)

Then: - very distant  
 - hard to relax  
 - I admired for how senior she was, rather than qualities

Now: More admiration for moving a starting entry into commercial space, and answering & politicking

Impact - No glass ceilings.

Manager 2

Then: - felt like my personality didn't fit  
 - felt like I wasn't part of the in-crowd  
 - different approach & working & work with

Now: More admiration for coming out a unique role

Impact: Emphasised importance of relationships, and "info sharing" without gossip.

Manager 3

Then: - Intimidating at first  
 - Again, worked hard & fit in  
 - Relaxed once I could see her flaws

Now: Admiration for the work taken & clients so high

Impact: Awareness of the costs of apparent success - how much schmoozing can go into relationship building

Manager 4

Then - intimidating at first then growing respect.  
 - still want to desire & impress

Now: Admiration for maintaining a strong personality/approach

Impact: Professionalism. And importance of information awareness

Manager 5

Then: Much more personality driven

- Built a model of "having to be friends" to get on professionally  
 - Harder to respect professionally  
 Now / Reiterated importance of building  
 Impact: different types of relationship

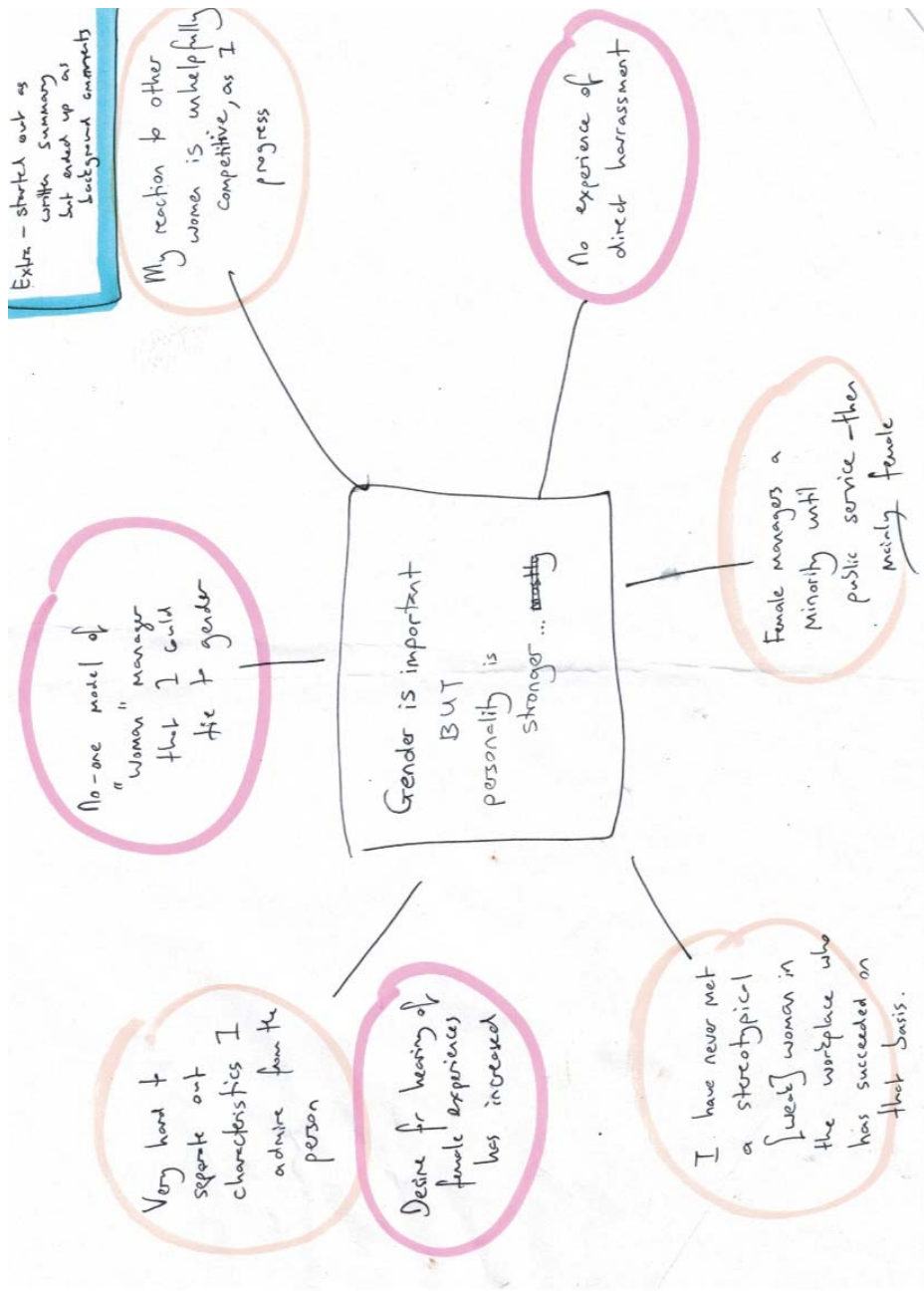


Figure 4.8: Fiona's creative work – mind map

#### 4.13 Amy's story

Amy is 45, a community support worker in the health sector and is Australian. She trained as a nurse and during her nurse training joined the army reserves in a medical unit. The unit was "quite top heavy with women" who were "very strong and very much into being supportive of other women moving their way up the ranks". From her five years in the army reserves, Amy learnt the benefit of teamwork, people "pulling their weight" and the importance of following instructions. She admired the leadership characteristics of the senior women.

I think being decisive, I'm very indecisive. So I'd say being in control and decisive and not having a fear of being in a position of leadership. Taking the reins and appearing quite confident.

After her nurse training, Amy worked in a hospital for 18 months, which had "quite a good sense of community". She recalls two women Irish charge nurses on one ward who seemed to clash with each other. One was "quite fiery and she used to have quite a temper", but never with Amy. The other "knew all her nursing but had no common sense". Their behaviours did not worry Amy because she would "keep a low profile" and focus on her work. She "didn't really have any clashes".

Amy left the hospital to travel for three and a half months. When she returned to Sydney, the job market for nurses had changed, and unable to find a job in the sector she found a job as a nanny. She worked for a professional couple, and was inspired by the mother, Jenny.

She was very intelligent and directed and she used to try and encourage me. She wanted me to stay longer and so she would encourage me to look towards my future.

She encouraged Amy to look into further study and “expand and look to the future”. However, further travel was calling Amy and she did not want to miss the opportunity to work in England. From working for Jenny, Amy learnt about the importance of trust, responsibility and honesty. While she was working closely with the family, Amy kept a clear line between the professional and personal boundary.

She later moved to New Zealand and worked as a gardener for a long period of time. She “loved being outside”, “it was low stress”, she liked the “sense of teamwork” and “enjoyed the work” which had a “nice sense of achievement”. She later took a job as a community support worker fieldworker with a small non-government organisation. Amy finds the team, who are mainly women, not supportive at times. There are a few “really strong willed women” who “really can be quite aggressive and argumentative”.

You can try and discuss something and they get their backs up. A couple of times I have had to speak up and get a bit grumpy. I just say “let me finish, you’re not letting me finish”.

Amy reports directly to the Chief Executive. About two years ago, Tania was appointed to this role. She had previously been in the marketing and fundraising role for the organisation. While Amy thinks “she’s nice”, has “got a good heart”, and is “full of enthusiasm”, her management skills need developing. She has a tendency to become overly involved with clients and overstep personal boundaries, “tends to be a bit of a bull at a gate”, and struggles with communication “because she’s always doing so many things she doesn’t always read things properly”. She also “puts little kisses after her name”, which Amy finds unprofessional. Amy provided feedback to Tania on one occasion about a tendency “where she gets an opinion about something and you can’t discuss it, it’s like a closed door”. While Tania said she appreciated the feedback, and initially sought to make changes, this has not lasted. Amy thinks a lot of Tania’s issues

relate to lack of experience and she “likes to look like she’s in control and doesn’t like people to think she doesn’t know what she’s doing”.

The current marketing and fundraising staff member has taken a personal grievance against Tania. While “they started off as best buddies”, “they’ve been clashing recently”.

At first they were very similar and best pals and it was all going good, good, good, and then as the new marketer fundraiser wanted to be autonomous and have more say, she felt blocked at times and things she would want to do she wasn’t allowed to do them in a set way and then if they backfired she’d get the brunt of it... Maybe initially there was a blurring of boundaries between friendship and work.

Amy does not have any particular career aspirations. She would like to do something different but feels that she is “in the dark” and “at a cross-roads”. She recognises her lack of aspiration to be a leader can be limiting. Her creative work reflects on her experiences with women managers, as well as her career aspirations (Figure 4.9).

From very small I've felt a connection more with the fairer sex.  
A looking up to, feeling closer to. Like a 'crush' one won't forget.  
In the Army-unit I joined woman mainly 'ruled the roost'.  
They showed strength and leadership qualities. Generally eager to give you a boost.  
To build up any aspirations, climb as far as you could go.  
I'd been raised to follow obediently, rather than push the boundaries and grow.

Nursing's strongly female staffed. We worked together as a team.  
Varied personalities took turn as 'leader'. Some were bossy, some less seen.  
I tend not to clash with authority; I follow directions and help as required.  
I resigned for worldly travels. When I returned, as a nanny I was hired.  
In theory I worked for both parents. In essence the Mum was more my boss.  
She was intelligent, kind, strong and directed; a motivated achiever, one to inspire.

The jobs and type of work have varied. The people have as well.  
My working style has stayed fairly consistent, as far as I can tell.  
Early discipline to the point of 'terrorism' has made my strengths conform.  
A peacemaker who is geared for obedience, not to question what is law.  
Only now I start to question, acknowledge and retrieve the value of the past.  
The strength of women I've had contact with and the influence they can impart.

Comfortable, Respectful, Inspired but not wanting to 'ladder' climb, Strength at carrying out instruction.

Figure 4.9: Amy's creative material - poem

#### 4.14 Sarah's story

Sarah is 40, Romanian and works in a community-based role in the public sector. She grew up “in a traditional Romanian family and a good job for a girl could be teaching or a nurse”. However, she fell “in love with the idea of the media”, enrolled in a journalism degree and got a job in radio to fund her study. After a week, Sarah got her first experience of being on-air.

A brave colleague put me on air at 6 o'clock in the morning, and the management kicked me out and said I can't go live because my voice is thin like a thread. I remember for days and days and days I was reading in front of the mirror and exercising and in a couple of years I did have one of the best voices there.

Radio in Romania was a masculine environment but she worked for men and women. Her first woman manager took on the “role of a man” in her management style.

She wanted to compete at that level and she took that behaviour and probably took it a little bit to the extreme because she had to run a department, a department that had very big personalities. She was very successful indeed.

She could be blunt and Sarah was scared of her at first. However, when Sarah had her “first success and when I had my first victory she was the first to acknowledge that so she was actually very fair but very blunt”. Another woman manager went on holiday and gave Sarah the opportunity to produce her first broadcast. She was encouraging and supportive of Sarah.

Sarah's media experience expanded into television, but while she loved the media, after seven years she lost some of her enthusiasm. It was a hierarchical institution and she was “too young to get promoted”. She emigrated to New Zealand and her first

main roles were for non-governmental organisations in the mental health sector. In these roles she felt useful and it was rewarding. She found the people working in NGOs to be kinder, caring, supportive and more open than in the corporate world and she was treated well and fairly.

She moved into a public sector organisation delivering community-based programmes. However, after three years in that role, a major restructuring saw new managers and a new delivery model. From Sarah's perspective, they were not "very experienced and you could see that their model would fail". Her woman manager, Celia, had been made redundant in the organisational restructure after 10 years in a job and had taken a different job, which Sarah believed she did not have the experience for. It was a time when Sarah's values "were in contradiction with what I was supposed to deliver and there was a lot of frustration". Celia was "a normal woman" but the working relationship between her and Sarah became difficult and "it ended up quite bad, the frustration was probably on both sides". Celia would scream at Sarah, who eventually "took stress leave and actually the only thing that I wanted to do was just not work with her anymore because the conflict was so open".

Sarah's working relationship with Celia had a big impact on herself and her family.

It was really terrible for myself, my family, my husband wanted to come and beat up everybody. So it really affects your family. I remember it was summer and I didn't see the summer, I didn't feel the warmth, I was so stressed out and caught up in those discussions.

Sarah ended up in mediation. Her union encouraged her to take a personal grievance, which would have been a six month process. There was another restructuring happening and Celia was not going to be her manager in a couple of months time.



Sarah decided not to pursue a personal grievance, after which Celia “was the kindest person ever”.

From this experience, Sarah has “a lot of feelings now for people who come to me with similar problems because I’ve been through that and I know”. She recognises “the way that work does change our perspective on life, our private life...” It was also a catalyst for new things as she became a member of a union, which has “the principles of fairness and equity” and which she feels very strongly about. Sarah is also now a member of the union’s nationwide women’s network and feels more strongly about supporting women in the workplace.

In her creative work (Figure 4.10), a fictional story, Sarah drew an analogy to organisations treating people as hands, rather than as whole people, with a drive towards standardisation and making people fit within those standardised hands. She has seen “great women managers” who:

don’t work with ‘hands’ but with real people, and they understand how personal life affects one’s job. They pay attention to detail, they pay attention to work space, they pay attention to one’s place in the team, and team’s dynamics. They see their role in growing people and take their employees with them in their leadership journey. Health and safety is important for them, and not just words. They encourage, inspire innovation, open thinking and a great deal of respect.

In contrast, she has seen women managers:

who copied a male style of managing, some with great success in implementing a male understanding of efficiency and values. While I think that we should be happy for every woman succeeding, I fear that this may just confirm a status

quo designed by men, rather than redesigning the environment with things that matter for women (wellbeing, community, children,...).

### *The Hands*

On the first day in my job they gave me new hands. They were sparkingly shining and perfect.

They knew how to work well, busying themselves to stack things here, to unpack there, to arrange everything beautifully, in the perfect order. As required. My friends were watching them with envy –and that made me so proud of them, of me! They were so quick that sometimes I couldn't keep up with their movement. I spoke with my supervisors about my fears – not being able to anticipate the next action, to stop and reflect on what is good and what is bad. Not even having the time to enjoy their success – one second there, the next one following my new hands on the job. They said not to worry – my hands will get me there.

My hands were never tired; but I started to be. Don't get me wrong, they were perfect indeed, and the joint to my body was perfect too. Somehow my bones started to get old, and my skin wrinkly, and that was where my new perfect hands didn't fit anymore. It got painful. I tried to work the mismatch – I went to the Office of Technology, to change my hands to better fit my body. But you see, the hands were made to fit all the employees, and one change would affect all the production, and of course, the other employees as well, who never complaint, I was told. Or if they did, probably for a completely opposite reason. It's hard to get hands to satisfy everybody, for some they are too large, for some too narrow, for some too fast, for some too slow. Believe me, the Office of Technology manager said, your hands are perfect. You may need to change to fit them, rather than the other way around.

And I tried, I really tried! And suddenly the sun turned black, the flowers grew up-side down and the bees were digging for food under waves of earth. And I really tried to believe that, to convince myself that the Earth is not round and that happiness lives in a mathematical equation. I nearly did. It would have made my life so much easier...

But one evening... One evening my hands were doing their usual the thing, the thing they knew the best – work work work, cleaning here, cooking there, washing here, and then ... my son asked me something – it was something like a four years old can ask, nonsense my hands argued, but it was there some long forgotten warmth, recalling sounds from long last memories. I had to give him a hug. But then he started to cry. You see, my hands got on the job very efficiently, pressing his little body a little bit too fast, a little bit too strong, they weren't hugging hands. I tried to control them, but OMG how they controlled me! I sat down and cried with my child.

The following morning, when my hands got me up and started to iron the office shirt I remembered something different. And, for the first time in a long long time I stopped for a second. I refused to follow my sparkingly shining and perfect hands. They got angry, of course, they started to make noise, they threatened, they tried to make me feel guilty, what will people say? Too much: I took them out and threw them out the window. Outside, a bee shacked its wings and started the long journey towards a bright orange sun – orange, like in my little child's drawings.

The end.

**Figure 4.10: Sarah's creative work – short story**

#### 4.15 Emma's story

Emma is a lawyer in private practice. In her first job there were no women partners at the law firm and the culture was “pretty blokey”, but it did not worry Emma because she was “a sporty girl”. After a couple of years, Emma left to travel overseas. She had always wanted to travel. She was offered a job at a larger law firm in New Zealand. While it was a good job working in a good team, her partner at the time “had secured a job overseas and he was keen to go right away”.

Again it's one of those moments where you look back and think you know what, if you'd taken that job and had another year under your belt then your options in England might also have been to work in a firm rather than to work in-house. For me it's another example of taking an option that probably curtailed my opportunities rather than expanded them.

In England Emma worked in an in-house role in a bank and if she thought “it was blokey at the firm I was at, this was another thing altogether”. It was “very patriarchal” and she was “the subject of sexual harassment from her boss”. However, she coped because she was having a fabulous time outside of work, had “a great support network of friends” and it provided her with the opportunity to travel. After a couple of years, Emma returned home, primarily for family and relationship reasons. Looking back, it was not necessarily the best decision from a career perspective, and she reflected how she “went for the most comfortable choice rather than necessarily the best choice”.

Emma has never had a woman manager but manages a team which includes women. She enjoys managing staff, seeing them step outside their comfort zone, and she gets “a lot of satisfaction from seeing people do well”. She does need to push women employees. She notices a difference in the confidence of the young men versus young women lawyers she manages.

The men are far more ready to step forward and try something or brag their way into a role or say “yeah, I can do it” and then muddle their way through than a woman is. A woman will say to me “yeah, I think I can do it but I haven’t done this before...”. It’s quite a different management style that’s required. I see in that dichotomy exactly what it is that holds women back because your male counterpart knows less than you do but they’re off doing the job that you could do standing on your head and it’s a confidence thing.

She is firm with her women employees that they need to try new things, providing them with the reassurance that she will be there to pick up the pieces if needed. While they “absolutely hate it” at the time, they are thankful afterwards. Emma also enjoys the relationships she can have with her women employees. There is a lot of mutual respect and she is there to support and mentor them. However, as she has become more senior “there is no longer an attempt to be pals or be friends” and she finds that separation “quite helpful”.

Emma generally feels well supported by her team, although there is sometimes tension when their social lives get in the way of getting a job done, something she finds men are worse at. She also has to adjust the way she delivers negative feedback between men and women. A man “tends to get angry or defensive” and a woman “tends to cry”. She finds these hard discussions difficult because it is regarded as a confrontation.

Emma also sometimes feels frustrated when young women who work for her get distracted by personal relationships reflecting that:

I guess I feel that historically that hasn’t necessarily worked for me and I’m worried that it’s not going to work for them but that’s as much my baggage being brought to bear on what they’re doing.

While Emma has always reported to male partners, there have been times when she has worked with women partners. She has found it to be “a lot more collegial in the sense that there wasn't the pecking order that you tend to have with the male partners” and the structure is “slightly flatter”. She also has good professional relationships with other senior women in the law firm. However, while they are not openly competitive with her, they have also not been particularly supportive of her career either. She does feel they should be supportive, something which she feels in her own relationships with younger women lawyers.

Emma has, over the last 15 years, progressed to a senior position. She has not however, become a partner, which is seen as the pinnacle of success in the corporate law sector.

My career aspirations are, that I frankly want a good job that pays well that I find interesting and that allows me to spend time being a mother, being a wife, having some time for myself which is a rarity in most of our lives. I truly do want what everyone says they want which is that balance and I accept that in this environment it means I'll never be a partner. That is just the reality of a big law firm.

She knows she has all of the qualities needed to be a partner but she is not willing “to sacrifice my time with my family to build the business case that is required for partner”.

#### 4.16 Summary

The participants discussed over 50 relationships with women managers and employees. Using elements of RCT and the participants' descriptions, the relationships were either categorised as positive, mixed/ambivalent, or negative. All 15 of the participants had experienced relationships that were mixed or ambivalent in terms of quality and impact. Seven participants had experienced a positive relationship with a woman manager and/or employee and 11 had experienced a negative relationship.

**Table 4.3: Summary of the participants' experiences**

<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Positive</b>	High degree of respect, trust, loyalty, open communication	Empowering	7
<b>Mixed/Ambivalent</b>	Moderate degree of trust, loyalty, open communication	No or little impact (as narrated by the participant)	15
<b>Negative</b>	Low degree of respect, trust, loyalty, open communication	Disempowering Damaging	11

Examples of the comments participants made about their positive and negative relationships with women managers and/or employees are contained in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Examples of participant comments about their positive and negative relationships

<i>Relationship quality</i>	<i>Examples (participant comments)</i>
<p><b>Negative - Disempowering Damaging</b></p> <p>Low degree of respect, trust, loyalty, open communication</p>	<p>...it was just a constant time pressure, constant pressure of am I doing it right, am I doing it wrong, is it going to be good enough for her. [Steph, about a manager]</p> <p>...she didn't want to show any weakness and so she would never, or very rarely, move from her position. [Lucy, about a manager]</p> <p>I voiced my opinion that despite all my knowledge/ experience, my disappointment in her not fighting to keep me [during the restructuring] [Talia, about a manager]</p> <p>[She was] going around talking about me a lot to the tenants and putting me down. That was a situation that was taking down the morale of everyone [Nicole, about an employee]</p> <p>I felt like she was very pedantic. Super pedantic. I couldn't write an email without her changing anything... She was over my shoulder all the time and I couldn't handle it. I couldn't do anything right. [Karen, about a manager]</p> <p>She wouldn't report on her projects. She didn't feel she needed to report to me. She didn't want to take on work that I was passing her way. She wanted to work in her own little office and stare and not engage with me. [Helen, about an employee]</p> <p>...she was just awful. It felt like she was somebody who I had to keep making my boundaries clear. Then I felt that she would say something and try and invade my privacy and say something inappropriate and then I'd have to make my boundaries clear again. [Susan, about a manager]</p> <p>She was gone all the time, always in meetings. When she was there you didn't want to interrupt her because she looked so busy. She was constantly late and sometimes she didn't even turn up for meetings. I almost felt guilty asking for help from her, I didn't want to go to her. [Mary, about a manager]</p> <p>Short and sharp when she'd talk to me, not friendly, not approachable. [Cathy, about a manager]</p>



<b>Relationship quality</b>	<b>Examples (participant comments)</b>
	<p>I never used to think she did [listen] actually. [Tracey, about a manager]</p> <p>It ended up in an open conflict when she would come and scream at me that she doesn't want to work with me anymore... [Sarah, about a manager]</p>
<p><b>Positive - Empowering</b></p> <p>High degree of respect, trust, loyalty, open communication</p>	<p>We'd sit down and she would say "this isn't right, this isn't right" but she'd also explain why it needed to be that way. [Steph, about a manager]</p> <p>She loved to debate everything. She was so open to it. She was really interested in what you had to say as well. [Kate, about a manager]</p> <p>...she took time to get to know me as a person as well and draw out my personal strengths as well as the intellectual and work-focused ones. [Helen, about a manager]</p> <p>She was really honest, really high integrity. [Mary, about a manager]</p> <p>...proved to be very loyal and efficient, probably one of the best managers I have employed. [Nicole, about an employee]</p> <p>She was really empowering. She wouldn't feed me the answer, she'd make me think about it and support me to find the answer myself. [Karen, about a manager]</p> <p>She was giving the opportunity, encouraging, supporting, walking with me in my journey to get there. [Sarah, about a manager]</p>

The next chapter explores these relationships and the impact they have had on the participants' careers. Chapters Six and Seven also draw on data obtained from the Phase Two collaborative workshops with participants.

# **Chapter Five: Exploring Lived Experience – Hierarchical Relationships and Career Impacts**

## **5.1 Chapter overview**

This chapter explores the findings of Phase One, which examined the participants' experiences managing and/or being managed by women and the impact these experiences had on their career decisions. The findings suggest that the quality of these relationships has the potential to directly and indirectly affect women's careers, particularly when the relationships are perceived as negative. It also points to the likelihood that many women will, at some stage during their career, experience a negative relationship with a woman manager and/or employee. In addition, personal and organisational context are important factors influencing relationships and career decision making.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings expand the KCM by adding important relational components to the career parameters of balance and challenge. From a practical perspective, the findings point to the need for greater organisational and personal awareness of relational dynamics and the connection between women's hierarchical relationships and their careers, as well as the development of gender-specific support mechanisms aimed at building positive and mutually empowering relationships.

## **Article 2: The career impacts of women managing women**

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### **5.2 Abstract**

Our study examines the interconnection between women's workplace hierarchical relationships and their career decisions using relational cultural theory and the kaleidoscope career model (KCM). The findings suggest that the quality of these relationships directly and indirectly affect women's careers, particularly when the relationship is perceived as negative. This research critiques and extends the KCM by adding an important relational component. Balance is extended to include the impact women's hierarchical relationships have on personal and family wellbeing, particularly where it is viewed as negative, disempowering and lacking in mutuality. Challenge is extended to include the additional demands presented by a negative hierarchical relationship, along with the opportunity it provides for learning and growth. Our research makes the case for greater personal and organisational awareness of the connection between women's hierarchical relationships and potential career impacts as one mechanism to support the careers of women.

### **5.3 Introduction**

Feminism has long held the hope that as women enter the workforce in increasing numbers, they will nurture and support each other and eventually bring about more equal gender representation at all organisational levels. In New Zealand, the first

country in the world to give women the right to vote, women represented 47.3% of the workforce in 2016 (Statistics New Zealand, 2016b). However, despite this increased workforce participation, women remain markedly under-represented in governance and senior executive positions in private sector organisations. For example, in 2016 women held only 19% of New Zealand's private sector senior management positions and 17% of governance positions in the top 100 companies listed on the New Zealand stock exchange (Davies, 2016; Grant Thornton International Ltd, 2016; Ministry for Women, 2016c). Women also continue to be paid less than men, with the gender pay gap sitting at 11.8% in 2015, based on median hourly earnings (Ministry for Women, 2016b). This is not unique to New Zealand. It is a worldwide phenomenon (Grant Thornton International Ltd, 2016).

Positive relationships between women involving mentoring, networking and role modelling by and for women are encouraged as strategies to enhance women's careers and organisational advancement (Carter & Silva, 2010; Dworkin et al., 2012; Ely et al., 2011; Ibarra et al., 2010; Madsen, 2008; O'Neil et al., 2011; Tolar, 2012; Woolnough & Fielden, 2014). Research indicates that these types of supportive relationships are helpful, but they do not provide the same degree of benefit to women as received by men (Carter & Silva, 2010; Ely et al., 2011; Kottke & Agars, 2015; Kumra, 2010). Australian research has found though, that women do benefit more than men from career mentoring, where it is in the nature of "sponsorship, challenging work, and coaching" (Tharenou, 2005, p. 101), although women are much less likely than men to receive career sponsorship (Ibarra et al., 2010).

Negative workplace relationships have been linked to job dissatisfaction and a higher likelihood of employee turnover (Morrison, 2007). Research has investigated the

negative aspect of women's workplace relationships through for example, queen bee research. This refers to a phenomenon where senior women who have achieved success in male-dominated organisations actively work against the interests of other women trying to progress into more senior organisational positions (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Derks, van Laar, et al., 2011; Ellemers et al., 2012; Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mavin, 2006a, 2006b; Sheppard & Aquino, 2013; Staines et al., 1974). The queen bee phenomenon has been picked up by the popular media in recent times, with for example, the Wall Street Journal running an article in March 2013 called "The Tyranny of the Queen Bee" (Drexler, 2013). However, the extent of this type of behaviour is contested. For example, Australian research suggests that only a minority of senior management women hold views resembling those of "queen bees" (Rindfleish, 2000). A small body of research has also investigated the incidence of indirect, relational and social aggression, where a small number of women engage in subtle aggression towards other women, including insults, putdowns, denigrating messages and sabotage (Brock, 2008, 2010; Mavin et al., 2014).

Women are encouraged to support each other in the workplace through, for example, mentoring and networking. However, research also exists suggesting women can treat their women employees particularly harshly, as indicated by the queen bee and relational aggression research. This encourages a closer examination of women's hierarchical workplace relationships. However, the connection between women's hierarchical workplace relationships and their career decisions has been largely overlooked in the literature. This is particularly important as research suggests it is likely that a person's immediate supervisor or manager will have a greater influence over career prospects and advancement than the CEO of an organisation (Lucifora & Vigani, 2015). In this article we explore this connection, drawing on the experiences of

15 women in New Zealand who have managed or been managed by women, focusing on the key question: what have been the experiences of these women who have been managed by and/or managed women in hierarchical organisations and how have these experiences influenced their career decisions? This article begins with a review of the literature on gender and hierarchical relationships in the workplace and the way in which women's careers develop, theoretically grounded in relational cultural theory and the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM). Following this, we outline the research methods and discuss the findings, before drawing conclusions and implications for organisational practice, as well as future research. In doing so, we offer a critique and extension of the KCM as developed by Mainiero and Sullivan (2006).

In focusing on the connection between relationships and career decisions, we acknowledge the relevance of gender issues such as unconscious bias and gender stereotypes. However, those issues, while important, are not the focus of this article. We have also focused exclusively on the interconnection between women's workplace relationships and the resulting career implications, rather than undertaking a comparison with cross gender relationships or relationships between men. This is not to render inquiry into those relationships as unimportant. Rather, it acknowledges the gendered nature of women's relationships and careers, and privileges women's lived experiences as the focus of inquiry.

#### **5.4 Gender and workplace relationships**

Relational cultural theory (RCT), a feminist theory of human growth and development (Creary et al., 2015), places relationships at the core of human growth and as a central organising factor in our lives (Fletcher, 1999; Jordan, 2004b; Jordan & Walker, 2004). RCT posits that positive relationships are mutually empowering, empathetic and

promote outcomes of zest, empowered action, an increased sense of worth, new knowledge, and the desire for more connection (Fletcher, 2007).

Difficult or negative relationships lack the characteristics of mutually empowering relationships and can be damaging, leading to disconnection (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Motulsky, 2010). However, they can also be a source of personal growth if managed well (Jordan, 2004a; Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1986; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Richardson, 2012). Relationship conflict is not inherently bad. We have the potential to “undergo our most profound change and grow most deeply when we encounter difference and work on conflict” within the context of that relational connection (Jordan, 2010, p. 4). For growth to occur though, it does require the development of relational awareness, which “includes personal awareness, awareness of the other, awareness of the impact of oneself on the other, the effect of the other on oneself, and the quality of energy and flow in the relationship itself” (Jordan, 2004a, p. 54).

RCT also recognises the existence of relational power. It places an emphasis on the exercise of joint power or “power with”, rather than “power over” others, as a way of promoting mutual growth and development (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Surrey, 1987; West, 2005). This requires an acknowledgement of and commitment to relational interdependence, collective learning and mutual empowerment and engagement (Fletcher, 2004a; Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003). These elements are difficult to enact in organisations structured around more masculine power models that promote and reward independence, competition and individual achievement (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Sinclair, 2007).

All events and relationships are contextually bound and are influenced by many factors (Fletcher, 2004a; West, 2005). Hierarchical workplace relationships exist and are

interpreted within a personal, organisational and broader societal and cultural context, which represent and reproduce a society's culture (Jordan, Hartling, & Walker, 2004; Schultheiss, 2013). Fletcher (1999) stresses that RCT is a context driven theory, which recognises that the concept of relationality is not gender-neutral. In a gendered society, workplace relationships are understood and experienced in a gendered way. Relational cultural theorists maintain that the responsibility for maintaining relationships has primarily been assigned to women in the private sphere and more recently, in the workplace (Fletcher, 1999; Miller, 1986), and that acting in a relational manner, through behaviours that are nurturing and promote connectedness and interdependence, is one way women "do gender" (Fletcher, 1999, 2007; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Women are generally considered to place greater emphasis on personal relationships, in contrast to men, who tend to be more task orientated (Brock, 2008; Sias, 2009), with women's relationships focusing more on emotional and social support, especially during stressful times or where the relationship becomes one of friendship (Brock, 2008; Jogulu & Vijayasingham, 2015; Litwin, 2011; Mavin et al., 2013; Morrison, 2009). However, the workplace relational skills and practices of women are often not valued and are "disappeared", or rendered invisible as something women simply do as part of their role to be nice, to enact femininity and to be nurturing (Fletcher, 1999, 2012).

## **5.5 Gender and careers**

Traditionally, the careers of men have developed in a linear, planned and unbroken manner (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2009), and although this may be changing, particularly for the younger generation, it is still the predominant career model for many men (O'Neil et al., 2008). In contrast, women's careers do not tend to develop in such a linear fashion. They are more opportunistic, unplanned, and feature



more career breaks and interruptions than the careers of men (Doherty & Manfredi, 2010; Lalande et al., 2000; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2008). This tends to make it more difficult for women to achieve senior organisational roles, which require a long period of uninterrupted employment and a systematic progression through more senior line management positions (O'Neil et al., 2008).

Women's careers are influenced by a complex mix of factors, such as pull factors (including the needs and demands of their personal relationships) and push factors (such as discrimination, lack of organisational advancement opportunities, and the impact of masculine organisational cultures) (Cabrera, 2007). The Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM), developed by Mainiero and Sullivan (2005), seeks to understand the complexities of women's career development, putting gender at the foreground.

Like a kaleidoscope that produces changing patterns when the tube is rotated and its glass chips fall into new arrangements, women shift the pattern of their careers by rotating different aspects of their lives to arrange their roles and relationships in new ways. (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, p. 111)

The KCM proposes three career parameters of authenticity, balance and challenge, which shift in importance or emphasis over the course of a woman's life. Authenticity involves "being true to oneself" (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1548) and the alignment of organisational and personal values (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), as well as passion (Shaw & Leberman, 2015). Balance considers work and personal life as a coherent whole (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), and requires self-awareness as its starting point (Shaw & Leberman, 2015). Challenge is defined as "stimulating work and career advancement" (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1548), but also includes seeking out challenges and taking opportunities as they arrive, even when they result from negative

experiences (Shaw & Leberman, 2015). While a woman will often consider all of these factors when making career decisions, their relative importance changes during a woman's lifespan. Challenge is generally favoured in early career, then balance during mid-career, and finally authenticity tends to be more important in the later career years (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006).

The KCM emphasises the concept of “career” situated within the broader life context and particularly a woman's relational context.

Women's careers, like kaleidoscopes, are relational. Each action taken by a woman in her career is viewed as having profound and long lasting effects on others around her. Each career action, therefore, is evaluated in light of the impact such decisions may have on her relationships with others, rather than based upon insulated actions as an independent actor on her own. (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, p. 111).

Women's career decisions are made “from a lens of *relationalism*” and factor in “the needs of their children, spouses, aging parents, friends and even co-workers and clients” (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, pp. 111, emphasis in original). For example, recent Australian research found that one of the reasons women were leaving senior roles in the finance industry was due to their frustration over difficulties balancing work and family, although few left solely for family reasons (Neck, 2015a, 2015b).

This relational component of KCM research has focused on how a woman's career decisions are influenced by the perceived impact those decisions will have on her relationships with others, primarily within the private realm. Shaw and Leberman (2015) extended the relational component of the KCM by including the influence of

working relationships in their research on the experiences of women CEOs in New Zealand sport. Their research found that the deliberate act of building good working relationships, based on personal values and passion, enhanced career authenticity. They also found that mentors were important to the development of work/non-work balance. However, KCM research has not considered the impact of the manager/employee relationship, including good and bad relationships.

While the KCM provides a framework to understand the complexities of women's careers, it does not provide the complete picture. In their review of contemporary career theories, including the KCM, Baruch and Vardi (2015) identified two main problems. First, these theories have largely shifted career responsibility from organisations to individuals and second, they primarily take a positive focus that, "with the right approach, everything is possible, that things will eventually work out, and that a successful career will eventuate" (p. 356). They suggest that negative experiences may have more influence over career paths than positive ones, because we learn more from our failures than our successes. In researching the careers of women, it is important to delve into the influence of the organisational environment as well as the individual context, and to also consider the impact of good and bad experiences, including relational experiences. Our findings seek to contribute to understanding how the range of women's experiences impact on their career decisions.

The literature has identified a small body of research into aspects of women's workplace relationships. Similarly, some research specifically focuses on the ways in which women's careers develop. However, there is a noticeable gap, namely the interface between women's hierarchical workplace relationships and the impact these relationships have on the careers of women. We argue that an exploration of the

relational experiences of women managers and their women employees can provide an important element to understanding the complexity of women's careers.

## **5.6 Method**

This current research is an exploratory study, grounded in the lived experiences of women who have managed and/or been managed by women. It is based in narrative inquiry, which seeks to understand lived experience as narrated and understood by the research participants. Narrative inquiry, as developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is not only a method, but a way of thinking about phenomena, based in a narrative view of experience (Caine et al., 2013). It is through story that people understand, relate to and make sense of their experience and existence (Caine et al., 2013). Narrative inquiry places people's lived experience at the centre of the research journey, with "literature reviewed as a kind of conversation between theory and life" rather than "as a structuring framework" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41). It adds to knowledge by focusing more on the creation of a new understanding of the area of research, as vicariously tested by the reader, rather than the development of specific theory using a formalistic framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

This research has as its central point of focus the lived experience of a woman as narrated by her and situated within the many and varied contexts of her life (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry not only collects stories about lived experiences, it also situates them within their social, cultural and personal context (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). This approach is philosophically consistent with RCT, which similarly situates relationships within a gendered organisational, societal and cultural context (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003). Narrative inquiry encourages the researcher to explore this

context, recognising that stories carry multiple meanings and interpretations, depending on when and where they are told, and by whom.

Ethical approval for the research was obtained prior to commencement of the fieldwork. Potential participants were identified using the snowballing selection technique (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Creswell, 2013), based initially on the lead author's personal and professional networks. Women who had experience either managing or being managed by one or more women were invited to participate. Fifteen women elected to participate in the study and their demographic details are provided in Table 4.1 (see Chapter Four).

Data was gathered using a mixture of traditional and more creative methods. Participants were requested to prepare a timeline of their careers, detailing the significant life events they felt had impacted on career progression. This enabled their experiences to be placed into context within their work and life history. Participants were also asked to prepare a piece of written or visual material depicting their experiences with women managers or women employees (either focusing on one or more specific relationships that they felt were significant or depicting how these relationships had affected their career in general), how they felt about those experiences and relationships (now and/or at the time) and what impact (positive or negative), if any, these have had on their careers.

The creative material was used as a starting point and focus for a subsequent interview, as well as providing a different way of expressing and understanding their experiences (Broussine, 2008, p. 20). Artistic understanding focuses on our senses, intuition and unconscious ways of knowing, enabling the sharing of emotional information (Bell & Davison, 2013), all of which create a wealth of meaning that is not

always easily accessible through more rational, conventional techniques (Adler, 2015; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). Emotions “arise and flow between people” (Bondi, 2005, p. 443) and are as such, relational in nature (Spowart & Nairn, 2014). Methods that encourage the exploration of emotional information are particularly important therefore, to research exploring relationships between people, such as the hierarchical relationships between women.

The creative material gathered ranged from written accounts of experience, unsent letters, poems, a fictional story, line drawings, and collages. Where possible, the lead author recorded her reflections on this material prior to interviewing the respective participant. Semi-structured interviews, conducted in the nature of a guided conversation (Polkinghorne, 2005), were then undertaken with each participant, lasting between 45 and 120 minutes. The questions primarily focused on the participant’s experiences with women managers and/or employees, the organisational and personal context in which they were situated, the personal and professional impact, her career aspirations, and her views on gender in the workplace. These interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The data was analysed iteratively, in two ways. The interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and coded using the software programme NVivo, to identify descriptive codes. From this, a series of themes relevant to the research questions were identified. Careful reading and re-reading of the transcripts supplemented this. In addition, a narrative account was written by the lead author, capturing and retelling each participant’s story chronologically, by referencing the interview and timeline data. The narrative account used a combination of the participant’s and the lead author’s words. This approach ensured that each participant’s experiences were situated and

interpreted within the context of her life (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Both the interview transcript and the re-storied account were sent to each participant for review, comment and amendment. The NVivo analysis and the narrative accounts were compared and contrasted to identify key themes for a thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008). By undertaking this iterative process, we were able to gain an understanding of how the quality of the hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace impacted on their careers.

## **5.7 Findings**

### **5.7.1 *About the relationships***

The 15 participants discussed over 50 specific relationships with women managers and employees, as well as providing general views about hierarchical relationships with women in the workplace. Thirteen of the participants had been managed by a woman at some stage during their careers and eight of the participants had managed women. The relationships were analysed and categorised based on the quality and impact of the relationship. This categorisation was undertaken by the lead author using elements of relational cultural theory, which posits that a positive relational interaction is mutually empowering and empathetic, promoting outcomes of zest, empowered action, increased sense of worth, new knowledge, and desire for more connection (Fletcher, 2007). The relationships were categorised as either positive, mixed/ambivalent, or negative, based on the participants' descriptions. All of the participants discussed relationships with one or more woman manager and/or woman employee that fell into the mixed/ambivalent category. These were the most common experiences shared by all participants. However, these relationships did not have a strong impact (either direct or indirect) on the participants' subsequent career

decisions. It is the interconnection between relationships and careers that is the focus of our research and this article. Therefore, this article focuses on those relationships that fell into the positive and negative categories, as these relationships had the biggest influence on the participants careers. Examples of participant comments about their positive and negative relationships are contained in Table 4.4 in Chapter Four.

Seven participants shared positive experiences with women managers or employees, which were perceived to significantly empower them and positively influence their growth and development as a person. Language used to describe these women and the positive relationships included good “communication”, “inspiring”, “strategic”, “supportive”, “honest”, “integrity”, “nurturing”, “passionate”, “zeal”, “encouraging” and providing “opportunity”. For some of the participants, the positive experiences became even more important when considered in hindsight, particularly when juxtaposed against negative relationships. This demonstrates how experiences function and are understood differently over time and are dependent on the context in which they are told, reflecting that there is never one view of reality, a concept grounded in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Eleven participants spoke emotionally about negative relationships. For the majority of those participants, their experiences were with a woman manager. However, two participants had negative experiences with a woman employee. While it is impossible to generalise, the overall impression is of relationships characterised by a lack of warmth, empathy and rapport. Connections based on trust, loyalty and respect were not formed. Words used to describe the women managers and employees include “fake”, “abrasive”, “tough”, “two-faced”, “pedantic”, “moody”, “temperamental”, and “psychotic”. None of the participants though, described behaviours that would clearly



fit within that described by either the queen bee syndrome or the research into relational aggression. There was no suggestion for example, that women managers were undermining or sabotaging their women employees in order to secure their own position on the management hierarchy.

### **5.7.2 Career impacts of positive relationships**

While seven participants described positive and empowering relationships, only one of these participants linked that relationship with a major career decision. This may be due to the career paths and aspirations of the women, which for most were focused on factors such as a desire for a balanced life, the importance of values, wanting meaningful work and the impact of relationships. For most of the women, their careers were unplanned and opportunistic in nature and they were not motivated by an aspiration to climb the career ladder.

While the promotion of career advancement was not directly evident, supportive women managers did provide the participants with important skills to aid them in the development of their careers. Consistent with relational cultural theory, positive relationships were empowering, boosted self-confidence, enhanced knowledge and were inspiring (Fletcher, 1999, 2007; Schwartz & Holloway, 2012). As well as this psychological support, the participants gained important technical and interpersonal expertise, all of which are important aspects of career development.

For one participant, Steph, a positive relationship was important to rebuilding her self-confidence after it was severely damaged by a prior negative relationship. She was transferred to the supervision of a different woman manager, who helped her to rebuild her confidence.

It's really good to know that I'm trusted to be able to just get on with my job and I'm backed by them if something does go wrong, they will ask me what happened to know the full details. Yeah, it's a lot more confidence in knowing that I'm doing my job well.

Steph remained with the same organisation, suggesting that active relationship management could be an effective organisational strategy in reducing the likelihood a woman will leave an organisation after a negative experience with a woman manager or employee.

### **5.7.3 Career impacts of negative relationships**

#### *Direct career impacts*

Negative and disempowering relationships had a direct impact on the careers of many of the participants. Seven of the 11 women who had experienced a negative relationship with a woman manager or employee resigned from the organisation they worked for. In making their decision to resign, the impact of the negative relationship on family, health and wellbeing were all relevant factors.

It had quite an impact on my health so I ended up seeing a naturopath and... doing all sorts of exercises to try and deal with my stress better. [Lucy]

In the end I walked out one night and my kids and husband were witness. I just snapped at some throw away comment my husband made, and I wanted to run away, escape. But beside that big moment (which ultimately made me realise something had to change, or I'd lose what was most important, my family) there were many moments of guilt from being away from the kids too much and when

I was around I was absent - constantly stressing or thinking I had to hurry with them so I could get to work. [Mary]

All of the seven participants who left their organisations took a backward or sideways career move (when considered in terms of organisational hierarchy and position). For example, Mary and Lucy were managing teams, but subsequently moved into positions where they had no management responsibilities and were questioning whether they wanted them in the future. Helen was still managing a team, but had taken a sideways move to an organisation some distance from where she lives, requiring a lengthy daily commute, and she was questioning her aspirations for senior management positions in the future.

None of the participants who left organisations as a result of negative relationships considered that they had paid a career penalty. Instead, they reflected more on what they had learned from the experience and the opportunity it had provided them to do something different. For example, Lucy focused on what she has learned from her negative relationship with a woman manager.

I don't think it has harmed my career. I guess it has helped me realise a lot more about myself and perhaps it has moved me into a nice pause period, which I probably needed to recover a bit and to think about where to next.

Another participant, Tracey, reflected on how a negative relationship with a woman manager during a restructuring had set her on a new path, which in hindsight was the right decision for her and her family.

*Indirect career impacts*

As well as the more direct career impacts, participants also reflected on elements that indirectly affect careers, such as damage to self-confidence and changes to their career aspirations. For six participants, their self-confidence was significantly affected by negative relationships with women managers or employees. Susan wrote a poem about the impact on her self-confidence (see Figure 4.5 in Chapter Four).

Four participants left organisations after a negative relationship with significant self-doubt and a need to rebuild their confidence in their next jobs, something they were still working on when interviewed.

I think before I move into a leadership role again, there are probably some things I need to work on in terms of projecting confidence and just coming across as a stronger confident person, which I thought I had but I think I lost under her leadership. I think they were things that I was growing, but that got a bit squashed or lost over those experiences. [Lucy]

For two of the participants, their self-confidence was damaged in a matter of months, demonstrating how quickly it can be eroded by negative relationships.

The negative relationships affected the career aspirations of participants. While most participants discussed their careers in terms of a desire for balance, meaningful work, and making a difference, rather than an aspiration to climb the career ladder, balance became even more important for those who had experienced a negative relationship. They emphasised happiness and family in how they subsequently defined and understood their careers.

I think the higher you go the [greater the] vulnerability with falling. You've got so much to lose and it's nice plateauing. I'm fine, I'm happy with my life. I've got two kids, a great husband, I don't want to push myself. I've seen a lot of people who just push themselves so far and everything flies apart. They spend too much time at work and not enough time on their relationship and their families. [Mary]

Karen depicted her career through the metaphor of a river in a collage she prepared (see Figure 4.8 in Chapter Four). She described her negative relationship with a woman manager as being like winter using the following words: "cold, stagnant, frozen, chilly, isolation, fog, darkness, blur, depressed, silence". Her career aspirations, while previously focused on upward advancement, had changed as a result of that relationship to a desire for happiness, as depicted by the metaphor of summer. For Karen, this includes working "with nice people" and feeling "like I'm doing something productive and value add" and being able to "just go home happy and not think about work".

### **5.7.5 Organisational context**

The organisational context was an important factor, particularly for those women who had negative experiences. For seven of the 11 women who had negative relationships with either a woman manager or employee, these occurred during a time of significant organisational change. Their stories suggest that women were placed into management positions without necessarily having the level of experience or support required during times of significant change, placing a high degree of additional stress on relationships. For example, Sarah commented on the impact a major organisational merger had on her woman manager.

She was a normal woman. She worked for ten years in a job and then she got made redundant... Mid-life suddenly she was offered this job so she took it very happily. She didn't have the experience. Looking at the configuration, she was chosen for particular relationships, rather than for the job requirements. She certainly didn't have the experience to do it.

Not all of the participants reported organisational change as negatively impacting on their relationships with a woman manager or employee. Two participants went through a large-scale organisational merger, which required them to apply for new jobs within the newly amalgamated organisation. They reported positive experiences with their new woman manager. However, they went through this time of significant organisational change later in their careers and they decided to apply for newly created jobs with a woman manager who they knew and respected. Their experiences suggest a higher degree of control over their environment, together with a woman manager who perhaps was better able herself to cope with the pressures associated with a senior management position within the newly amalgamated organisation.

For some participants, negative experiences with women managers had cascading impacts onto their own employees. The pressure Mary was under from her woman manager affected her team. She did not have the time to give them the support and feedback they needed and felt she was not much better than her woman manager in that regard. Similarly, Steph commented how the pressure from her woman manager had "a snowball effect" and she was treating her employees in the way she was being treated. This impact changed when she starting working with another woman manager, with whom she had a positive relationship. By being under less stress and better supported by her manager, she commented that she was able to support her

team better. These experiences point to the broader organisational impact hierarchical relationships can have, beyond those immediately involved.

None of the 11 women who had negative experiences reported having good organisational support during the time they were living their experiences. While this is understandable for two women, namely the small business owner dealing with a difficult woman employee and the employee working in a small owner/operator business, the remaining nine women worked for organisations which could be expected, because of their size, to have good support systems in place. For example, Lucy felt it was futile to raise her concerns regarding her woman manager with anyone else in the organisation:

I just didn't think there would be any sort of confidentiality around it. I didn't want to take that risk.... There were other people in the organisation and in the hierarchy who could observe what was going on and realise that it was very difficult, but they couldn't really assist.

Helen had negative experiences with two women employees when working for one organisation. Both involved personal grievance actions brought by her employees, neither of which were substantiated. Helen did not feel well supported by the organisation during either process, and with respect to the second employee, she commented that, in her view, the relationship and its impact on her was not taken seriously. The employee “was still there” and the work Helen “was involved in still had a lot to do with her”. Helen felt despondent with the organisation and eventually resigned.

The participants' experiences suggest that the organisations they worked for generally did not recognise the relationships difficulties or put in place effective support mechanisms to enable solutions to be found. Action only seems to have been taken at an organisational level when formal procedures, such as personal grievances, were taken. Otherwise, it was incumbent on each individual woman to seek her own support, such as drawing on her own informal networks, seeking external support, and finding her own methods to cope with difficult relationships with a woman manager or employee.

### **5.8. Discussion**

The hierarchical relationships between the women participants, for the most part had no significant impact, good nor bad, on the women involved and their careers. The vast majority of relationships discussed suggest that women managers and employees generally work well together. However, most of the women in this research had also experienced a negative hierarchical relationship with another woman, pointing to the likelihood that women will, at some stage during their working life, have a difficult relationship with a woman manager or employee.

This research confirms that negative hierarchical relationships, which are disempowering and characterised by a lack of rapport, trust, and empathy, can have direct and indirect impacts on women's careers. The majority of women in this research who had experienced a negative relationship left the organisation they worked for, often at the mid-career stage, confirming the link between negative workplace relationships and turnover (Morrison, 2007) within a gendered relational context. Not only are these women leaving organisations because of difficult relationships with women managers or employees, they are also taking either a



sideways or backwards career step. With research suggesting that any career interruption can result in a career penalty (O'Neil et al., 2008), these career decisions may well be detrimentally affecting their future careers. As well as the direct career impacts, these negative relationships can temper career aspirations and damage a woman's self-confidence, something which can take considerable time to regain.

These direct and indirect career impacts are concerning for three important reasons.

First, they affect organisations which benefit from greater gender diversity at the senior management level (Badal & Harter, 2014; Catalyst, 2013; Dezsö & Ross, 2012; Joecks et al., 2013; Pellegrino et al., 2011; Wagner, 2011), as they risk losing mid-career women who are potentially an important part of the senior management pipeline.

Second, not only are women leaving organisations because of difficult relationships with women managers or employees, they are, in some cases, taking either a career step sideways or backwards in doing so. Research suggests that any career interruption can result in a career penalty (O'Neil et al., 2008). By taking a sideways or backwards career step, these women may well be detrimentally affecting their future careers, if career success is defined in terms of organisational advancement or upward mobility. Finally, it poses yet another obstacle for women on the already difficult advancement path to the senior executive level, which more broadly affects gender equity in the workplace (Cohen & Huffman, 2007; Cook & Glass, 2014; Kurtulus & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012; Skaggs et al., 2012).

Conversely and consistent with RCT, positive relationships were empowering, boosted self-confidence, enhanced knowledge and were inspiring (Fletcher, 1999, 2007; Schwartz & Holloway, 2012). As well as psychological support, the participants gained important technical and interpersonal expertise. These are all facilitators of career

development for women (Broadbridge, 2015). In some instances, positive relationships were also critical to rebuilding self-confidence after a negative relationship, suggesting that active relationship management could be an effective organisational strategy in reducing the likelihood a woman will leave an organisation after a negative experience with a woman manager or employee. However, positive relationships were not directly linked to major career decisions or career advancement, confirming that supportive hierarchical relationships between women are not sufficient on their own to disrupt gendered organisational structures which promote traditional career paths favouring men (O'Neil et al., 2008; Vinkenbug & Weber, 2012). These findings suggest the need for more active career sponsorship (Tharenou, 2005) alongside organisational structures that better accommodate the complexities of women's careers, including the relational demands of balancing work and personal lives (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Neck, 2015b).

From a theoretical perspective, this research integrates RCT and the KCM by adding an important relational component to the KCM, particularly in the areas of balance and challenge. Balance in the KCM emphasises the importance of a woman's relationships and the impact career decisions have on those relationships. Similar to the research of Shaw and Leberman (2015), our research extends the concept of balance to include a woman's workplace relational context. However, while the research of Shaw and Leberman (2015) identified the importance of mentoring to work/non-work balance, our research goes further to include the relationships between a woman manager and employee. Women consider the quality of these relationships and the impact they have on her personal wellbeing and her family when making career decisions, particularly where a relationship is negative, disempowering and lacking in mutuality.

Our research also extends the KCM in the area of challenge. The KCM as originally developed, perceived of challenge as a person's desire for stimulating and interesting work that encourages growth as well as career advancement (August, 2011; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). The concept of challenge has been extended by Shaw and Leberman (2015) to include the challenges of working in a gendered environment, noting that while challenges were not always self-created, a person has a choice about how they respond and this could be positive. Our research demonstrates that negative hierarchical relationships between women can be challenging and damaging to the woman involved, as well as her career. However, Baruch and Vardi (2015) maintain negative experiences provide an important learning opportunity. Our research suggests that many women will have at least one negative and challenging relational experience with a woman manager or employee during the course of their working lives. This may have an impact on career decisions. However, consistent with RCT, these relationships also provide a learning and growth opportunity, provided those involved are encouraged and supported to develop self and relational awareness (Jordan, 2004a).

As well as the challenge situated within the interpersonal relational context, the concept of challenge must also be considered within the broader organisational context. Our research suggests that the negative relationships between women managers and employees are often situated within a context of significant organisational change, which places considerable stress on all people involved (Morris, 2008), and consequently on relationships.

There is also the perception of inadequate organisational support, particularly when relationships become strained. While career theory, including the KCM (Mainiero &

Sullivan, 2005; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2008), focuses on careers as an individual responsibility (Baruch & Vardi, 2015), our research makes a case for greater organisational awareness of and responsibility for the relational environment, as it affects women's careers. This requires a commitment at the most senior organisational levels to understanding the relational dynamics and expectations of women managing and being managed by women, and the development of gender-specific support mechanisms aimed at building positive, mutually empowering relationships. This is particularly important during times of significant organisational change.

### **5.9. Conclusion**

Hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace have the potential to affect women's careers, particularly when these relationships are negative. However, little is known about the connection between these relationships and the careers of women. This is an area that warrants considerable further research. For example, in-depth research into the relational expectations women have of their women managers and/or employees would enable a better understanding of gender-based relational dynamics. In addition, research is needed examining the link between relationship quality and organisational context, including the availability of organisational support and the implications of organisational change. Longitudinal research is also warranted in this area to understand the longer-term career impacts of a negative relationship, mapping for example, not only the career implications in terms of occupational decisions, but also how career aspirations may change over time. This research agenda would add to both the understanding of women's workplace relationships and women's careers, and enable the development of personal and organisational strategies to build supportive and mutually empowering relationships.

Many of the findings from this research may well be relevant irrespective of gender. Research on the relationship experiences of men, as well as cross-gender relationships, and the associated career impacts would add to academic and organisational knowledge. However, research suggests women relate to each other differently than men do and their careers develop differently to those of men. With women constituting nearly 50% of the workforce, it is likely that a woman will either have a woman manager or women employees at some point in her career, particularly at the lower and middle management tiers. This makes it important to focus specifically on the hierarchical relationships between women, alongside the ways in which women's careers develop. Such focus does not suggest that hierarchical relationships between women are to blame for the lack of women at the senior executive level. Rather, it begins an open and honest conversation which recognises the personal, organisational and societal context within which women live, the factors that affect relationships and careers, and encourages individual and organisational awareness and change, all of which are required in pursuit of workplace gender equity.

### **5.10 Chapter summary**

This chapter has examined the positive and negative relationships between women managers and employees and the direct and indirect career impacts of those relationships. The next chapter explores the expectations women employees have of their relationships with women managers.

## 5.11 DRC 16: Statement of contribution to doctoral thesis containing publications

DRC 16



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

### STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION TO DOCTORAL THESIS CONTAINING PUBLICATIONS

(To appear at the end of each thesis chapter/section/appendix submitted as an article/paper or collected as an appendix at the end of the thesis)

We, the candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

**Name of Candidate:** Jane Ann Hurst

**Name/Title of Principal Supervisor:** Professor Sarah Leberman

**Name of Published Research Output and full reference:**

Hurst, J., Leberman, S., & Edwards, M. (under review in the Australian Journal of Management). The career impacts of women managing women.

**In which Chapter is the Published Work:** Chapter Five

Please indicate either:

- The percentage of the Published Work that was contributed by the candidate: **95%**  
and / or

- Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the Published Work:

The candidate undertook the research on which the manuscript is based including the fieldwork, literature review, data analysis, manuscript writing and revision. The co-authors (supervisors) provided feedback on the draft manuscripts.

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27 November 2016

Date

GRS Version 3 – 16 September 2011

# **Chapter Six: Relational expectations of women managing women**

## **6.1 Chapter overview**

This chapter explores the relational expectations women have of their women managers. While the participants initially believed they expected the same things of a manager or employee irrespective of gender, a closer examination revealed gender-based expectations. The findings suggest women expect a higher degree of emotional understanding and support from a woman manager, than they would expect from a man. It also suggests that they expect a woman manager to see them as an equal, take an holistic view of them as people, understand the complexities of their lives, and provide flexibility to accommodate those complexities. This points to more relationally based expectations of women managers. Awareness and understanding of these expectations enables the development of personal and organisational strategies aimed at strengthening relationships.

**Article 3: The relational expectations of women managing women**

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**6.2 Abstract**

**Purpose** - The purpose of this paper is to examine the expectations women have of their women managers and/or women employees and suggest personal and organisational strategies to strengthen those relationships.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Building on a first phase of research using narrative inquiry into the lived experiences of women managing and/or being managed by women, workshops were held with 13 participants to explore their relationship expectations of women managers and/or employees.

**Findings** – While the participants initially believed they expected the same things of a manager or employee irrespective of gender, a closer examination revealed gender-based expectations. Women expect a higher degree of emotional understanding and support from a woman manager, than they would from a man. They also expect a woman manager to see them as an equal, take an holistic view of them as people, understand the complexities of their lives, and provide flexibility to accommodate those complexities.

**Research limitations/implications** – This is an exploratory study in an under-



researched area. Extensive further research is warranted.

**Practical implications** – Understanding the expectations women have of their women managers enables the development of both personal and organisational strategies aimed at strengthening those relationships.

**Originality/value** – These findings begin a dialogue on the often unspoken and unrecognised gender-based expectations women have of their relationships with women managers and/or employees. Although considerable research exists on gender stereotypes in the workplace, little research exists on gender-based relationship expectations.

### **6.3 Introduction**

Gender equity in the workplace remains a live issue, despite the significant gains women have made in terms of workforce participation. In New Zealand, women represent nearly 50% of the workforce (Statistics New Zealand, 2016b), but are still paid less than men and remain significantly under-represented at the senior management and governance level (Davies, 2016; Grant Thornton International Ltd, 2016; McGregor, 2012; Ministry for Women, 2016b, 2016c; NZX Limited, 2016). A sheer weight of numbers working in the lower and middle organisational levels has not been enough to shatter the glass ceiling and bring about gender equity.

Researchers and organisational practitioners continue to investigate the factors driving this persistent dilemma, seeking to develop strategies and initiatives that will close the gender gap. Receiving considerable academic investigation is the interconnection between gender and leadership stereotypes, and the resulting implications for women seeking to pursue senior management roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Johnson et al.,

2008; Mavin & Grandy, 2012; Powell, 2012; Prime et al., 2009; Rhee & Sigler, 2015). The role of hierarchical relationships between women in promoting gender equity is another area that has received some attention. Researchers have for example, investigated strategies such as role modelling, mentoring, networking and sponsorship as ways of women supporting each other's careers (Carter & Silva, 2010; Dworkin et al., 2012; Ely et al., 2011; Ibarra et al., 2010; Madsen, 2008; O'Neil et al., 2011; Tolar, 2012; Woolnough & Fielden, 2014). Researchers have also looked at the shadow side of women's workplace relationships, with a small body of research pointing to a lack of solidarity, aggression, and competitive behaviours between women in some circumstances (Brock, 2008, 2010; Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Derks, van Laar, et al., 2011; Derks et al., 2015; Ellemers et al., 2012; Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mavin, 2006a, 2006b; Mavin et al., 2014; Sheppard & Aquino, 2013; Staines et al., 1974).

While considerable research has looked at gender in the workplace, very little has focused on the expectations women have of their women managers or women employees and the impact this has on workplace relationships and careers. This was an area we identified for further research in our earlier article which explored the literature relevant to the intersection between women's hierarchical workplace relationships, career development and gender equity (Hurst, Leberman, & Edwards, 2016). We theorised that if "these expectations can be better understood, it can open up a dialog, at both the personal and organizational level" (p. 9). This is an important part of building self-awareness and the development of supportive and mutually empowering relationships. In this article we explore these expectations, drawing on the experiences of 13 New Zealand women who have managed or been managed by women. The article reviews the literature exploring women's relational expectations,

outlines our research methods and discusses the types of gender-based expectations women have of their women managers, privileging the voices of our women participants, consistent with women's voice literature (Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011). In drawing our conclusions, we focus on the types of personal and organisational strategies that can be developed to strengthen relationships between women, support their careers, and potentially, a greater female representation within the upper echelons of organisations.

#### **6.4 Literature review**

Relationships and the desire for connection with others are at the core of our lives (Fletcher, 1999; Jordan, 2004b; Jordan & Walker, 2004). We understand ourselves and the world around us within the context of the relationships we form; we are not "rational self-contained individuals", but rather "contextual, relational beings" (Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012, p. xxi). Relational cultural theory (RCT) maintains that the desire for connection with others is the primary organising feature and motivation of people's lives and is central to human growth, with people striving for mutually empowering relationships (Jordan & Walker, 2004). However, relationships exist within and reproduce the culture in which they are embedded (Jordan & Walker, 2004). RCT posits that the concept of relationality is not gender neutral, with western society traditionally assigning responsibility for relationally focused skills and activity to women (Fletcher, 1999, 2012; Miller, 1986). While women are expected to be more communal and relationship orientated in the workplace (Catalyst, 2007), research suggests that by assigning these relational skills to women, they have become invisible, and in the workplace they have been marginalised or "disappeared" (Fletcher, 1999, 2012; Miller, 1986). Enacting relational skills is seen as simply something women do, an enactment

of femininity, and part of a woman's role to be nice, nurturing and caring (Fletcher, 1999, 2012).

This relational gender role affects the way women interact with each other, including in the workplace. Research suggests that women place more emphasis on personal relationships, with a desire for emotional and social support, as opposed to a more task and activity orientated focus of men (Fletcher, 1999, 2012; Miller, 1986). Women expect their women managers to “be more understanding, more nurturing, more giving and more forgiving than men” (Mavin, 2006b, p. 267) and exhibit more relational behaviour (Brock, 2008; Jogulu & Vijayasingham, 2015; Litwin, 2011; Mavin et al., 2013; Morrison, 2009; Sias, 2009). Conversely, women who have a more masculine leadership style, exhibiting more task focused and agentic traits, can be seen as difficult to work with (Litwin, 2011).

We all have expectations of our relationships. However, they often go unspoken. When researching women's workplace friendships, Litwin (2011) found that while there was a core set of expectations, these were rarely discussed, meaning that “mismatched assumptions may not be discovered until damage has been done to the relationship” (p. 2). Likewise, followers rarely tell leaders what they expect of them and may not even be aware of their expectations (Ladkin, 2010). Similarly, women will have expectations of their relationships with a woman manager or women employees based on their assumptions about gender. However, little in-depth qualitative research has been undertaken on these expectations and how they affect relationships. Instead, much of the research to date is quantitative and focuses on revealing and understanding gender stereotypes and the different ways women and men in management and leadership positions are perceived (Elsesser & Lever, 2011; Litwin,

2011; Prime et al., 2009; Rhee & Sigler, 2015; Rudman & Glick, 1999; Stempel, Rigotti, & Mohr, 2015; Vinckenburg, van Engen, Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2011; Wolfram & Mohr, 2010). Exploring the expectations women have of their women managers and employees builds awareness, which is an important first step in enabling open and frank discussion, as well as the development of strategies at the personal, interpersonal, and organisational level to enhance women's hierarchical workplace relationships.

## **6.5 Methodology**

Our research is an exploratory study, using qualitative methods. It is based in narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and is grounded in the lived experiences of New Zealand women who have managed and/or been managed by women. It was undertaken in two phases. The first phase gathered data using a combination of semi-structured interviews, timelines and creative materials prepared by the participants (such as drawings, collages, unsent letters, and poems). This provided an understanding of the participants' experiences of managing or being managed by women and how those experiences influenced their career decisions. The findings from phase one suggest that women's career decisions are affected by the quality of the hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace, particularly when the relationship is perceived as negative. These negative relationships were characterised by a lack of trust, empathy, rapport and respect, and were damaging to the woman's self-confidence and self-esteem. There was little organisational support provided to the affected women and they often made a decision to resign. Phase two, building on these findings, focused on developing personal and organisational strategies that strengthen the hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace, enhancing

women's careers, and in doing so, the role of women within businesses, as well as positively contributing to workplace gender equity.

Potential participants were identified using the snowballing selection technique (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Creswell, 2013), based initially on the lead author's personal and professional networks. Women who had experience of either managing or being managed by one or more women were invited to participate. Thirteen participants participated in phase two. Participants identified with a range of ethnicities: New Zealand European, New Zealand Māori, Samoan, Chinese, Zimbabwean, Romanian, and Australian. Ages ranged from 25 to 54, with a variety of occupations and sectors represented, including the public sector, health, financial services, defense force and beauty industry. Demographic details of the participants are provided in Table 4.1 (see Chapter Four).

Ten of the participants came together in a series of three workshops (two of the workshops were attended by three participants each, and the third workshop was attended by four participants). Three participants could not attend workshops so provided their input into phase two by other means (two in writing and one via phone). Participants were asked to reflect on a series of questions, which were provided in advance. These included the following two questions on relationship expectations, which are relevant to this article.

*1. What do you expect from your relationship with a woman manager (or woman employee)?*

*2. Reflecting on your own experiences, what were the characteristics that made your relationship with a woman manager (or woman employee) either good/empowering or bad/damaging for you?*

Notes were taken by the lead author at the workshops and the discussions were recorded and transcribed. The workshop and phone interview transcripts and the written accounts were coded using the software programme NVivo, to identify descriptive codes. These were reviewed alongside the notes taken at the workshop to identify seven key themes: support, collaboration (including being approachable), communication, holistic approach, empathy and emotional intelligence, relationship boundaries, and consistency. Careful reading and re-reading of the workshop notes, written material and transcripts by the lead author further clarified the themes that involved gender-based expectations, namely support, holistic approach, and emotional understanding. As with all qualitative research the objective is not to generalise. Rather, the focus is on depth of understanding rather than breadth (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Consistent with much qualitative research, and particularly narrative inquiry, the sample size is relatively small (Creswell, 2013; Guest et al., 2006; Saunders, 2012). This provides a focused and in-depth exploration of expectations, with the rich data enabling a deeper understanding of the complexities associated with hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace.

## **6.6 Findings**

Most of the participants' comments related to their expectations of women managers, as opposed to women employees, even though several of the participants were managers. Therefore, this article focuses on the expectations women have of women managers. When asked about their expectations, participants initially responded that they expect the same things, irrespective of gender. Participants referred to the importance of mutual respect, honesty, and open communication.

I'd say that I would expect the same of a female as with the males. I don't have a real gender thing. I'd expect honesty, good communication, the person to be fair and to maintain boundaries. [Amy]

The participants also all mentioned behaviours that would be expected of any manager, irrespective of gender. These included a collaborative relationship where the manager was approachable, was willing to listen to ideas, trusted her employees and enabled them to show initiative. They discussed the importance of good, open and timely communication, being kept in the information loop, and feeling safe to have honest conversations. Expectations also included the need to maintain appropriate professional boundaries and the importance of consistency of approach, particularly when managing conflict.

While many of the expectations would apply equally irrespective of gender, after more discussion it became apparent that the participants did have specific expectations of their women managers based on gender. They expected women managers to show a greater degree of emotional understanding and support towards their women employees than male managers. They also expected women managers to treat their women employees as equals, see them as a whole person, and understand their life circumstances and their need for flexibility. One participant, Karen, referred to her higher expectations of a woman manager in the following way.

My expectation is the relationship should be the same for both men or women. Perhaps there may be a higher expectation placed on woman managers (implicit expectation), which requires them to provide more support. This may stem from the fact you expect [a] woman to understand you more, and to be wired psychologically more similar, therefore you expect more empathy and



compassion. I don't feel this is a reasonable expectation, and I'm not sure whether I have this expectation, perhaps a little bit.

The gender-based expectations are highlighted below under the three key themes of support, holistic approach, and emotional understanding, all of which emerged from the data. Consistent with women's voice literature (Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011), our intention is to privilege the voices of our participants. As such, we categorised their expectations into themes using their own language. We have also drawn on their voices and words to describe the themes.

### **6.6.1 Support**

The theme of support, as discussed in the workshops, involves an expectation of a nurturing and supportive relationship, where a woman manager looks to grow and develop her women employees, sees their strengths and weaknesses, is encouraging, shares her experiences, provides challenges, and spots development opportunities. Mary described her expectation of a nurturing woman manager.

I was looking for someone who helps you grow and develop and I think with a woman you're often looking for the more nurturing qualities out of a manager than you might expect from a man.

She described a supportive and nurturing relationship with her "favourite female manager" as "almost like a big sister relationship". She was a role model, something which, as another participant, Helen, commented:

...you want this from anyone who is a manager but great if it's a woman as a role model to spot where you should be, not just where you think you want to

be. To push you maybe to consider other options or challenge you in things that you didn't think were really your cup of tea.

The participants described a good woman manager as one who helps to develop confidence in her woman employees, pushes them to step outside their comfort zone, and is validating, with Tracey commenting, "sometimes a male manager would struggle with being as upfront in terms of their validation of you as a person". A good woman manager is also invested in building long term relationships and growing people, rather than delivering short term outcomes.

My best memories with women managers were when they believed in me and took a risk to allow me to get into that project or into that thing and do it. I asked her "why, because it's such a risk" and rather than delivering quickly and a successful project, risking to give it to a younger employee. Their response was that they're investing in long-term and they're investing in the relationship. They saw their role as growing people. Their role wasn't to deliver short-term outcomes, but to grow people to deliver long-term outcomes. [Sarah]

A supportive woman manager "listens and understands my goals, whether it is in line with organisation goals or not" (Karen) and is expected to take the time to understand and support her women employee without "assuming that I want from my career the same thing that she wants from hers, or that we have the same drivers" (Emma). She is also expected to have an inspiring leadership style, be excited by new ideas, innovative, willing to take risks and celebrate success.

There are different types of leadership and I do believe that the traditional leadership top-down managerial tasking ways of managing is a patriarchal way

of leadership. I do believe in more inspiring leadership. Leadership that will walk the way with you, that encourage[s] and support[s] and inspire[s] rather than talk-down leadership.... If I think of traditionally men way of doing things and women way of doing things, I would expect this kind of encouraging, embracing, walking together way of work journey from a woman manager.

[Sarah]

The participants described the characteristics of women managers who did not meet these supportive expectations as very competitive, focused on power and control, with a need to stamp her authority. They exhibit professional jealousy and a reluctance to share knowledge, skills and contacts. When a woman employee or manager feels threatened “they’re trying to second guess you all the time or trip you up and it becomes a bit of a competition” (Tracey). Some women managers try to chalk up points against other women, have a desire to be “one of the boys”, and as one participant, Sarah, described, feel like they have to act like men when put in a position of power.

I’ve had wonderful women who became managers and they changed completely and it’s unbelievable what power can do to people. I do believe that sometimes women put in that position of power they have to actually act to compete at that position with other men so sometimes they have to act like a man or they feel like they have to do that to be successful in that environment.

That just doesn’t feel right.

Some of the participants also raised an expectation that women managers will understand the challenges and bias women face in the workplace and will be supportive, empowering and enabling of their women employees as a result.

...you expect a level of support I think in terms of that empathy or encouragement even to break some of those stereotypes or break some of those barriers down. [Kate]

However, these expectations are not always met.

One thing that was particularly frustrating with one manager I had who was quite aware of biases in a male dominated area of work and talked about those sorts of things and their struggles and thought she might've been coaching me to be tough like her, but in her relationships was quite the opposite. Not empowering at all and she had much stronger relationships with the men in the team. [Lucy]

### **6.6.2 *Holistic approach***

As well as being supportive, nurturing and empowering, a number of the participants raised an expectation that a woman manager will acknowledge and understand the complexities of women's lives, including her home life, responsibilities for children or parents, and women's health issues, and in doing so, provide her with flexibility.

...the reality is for a lot of women we actually have twice the work. It's great that we have the choice and that's important and I would never take that back, but a lot of women are juggling having a career, as well as having children and a family. As a woman manager I think you're in a better position to actually maybe understand and have a little bit of more flexibility. I think flexibility in whatever way, shape and form that looks like. [Susan]

A good woman manager "would see things in a more holistic way" and see her women employees as a "whole person" (Sarah), "rather than as just a person who can output

what they need” (Mary). She will treat a woman employee as an equal person, with Talia commenting, “I don’t expect anyone to necessarily see me as an equal in skills or anything like that, but I am a person and I’m an equal person when I’m there”.

Tracey discussed her own experiences in understanding the needs of her women employees.

...as a manager to the women in my team, I try to have that empathy; that understanding that their lives are often more complicated because of commitments with family. It may not be children, it may be family, parents, health or a whole lot of things. Particularly women of that unfortunate age that are susceptible to things like breast cancer. I’ve had a couple of staff... go through that. As a manager, I have to take that on board and make sure that they’ve got room to heal and do all the things that they need to do, that capacity.... I didn’t have women managers when I had the children so I guess I probably came across as someone who was there for the job and those things didn’t interfere, but it would’ve been nice in hindsight if I’d had a woman manager that acknowledged and noticed that.

By getting to know the whole person, a good woman manager understands when her employee is having a bad day or is under stress at home, meaning “everyone can go, it’s just a bad day, be a bit resilient about it” (Helen). She also understands the need for flexibility when a woman is facing stress in her personal life.

While women managers are expected to understand that their women employees will need flexibility, the participants recognised this was not always forthcoming. Instead, some participants have had better experiences with male managers providing flexibility

in the workplace. Susan commented that “it was interesting that it took a man to be that flexible” and Mary reflected that “funnily enough, I’ve most found that I’ve got more of that from some of my male managers, but male managers who have children”. However, they do expect women managers to have a deeper understanding of the competing personal and professional demands their women employees face and their need for flexibility in the workplace to manage these demands.

### **6.6.3 Emotional understanding**

Closely linked with the expectations of support and an holistic approach, is the expectation of a greater emotional understanding between women.

I think it’s more an emotional thing when it comes to women managing women isn’t it? They can understand your emotions a lot more.... If somebody had come to me in a situation where they’d had breast cancer, I would be very emotional towards them. You probably couldn’t even feel like you could express that to a male manager. You could but they probably wouldn’t give you the same emotional support and empathy. [Cathy]

With this comes the expectation that a woman manager will be more understanding of a woman employee’s emotions and moods, and give more emotional support than a male manager. Kate, Tracey, Talia and Karen used language such as “emotional intelligence” and “empathy” to describe these expectations.

Women managers are also expected to be genuine, understanding, good at giving developmental and motivational feedback, and able to have the frank conversation about what needs to be worked on.

...the positive experiences I've had with women managers is when they've been really good at the emotional intelligence side, they've been really good at calling you on things, so giving you really good developmental feedback as well as good motivational feedback. That can happen with men as well but it seems more genuine, more understanding. [Kate]

Understanding how to give appropriate, specific and timely feedback to women employees can be difficult for some women managers, particularly if they have a history of working in male-dominated environments.

I only have women in my team and that was a first for me as a manager. It is quite interesting balancing the emotions.... That's been a real challenge for me over the last five years, learning about how they respond to feedback and how the feedback has to be delivered and having to change the way I do things..... when you work in a more male environment you can be a bit more upfront and a bit more blunt and no one takes offence. Unfortunately women do. "She didn't thank me for that" or "what have I done wrong?" [Tracey]

This participant's quote points to a tendency for women to take things more personally than men, and the expectation that women will be more sensitive. In addition, a good woman manager is expected to be able to share her "own experiences, thoughts and emotions while staying professional" (Karen).

However, Cathy commented that sometimes women managers can "turn a blind eye" to a woman's emotions and at times, women employees can bring too much of their personal lives into the workplace.

When people talk about themselves and their own lives and all their stuff, it's like this isn't your friendship workplace, this is your workplace. I'm not saying that there's no chance for people to be friends within the workplace, but there's a time and a place. You've got friends and you've got family and a support network, it's more appropriate to talk about things like that with them than people that you work with. [Steph]

## **6.7 Discussion**

These research findings suggest that while women may believe that they have the same expectation of managers, irrespective of gender, this is not necessarily the case. In particular, this research points to an expectation of a higher degree of emotional understanding and support from a woman manager, than would be expected from a man. It also suggests an expectation that a woman manager will see her women employees as equals, take a more holistic view of them as people, understand the complexities of their lives, and provide flexibility to accommodate those complexities. Women managers are, therefore, expected to be relationally focused and exhibit behaviours consistent with the more communal traits associated women (Fletcher, 2012; Prime et al., 2009). When a woman manager acts consistently with these expectations, it is likely to enhance the working relationship between a woman manager and her women employees. Conversely, when these expectations are not met, it is likely to place a strain on relationships which, as phase one of our research suggests, can lead to a woman making a major career decision, such as resigning from the organisation she works for (Hurst, Leberman, & Edwards, in press).

These expectations have the potential to pose particular challenges for women managers. They are often unspoken (Litwin, 2011) and assumed as part of our cultural



and societal conditioning (Crooks, 2012; Mavin & Grandy, 2012; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Women managers and employees alike may not even be consciously aware of these expectations (Ladkin, 2010). This can lead to misunderstandings and relationship difficulties based on differing and mismatched assumptions and expectations between manager and employee. Additionally, not all women naturally work in a way that is consistent with the types of expectations identified in this research. Not all women, for example, will show a high degree of emotional understanding and connection, or be able to provide a flexible working environment. This may result in them being viewed negatively by other women (Litwin, 2011; Rhee & Sigler, 2015).

Understanding the expectations women have of their women managers enables the development of both personal and organisational strategies aimed at strengthening those relationships. At the personal level, if a woman manager understands the gender-based expectations her women employees have of her, she can be more sensitive to times when the relationship may be placed under strain and weakened as a result of those expectations. We all experience conflicts in our relationships. RCT suggests this can lead to a weakening of the relationship or disconnection as we move away to protect ourselves (Jordan & Walker, 2004). If a woman manager is not able to meet the gender-based expectations a woman employee has of her, this can lead to a breakdown in the relationship. Awareness enables the woman manager to discuss and renegotiate this disconnection, enabling the relationship to not only be repaired, but potentially enhanced, reflecting the growth potential of appropriately managed conflict (Jordan, 2004a; Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1986; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Likewise, self-awareness and reflection by a woman manager enables her to understand her own relational strengths and weaknesses, and the ways in which these may conform to

or conflict with the gender-based expectations of her women employees. Self-reflection is a fundamental element of good leadership, as is seeking to understand the expectations of others, alongside challenging our own behaviours and the assumptions we make about ourselves and others (Taylor, 2012).

Relational cultural theorists maintain that a mutually empowering relationship requires self and relational awareness by both parties (Jordan et al., 2004). This involves an open dialogue between relationship partners, a willingness to acknowledge and accept difference, and a commitment to negotiating relationship expectations in a mutually beneficial way (Jordan, 2010). Therefore, it is also important for a woman employee to reflect on and understand how her gender-based expectations may be influencing her perceptions of, and relationship with her woman manager, in order to build a strong relationship that is empowering for both women. The personal responsibility lies with both women employee and manager and requires a commitment to self and relational reflection in order to build a strong and mutually supportive working relationship. This is particularly challenging given the engrained nature of culturally and societally based gender roles and expectations, and suggests organisations also have an important role to play in awareness raising and education.

Understanding the gender-based expectations women employees have of their women managers (and vice versa) is extremely important for organisations seeking to support the careers of their women employees. Women managers will not necessarily be rewarded for acting relationally and in a manner consistent with the expectations of their women employees. Women's relational skills are often "disappeared", as something women simply do (Fletcher, 1999, 2004a). Because women are expected to act in this way, they arguably are more likely to be noticed when they fail to do so,

whereas men will more likely be noticed when they do act in this way. Women managers are simply meeting the expectations of other women when they exhibit these relational characteristics, whereas men are exceeding expectations. This is consistent with research which suggests that while more participative or collaborative styles of leadership (such as transformational or authentic leadership) are seen as more congruent with the female gender role (Elsesser & Lever, 2011; Stempel et al., 2015; Vinkenburg et al., 2011), men who exhibit participatory leadership styles will be viewed more favourably and rated as more effective than women who do so (Rhee & Sigler, 2015; Wolfram & Mohr, 2010). Acting in a manner that meets the expectations of women employees, does not necessarily provide an advantage to women seeking organisational recognition and upward career progression. A critical first step is for organisational practitioners to become aware of women's relational focus and expectations and make a commitment, at the senior executive level, to recognise and properly reward women managers who exhibit these behaviours. This requires ongoing education at all organisational levels of gender-based expectations and the way in which these influence and impact relationships, as well as the development of performance recognition systems that equally reward relational behaviours, irrespective of gender or gender-based expectations.

The organisational environment may also work against women managers seeking to meet the relational expectations of their women employees, and in doing so build mutually empowering relationships. While women may expect their women managers to treat them as an equal, this may be difficult within masculinised hierarchical organisational structures and cultures which, despite a greater emphasis on collaborative relationships and leadership styles, continue to reward individual effort, independence and competition (Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011; Fletcher, 2004a;

Fletcher, 2004b; Miller, 1986; Sinclair, 2007). This has the potential to place particular strain on the relationship between a woman manager and her women employees, where that relationship is expected to be based more in the relational concepts of equality, interdependence and mutuality (Miller, 1986). In addition, while women may expect their women managers to understand their life circumstances and need for flexibility, the organisational culture, policies and practices may not fully support, incentivise and reward the woman manager to do this. Organisations committed to gender equity must carefully review their structure, culture, and policies against the expectations women have of their women managers. For example, does the organisation enable women managers to meaningfully provide the type of support, empathy and flexibility expected of them by their women employees? Does the structure of the organisation enable a woman manager to treat her women employees as equals and is she able to consider for example, aspects of a woman's private life within the work context? It is often the small processes and actions that have the biggest impact, rather than "a single big action" (Taylor, 2012, p. 148), which suggests organisations need to be highly aware of, and sensitive to, the way their processes, policies and structure interact with and affect the relational expectations of women managers and employees.

Building mutually empowering and beneficial relationships between women managers and employees requires not only organisational awareness, but significant support to create a safe environment in which relationship dialogue and development can occur. One option is leadership training and team building programmes specifically designed by and for women, which encourage self-reflection and the open discussion and negotiation of gender-based assumptions and expectations (Ely et al., 2011). By incorporating, for example, practical reflection tools that enable women to challenge

their own thinking and to “go deeper” when reflecting on themselves and their relational expectations (Taylor, 2012), women can be given the resources and support to build strong and mutually empowering hierarchical relationships. This approach requires considerable organisational commitment and investment over a sustained period of time if it is to be successful.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

With this research, we have sought to identify the types of gender-based expectations that exist and influence workplace relationships. The focus though, has not been to understand the nature or implications of gender stereotypes in the workplace. Neither have we delved into why women have the types of gender-based expectations raised in this article. We also acknowledge that when considering a specific relationship, context is extremely important. None of the women’s stories occur within a vacuum. Experience and interpersonal relationships are situated within and influenced by a complex mix of personal, organisational, and societal contexts. We also do not seek to attribute blame or responsibility for difficult relationships between women to the existence of gender-based expectations. Instead, this research begins a discussion and gives voice to women’s experience.

Our research points to gender-based expectations women have of their women managers. However, these expectations are rarely discussed, raising the potential for misunderstanding and conflict. Our research sheds light on these expectations, as well as suggesting strategies that individuals and organisations can explore to strengthen relationships. Women managers seeking to build strong relationships with their women employees (and vice versa) will benefit from a greater understanding of these gender-based expectations, as will organisations seeking to support and empower women as

they progress through the organisational hierarchy. This is an area which warrants considerably more academic and organisational investigation and discussion. A greater awareness of these often unspoken expectations between women managers and employees at both the individual and organisational level, combined with a commitment to building strong, mutually empowering hierarchical relationships, adds another important, but under-researched aspect to workplace gender equity research and practice.

### **6.9 Chapter summary**

This chapter has explored the gendered relational expectations women employees have of women managers. The next chapter focuses on the strategies that organisations and women can use to better support the careers of women.

## 6.10 DRC 16: Statement of contribution to doctoral thesis containing publications

DRC 16



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

### STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION TO DOCTORAL THESIS CONTAINING PUBLICATIONS

(To appear at the end of each thesis chapter/section/appendix submitted as an article/paper or collected as an appendix at the end of the thesis)

We, the candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

**Name of Candidate:** Jane Ann Hurst

**Name/Title of Principal Supervisor:** Professor Sarah Leberman

**Name of Published Research Output and full reference:**

Hurst, J., Leberman, S., & Edwards, M. (in press). The relational expectations of women managing women. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*

**In which Chapter is the Published Work:** Chapter Six

Please indicate either:

- The percentage of the Published Work that was contributed by the candidate: **95%**  
and / or
- Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the Published Work:

The candidate undertook the research on which the manuscript is based including the fieldwork, literature review, data analysis, manuscript writing and revision. The co-authors (supervisors) provided feedback on the draft manuscripts.

**Jane Hurst** Digitally signed by Jane Hurst  
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**27 November 2016**  
Date

GRS Version 3– 16 September 2011

# **Chapter Seven: Strategies for supporting careers and enhancing relationships**

## **7.1 Chapter overview**

The purpose of this research was to not only understand the experiences of women managing and being managed by women and the consequential impact on their career decisions, but also to work collaboratively with participants to identify strategies that strengthen these workplace relationships. In Phase Two of the research, participants were brought together in small groups to discuss their ideas for ways in which women managers can support the careers of their women employees, as well as strategies for responding to strained relationships between women managers and employees.

In this chapter, the participants' suggested strategies for supporting women's careers are discussed. This also includes a discussion of the participants' career aspirations and the implications for individuals and organisations. The chapter then includes an article accepted for publication in the *Journal of Management & Organization*, which delves into the participants' views on strategies for responding to strained workplace relationships and proposes a more holistic, context-focused and relational framework.

## **7.2 Supporting women's careers**

Phase One of the research identified that women managers and employees generally work well together. Seven of the participants shared positive experiences with women managers or employees. These relationships benefitted the participants by providing psychological support, as well as the development of technical and interpersonal skills and expertise, all of which facilitate the career development of women (Broadbridge,



2015). However, with one exception, these relationships were not linked to a major career decision. In addition, the participants most common relationship experience was ambivalent or mixed in nature. This suggests that there is an opportunity to strengthen these workplace relationships as one way of supporting and facilitating the career progression of women.

In Phase Two, participants were asked to reflect on a series of questions, which were provided in advance. These included the following questions.

*How do you think a woman manager could best promote and support the careers of her women employees?*

*What, if anything, would encourage you to strive for a more senior management position and why (or if not, why not)?*

### **7.2.1 Ways women managers can support the careers of their women employees**

All of the participants suggested ways women managers could provide career support to their women employees. A degree of career support is something that could be expected of any good manager. One participant, Karen, did comment though, that “I don’t think they should go out of their way to promote an employee just because they are a woman. Career progression and promotion should be based on merit”. In suggesting career supporting actions and strategies, the participants primarily focused on four broad areas; on-the-job development, self-efficacy strategies, career advice and support, and sharing of experience and networks. A fifth area, gendered decision-making, emerged as a minor theme. These are discussed below.

***On-the-job development***

Participants focused on ways women managers could help to improve the skills of their women employees through for example, training and practical work experience. This involves the woman manager acknowledging the need for training, “going in to bat” for her employees and “putting the right amount of resource” into ongoing training and development in a way that takes a longer term view.

That’s quite a chunky investment. It’s not just the two day course. It’s the follow-up and a big programme. [Helen]

As well as training programmes, Steph raised the importance of being provided with challenging work opportunities without them being tests, of “getting regular feedback”, and being supported to develop the tools and skills she needs to do her job well. This involves being encouraged, stretched and incentivised to achieve. Cathy discussed how her first woman manager:

wasn’t scared to take that chance on you. She believed in you to let you do things... There was always an incentive for you as well, it didn’t matter what she asked you to do, it was “you get to here and you get this”. It was motivating to do whatever she wanted you to do. It was fun. It wasn’t “this is what you have to do and you have to do it by this time”, it was “if you can get to here for me then you can achieve this out of it”. It was a real win-win situation with her.

While this type of support may be expected of all managers irrespective of gender, it is arguably of greater importance to women employees who, research has shown, are less likely than men to be given the challenging and high profile work opportunities required for career advancement (Silva, Carter, & Beninger, 2013).

### ***Self-efficacy strategies***

Participants emphasised the importance of empowerment, focused particularly on confidence and self-belief, which are all self-efficacy strategies. Participants who were or had been managers discussed the responsibility they felt to “make women feel more comfortable and empowered”.

Be prepared to challenge a bit. Gross generalisation, but women do tend to be more reticent. I know I am. Encourage them to challenge themselves and get outside their comfort zone. Empower your employee to advocate for herself. Lead by example. [Emma]

Mary explained how a woman manager had helped her to believe in herself and Talia was grateful for the “trust and faith” her woman manager had in her decisions, even though it required her to take a “leap of faith”. Lucy raised her feelings of responsibility to empower her women employees.

I’m not a manager at the moment but when I was I felt a responsibility because I had quite a big team of men and women, and a bunch of lawyers to boot. I know generally speaking, that the men in the team were more confident about speaking out on matters and I felt a responsibility to make the women feel more comfortable and empowered too because they were just as competent as the guys to talk about their work issues and celebrate wins as well.

This concept of empowerment also extends to understanding the complexities of women’s lives, that they juggle family and career, and the need to provide flexibility. As discussed in Chapter Six, women managers are expected to better understand and respond to these complexities.

### ***Career advice and support***

The provision of career support by women managers, including career planning advice and recommendations and encouragement to apply for new roles, were seen as particularly important. Providing meaningful career support involves a woman manager taking a longer term view, understanding the abilities and aspirations of her women employees, and recognising that career aspirations and motivation are different for different people.

The first step is understanding what it is that the employee wants from this stage of her career. Long term goals and aspirations are also important. Checking in regularly to see whether the goals and aspirations have changed, developed and if so why? Checking in regularly to test with the employee whether she feels that she is doing the best that she can do and is getting what she wants out of her role. Is she feeling fulfilled? Restless? If so, why? Without knowing what your employee is trying to achieve in her current role and in her career generally, you can't hope to promote or support. Doing the very best you can to listen and not to judge. Encourage. Not assuming anything from your own life experience naturally applies equally to your female employee. [Emma]

Some participants suggested that women managers should overtly and proactively look at ways to develop their women employees. This involves suggesting career opportunities and “looking ahead at how they can encourage you to go for roles to further your career” (Talía).

It's not waiting for you to go to them, they actually have enough of a relationship with you to say “I think you'd be really good at this, have you thought about

this". Even to the extent of "there's a really good job coming up, I think you should put your hat in the ring". [Tracey]

Providing career advice and support is important for women who tend to be reticent about putting themselves forward for career advancement when they do not feel they have all of the required skills and experience (Institute of Leadership & Management, 2011; Ross-Smith & Chesterman, 2009). Actively encouraging women to apply for positions that will advance their careers has been recognised as a particularly important career strategy (Blue, 2014; Ross-Smith & Chesterman, 2009).

Perhaps surprisingly, mentoring was not raised as a specific strategy. Participants in one workshop noted that if mentoring is provided, it needs to be at the right time and the person being mentored needs to be ready for that type of relationship.

...when I was very young, there were some women in positions of leadership and they would really encourage me with things and I never grasped on to it because I've never been one who is interested in climbing the ladder. Had I been someone else they might've followed and strided ahead. There is a personal responsibility from the person. You can only encourage somebody so much and there has to be some sort of thing in the end that they actually want to progress. [Amy]

Steph (who had some mentoring early in her career), also reflected that "if it doesn't fit it's not going to get very far". This suggests the importance of mentoring as a partnership, an approach consistent with a relational approach to mentoring based in RCT as proposed by Fletcher and Ragins (2007). In this situation, mentoring is

regarded as a mutually empowering and growth fostering relationship, promoting for example, interdependence, reciprocity and mutual learning.

While participants acknowledged the importance of career support and encouragement from women managers, the concept of sponsorship, involving active advocacy for a person's career advancement, was not raised as a specific strategy or something the participants had experienced. This is consistent with research by Catalyst which suggests that women are less likely than men to receive active career sponsorship (Ibarra et al., 2010).

### ***Sharing of experiences and networks***

The participants raised the benefit of a woman manager sharing her networks with her women employees.

One thing I've noticed in a number of different jobs now is the importance of having a good network to get ahead. Having good networks so managers can link women employees into their networks or link them up with particular people.  
[Lucy]

This was particularly important to Helen when leaving New Zealand to work overseas.

When I went overseas she [my manager] basically gave me her entire address book. These are quite important people to her so that was really important to me. I felt guilty if I didn't actually meet someone because she was expecting me to. I thought that was really good. It was opening up her worldwide networks to me. [Helen]

Women's networks can also provide an important learning and sharing forum.

I remember one of the [organisations] I was at, the CEO was female and she did have a group where she got the women managers together to gel and had a peer group going. That was reasonably successful. She lost interest in doing it but she set it up. It had a good vibe and it could've been a really positive opportunity. [Tracey]

In addition to the benefit of being linked into a woman manager's networks, Lucy discussed the importance of getting time with busy women managers to learn from their experiences, noting however, that "I don't get to have the time with good women leaders to have those conversations". Kate appreciated gaining insights from the experiences of her women managers, "into how they were developed and how they overcame some of the barriers and blockages and challenges" and "how they developed their capability can be really valuable".

### ***Gendered decision-making***

The career development strategies primarily identified by the participants focused on the development of self-efficacy, human capital and social capital. However, Sarah also raised the responsibility of women managers to use their positions of power to "effect structural and environmental change" to make the workplace more welcoming for and supportive of women. She discussed how the organisation she works for is "a very big company but still we do not have a crèche or children's facilities close by" and how her workplace is not child friendly. She described how a "woman who gets into that position of power and keeps her values as a woman, as a mother" would think about these things and would create a more welcoming environment.

Helen raised the importance of promoting gender balance at senior levels through recruitment processes.

I'm building a new team at the moment and deliberately trying to look for more of a balance. I'm actually applying an affirmative kind of action thing. All other things being equal, I'm trying to get the gender balance as well. I'm also trying to get more Māori and Pacifica.

### **7.2.2 Women's career aspirations**

While the participants suggested a number of ways women managers could support the careers of their women employees, these strategies must be viewed within the context of women's career aspirations. Most of the participants were not striving for senior management positions. One main reason given for this is the belief that senior management positions are too far removed from the actual business of the organisation. Amy talked about her desire to do "tangible things that I feel are making a difference and have purpose", but she sees more senior organisational roles as being very process orientated. In a similar vein, another participant, Talia, is happy at the "grassroots" level, working with the public. She does not think her "make-up is management style" and her attitude is "put me where I'm best used rather than keep pushing me up where I know I'll decline in that space". She is comfortable in her current role and feels no desire to "go up". Similarly, Kate prefers to work in a role where "I actually get to see stuff happening on the ground and the community gets various rewards". She is not interested in the senior management level as "it all gets a bit theoretical" and "it bears no resemblance to what goes on at the coal face and the grass roots level".

For other women, their interest in more senior roles is tempered by their desire for a balance between work and personal life, and particularly their concern about the impact on their families.



That's one of the things that's holding me back at the moment, I'm almost happy plateauing where I am for now because I know those next steps up mean that I'd have to sacrifice more time with my kids and my husband and I don't want to do that. I still am motivated by moving up and taking on more challenges but I do want to balance it with my family. [Mary]

The demands of senior management roles are seen by some participants as being in conflict with women's relationship and family responsibilities, with Mary commenting for example, that she has seen people who "spend too much time at work and not enough time on their relationship and their families" and "everything flies apart" as a result. Sarah commented that she would be motivated to aspire higher if a managerial position changed her "position at home from being a servant and from having to pick up the kids, tuck them in, cook and so on". She also commented on the importance of her workplace being family friendly and that "if the structure of the position or the environment does not allow me to be me [a mother] in the workplace then certainly I'm not going to aspire to those jobs". Tracey wanted to have time to spend with her grandson and for her, the location of her work was also important as she did not want to take a more senior role that would require a long commute. Participants also reflected on the time and energy commitments of senior roles with one participant commenting that she "wouldn't really enjoy a role if it ended up that the role took the majority of my energy". A desire to "be happy" and to "work with nice people" were also factors in the aspirations one participant had for her career.

For some women, the reality of their work and workplaces mean that there is not "really a career structure as such" and "there's not a lot of avenue for climbing up ladders" (Amy). Also, some women had no particular career aspirations. Kate described how

she was happy in her current role because it provides lots of opportunities for projects and initiatives, a challenge, and she gets a lot of satisfaction from the role. For others, the autonomy of running their own businesses was particularly attractive. However, as Talia stated, just because a woman does not wish to climb the career ladder does not “make us any less goal orientated”.

For those women who may aspire to more senior organisational roles, a number of factors are influential. There needs to be an alignment of personal and organisational values. Participants are making career decisions based on values and culture, not just based on opportunities for hierarchical promotion and progression.

As soon as I got into my current role I thought right, I want my boss's job. I've always had that drive in my area of work. I won't stick around if the culture is going to be quite miserable... If things don't sit right then no matter how much I want that, I don't want the title. I want the role and the job itself, not the glory that comes with it. If the culture and the values don't sit with me then I won't strive to be in that progression in that workplace. [Lucy]

They need to be inspired, excited by and passionate about the role, and it needs to involve innovation, problem-solving and decision-making, as well as provide a challenge.

Emma felt a senior role would provide her with “recognition”, a “personal sense of satisfaction” and “a desire to be respected” for her knowledge and success. However, this was tempered by:

the knowledge that I would constantly be fighting the tide, constantly feeling as though I did not measure up to constantly moving targets and with that comes significant personal cost that makes me hesitate.

In a similar vein, Karen expressed interest in more senior organisational roles if she felt her knowledge and expertise would provide a positive contribution to the organisation. For her, "if it is something that happens, where I move up the ranks based on my merit, then great, if not, I'm also OK". For other women, they need to feel encouraged and supported by the organisation to take safe steps to reach above their current role. This involves being given "a chance to do little jobs or tasks that are actually the next level jobs but I know I can capably do just for that little extra self-confidence" (Steph).

### ***7.2.3 Career support, aspirations and gender equity***

The career aspirations discussed by the participants are generally consistent with the KCM, with the focus primarily revolving around the KCM's parameters of authenticity, balance and challenge (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006), rather than driven by aspirations to advance to senior organisational positions. Consistent with the KCM, most of the participants are seeking to achieve a balance between their work and personal lives (Cabrera, 2007; Lalande et al., 2000; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Rapoport et al., 2002). They are also aspiring to careers that enable them to make a difference and are challenging. By doing so, they may well be exercising a form of leadership in their working lives, without necessarily being in a formal leadership position.

The participants' careers generally do not appear to be progressing in a way that enables them to reach the senior executive level. Their careers have not been linear and uninterrupted, which is consistent with research on women's careers (Doherty & Manfredi, 2010; Lalande et al., 2000; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Sullivan & Mainiero,

2008), and their career aspirations are not motivated by success factors such as organisational advancement and pay levels (O'Neill et al., 2013; Sturges, 1999). Not only is organisational position not a major driving force in the careers of most, if not all of the participants, it is perceived negatively by some when balanced against other factors, such as family responsibilities.

The career promoting strategies raised by the participants will not result in a significant increase in women in senior management if women are not aspiring to those positions, although they are likely to enhance how a woman perceives her career, in terms of the KCM parameters and subjective views of success. While career success is just one component in a broader concept of a successful life, if most women are not aspiring to senior organisational positions then it is hard to see how a critical mass of women in those positions will ever be achieved. Without this critical mass, gender equity in the workplace may never be realised. This causes a disconnect between the benefits, from a gender equity perspective, of a critical mass of women in senior executive and governance positions (Cohen & Huffman, 2007; Kurtulus & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012; Skaggs et al., 2012), the way in which many women's careers develop, their career aspirations and their interpretation of career success.

Based on this phase of the research, three approaches have been identified in response to this disconnect. The first is to expose the discrimination that is hidden behind the discourse of choice and educate women and organisational practitioners. The second approach involves the development of organisational strategies that harness the diversity presented by women's career paths. The third is to build on the personal approaches identified as a way of supporting women's careers.

Turning to the first approach of exposing discrimination, it appears that many women are choosing not to put their career first. Based on an equality of opportunity approach, they arguably have the same opportunities as men to reach the senior organisational level, but are choosing to prioritise other factors, such as their relationships, families, and a desire for a balanced life. However, to aspire to these senior positions requires the level of work commitment that many women are unwilling or unable to make. Their family responsibilities may preclude them from working the hours required of these senior roles. The opportunistic and unplanned nature of women's careers and the likelihood that they will experience career breaks, all make it difficult to follow the traditional senior management path, which requires uninterrupted careers, long working hours, and systematic progression through line management roles. Flexible working arrangements often reinforce perceptions of lack of commitment and are difficult to implement in more senior roles (Holton, 2015). To suggest that women have a choice between focusing on their careers or seeking to live a more balanced life reinforces the supremacy of the ideal worker norm, based on traditional masculine ways of working and as a result, contributes to ongoing but subtle gender discrimination. This is an area that specifically requires enhanced individual and organisational awareness and education.

The second approach focuses on structural change. Alternate organisational career paths (Sturges, 1999) and new structures of work are needed that recognise the ways in which women show leadership within their roles, irrespective of where that role is situated within the organisational hierarchy. This includes a recognition of the value women can bring to the senior management table regardless of whether they manage staff and acknowledges that not all women are suited to or able to fulfil increasingly demanding line management roles. Different types of pathways to senior positions are

required, decoupled from linear and uninterrupted line management experience, and which properly recognise and reward the broader work and life skills and diversity of experience of women who take a more opportunistic approach to their careers.

The third approach, based in agency, involves the development of personal strategies which encourage women managers to better support the careers of their women employees. These career supporting approaches are important because self-efficacy, human and social capital are all important components in career development (Broadbridge, 2015). The development of self-belief, confidence, technical skills and networks, along with tailored and proactive career advice have all been identified as important elements of career support for women. On their own, these strategies may not necessarily result in significant organisational advancement, but they do help in the development of careers based in the ways women define career success.

The research findings suggest that women are looking to their women managers for career support, who are well placed to draw on their own work and personal experiences to provide meaningful, gender-specific support. It is important, therefore, that women managers understand the significance of the career support they can provide to their women employees and that organisations enable and reward this supportive role. However, the agency-based personal strategies to support the career development of women are the easiest to implement, but will arguably only ever have marginal effect unless organisational structures and practices change to recognise and accommodate the different ways women's careers develop. The structure of work, which is still very much focused on the ideal worker, upward mobility and privileges line management experience, must also change.

This section has focused on career-promoting strategies. The remainder of the chapter contains an article submitted for publication, which explores organisational and personal strategies for managing strained relationships between women managers and employees.

**Article 4: Women managing women: An holistic relational approach to managing relationships at work**

*Accepted for publication in a revised form in the Journal of Management & Organization. This version is free to view and download for private research and study only. Not for re-distribution, re-sale or use in derivative works. © Cambridge University Press*

Hurst, J., Leberman, S., & Edwards, M. (in press). Women managing women: An holistic relational approach to managing relationships at work. *Journal of Management & Organization*

**7.3 Abstract**

With women representing nearly half of the workforce in western countries, it is likely that a woman will have a woman manager and/or employees at some point during her working life. In our research, we worked collaboratively with 13 New Zealand women to develop personal and organisational responses when hierarchical relationships between women become strained. We identified four interlinked strategies at the personal and organisational level: developing awareness of the existence and nature of the conflict, enhancing personal and relational skills such as confidence and communication, building support networks within and outside the organisation, and finding acceptance when change is needed. Taking a gendered relational perspective, we propose that responses to a strained relationship need to be considered within the broader personal, organisational, societal and temporal context within which the relationship is situated. Therefore, we propose a more holistic relational and context-focused framework to create an environment more conducive to understanding and positive change.



## **7.4 Introduction**

In New Zealand, as in many western countries, women now represent nearly half of the workforce (Statistics New Zealand, 2016b). While women continue to be markedly under-represented at senior management and governance level (Grant Thornton International Ltd, 2016), it is likely that a woman employee will have a woman manager at some stage during her working life, at least at the lower and middle organisational levels. However, very little is known about the nature of these hierarchical relationships and the impact they have on women's careers, particularly when these relationships become strained.

Our research has explored these hierarchical workplace relationships between women, including career impacts and relational expectations, and identifies strategies that can be developed at both the individual and organisational level to respond to strained relationships. This article focuses on women's experience as contextually situated and adopts a relational lens to develop an holistic and context-focused framework. The article begins with a review of the relevant literature on women's workplace relationships, followed by an outline of our methodology. Our findings canvass the personal and organisational strategies recommended by our participants and we conclude with a discussion of a context-focused approach to addressing strained hierarchical workplace relationships between women. This is consistent with recent shifts towards more context specific management and organisational research (Bamberger, 2008; Egri, 2013; Galvin, 2014).

## **7.5 Viewing workplace conflict through an holistic relational lens**

Relationships and the desire to develop connections with other people are at the core of human existence (Fletcher, 1999; Jordan, 2004b; Jordan & Walker, 2004; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). Organisations are structured around relationships, with work, for

most people, being an inherently relational act (Blustein, 2011). This relational approach focuses on the interconnection between people within the working environment and places these relationships at the centre of inquiry, in contrast to more traditional perspectives that focus on work as a more individual endeavour and which “have articulated a vision of individuals who are fairly autonomous” (Blustein, 2011, p. 1). A relational approach emphasises interdependence, collectivity, and connection to others (Fletcher, 1999, 2012; Hammer, Trepal, & Speedlin, 2014), and in adopting a relational lens, it is this connection between people that is the central focus of inquiry.

Workplace relationships exist within a broader societal and cultural context, both representing and reproducing a society’s culture (Jordan et al., 2004; Schultheiss, 2013). In a gendered society, workplace relationships are understood and experienced in a gendered way. Women are generally expected to act relationally (Brock, 2008; Catalyst, 2007; Jogulu & Vijayasingham, 2015; Litwin, 2011; Mavin et al., 2013; Morrison, 2009; Sias, 2009) and are more likely to look to their women colleagues for emotional support (Blustein, 2011; Fletcher, 1999, 2012). Men, in contrast, tend to be more task focused and seek instrumental support from colleagues (Brock, 2008; Sias, 2009). However, little is known of the relational expectations women have of their women managers and/or women employees. Research by Mavin (2006b) suggests that women managers are expected “to be more understanding, more nurturing, more giving and more forgiving than men” (p. 267). Our research has found that women tend to expect their women managers to understand the complexities of their lives, provide flexibility to accommodate those complexities and treat them as an equal person. They also expect a higher level of emotional understanding and support from a woman manager than they would from a man (Hurst, Leberman, & Edwards, 2017). Research suggests that relationship expectations in the workplace, including gender-based expectations, often go unspoken (Ladkin, 2010; Litwin, 2011), leading to the

possibility of misunderstanding and conflict. Our research found that a strained and damaged relationship with a woman manager or woman employee can lead to major career decisions, including resignation and sideways or backwards career steps, when considered in terms of organisational position or hierarchy (Hurst et al., in press). Research suggests that advancement to senior organisational roles requires a long period of uninterrupted employment and systematic progression through increasingly more senior management positions (O'Neil et al., 2008). However, women's careers tend to be opportunistic, involve career breaks and do not tend to advance in a linear manner, which detrimentally affects a woman's ability to reach a senior management position (Doherty & Manfredi, 2010; Lalande et al., 2000; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, 2006; O'Neil et al., 2011; Sullivan et al., 2009; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2008). Any interruption therefore, such as resignation and sideways or backwards career steps in response to negative relationships, can affect the progression of women into more senior management roles, even though they may be gaining valuable experience from these career moves.

Negative relational experiences between women managers and their women employees not only affect the individual, but also have organisational and gender equity implications. Securing a critical mass of women at the senior management level has been demonstrated to improve business performance (Catalyst, 2013; Dezsö & Ross, 2012; Grant Thornton International Ltd, 2016; Joecks et al., 2013; Pellegrino et al., 2011; Wagner, 2011) and therefore, the loss of women from mid-career levels impacts on an organisation's senior management pipeline and potentially on business performance. In addition, retaining women in the ranks of senior management is important from a gender equity perspective, with research suggesting a critical mass of women at the senior organisational levels can lead to a reduction in the gender pay gap (Cohen & Huffman, 2007) and an increase in the promotion of women at all

organisational levels (Cook & Glass, 2014; Kurtulus & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012; Skaggs et al., 2012). From a personal, organisational and societal perspective, the quality of hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace is an important but under-researched issue.

In our research we have sought to harness the lived experiences of our participants to develop personal and organisational strategies that better respond to strained relationships and in doing so, positively enhance women's careers and strengthen the organisational role of women. Relational cultural theory (RCT) posits that a positive relationship between women is one that is mutually empowering and empathetic and promotes outcomes of zest, empowered action, an increased sense of worth, new knowledge, and desire for more connection (Fletcher, 2007). While difficult or negative relationships lack those characteristics and can be personally and organisationally damaging, they can also be a source of personal growth if managed well (Jordan, 2004a; Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1986; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Richardson, 2012).

Relationship conflict is not inherently bad. We have the potential to "undergo our most profound change and grow most deeply when we encounter difference and work on conflict" within the context of that relational connection (Jordan, 2010, p. 4). It does require though, the development of relational awareness, which "includes personal awareness, awareness of the other, awareness of the impact of oneself on the other, the effect of the other on oneself, and the quality of energy and flow in the relationship itself" (Jordan, 2004a, p. 54).

To better understand the hierarchical workplace relationships between women, we grounded our research in narrative inquiry. A narrative approach to understanding experience has, at its central point of focus, the lived experience of a person as narrated by her, and situated within the many contexts of her life (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Each woman has a different life context and history which influences her

understanding of experience, including the way she understands and reacts to workplace relationships with women managers and/or women employees (Patton & McMahon, 2014; Smith-Acuna, 2011). Her past experiences will influence how she perceives and reacts to her current situation, as well as her future decision-making and envisioned future. This reflects the temporal and continuous nature of experience, by which “experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). It also recognises that the way in which a woman understands and narrates her lived experiences will change depending on where it sits within her personal life context, as well as the broader organisational and societal context. This holistic approach to understanding experience, based in the epistemology of narrative inquiry, encourages the examination of multiple contexts when considering relational difficulties (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), recognising that there are likely to be multiple factors involved in a strained relationship, requiring multiple interventions (Smith-Acuna, 2011). This contextual approach is also consistent with RCT, which situates relationships within a gendered societal and cultural context (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003), as well as the recent calls for a more context focused approach to management and organisational research (Bamberger, 2008; Egri, 2013; Galvin, 2014).

## **7.6 Methodology: Delving into lived experience**

As discussed above, our research used narrative inquiry to examine the experiences of women managing and/or being managed by women, the influence these relationships have on their career decisions, and to recommend strategies to enhance those relationships and the role of women in business. It is an exploratory study grounded in the lived experiences of New Zealand women and situates those experiences within their particular context, rather than seeking to produce broad generalisations (Creswell, 2013). This is a small scale qualitative study with an emphasis on depth, rather than

breadth of understanding (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Guest et al., 2006; Saunders, 2012).

Ethical approval for the research was obtained prior to commencement of the fieldwork. Participants were identified using the snowballing technique (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Creswell, 2013), based initially on the lead author's professional and personal networks. This method initially identified 49 women who were approached via email and from these, 15 women self-selected into the first phase of the research, based on the criteria that they had experience managing and/or being managed by women. Participants were provided with an information sheet containing details of the research purpose, methods, process, and participant rights, including confidentiality arrangements. All participants signed participation consent forms prior to the commencement of fieldwork, covering their involvement in phase one and two of the research.

Phase One of the research explored the participant's hierarchical workplace experiences with women. Thirteen of the original 15 participants elected to participate in the second phase of the research (which is the subject of this article). This phase focused on the development of strategies to better support the careers of women. Demographic details of the 13 participants who participated in the second phase of the research are provided in Table 4.1 (see Chapter Four). One of the 13 participants worked in small owner-operator businesses, and another worked in a small not-for-profit organisation. All other participants worked in larger public and private sector organisations, with workforces ranging from between 200 and 10,000 employees.

Phase One of the research used a mixture of interviews and participant prepared creative materials to explore the lived experiences of the participants. Participants were asked to produce either a piece of written or visual material prior to the interview

depicting their experiences with a woman manager or employee, as well as a timeline detailing any life events they felt were significant to their careers. Participants produced line drawings, collages, unsent letters, fictional stories, poems and written summaries of their experiences. This material informed the subsequent interview with the participant.

Phase One identified that over two-thirds of participants had experienced a damaging or negative relationship with a woman manager or employee at some stage during their career and for over half of these participants, this influenced subsequent career decisions. The personal, organisational and societal contexts in which those relationships were situated influenced how the relationship was perceived and subsequent career decision-making. Participants also had relational expectations of women managers, such a higher degree of emotional intelligence, empathy and support, an understanding of the complexities of their lives, a willingness to provide flexibility to accommodate those complexities, and an expectation to be treated as an equal.

Phase Two, which is the focus of this article, brought the participants together through a series of small workshops (which were supplemented by written and telephone responses where a participant was unable to attend a workshop), to develop strategies to strengthen hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace. Three workshops were held on different days, locations and times to enable participants to attend. Ten participants attended these workshops (two workshops were attended by three participants each and one workshop was attended by four participants). Three participants could not attend the workshops and therefore, two sent written responses to the workshop questions and one provided her response by telephone. Participants were reminded at the start of each workshop of their rights relating to participation, including confidentiality and responsibilities. Participants did not, during the

workshops, name any person that they had previously worked with or the relevant organisation. Instead, they used generic references such as “my boss” or “my manager”.

Participants were asked to reflect on a series of questions, which were provided in advance. These included the following questions which are relevant to this article.

*Reflecting on your own difficult relationships with a woman manager or woman employee (or relationships you may have witnessed):*

- *What could have enabled you to cope with that relationship better?*
- *What, if anything, could you or the organisation you worked for have done differently?*

The workshops were recorded and transcribed. The lead author also made notes of the key discussion points on large sheets of paper, visible to all participants. The notes were used to create five categories for analysis of the workshop and phone transcripts, and written responses, using the software programme NVivo, namely awareness, communication, support, skills and acceptance. This was supplemented by careful re-reading of the source material and a review of the relevant data from Phase One. The analysis refined the categories into a number of themes, which were further broken down into personal and organisational responses. The following discusses the findings from Phase Two against the identified themes (Miles, 2014; Morrow, 2005). All relationships discussed in this article refer to those between women.

### **7.7 Findings: Personal and organisational strategies**

The participants identified a number of personal and organisational strategies that can be developed in response to strained hierarchical relationships. These have been developed into four themes and are discussed below: developing awareness,



enhancing personal and relational skills, building support networks, and finding acceptance.

### **7.7.1 *Developing awareness***

Strained relationships placed considerable stress on the participants, affecting their physical and psychological wellbeing, as well their personal relationships, including their families. Personal and organisational awareness of both the existence and consequential impact of a strained or difficult relationship, as well as an ability to articulate that awareness, is essential to the development of appropriate strategies. Personal awareness requires a degree of self-reflection (Taylor, 2012) and recognition of the extent of relationship stress being experienced. This can be hard to see at the time.

I wished I'd been more aware of the stress I was experiencing and got some sort of supervision or counseling to deal with it and empower me and find some tools to better deal with the relationship with my manager. [Lucy]

Personal awareness and self-reflection can be facilitated through various mechanisms such as seeking professional support, gaining the advice of an impartial person, drawing on "gut feeling", trusting instincts, and listening to the impact the relationship is having on physical and psychological wellbeing. This awareness building also extends to understanding the broader personal, relational and family impacts of a strained relationship, as well as the gendered expectations women can have of their women managers and/or employees.

While individual awareness is important, organisations also need to develop ways to increase their awareness of strained relationships. It can be difficult for an organisation to respond if the appropriate staff are not told about a difficult relationship. One

participant (Susan) noted that “I don’t know how the organisation would’ve responded to me because I didn’t give it a chance to respond because I didn’t do anything”.

However, this participant also noted that organisational awareness should have been triggered by the high turnover of staff within her manager’s team, as well as the complaints made against her by other people. This requires an organisational culture that recognises the factors pointing to a problem and proactively responds, rather than waiting until a formal complaint is made.

Organisational practitioners also need to be more aware of the contexts in which those relationships can become strained. For example, our research found that phases of major organisational change can place considerable stress on hierarchical relationships between women, suggesting that organisations need to consciously foster a more supportive environment as part of their change management plans. As well, greater organisational awareness is needed about the gendered expectations women have of their relationships, and the resulting relational impact if these expectations cannot be met.

### ***7.7.2 Enhancing personal and relational skills***

At the personal level, participants raised the importance of self-confidence when they reflected on their negative relationships. While it is important to avoid over-generalisation, research points to a tendency for men to have (or at least display) a greater degree of confidence than women (Institute of Leadership & Management, 2011; Kay & Shipman, May 2014; Sturm et al., 2014). Given the relational expectations women have of other women to be more emotionally understanding (as found in our research), it may be assumed that women might feel more confident raising issues with another woman, than with a man. However, our research suggests that this is not necessarily the case. Women can struggle with asking for help, even

when their manager is a woman. It can make them “feel needy” and “vulnerable”, when they are “trying to be the all in control woman”.

It is about not being frightened to ask for help. Being so staunch because you're juggling all over the place when you have a young family and everything else. You can't let anything slip but sometimes you need to show you've got a bit more vulnerability and that's not necessarily a bad thing. I guess showing vulnerability to me meant you weren't coping and you weren't good enough.

[Tracey]

The ability to ask for help and to show vulnerability involves developing the confidence to have an “honest conversation” with a woman manager and be more proactive in raising issues.

Developing good and honest communication and finding ways to bolster confidence are important relational skills. Women need to understand that their managers may also be lacking in confidence, which may be affecting their relationship. One participant (Kate) noted that she had a difficult relationship with a woman manager who “probably flip flopped a lot because of her own [lack of] confidence”. Enabling a woman to see an issue or situation from her manager's perspective provides an opportunity for relationship growth. One participant (Helen), for example, assumed her manager did not like her. However, a woman mentor enabled her to gain a different and invaluable perspective by explaining that the manager “was struggling in the male environment she was working in” and Helen's actions were exacerbating that difficulty.

Our research suggests a tendency for some women to personalise relationship conflict. For example, one participant discussed how she had believed a strained relationship was all her fault, that she “was a bit of a pain” and “more of an inconvenience”, until she received some independent external support that provided her with a much more

balanced perspective on the relationship difficulties. This finding is consistent with research pointing to a tendency for some women to be more critical of themselves, have less self-compassion and use more negative self-talk than men (Yarnell et al., 2015). It is important therefore, for women to obtain support that enables them to gain a sense of perspective and develop the skills to recognise and respond to negative self-talk, as well as build a sense of self-compassion.

Organisations need to be more aware of the confidence issues some women face and develop mechanisms that encourage women to have honest and open conversations and to seek help and support, within a safe environment. In doing so, organisations must recognise that the relational needs of women may well be different from that of men. Organisational investment in programmes that enhance women's relational skills, build self-confidence, develop skills to address issues like negative self-talk, and provide education on the gender-based expectations women have of their relationships, has the potential to strengthen those relationships.

Organisational practitioners also need to develop their relational skills so that they are better able to recognise and respond to hierarchical relationships between women that have the potential to result in conflict and cause damage. In reflecting on her own experiences, one participant commented that:

Human Resources should have played a much bigger role in not pushing people to work together if they are completely incompatible. When the first signs of conflict or misunderstanding and so on do appear, they could have actually worked things out. [Sarah]

This suggests that senior managers and human resources practitioners could benefit from a broader understanding of how to better match people within teams. This could be combined with a wider range of tools to respond to strained relationships, including

exploring options to relocate women to other teams, where strengths and personalities may be better matched.

Strained and damaged hierarchical relationships can be healed if approached with honesty about the existence of conflict, emotional maturity and a willingness by both parties to address the issues (Jordan, 2004a; Jordan, 2010). For example, organisational change severely damaged the relationship one participant, Talia, had with a woman manager. A restructuring saw Talia moved to another work area against her wishes. She felt very angry with her woman manager at the time for not fighting to keep her. Another restructuring a couple of years later saw her working for that manager again. They openly discussed their issues and agreed to start afresh. Talia “had to get over any anger that I had with my manager at the time and get on with it”. She now describes her manager as having “been the real rock of my life”, commenting that “we’ve actually had to grow and it’s taken a 20 year relationship of work careers and crossing paths continually”.

### **7.7.3 Building support networks**

Our participants identified the importance of good support mechanisms that provide advice and emotional and practical support when dealing with strained and difficult relationships. This support can come from fellow work colleagues, particularly when they are all experiencing similar difficulties with a woman manager. It can also come from an external person. One participant, for example, described the benefit of having a skilled external consultant to help her understand what was going on in her strained relationship and provide an impartial opinion.

We talked through her experience of a very similar thing and that was when the lights went on and the cloud lifted and I could see clearly. Up until then I had been talking to everybody internally but I think I just needed to talk to that

external person because they were impartial. Everybody I talked to internally had their own agenda. They didn't want me to leave so they had their own motivations for what they were saying to me. Talking to this external person who had the skills helped. [Mary]

The external consultant was able to empathise, due to her own experiences, and provide another perspective. This participant also saw a psychologist who validated her experiences.

I went to see a psychologist. I explained to her what was going on and she went "oh my God, you need to leave". Just having someone say that, those were the two key things together and they were both external impartial people. [Mary]

One participant (Lucy), reflecting on her negative experiences with a previous woman manager thought at the time that "I just have to soldier on, I can manage this myself" but in hindsight realised she "should have got support outside the organisation at the time". She was busy and felt she did not have time to do so, even though her mother was encouraging her to get external support. Another participant (Susan), reflected on how she did not ask for help and did not take action to address relationship difficulties, even though she considers herself to be a "strong independent woman". In hindsight she could have "called her up on it and gone and spoken to HR or another manager and said 'we need to actually have a mediation here because this isn't working for me'".

Organisations need to facilitate avenues for impartial, safe and qualified support from people who have an awareness of the relational dynamics and characteristics that can be present. This can be through external or internal channels. One participant (Karen), reflected on how she should have talked to someone in the organisation about

her relationship difficulties. However, she “was scared because I was the little person” and thought “that they would not listen to me”. This is a particular issue if the woman manager is very senior within the organisation, as one participant found.

...our human resources people were well aware of a number of issues with my manager and people in the organisation and they were even scared of her..... I found that quite disappointing that people I thought I could rely on to intervene and say “this is not right” didn’t do that.... Then again, I guess that’s quite hard when the person who is causing the trouble was part of the executive team of the place too. It was quite a position of power. [Lucy]

Another participant reflected on how she was shocked by the “culture of silence” and lack of organisational support when she found herself in conflict with her woman manager. There was an over-reliance on formal procedures to address relationship issues.

Nobody talks and you do not talk about her or what happened, don’t discuss with her about it because it’s a case in progress. That made things really hard. We actually wanted to get together and sort things out but no, you have to follow procedure, processes and so on. [Sarah]

Organisational support requires the provision of safe avenues to gain advice and guidance, such as through external employee assistance programmes offered by some organisations. It also requires an empowered human resources department equipped with the skills and tools to address relationship issues, irrespective of the position a woman manager holds within the organisation.

#### **7.7.4 Finding acceptance**

A number of participants raised the importance of accepting what can and cannot be changed when dealing with a difficult relationship. For example, one participant (Amy), described how she and her work colleagues tried to talk to their woman manager about their concerns. When the response was “I’m the boss, I can do what I want.... we just decided to leave it and let the train run away”. Another participant (Lucy), realised organisational intervention would not have helped “because it would’ve just made this person more entrenched in her decisions”.

Part of finding acceptance is recognising how bad the relationship has become, the impact it is having, and knowing when to leave the organisation. One participant (Helen), reflected that “if I’d recognised sooner how toxic and bad things were, I should’ve just left” and another felt, in hindsight, she “should’ve left sooner”. Another participant (Karen), who had left an organisation because of a damaging relationship reflected that, if in future she was faced with another difficult relationship that was affecting her personally, she would “think about the dynamic as a reflection on her (manager) not myself” and “the best option is to quit”.

Reaching a place of acceptance is a process. For some of the participants, this did not occur until well after the relationship with their woman manager or employee had ended. For others, participation in our research provided an important opportunity to reflect on and reach a point of acceptance about their experiences. One participant (Mary), commented that, “it was a really good unpack of what I’d been through and then what I’d learnt and being able to grow in confidence”. For another participant (Helen), it showed her “how much I needed to be able to get the last few years off my chest” and a third participant (Talia), commented about attendance at the workshop that, “it’s good to meet other women and we’ve actually all been there and done that



sort of thing....you're not alone". Retelling their stories, in their own way, seems to have provided participants with a powerful medium for gaining acceptance.

## **7.8 Towards a more holistic relational approach**

### **7.8.1 *The framework***

Our participants identified a range of personal and organisational strategies for responding to strained hierarchical workplace relationships, which we have organised into four strategies. This does not represent an exhaustive analysis and identification of all possible responses as there are undoubtedly many more specific interventions that could be developed and implemented. We have though, drawn on the identified strategies to form the basis of a more holistic, context focused and relational response framework. The key features of this framework are shown in Figure 7.1 and discussed in more detail in this section.

Figure 7.1 shows the four identified strategies at the centre (the inner circle), which are interlinked rather than linear in nature. They are also situated within and influenced by a broader relational context, namely the personal, organisational and societal contexts (the middle circle), which are in turn situated within a continuum of time (the outer circle). It is the combination of each of these elements that provide an holistic, relational framework to identifying and responding to strained workplace hierarchical relationships.

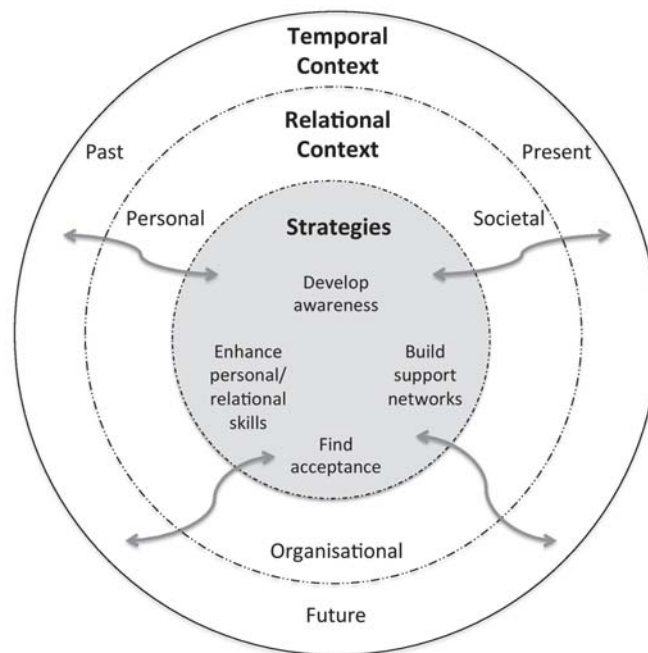


Figure 7.1: Holistic relational response framework

### 7.8.2 Temporal and contextual factors

Taking a relational approach reflects that work is an inherently relational act and recognises the importance of workplace relationships to women (Blustein, 2011; Fletcher, 1999, 2012; Miller, 1986). We have taken an holistic approach to the development of relational strategies, recognising that workplace relationships are part of and are understood within a person's broader lived experience, consistent with the epistemology of narrative inquiry, in which this research is grounded (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2010; Richardson, 2012). The relationship sits within a continuum of time and experience, with a woman's perception and reaction to current experience influenced by past experiences, as well as her envisioned future (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). It also sits within a much broader personal context. Her personal life, such as

her family and financial responsibilities, are all relevant contexts. Understanding and responding to hierarchical relational conflict in the workplace recognises that we all experience events, relationships and situations differently depending on our personal context. Responding in a more holistic and relational way to strained relationships, involves an acknowledgement and degree of understanding of the inherent personal difference between individual women (Smith-Acuna, 2011). This is not to suggest a need to delve in detail into the complexities of a woman's life history. Rather, it requires a willingness to listen and to seek to understand each woman's perspective and develop an awareness that their gendered working relationships will be influenced by many factors from both within and outside the work relational context (Jordan, 2004a; Jordan, 2010; Smith-Acuna, 2011).

As well as the personal context, a narrative approach situates lived experience within a broader societal/cultural and institutional/organisational context. To explore the relational dynamics requires an exploration of the organisational and societal contexts within which that relationship sits. Organisationally, our participants reflected on how damaging relationships existed within an organisational culture of silence, with a lack of awareness of relationship difficulties or the "turning of a blind eye", with organisational response seeming to favour implementation of formal processes. Organisational change and a lack of organisational support were also relevant contextual factors identified in our previous research. Societally, our research has pointed to gender-based relational expectations women have of their women managers. This societal context will permeate and influence relationships and expectations (Hurst et al., 2017).

### ***7.8.3 Multiple and interlinked responses to conflict***

These temporal, personal, organisational and societal contexts all influence the hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace, and provide the holistic

relational framework within which the proposed individual and organisational responses to strained relationships are situated. By being open to the complexity this approach brings, it becomes possible to embrace the concept of multiple causality (Patton & McMahon, 2014; Smith-Acuna, 2011). This recognises that a strained hierarchical workplace relationship is likely to be caused or influenced by many different elements, requiring multiple interventions or responses at both the individual and organisational level (Smith-Acuna, 2011).

The four strategies (developing awareness, enhancing personal and relational skills, building support networks, and finding acceptance) are interconnected. While it may be tempting to seek to isolate and focus on specific issues, components and interventions, a combination of strategies are likely to be more appropriate. For example, individual and organisational awareness of the existence and severity of a strained relationship is essential to the development of better personal and relational skills, such as enhanced relationship communication. At the individual level, developing awareness may require the assistance of another person, demonstrating the importance of good support networks. Likewise, the enhancement of personal and relational skills is likely to draw on third party expertise and support. However, some degree of individual and organisational awareness is required to identify the need for greater support. A good support network will also facilitate a person's ability to find acceptance and make difficult decisions, such as a decision to leave the organisation she works for, if this is the best option. However, while acceptance may be viewed as an outcome, it is also part of the response framework. As well as awareness, a woman must also accept that some form of response is needed, such as reaching out for support or seeking to develop better personal and relational skills.

A good understanding of each of the four strategies allows individual women, organisational practitioners and business owners (where an organisation is not of

sufficient size to have human resource specialists) to best personalise the responses to the particular relationship and women involved, recognising that a combination of approaches may well be needed to address a strained relationship. Some responses may work better, be easier to implement, or be more appropriate than others. For example, Talia developed a stronger relationship with her manager by accepting that change was needed and through the development of enhanced relational skills, demonstrating that when a difficult relationship is managed well, this can be a source of personal and relational growth. At the other end of the spectrum, a number of our participants resigned from the organisation where they had a damaging relationship with a woman manager or woman employee. Ideally, the personal and organisational response will enable the women involved to develop a stronger relationship and remain working for the organisation. However, even a decision to resign can bring learning and personal and relational growth, particularly if the women involved are supported to gain awareness, enhance personal and relational skills and find acceptance. Change is not therefore, necessarily good nor bad, but provides a platform for growth depending on the response. It is important though, that the responses are cognisant of the characteristics that can be present in a hierarchical relationship between women, including the gendered expectations women have of their women managers and/or employees, and are tailored to the specific relationship context.

Many of the strategies suggested by participants involved personal actions that a woman could take, with a greater focus on individual agency than on organisational response. This perhaps suggests a greater willingness by participants to change their own personal situation, rather than to seek organisational change. While there is likely to be some shared responsibility for relationship issues between the individual women involved, as well as the organisation they work for, shared responsibility does not equate to equal responsibility, as each party will hold different levels of relational power

(Smith-Acuna, 2011). Arguably, more power to address interpersonal relational issues is held at the organisational level, suggesting a greater organisational responsibility to recognise and respond to strained hierarchical relationships. This requires an organisational culture that understands the importance of strong relationships between women from a business and gender equity perspective and a sustained commitment at senior executive level to develop and implement a more holistic relational approach to supporting those relationships.

The relational response to a strained relationship must balance personal action and responsibility with organisational action. This requires a degree of sophistication and a recognition that processes must be flexible. To recognise the need for both an organisational and individual response, we have developed a reflective matrix (see Table 8.2 in Chapter Eight) that can be used by individuals and organisational practitioners (and business owners) when responding to strained relationships. This matrix contains a series of questions to prompt individual and organisational reflection, discussion and action. It provides a reflective starting point when responding to relationship conflict, rather than a comprehensive list of questions. In addition, while the questions have been ordered in a table format, the reflective process is not a linear one.

A number of the participants' suggested strategies only became apparent to the participants with the benefit of hindsight. While ideally an individual or organisation would have the awareness and resources to respond at the time, the types of responses identified can also be employed to good effect after the strained relationship has ended. For example, three of the participants in the study reported their participation in the research as beneficial which, combined with their subsequent experiences, provided them with a greater personal awareness and understanding, improved confidence, support from other participants (through workshop participation)

and a sense of acceptance. This suggests that the holistic response framework could inform career coaching more generally to aid understanding, self-reflection, awareness and personal growth both during and after the lived experience of a strained relationship.

## **7.9 Conclusion and future implications**

Hierarchical relationships between women in the workplace are important from a personal, organisational and gender equity perspective. Our research suggests that many women will, during the course of their working lives, experience a particularly strained or damaging relationship with a woman manager and that this may impact on their careers. A number of women in our research left organisations they worked for and took either sideways or backwards careers steps (in terms of organisational hierarchy or position) as a result. This has implications for the careers of individual women, as well as organisational and gender equity implications. With women under-represented at the upper echelons of business in New Zealand, like many other western countries, better individual and organisational responses are needed to address strained hierarchical relationships between women.

Working collaboratively with our participants, we have developed a more holistic response framework, with the relationship situated within its broader context as the focus. This proposed holistic relational response framework is potentially relevant to all strained workplace relationships, irrespective of gender. However, when a conflict involves a hierarchical relationship between women, the application of a gender lens which recognises for example, the expectations women have of these relationships and the consequences of relationship deterioration, will enable the development and implementation of more appropriate and tailored responses at both the personal and organisational level. We have provided a framework that organisational practitioners

(and business owners) can draw on not only when responding to strained relationships, but also in the development of relationship strengthening programmes. The reflective matrix complements this by providing individuals and organisational practitioners with a practical tool aimed at enhancing personal and relational reflection, discussion, understanding and ultimately constructive relationship-building action.

Examining conflict within a more holistic, relational and gendered context shifts the focus of attention away from individual blame and create a personal and organisational environment more conducive to a deeper understanding and positive change. This requires much more than individual commitment to relationship building responses. Organisations must embrace the potential benefit of strong, healthy relationships between women, and be prepared to invest in the development of those relationships in a more holistic manner. This is not only good for the careers of individual women seeking organisational advancement and for businesses seeking to benefit from gender diversity at the senior management levels. It is also another important step in the quest for gender equity in the workplace.

### **7.10 Chapter summary**

This chapter has explored personal and organisational strategies for better promoting the careers of women and responding to strained hierarchical relationships. The next and final chapter draws the thesis to a close by summarising the key findings, detailing the contributions to knowledge, and identifying areas for further research.



## 7.11 DRC 16: Statement of contribution to doctoral thesis containing publications

DRC 16



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

### STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION TO DOCTORAL THESIS CONTAINING PUBLICATIONS

(To appear at the end of each thesis chapter/section/appendix submitted as an article/paper or collected as an appendix at the end of the thesis)

We, the candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

**Name of Candidate:** Jane Ann Hurst

**Name/Title of Principal Supervisor:** Professor Sarah Leberman

**Name of Published Research Output and full reference:**

Hurst, J., Leberman, S., & Edwards, M. (under review in Journal of Management & Organization). Women managing women: An holistic relational approach to managing relationships at work.

**In which Chapter is the Published Work:** Chapter Seven

Please indicate either:

- The percentage of the Published Work that was contributed by the candidate: **95%** and / or
- Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the Published Work:

The candidate undertook the research on which the manuscript is based including the fieldwork, literature review, data analysis, manuscript writing and revision. The co-authors (supervisors) provided feedback on the draft manuscripts.

**Jane Hurst** Digitally signed by Jane Hurst  
Date: 2016.11.29 13:55:30 +13'00'  
Candidate's Signature

**23 November 2016**  
Date

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Date: 2016.11.29 14:43:03 +13'00'  
Principal Supervisor's signature

**27 November 2016**  
Date

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

*We are not what we know but what we are willing to learn.*

*(Bateson, 2004, p. 8)*

I began this research journey puzzled by my own mixed experiences of working for and managing women in the workplace. Some relationships have been strong and supportive. Others have perplexed me. One relationship, with a woman manager early in my career, had been extremely damaging to my self-confidence and led to my resignation and time out of the paid workforce. I felt a sense of dismay that a woman in such a senior management role, in a sector that was and still remains male-dominated, had treated me so badly when I had expected to be taken under her wing. Over the years I have discovered that my mixed experiences have been shared by other women. They have perhaps even been felt by my own women employees as I struggled with the demands of running my own business and finding my authentic management style.

As someone who has always identified as a feminist and believed in the power of the sisterhood to bring about gender equity, my experiences with women managers and employees and those shared with me by others have brought with them a degree of internal conflict and led me to ponder and explore the role women play in supporting other women's careers. As part of my research journey, I discovered a significant gap in the literature, namely the interconnection between women's experiences of managing or being managed by women, the impact those experiences have on their career decisions and the implications for workplace gender equity. It is this gap that my research has sought to explore.

This chapter provides an overview of the key findings in relation to the research questions, discusses the theoretical, practical and methodological contributions of the research, raises areas for future research, considers the implications and concludes with my final thoughts and reflections.

## **8.1 The three research questions**

### ***Research Question One: What have been the experiences of women in New Zealand who have managed or been managed by women?***

The 15 participants discussed over 50 specific relationships. All of the participants discussed relationships with one or more woman managers and/or woman employees that were ambivalent or mixed in nature. These were by far the most common experiences shared by all participants, suggesting that women managers and employees generally work well together.

Nearly half of the participants had experienced a particularly positive or empowering relationship with a woman manager and/or employee. However, most participants had experienced a difficult or negative relationship. These relationships were characterised by a lack of warmth, empathy, trust and respect. This finding suggests that most women will experience at least one particularly negative hierarchical relationship during their working lives. It is worth noting though, that none of the women described behaviours that clearly fit within that described by the queen bee syndrome (where a woman manager actively works against the interests of women seeking to progress into more senior organisational positions) or the research into relational aggression.

***Research Question Two: How have these experiences influenced their career decisions?***

Positive and empowering relationships provided participants with important technical and interpersonal expertise and provided psychological support, all of which are important career-influencing and enhancing factors (Broadbridge, 2015). However, these relationships were not linked to major career decisions, suggesting that while supportive relationships are beneficial and indirectly support careers through, for example, the development of self-confidence and technical expertise, they do not directly and specifically enhance women's careers when seen through a lens of upward organisational advancement.

Conversely, negative relationships had direct and indirect careers impacts. Of the 11 women who had a negative relationship, seven left the organisation they worked for, often taking a backwards or sideways career step, when considered in terms of organisational position. This suggests that many women will have at least one difficult or damaging relationship with a woman manager or employee during her career that is likely to negatively affect her career, at least in the short term, when considered in terms of organisational hierarchical position.

In addition to the direct career impacts resulting from negative relationships, the participants' experiences also indirectly impacted on their careers. Their self-confidence was eroded, their physical and psychological health and wellbeing was affected, and their families were negatively impacted. For many of the participants, their career aspirations were also affected, with the desire for happiness and balance becoming more important in how they subsequently defined and understood their careers. All of these are factors which have the potential to indirectly affect the careers of women.

Context played a particularly important role when a participant was faced with a negative relationship. The research identified three important contextual realms: the personal, the organisational, and the societal. At a personal level, career decision-making was influenced by a participant's financial and family responsibilities. Also important was the organisational context, with many of the negative relationships situated within a time of major organisational change. Women were placed into management positions without necessarily having the level of experience or support required during times of significant change, placing a high degree of additional stress on relationships. There was often an absence of organisational support and an organisational failure to recognise difficulties in the hierarchical relationships between women. At the societal level, the research found that women had gendered expectations of their women managers and employees, which also impacted on their workplace relationships.

***Research Question Three: How can organisations encourage women managers and employees to support and promote each other's careers?***

The participants identified a number of strategies that both organisations and women managers could use to better promote the careers of their women employees.

However, these were not necessarily associated with career promotion in terms of organisational hierarchy and advancement. Consistent with much of the research on the careers of women, most of the participants were not striving for senior management positions.

The participants also identified strategies that could be used when hierarchical relationships become strained, with these strategies broadly falling within four categories; developing awareness, enhancing personal and relational skills, building support networks, and finding acceptance. Based on these strategies, an holistic and

relational framework, overlaid with a gender lens, was developed as a method of understanding and responding to strained relationships between women managers and employees. This takes a gendered and context focused approach, recognising the factors that can influence and affect hierarchical relationships between women.

## **8.2 Theoretical contributions**

### **8.2.1 Gendered relational expectations**

Understanding the gendered expectations women have of their relationships, particularly with their women managers, is the first theoretical contribution of this research. Specifically, while the participants initially believed they expected the same things of a manager irrespective of gender, a closer examination revealed gender-based expectations, consistent with Litwin's (2011) research. The participants expected a higher degree of emotional understanding and support from a woman manager, than they would from a man. They also expected a woman manager to see them as an equal, take an holistic view of them as people, understand the complexities of their lives, and provide flexibility to accommodate those. This suggests women expect their women managers to be relationally focused, which has the potential to cause conflict if those expectations cannot be met. My research therefore, adds to knowledge on workplace gender-based relational expectations, an area which is currently under-researched and as Litwin (2011) suggests, often goes unspoken.

### **8.2.2 Relational component to gendered career theory**

The second theoretical contribution is the advancement of gender career theory. By synthesizing RCT (relational cultural theory) with the KCM (Kaleidoscope Career Model), an important relational component is added to this career theory. While the KCM has traditionally focused on the impact of career decisions on a woman's personal relationships (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006), my research suggests that a

woman will also consider the influence a work relationship is having on her personal life. This finding expands the KCM career parameter of balance to include the impact of a woman's workplace relational context, particularly when it involves a negative relationship with a woman manager or employee.

The KCM career parameter of challenge was originally focused on a woman's desire for stimulating and challenging work (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). My research has extended the concept of challenge to include that presented by negative relationships. These relationships present a challenge, which as RCT posits, provides the opportunity for learning and growth if those involved are supported and encouraged to develop self and relational awareness (Jordan, 2004a). Furthermore, my research has provided evidence that challenge also emanates from an organisational perspective, with negative relationships often situated within times of organisational change, which places considerable stress on people (Morris, 2008) and relationships. The concept of challenge therefore, moves from solely an individual perspective to a more relationally and organisationally focused career parameter.

A relational approach expands the KCM focus of a career as primarily an individual undertaking, to situate it within its broader personal, organisational and societal context, including the organisational structures and practices that influence the careers of women, their career aspirations, the ways in which career success is defined, and the implications for women of the discourse of choice. A broader contextual approach places a degree of responsibility on organisations to increase their awareness of and accept greater responsibility for the relational environment as it affects women's careers, in order to better understand and support the careers of their women employees.

### **8.3 Practical contributions**

This research provides a number of practical contributions to organisational practice. First, the findings from Phase Two provide organisational strategies to strengthen relationships between women in the workplace and in doing so, support their careers. These strategies, which are summarised in Table 8.1 broadly fall into four main categories; education and awareness building, supporting relationships, providing career support, and effecting structural change.

The second practical contribution is in response to difficult hierarchical relationships between women. When responding to and supporting strained relationships, my research suggests organisational practitioners would benefit from taking a more holistic, context focused approach. Rather than viewing the work relationship in isolation, this approach is cognisant of the multiple contexts within which that relationship sits and the complexity of causation. When contextual factors are considered, a more specific and personalised relational approach is encouraged.

In Chapter Seven I proposed an holistic relational framework as a response to strained relationships between women managers and employees. Using this framework and the strategies identified by the participants, Table 8.2 contains a proposed reflective matrix which provides a series of questions that individuals and organisations can ask to prompt reflection, discussion and action. This matrix is not intended to provide a comprehensive or complete list, but rather a reflective starting point. The reflective process is also not linear. An identification of the need for skills, for example, will lead on to questions about the type of support needed to gain those skills. With these caveats in mind, it is hoped that this matrix will provide a tool to aid personal and organisational reflection.



**Table 8.1: Organisational strategies to strengthen relationships between women managers and employees**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Organisational strategies</b>
<b><i>Education and awareness</i></b>	<p>Education at all organisational levels about gender-based expectations and the ways in which these affect relationships.</p> <p>Development of programmes by and for women, designed to enhance self and relational awareness and reflection, and build mutually empowering relationships between women.</p> <p>Development of mechanisms to increase organisational understanding/awareness of strained relationships, including the contexts within which relationships can become strained.</p>
<b><i>Supporting relationships</i></b>	<p>Provide a safe environment through which relationship dialogue and development can occur.</p> <p>Provide access to impartial, safe and qualified support from people who understand the relational dynamics, characteristics and expectations that can be present in hierarchical relationships between women, particularly when relationships become strained.</p>
<b><i>Career support</i></b>	<p>Encourage, support and reward woman managers to take a proactive approach to supporting the careers of their women employees.</p> <p>Enable and resource women managers to support women's careers through the development of technical skills and on-the-job experience, providing career advice, building networks, and taking measures to empower and enhance self-belief and confidence.</p>
<b><i>Structural change</i></b>	<p>Review organisational culture, structure, policies and practices against the expectations women have of their women managers to ensure there is no hidden conflict or bias.</p> <p>Alter organisational structures and career pathways to better accommodate the complexity of women's careers, including the relational demands of integrating work and personal lives.</p>

Table 8.2: Reflective matrix

Theme	Individual Perspective	Organisational Perspective
<b>Developing awareness</b>	<p>Have I got the skills to recognise and reflect on my relational experiences and understand the impact it is having on me and others?</p> <p>Have I thought about the situation from the other person's perspective?</p> <p>Have I thought about how experiences from my past may be influencing my response to this relationship?</p> <p>Have I thought about how gendered expectations may be influencing this relationship?</p> <p>Do I need to talk to someone about my experiences?</p> <p>Am I able to safely tell someone in the organisation about my experiences?</p>	<p>What mechanisms can the organisation put in place to encourage and support personal and relational reflection?</p> <p>Does the organisation have safe and robust systems to identify relationship issues (or the potential for relationship issues)?</p> <p>Does the organisation have mechanisms to manage relational impacts during times of high stress (such as organisational change)?</p> <p>Is the organisation (including staff) aware of the gendered expectations women have of their relationships and the relational impact if these cannot be met?</p>
<b>Enhancing personal and relational skills</b>	<p>Do I need to improve my self-confidence?</p> <p>Am I able to ask for help?</p> <p>Am I able to communicate honestly and openly?</p> <p>Do I engage in negative self-talk and if so, do I have the skills to respond to this?</p> <p>Have I thought about whether a lack of confidence or self-doubt is affecting the other person's behaviour?</p> <p>Do I have the confidence to address relational issues at work?</p>	<p>Is the organisation aware of the confidence issues faced by many women?</p> <p>Does the organisation have safe mechanisms in place to enable and encourage open and honest conversations between women?</p> <p>Is the organisation investing in programmes to develop personal and relational skills, targeted to the needs of women?</p> <p>Are there organisational mechanisms in place to ensure compatibility of people within teams, including a willingness to act where there is an incompatibility?</p> <p>Does the organisation have the appropriate expertise to enable strained and damaged relationships to be repaired?</p>

Theme	Individual Perspective	Organisational Perspective
<p><b>Building support networks</b></p>	<p>Can I safely tell my story to someone I believe will listen?</p> <p>Do I have a support person (or persons) to help me reflect on and understand the issues?</p> <p>Do I need impartial or specialised external support?</p> <p>Is there someone within the organisation that can support me?</p> <p>Is it appropriate to use the organisation's formal dispute resolution procedures?</p>	<p>Does the organisation have impartial, safe and appropriately qualified internal and/or external support available to staff?</p> <p>Are there safe mechanisms for an employee to confidently raise relational issues about a senior staff member, recognising the power dynamics this involves?</p> <p>Is the human resources area equipped with the skills, tools and authority to identify and address relationships issues?</p> <p>Are there informal and formal mechanisms and procedures available to support the resolution of relationship issues?</p> <p>Does the organisation overly rely on formal procedures to address relational issues?</p>
<p><b>Finding acceptance</b></p>	<p>Do I accept that I need to do something about the situation (even if it is just to accept that it cannot be changed)?</p> <p>Can I do anything to change the situation and if so, am I prepared to act?</p> <p>If I cannot change the situation, what are my options?</p> <p>What support do I need to accept the situation and my response to it?</p>	<p>Does the organisation accept that it needs to invest in developing strong, mutually beneficial relationships?</p> <p>Is there organisational acceptance that it needs to be responsive and not "turn a blind eye" to relationship issues?</p>

## **8.4 Methodological contributions**

### ***8.4.1 Using narrative inquiry in management research***

Narrative inquiry responds well to the recent calls for a more context-focused approach to management and organisational research (Bamberger, 2008; Egri, 2013; Galvin, 2014). Narrative inquiry, when based in the approach of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), takes a contextual and storied approach to exploring phenomena (Caine et al., 2013). Experience is situated within its personal, organisational, societal and temporal contexts, which encourages a more complex and holistic approach to the development of knowledge. Embracing contextual complexity encourages a deeper and more holistic examination of relationships, which makes narrative inquiry particularly useful to management and organisational researchers and practitioners seeking to explore and understand workplace relationships in more depth. It is challenging though, to maintain contextual integrity when presenting research findings, particularly when those findings are to be reported in academic journals. Despite this challenge, narrative inquiry, using the approach of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), provides significant opportunities for relationally-based management research.

### ***8.4.2 Combining participant-generated creative material and interviews: Benefits and challenges***

In Phase One, research participants were asked to reflect on their relationships with women managers and/or women employees by preparing a piece of written or visual creative material which was used to inform a subsequent interview. The use of creative material provided four important benefits for my study, which may make it a useful addition to other management research. Specifically, it provided a reflexive opportunity, enabled greater participant control, established a rapport, and enabled emotional data, all of which are discussed in Table 8.3.

While the use of creative methods has many benefits, it also has some challenges. First, it does potentially restrict participation to those people who are comfortable with creative expression. While I sought to minimise this impact by providing a number of written and visual options, it is possible that some people chose not to participate in my research because they were uncomfortable with the creative component. Second, while it can lead to a greater sense of rapport between participant and researcher, there is the danger that this may stray into a relationship more appropriate to a therapeutic environment. This is a relational and ethical issue which needs to be carefully addressed in the research design. Third, analysing creative material is challenging, particularly when participants are given the freedom to select the type of material they create. Although methods exist to analyse certain types of material, such as semiotics for visual material, analysis is particularly difficult when different forms of creative material are produced (such as both visual and written forms). In this research, I used the creative materials to inform and supplement interviews and where possible, to sit alongside the reporting of research results, providing another form of information available for interpretation by the reader. Any researcher using creative methods must be aware of and prepare for the challenges, as well as the opportunities they present.

**Table 8.3: Benefits of participant generated creative material (pre-interview)**

Benefits	Discussion
<b>Reflexive opportunity</b>	<p>Participants were able to intellectually and emotionally reconnect with and reflect on their experiences. This provided an important reflexive opportunity to the participants (Spowart &amp; Nairn, 2014).</p> <p>Participants came to the interview able to discuss their experiences in some depth. This enhanced both their and my understanding of their experiences.</p>
<b>Participant control</b>	<p>Multiple options for self-expression enabled participants to give voice to their experiences in ways that were meaningful to them and gave a greater degree of control over the method of expression.</p> <p>Participants could decide in advance which experiences they wished to share and the degree of detail and emotion revealed, giving them greater control over the pace and direction of the interview.</p> <p>This control is particularly important to feminist research, which seeks to address power imbalances in the research process (Beckman, 2014).</p>
<b>Creating rapport</b>	<p>The creative material provided a snapshot of each participant's experiences, often with rich and emotional description. This provided a connection between the participant and researcher, creating a sense of rapport and fostered a trusting environment conducive to participant openness and honesty (Broussine, 2008).</p>
<b>Emotional data</b>	<p>The creative material provided a type of emotional information that is not easily accessible by the spoken word alone.</p> <p>Combining creative materials to written text adds to the understanding of experience. It enables readers to connect intellectually and emotionally.</p>

### 8.5 Areas for further research

My research has identified the connection between women's hierarchical relationships and career decisions, particularly when those relationships are perceived as negative. Further research is warranted into relationship quality to more closely consider those attributes that influence how a relationship is perceived. Future studies could build on RCT's notion of mutually empowering relationships to investigate within an organisational context, the presence (or otherwise) of the five good things (zest,

empowered action, increased sense of worth, new knowledge, and desire for more connection) (Fletcher, 2007) as an indicator of relational quality.

Longitudinal research is also warranted to understand the longer term impacts of women's hierarchical workplace relationships on their careers, particularly where there has been a negative relationship. Research suggests that any career interruptions (including a backwards step when considered in terms of organisational hierarchy) potentially result in a career penalty (O'Neil et al., 2008). It would be beneficial to undertake research with women from the time they make a career decision as a result of a negative relationship, mapping their subsequent careers over a longer period of time. This would enable a greater understanding of the longer term career implications of a negative relationship. In addition, longitudinal research could be used to understand the ways in which a negative relationship affects subsequent workplace relationships with women managers and/or employees.

Organisational context and the availability of organisational support were influencing factors emerging from this research. The organisational context as a factor influencing relationship quality, is an area requiring further research and in particular, the implications of organisational change on relationships between women managers and employees. An exploration of context should also delve more deeply into the impact organisational structures, practices, policies and culture have on relationships, particularly in light of the expectations women have of their women managers. As well, the connection between relationship quality and impact, and the availability of organisational support is another area that merits further investigation.

## **8.6 Implications**

RCT recognises that there is a power dynamic present in hierarchical relationships, which must be carefully managed (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Surrey, 1987; West, 2005).

When a relational approach is taken with emphasises interdependence and the exercise of mutual power (a “power with” approach), along with a commitment to mutual empowerment, respect and empathy, connected relationships between women managers and employees are likely to be formed. These relationships are good for the women involved, may lead to a more satisfying work experience, and at least indirectly, benefit their careers. In addition, positive working relationships can help repair the damage (particularly to self-confidence) resulting from a previous negative relationships.

As the findings demonstrate, when relational power is not carefully attended to, the fallout has the potential to result in disconnection or conflict (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Motulsky, 2010). Hierarchical structures, based on individual advancement, achievement, independence and competition lend themselves to a “power over” approach which does not promote mutuality or relational growth (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Hartling & Sparks, 2008). This is also arguably inconsistent with women’s gendered expectations of their women managers, which are based in more relationally focused behaviours. Failure to meet these gendered expectations can lead to disconnection and conflict, which RCT theorists such as Miller (1986) suggest is felt as a significant loss by women because of the importance they place on relationships. If this disconnection cannot be managed and used as a source of growth, it can impact on health and wellbeing, and detrimentally affect women’s careers. This is supported by my research which confirmed the direct and indirect career and personal impacts of negative relationships. Greater organisational and individual understanding and awareness of the propensity for negative relationships and some of the influencing contextual factors is an important first step in identifying and responding to conflict and building stronger relationships.



The main findings of this research suggest though, that while hierarchical relationships between women may have an impact on their careers, particularly if they are negative, they are not a significant factor to achieving workplace gender equity. Improving the relationships between women will not, on its own, markedly improve the representation of women at the senior management table. The participants' experiences demonstrate that women's careers are generally not progressing in a way that enables them to reach the senior executive level. Most of the participants in my research were reluctant to strive for senior management positions, which they saw as being in conflict with their desire for balance between their work and personal lives and their relational responsibilities, supporting prior research relating to the careers of women (Cabrera, 2007; Lalande et al., 2000; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Rapoport et al., 2002).

However, women's reluctance is typically hidden behind a discourse of personal responsibility and choice (Anderson et al., 2010; Lewis & Simpson, 2010, 2015; Wharton & Estevez, 2014), obscuring the structural bias that favours the careers of men.

Positive relationships are not on their own enough to disrupt gendered organisational power structures where they are built on concepts such as individual advancement, achievement, independence, competition, and the ideal worker, all of which are weighted in favour of the careers of men. While there is undoubtedly benefit in improving the quality of hierarchical relationships between women, negative relationships or a failure by women to support each other's careers are not the cause of women's lack of advancement to senior management level. Rather, there is a more fundamental problem which lies in the structures of organisations. These must change to be more accommodating of the complex factors that influence women's careers if more women are to be supported to advance to senior organisational positions.

## 8.7 Final thoughts

As I reach the end of this research journey I have reflected on an important question. Are negative relationships between women in some part to blame for their under-representation at the senior management table? The individual stories of many of my participants exposed the impact difficult and negative relationships with women managers and employees have on their career decisions, which has the potential to fuel a discourse of blame. However, while negative relationships have an impact, the participants' stories demonstrate the complexity of issues that influence their career decisions. A closer examination also reveals there are many societal and structural factors which potentially have a far more significant and long lasting influence on their careers.

The participants' stories have highlighted the importance of women's workplace relationships and the benefits at both the personal and organisational level of investing in these relationships. While the quality of hierarchical workplace relationships between women may not play a significant or direct role in delivering gender equity in the workplace, they are nevertheless important to the careers and lives of women and warrant closer examination and support as globally we continue to strive for a more fair, just and equitable environment for women in the workplace.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: Ethics Low Risk Notification



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

29 May 2014

Jane Simmonds  
2/12 Corban Avenue  
Henderson  
AUCKLAND 0612

Dear Jane

**Re: Women Managing Women – The Impact on Employment and Career Opportunities and Decisions**

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 21 May 2014.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

You are reminded that staff researchers and supervisors are fully responsible for ensuring that the information in the low risk notification has met the requirements and guidelines for submission of a low risk notification.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

**A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:**

*"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".*

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

John G O'Neill (Professor)  
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and  
Director (Research Ethics)

cc Prof Sarah Leberman, HoS  
School of Management  
PN214

Dr Margot Edwards  
School of Management  
Albany

Massey University Human Ethics Committee  
Accredited by the Health Research Council

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise

Massey University, Private Bag 11222, Palmerston North 4442, New Zealand T 06 3505573; 06 3505575 F 06 350 5622  
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz; animalethics@massey.ac.nz; gtc@massey.ac.nz www.massey.ac.nz

## APPENDIX B: Information Sheet



**SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT**  
Private Bag 102904  
North Shore  
Auckland 0745  
New Zealand

Telephone: 64 9 414 0800  
<http://management.massey.ac.nz>

4 July 2014

***Women managing women – the impact on career opportunities and decisions***

**INFORMATION SHEET**

**The research project**

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in research I am undertaking on the experiences of New Zealand women managing and being managed by women and the influence these experiences have on their career opportunities and decisions. I am undertaking this research for a PhD in Management at Massey University.

Research shows that having a good representation of men and women at senior management and board level is good for business. However, women remain under-represented at the senior levels in New Zealand organisations. As well, a gender pay gap continues to exist. Women university graduates are, on average, paid six percent less than men a year after university, rising to 17 percent within five years. Women are encouraged to look to female role models and mentors, and actively network as ways of reaching senior management positions. Research suggests though, that while mentors have a positive effect on the career advancement of women, the rewards of mentoring are greater for men than women. As well, research also suggests that not all women managers are supportive of women employees. Little is known though, on the influence relationships between women managers and employees have on their respective careers.

The aim of this project is to understand the experiences of New Zealand women who have managed or been managed by women. What impact have these relationships had on their career decisions and opportunities? Using this information, the project aims, in collaboration with the research participants, to develop strategies that women and businesses can use to strengthen and enhance relationships between women in the workplace and in doing so, the career opportunities for women. By participating in this research, I also hope that you will gain knowledge and insights that will help you in your working relationships with other women.

**Identifying participants**

In order to obtain a diverse range of experiences and perspectives, approximately 20 women will be invited to participate in this research project. A "snowball" method of recruitment is being used. This means that people from my existing networks will be asked to recommend potential participants, and they in turn will also be asked to recommend participants.

1

Participants will be women who have worked for a woman manager or have managed women employees (or both). I am seeking a good cross-section of women from, for example, different age groups, ethnicities, and employment types.

### **Research approach**

The research is being undertaken in two phases.

#### *Phase 1*

Phase one involves you preparing a timeline of your work and relevant life history, and the creation of a piece of visual or written material depicting your experiences. This material will be used as a starting point and focus for discussion during a subsequent interview. It also provides a different type of information about experiences than can be gathered verbally during an interview. The aim is not to test your artistic or creative skills, but rather to gather information about your experiences. I expect that it will take around 2 hours to prepare this material. I will give you detailed instructions on how to prepare this information.

I will then interview you. This will be held at a time and place that is convenient to you, and will last for approximately 1 hour. The interviews will, with your permission, be digitally recorded and typed up. You will have the opportunity to review the interview transcript and make changes to it. The interviews will be held between July and September 2014.

#### *Phase 2*

Phase two involves the participants coming together for a facilitated collaborative workshop to develop strategies that can be used within organisations to empower women and enhance employment and career opportunities. I will be facilitating the workshop. It is likely to be held in early to mid 2015.

#### *Travel costs*

If you chose to participate, reimbursement of your travel costs for phases 1 and 2 can be made, if needed.

### **Your Rights**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question
- withdraw from the study at any stage prior to my research being submitted for publication
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give written permission
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

I am aware that talking about some of your experiences may at times be stressful or upsetting. If you feel that discussing your experiences is going to cause you psychological harm or distress, please do not accept this invitation to participate. If you do participate in this research and begin to feel stressed or upset, then please let me know. Your involvement can be stopped at any time. You also do not need to talk about anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.

**Data Management**

The information obtained from all the participants during this research project will inform the development of my PhD. In order to respect your privacy and confidentiality:

- all details that could potentially identify you or the organisation in which you work will be removed from any research publications
- the interviews will be transcribed by a third party who will sign a confidentiality agreement
- all material gathered during phases 1 and 2 will be stored in a secure location that is accessed only by me
- the original data will be kept for five years following the completion of the research in a secure storage room at Massey University (Albany campus).

Please be aware though, that while every care will be taken to protect your identity and for your details to be kept confidential, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

**Project contacts**

Please email or phone me if you would like to be involved in this research project (my details are listed below). If you have any questions at any stage regarding this project, please contact me or my supervisors listed below.

Yours sincerely



Jane Simmonds

**Project researcher**

Jane Simmonds  
PhD Candidate  
School of Management  
021 701 536  
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**Project supervisor**

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(09) 414 0800 ext. 43398  
M.F.Edwards@massey.ac.nz

**Note:**

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 350 5249, email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz).

**APPENDIX C: Participant Consent Form**



**SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT**  
Private Bag 102904  
North Shore  
Auckland 0745  
New Zealand

Telephone: 64 9 414 0800  
<http://management.massey.ac.nz>

***Women managing women – the impact on career opportunities and decisions***

Project researcher: Jane Simmonds

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name - printed** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D: Instructions to Participants For Preparing Creative Material



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### ***Women managing women – the impact on career opportunities and decisions***

**Project researcher: Jane Simmonds**

#### **INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS**

This research seeks to understand the experiences of women managing and being managed by women and the impact this may have on career development and choices. The aim is to develop strategies that enhance relationships and support career opportunities for women.

Phase 1 of the project involves gaining an understanding of the experiences of women who have been managed by or manage other women in the workplace. In this phase, you will be asked to describe the significant relationships you have had with women managers and/or women employees and how they have impacted on you and your career.

I will interview you during phase 1. This will take around an hour. In preparation for this interview, can you please prepare the following information to bring with you to the interview. Try not to take longer than 2 hours to prepare this information.

#### **1. Timeline**

A timeline of your career as well as any life events that you feel are significant. This will enable us to place your experiences into the context of your work and life history. There is no requirement to produce this in a specific format but I have attached a template for you to use if you wish.

## 2. Written or visual material

Prepare *one piece of written or visual material* showing or describing:

- your experiences with women managers or women employees (either generally or of one or more specific experiences)
- how you feel about those experiences and relationships (now and/or at the time)
- what impact (positive or negative), if any, they have had on your career.

This material will be used as a starting point and focus for discussion during the interview. It also provides a different type of information on your experiences than can be gathered verbally during an interview. The aim is not to test your artistic or creative skills, but rather to obtain information about your experiences.

Please choose *one* of the following options.

**Visual:** On a piece of paper no larger than A3, show your experiences visually in one of these ways:

- draw or paint
- do a collage
- use scrapbooking techniques (using photos, words and images)
- prepare a photo montage of photos you have taken or found

**Written:** Prepare a short written piece, either in handwriting or typed, using one of the following techniques:

- write a letter to either a real or fictional woman employer or woman employee (the letter *will not* be sent)
- write some poetry
- write either a fictional or non-fictional short story
- write a summary of your experiences

For confidentiality and ethical reasons

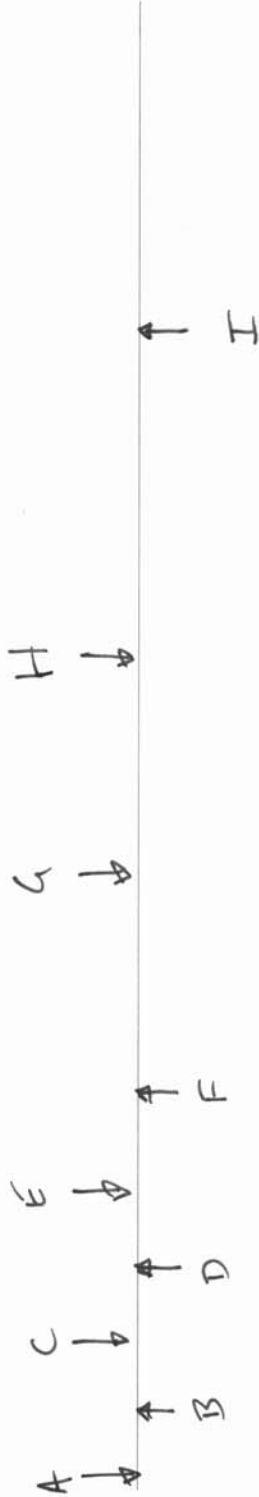
- please not include photographs of other people (other than photographs that are in the public domain, such as in magazines)
- change the names of people you write about



**Women managing women – the impact on career opportunities and decisions**

**Timeline**

Name:



	Date	Description
A	1993	Graduated with law degree. Started work at large law firm
B	1994	Left law firm. Studied at Massey - Post-Grad. Media Studies
C	1995	Moved to Hamilton - in-house solicitor at government agency
D	1996	Moved to Auckland - solicitor at large law firm
E	1997	Got married
F	1998	Left law firm to work on local government projects
G	2005	Set up public sector consultancy
H	2008	Got divorced
I	2014	Started PhD at Massey University
J		
K		
L		
M		

**APPENDIX E: Pre-Interview Observation Template**

**Women managing women – the impact on career opportunities and decisions**

**Pre-interview observations**

**Participant number:**

**Date:**

**Timeline produced?      Yes/No**

**Nature of creative material:**

**Initial impressions**

**Key issues or themes**

**Points of note**

**Areas to follow up in the interview**

**My feelings in response to the material**

## APPENDIX F: Interview Questions

### Discussion areas

1. Can you give me a brief overview of your background and your career?
2. What type of work do you do?
3. What are your job or career aspirations?
4. Tell me about the work you have produced – what was your experience of preparing it?
5. Tell me about your experiences with women managers and/or women employees
  - (a) Describe your experience(s) generally
  - (b) Tell me about a specific experience
  - (c) Why does that specific experience stand out?
  - (d) What did your work at the time involve?
  - (e) Where did you fit in the organisational hierarchy?
  - (f) What was the organisation and work environment like?
  - (g) Where does this experience fit on your timeline?
  - (h) What was happening in your life at the time?
  - (i) What impact did the experience(s) have on you, personally and professionally
  - (j) What was the woman/women like, how did she act towards you and others and what were some of the specific things she did?
  - (k) If the experiences were **positive**:
    - What was it that made it positive?
    - Have there been any long term impacts on you (including for your employment and career)?

- Has it had any influence on your career?
- Did the experience influence any of your career decisions?

(l) If the experiences were **negative**:

- Why do you think the woman manager/employee acted in the way described?
- What impact did it have on you at the time?
- What action or decisions did you take at the time, if any, and why?
- What was the result of those actions and decisions?
- How did you feel at the time and how do you feel about it now?
- Have there been any long term impacts on you (including for your employment and career)
- Has it had any influence on your career?
- Did the experience influence any of your career decisions?

(m) What advice would you give to other women in a similar situation?

6. Have your experiences affected how you feel about working with women generally?
7. What characteristics do you most value in a manager/employee and why?

Possible further questions:

- What impact, if any, do you think factors such as ethnicity and age may have had?
- What expectations do you have of women managers or women employees and why?
- Does the gender of your boss matter and if so, why?

## **APPENDIX G: Post-Interview Observation Template**

**Women managing women – the impact on career opportunities and decisions**

**Post- interview observations**

**Participant number:**

**Date:**

**Reflections on creative material**

**Observations**

**Key themes**

**Overall thoughts and impressions**

## **APPENDIX H: Phase One Data Analysis: Initial List of Parent Nodes**

- Types of experiences
- Impact of experiences on careers
- Career drivers and aspirations
- Physical and psychological impacts
- External support
- Learning from experience and developing resilience
- The importance of personal context
- Personal and professional boundaries
- Being a role model
- Advice to other women
- How experiences are interpreted at different points in time
- Telling stories benefits the storyteller
- Organisational change
- Organisational support
- Cascading impacts
- Mentoring and role models
- Gender in the workplace
- Building a sense of community

**APPENDIX I: Example of My Reflections on the Key Theme of Self-Confidence**

Two women, Kate and Talia, have a strong degree of self-confidence, which seems to have developed from an early age. For Kate, this was reinforced by her early supportive and empowering relationship with Megan. She has the confidence to “do her own thing”, reflecting that she is self-motivated, focused and has a strong belief in herself. Despite subsequent difficult relationships with women in the workplace, their self-confidence did not seem to be affected.

For six women (Steph, Lucy, Karen, Susan Helen, and Mary) their self-confidence was significantly affected by damaging relationships with women managers or employees. In Mary and Karen’s cases, their self-confidence was damaged in a matter of months, demonstrating how quickly it can be eroded by unhealthy relationships and work environments.

Two of the women, Steph and Susan, have rebuilt their self-confidence. Subsequent empowering relationships with women managers have helped Steph rebuild her self-confidence. The negative implications for her confidence, career and emotional wellbeing could have been significant if she had not received the support she needed. For Susan, her self-doubt, which developed while working for Kerry, has turned into self-belief through running her own business and taking responsibility for her own work decisions.h

Three of the women, Lucy, Helen and Mary, resigned and left organisations with significant self-doubt and a need to rebuild their confidence in the next jobs, something they were still working on when I interviewed them. Karen had just resigned from a position where she had very quickly lost her confidence, and was working through her notice period. For these four women, it is unclear how long it will take them to re-establish their self-confidence and self-belief.

Emma talked about her early struggles with self-confidence. While she is now confident in her abilities, she sees in many of the young women she manages similar issues with confidence that she has faced. She sees how this holds women back at work, particularly in the competitive environment of a law firm, and in order to support her women employees, she needs to push them out of their comfort zones at times.

The research establishes that women often struggle with self-confidence. For those that have established it from an early age, like Kate and Talia, their confidence may be less affected by negative experiences in the workplace. For those that struggle with it, difficult relationships with women managers and employees may significantly undermine their relatively fragile self-confidence. In the absence of subsequent empowering and supportive relationships such as that experienced by Steph, the damage may well take a considerable period of time to rebuild.

The fragility of confidence is something a woman manager needs to be aware of and sensitive to when interacting with her women employees. Organisations also need this awareness in order to support women managers and employees better. If confidence and self-belief is damaged, interventions are needed to rebuild this that are focused on the particular needs to the woman involved.



## APPENDIX J: Summary of Findings Sent to Participants



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June 2015

Dear

***Women managing women and the impact on careers***

**Phase 2**

Thank you for participating in the first phase of my research on the experiences of New Zealand women managing and being managed by women and the influence these experiences have on women's careers. I recently presented the preliminary findings of this research at a women in leadership conference in San Francisco and received positive feedback on the importance and value of this work. Your involvement in this study is already making a difference. I am now ready to moved into phase 2 of the study and am looking forward to working with you all again.

I have set out below a summary of the findings from phase 1. I have also attached to this letter a draft summary I have written about your experiences. This is a combination of your own words and my interpretation of what you told me in your creative work and your interview. Please feel free to make amendments to this draft summary and provide any further comments that may occur to you after reading it.

**Summary of findings from phase 1**

15 women participated in phase 1 and discussed their relationships with over 50 specific women managers or women employees, as well as providing more general views. Seven women discussed relationships that were particularly empowering, positive and supportive. They felt inspired, trusted and a sense of loyalty. From these experiences, the participants gained important technical and interpersonal skills that they have carried with them throughout their careers. These relationships were important to their careers, but none of the women linked these relationships to a specific career decision, such as decision to apply for a promotion.

11 women discussed relationships that were particularly damaging, negative and unsupportive. These relationships were generally categorised by a lack of warmth, empathy, rapport, trust, respect and loyalty. Some of the participants used language like moody, temperamental, more reactive, bitchier, short and sharp, more emotional and a tendency to take things more personally than men, to describe some of the negative characteristics of women managers or employees. Of these, seven women left the organisations they worked for, either because of this relationship, or the relationship was a significant factor in that decision to leave. While these participants generally stayed within the same sector, some took a sideways career move and others took a step

1

backwards, moving out of management positions and questioning whether they in fact wanted to manage staff in the future. For those women that stayed working within the organisation, financial and family responsibilities and commitments were a major factor in this decision. These damaging relationships impacted on the self-esteem and self-confidence of the participant, caused stress, and in some cases, affected the participant's health. Some participants discussed how a negative relationship with a woman manager detrimentally affected how they managed their own team. These experiences also, in some cases, negatively impacted on the participant's family. Despite these impacts though, many of the participants talked about what they had learnt from these experiences and the opportunities that lay ahead.

Most of the participants' worked for large organisations. A major organisational restructuring or merger was the context for many of the particularly damaging relationships the participants had with women managers or employees. For some participants, being put into roles without any consultation, time pressures and workload were contributing factors. Participants also seemed to receive little organisational support when experiencing these difficult or damaging relationships.

For most participants, their careers are generally unplanned, opportunistic and influenced by a variety of factors. These include their relationships, the desire for balance between work and personal lives, and the motivation to do work they feel passionate about and which is rewarding. Most (but not all) of the participants are not motivated by an aspiration to climb the career ladder. For some of the women, their career aspirations have changed as a result of damaging relationships with women managers or employees, with a greater focus on happiness, family, and rebuilding self-confidence and self-esteem as a priority.

## **Phase 2**

Phase 2 of the research involves participants coming together for facilitated collaborative workshops to develop strategies that can be used within organisations to empower women and enhance employment and career opportunities. I expect to run three or four small workshops at different times and venues. These are likely to be between 60 and 90 minutes long. I will be in touch with each of you to work out a date, time and venue that will suit you. I will then schedule the workshops.

I have set out below some questions that will form the starting point for these workshops.

1. *What do you expect from your relationship with a woman manager (or woman employee)?*
2. *Reflecting on your own experiences, what were the characteristics that made your relationship with a woman manager (or woman employee) either good/empowering or bad/damaging for you?*
3. *What do you think a woman manager could do to promote and support the careers of her women employees?*
4. *Reflecting on your own difficult relationships with a woman manager or woman employee (or relationships you may have witnessed), what could have enabled you to cope with that relationship better? What, if anything, could you or the organisation you worked for have done differently?*
5. *What, if anything, would encourage you to strive for a more senior management position and why (or if not, why not)?*

For those of you that are unable to attend a workshop, I would still really appreciate receiving your responses to these questions. This can either be in writing or by phone.

**Your Rights**

I want to remind you of your rights in participating in this research. You have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question
- withdraw from the study at any stage prior to my research being submitted for publication
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give written permission
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

I am aware that talking about some of your experiences may at times be stressful or upsetting. If you begin to feel stressed or upset at any stage, then please let me know. Your involvement can be stopped at any time. You also do not need to talk about anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.

I am looking forward to working with you all again as we enter phase 2 of this research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JH', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jane Hurst

Email: [j.hurst@massey.ac.nz](mailto:j.hurst@massey.ac.nz)

Phone: 021 701536

## APPENDIX K: Example of My Reflections on Phase Two Themes

Phase 2 Data Analysis  
Questions 1 and 2

### Women managing women and the impact on careers

#### Phase 2 Data Analysis

1. **What do you expect from your relationship with a woman manager (or woman employee)?**
2. **Reflecting on your own experiences, what were the characteristics that made your relationship with a woman manager (or woman employee) either good/empowering or bad/damaging for you?**

When asked what they expected from a relationship with a woman manager or woman employee, the initial response from participants is that they expect the same things from managers and employees, irrespective of gender. This includes mutual respect, honesty, and open communication. However, after more discussion, it became apparent that women do have other expectations of their women managers.

- Women managers are expected to show a greater degree of emotional intelligence, understanding, support, empathy and compassion towards their women employees than male managers.
- Women managers will treat their women employees as equals, see them as a whole person, and understand their life circumstances and their need for flexibility.

This is consistent with the characteristics of positive and negative relationships described by the participants. Women seem to expect a high degree of participatory leadership from women managers.

Areas for more consideration.

1. Women expect a higher degree of emotional intelligence, empathy and support from a woman manager, than they would from a man. The traits that are being described seem to fit in with the more participatory leadership style that is now favoured. Women are expected to act in this way, so they arguably are more likely to be noticed when they fail to do so, whereas men will more likely be noticed when they do act in this way. Women are simply meeting the expectations of other women when they exhibit these leadership characteristics whereas men are exceeding expectations. This is consistent with research (Rhee and Sigler, 2015) which suggests that men who exhibit participatory leadership styles will be viewed more favourably than women who do so.

1

Phase 2 Data Analysis  
Questions 1 and 2

2. The difficulty women face within an organisational hierarchy when they display emotional intelligence, as these characteristics may not be rewarded. As well, while women may expect their women managers to take a holistic approach, understand their life circumstances and need for flexibility, the organisational culture, policies and practices may not support the woman manager to do this.
3. Not all women work in this way. However, they are more likely to be viewed negatively by other women if they have a more authoritarian and transactional style.
4. Women seem to have expectations around equality which may place a strain on relationships between women within a male-dominated hierarchical organisational structure and culture.
5. The participants described an expectation of open communication between a woman manager and her employees, including where it relates to conflict and difference. Are women comfortable with and supported to have frank conversations on difficult issues when it can be perceived as a confrontation and do organisational processes enable women managers to seek meaningful input and provide timely information to their employees?
6. There is an expectation that women managers will take a holistic approach to their women employees, understand their life circumstances, and get to know the whole person. Does this go both ways? To what extent should women employees understand the stresses and constraints their woman manager is operating under and show empathy towards her?