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**Third culture young women:
Understanding their life experiences and leadership perspectives**

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Abstract

Globalisation influences how leadership is understood and practiced and impacts on culturally diverse interactions in New Zealand communities. Examining leadership and intersecting diversity with regards to culture, gender and age could provide a richer understanding of how identity impacts on leadership. Youth are increasingly growing up in multicultural communities, giving rise to a phenomenon widely referred to as Third Culture Kids (TCKs) – adolescents who grow up in cultures outside of their home culture. To date there is no research on the leadership perspectives and development needs of TCKs, and although there are programmes and studies focusing on leadership development for young women, very few of these initiatives focus on culturally diverse young women. This research focused on examining the diverse lifeworlds of third culture young women to appreciate how their intersecting experiences and perspectives influenced their leadership understanding.

Using an interpretive phenomenological approach, four third culture young women, selected from a leadership programme for Year 13 (16 year old) young women, were interviewed and asked questions that explored their experiences and perspectives regarding being third culture individuals, young women, and leaders. The responses were analysed using a modified version of Ashworth's (2003) phenomenological framework to reveal that diverse young women have an awareness of the gendered expectations that society constructs, have an ability to navigate cultural differences, and are able to strategize how to interact with various social groups as a result of their diverse life experiences and intersecting identities. Ultimately, their core values, life experiences, and diverse perspectives as culturally distinct adolescent women shape their leadership understanding and practice.

This study concludes that third culture young women are embodying values, perspectives, skills and strategies that suggest their potential as emerging leaders in their communities and future aspirations aligned with their leadership purpose of achieving personal success and helping others. In conclusion there is a need for greater application from academics and practitioners of intersectionality into leadership studies and practice. Recommendations were made with regards to leadership research and development programmes in the future and how these can explore the leadership potential of young, culturally diverse women like young TCK women.

Keywords: third culture, leadership, youth, women, intersectionality

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