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"She's me, the whole of me":

Constructing mentoring as a feminine gendered connection for women's professional identity

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

Master of Science

in

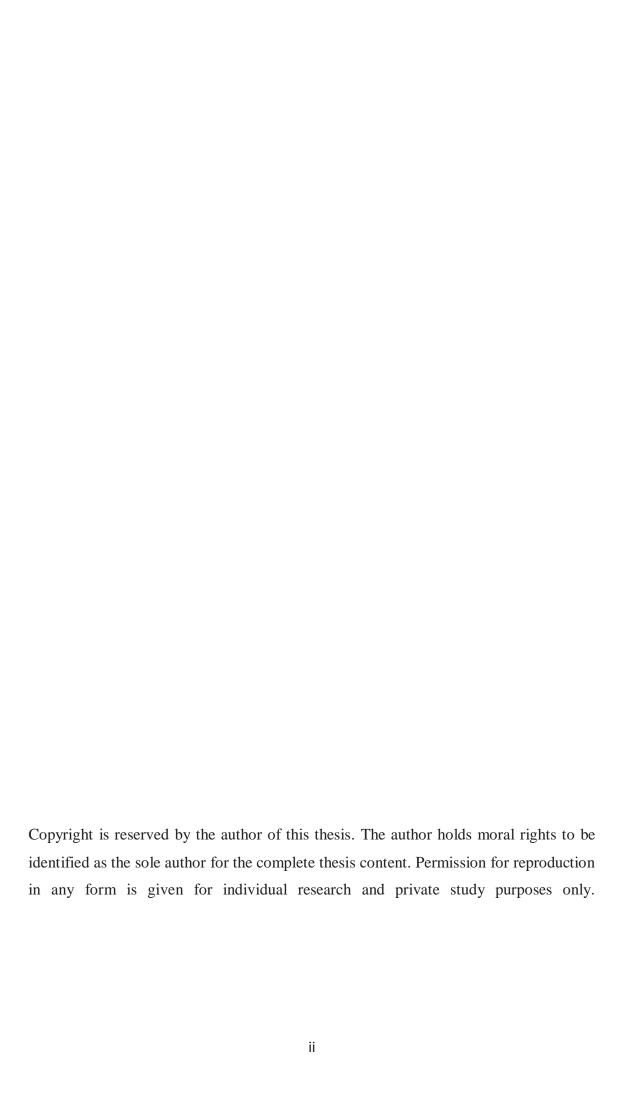
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Bianca Claire Haemmerle

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Abstract

Despite the increased numbers of women in the New Zealand labour market, gendered segregation of the workforce, pay inequality and a lack of women in leadership roles are still gendered issues facing women in employment today.

Mentoring is a widely accepted strategy to improve women's employment issues and career opportunities. While the promise of mentoring seems to offer women many rewards at work, this study reveals mentoring for women is complex, with gender implicated in the complexities.

This study is informed by feminist poststructuralist theory. The basis for analysis is a Foucauldian Discourse framework. Unstructured, conversational interviews with nine New Zealand, mid-career, professional women were used to gather mentoring narratives at work. The women discursively drew on various constructions of a 'connection'. Connectedness talk with mentors was constrained and/or enabled through two key elements of mentoring: institutionalised relationships and positioning.

Institutional mentoring with managers and partners as mentors and the resulting power relations, constrain the women's ability to make meaningful connections with mentors. Importantly, women actively position themselves and their women mentors through feminine discourse. This takes into account the psycho-social and emotional qualities of women at work and their various work-mothering responsibilities. A 'feminine gendered connection' enables the women to positively transform how they view themselves and their professional identity at work.

Dedication

To my mother, friend and mentor -

Words cannot express my gratitude, love and admiration I have for you. I am eternally grateful for everything you have sacrificed in order to get me here. You have tirelessly supported me and given me strength to keep persevering throughout this journey, and I wouldn't know where I would be in this world without you. You are courageous, loyal and a role model. I aspire to be like you.

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My research project was deemed 'Low Risk' from the Massey University Ethics Committee.

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