Female Teacher Identities and Leadership Aspirations in Neoliberal Times

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Abstract: *In a neoliberal economic environment, people are seen as and required to be self-managing and entrepreneurial in regard to their career and work advancement. Where neoliberalism prioritises individual freedom, institutions aid the career advancement of individuals by providing a framework that creates and preserves such practices. What happens, then, when women are placed in a hierarchical and patriarchal schooling system that consistently privileges men over women in their careers and in positions of power? This paper analyses the leadership experiences and observations of women in boys' secondary schools as they negotiate leadership aspirations in male-centred environments while often faced with the reality that their inability to progress their careers has more to do with gender bias than ability. This work draws on interviews with 36 female teachers and leaders in six boys' secondary schools in an Australian city. Analysis of the interviews suggest that the women found the 'niche' of being 'caring' to position themselves differently to male counterparts. This identification did not give them access to leadership roles or change the attitude of the male leaders to include them in leadership. It did though allow them to see themselves as relevant and essential to the organisation to which they belonged and self- managing within the few options open to them in the workplace.*

Key Words: Leadership, women and leadership, career advancement, patriarchy, neoliberalism, female teachers

Introduction

In this paper, we explore the space between the demands female teachers face in positioning themselves within discourses espoused by neoliberalism that focus on the need to be self-managing (Rose 1998; 1999a) and the inherent barriers present when aspiring to leadership roles. Through a series of interviews with women in boys' schools, we see how female teachers position themselves as 'caring' to manage and maintain their locus in a hegemonic hierarchy. When denied career advancement through the patriarchal system, however, they are still required to see themselves as 'managing' their careers in ways that do not conflict with the aspirations of their male colleagues. Albeit teaching has historically been perceived as women's work often associated with motherhood within broader debates on gender equality, what is referred to as the *feminisation of teaching* has in fact contributed to economic empowerment of women worldwide, solidifying opportunities for employment, particularly in developing countries. So, whilst improving the wellbeing and outcomes for some, teaching continues to be viewed as a gendered profession aligned with a so-called maternal instinct. Where women teach, men in contrast occupy the higher paid roles, charged with the responsibility of leading the profession (Strober & Tyack 1980).

Although leadership ought not to be conflated between sex and gender, this paper explores how boys' schools exercise leadership in a patriarchal way, often excluding women and privileging men and perpetuating 'masculine' leadership. In a patriarchal environment, a woman's style of leadership is typically seen to be 'softer', flexible, democratic, valuing openness, caring and compassionate and focused on relationships, none of which appears to be essential within linear hierarchical models. Within this, Nodding's (1984) '*ethic of care*' is explored, which acknowledges that personal relationships, kindness, compassion and commitment are important aspects of teaching and leadership, and that caring *for* another in turn teaches one to care *about* others. Finally, in this paper we explore how female teachers have constructed their teacher and leader identities within discourses that are available to them in a neoliberal framework. We discover how the positioning of women to be self-managing of their career has reinforced a series of gender stereotypes, such as the need for women to be nurturing and caring, as no other space was possible for them in the patriarchal system present in a boys' school. Within that, though, they begin to articulate a way of leading that while being based on gender stereotypes, affirms their very important role in the school.

Teaching and Educational Leadership-Gendered Pathways

History reminds us that whilst teaching was once the domain of the educated man in most western industrial nations, by the mid-19th century opportunities for women had improved and many saw teaching as an 'independent and relatively autonomous occupational niche' (Blackmore 1999: 24). Women embraced the prospect of a public profession and by the end of the 19th century, dominated numbers. What was seen as the feminisation of teaching led to a gendered deficit notion of the nature of the work, with most male teachers assuming leadership and supervisory roles or leaving the occupation altogether. Consequently, teaching was understood to be women's work, a nurturing and gentle role befitting women and often associated with motherhood. Teaching was considered 'an extension of the productive and reproductive labour women engaged in at home' (Apple 1986: 60), therefore women's supposed nurturing capabilities and natural empathetic qualities and the relatively low salaries made them ideally suited for what was considered a respectable occupation. Apple (1986) suggests there has always been a connection between 'teaching and the ideologies surrounding domesticity and the definition of women's proper place' (p. 61). 'Women had only a few choices of occupation; and compared with most- laundering, sewing, cleaning, or working in a factory – teaching offered numerous attractions' (Apple 1986: 66).

A woman's suitability to teaching, based on her natural mothering skills, had become an opportunity and a handicap by the late-19th century. On the one hand, teaching provided possibilities for the unmarried woman: formal education and training, autonomy, financial independence and access to the middle class before the responsibility of marriage and family. But on the other hand, having young unmarried women in schools required policing. Women's work was subject to patriarchal control. Male supervisors regulated and managed women, whose sexuality posed a risk and distraction during their short-lived independence prior to marriage (Blackmore 1999). While women made up the majority of the teaching labour market, their aspirations were by and large invisible. With a paternal gaze maintaining a stronghold on women's lives both in and out of the classroom, prospects for women wishing to pursue school leadership was limited. Consequently, whilst women were typically kept busy in the classroom, men occupied the higher paid roles, charged with the responsibility of leading the profession (Strober & Tyack 1980).

Despite the economic and technological advances of the 21st century, gendered notions of teaching and school leadership continue to limit career opportunities for women. Much of the literature continues to highlight perceived 'natural' associations between sex and gender roles, which see the education of children as an extension of the caring of children, considered a natural female trait (Drudy, Martin, Woods & O'Flynn 2005). The assumption that *motherhood* and teaching are inextricably linked has not only impacted on teaching as a *profession*, but moreover has inhibited opportunities for women aspiring to leadership roles. In fact, where one would assume that with women dominating the profession numerically, there ought to be high numbers in leadership, this is far from true (Moreau, Osgood & Halsall 2007).

Researchers from across the globe have documented the gender disparity in school leadership. While numerically, women dominate the teaching profession (Moreau, Osgood & Halsall 2007; Shakeshaft 1989), there are significantly fewer women moving to leadership roles. In the United States, women are said to make up 75 per cent of teachers, and account for 50 per cent of principal positions, whilst in the United Kingdom men are three times more likely to achieve a principal position than women (Coleman 2002). In Australia, women account for 70 per cent of the (FTE) teaching force (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011) but only 39 per cent of secondary school principals (OECD 2014a, 2014b). Similar results can be seen globally, with a study of Germany, Africa, Central America and China concluding that, 'whether or not therefore the profession is female dominated numerically, formal decision-making is in the hands of men … educational administration is still seen as a masculine occupation in many countries' (Davies 1990: 62).

Whilst research on gender binaries and hierarchy has suggested that the disparity of female leaders comes down to choice (Acker 1983), with women opting against leadership roles due to lack of ambition and family commitments (Lacey 2003), more recent research in keeping with a neoliberal discourse of self-management indicates a lack of agency amongst women in their approach to their occupation, with career trajectories not self-determined (Smith 2011). Women are often not considered for leadership and more often than not this has more to do with fixed role stereotypes than ability.

Ways of Leading

Lazar (2005) suggests that in contemporary western society, feminism as a social movement is a movement of the past. She goes on to suggest that the goals of feminism have been attained, such as the right to education, participation in the workforce and control over reproduction through safe contraception. Tasker and Negra (2007) posit that these successes have made feminism irrelevant to today, as the goals have become normalised within our contemporary western society. Instead, feminist ideas of empowerment, agency and success for women across all aspects of their life including work have become characteristics of contemporary or new femininities (Kauppinen 2013; Mc Robbie, 2009). Despite these claims, caution needs to be exercised to not overstate the 'extent to which the "empowerment" attaching to new femininities grants its practitioners access to social power that can rework gender hierarchy' (Budgeon, 2014: 331). In a comment of great relevance for the women in our study, Budgeon further notes 'gender evidently remains a fundamentally binary structure …. in a manner that preserves gender hierarchy' (p. 331).

Gender hierarchy is all too evident when discussing leadership, and especially women's leadership. Leadership is defined as 'a process of influence in regard to changing people's values, attitudes, approaches, behaviours and ideologies' (Uhl-Bien 2006: 668). However, notions of educational leadership, much to the detriment of both sexes, have often taken a rather bleak reductive view of gender more commonly associated with masculinity (Schein 1980). Traditional constructs of leadership continue to emphasise what are seen as masculine constructs, with an emphasis on individualism, autonomy, dominance, rationality and heroism (Cox 1996; Grint 2011). Men are portrayed as typically paternalistic and authoritarian in their leadership approach, whilst women are seen to be more people orientated (Rigg & Sparrow 1994). Sinclair (2014) suggests there is an emerging interest in collaborative, empowered or relational leadership rather than a focus on the heroic and individualist focus of the charismatic leader. Over the years, this has been defined as a style of leadership practiced by women, with women leaders being seen as more collaborative, flexible, democratic and communicative than male leaders (Blackmore 1999; Eagley 2007). Existing research posits that female leaders tend to place greater emphasis on relationships, adopting a more consultative approach, whilst their male counterparts place greater focus on the task at hand, adopting less democratic means of leading (Blackmore 1999; Shakeshaft 1989). The experience of leadership may play out differently for women than men, particularly when women follow men in leadership roles that are shaped by a masculine leadership discourse (Eagley 2007).

Emerging from a desire to refocus the fundamental purpose of education to a moral one, Noddings (1984) developed the notion of education as caring. The focus on *care* is a feminine ethic used as a means of contextualising the moral significance of relationships. Noddings (1984) acknowledges personal relationships, kindness, compassion and commitment as important aspects of teaching. What she termed an *ethic of care* – a feminist approach to ethics focused on caring – is seen to foster competent, caring, loving relationships, and is regarded as 'the very bedrock of all successful education' (Noddings 1992: xiv). Noddings (2013) proposes that we ought to place greater emphasis on cooperation, connection, and critical and creative thinking in schools. As teachers and leaders, educators must shift their focus from identifying who is achieving to a more critical investigation into creating opportunities for students through reciprocal caring. Whilst the notion of an ethic of care recognises that personal relationships, kindness, compassion and commitment are important within education, there has been considerable criticism of its impact on contemporary feminist thought (Blackmore 1999; Keller 1995). Noddings' (1984) ethic of care places great importance on caring in the educative process, and in doing so reinforces traditional gender role stereotypes. With teaching burdened by the stigma of being feminised work, suggestions that female teachers and leaders ought to focus their approach on care which, by and large, derives from motherhood devalues the work of educators and limits how women carry out leadership.

There continues to be considerable debate around ways of leading, with generalisations made about female approaches or male approaches to leadership. Studies of leadership styles amongst women and men have found sameness and difference between the sexes, but overall women leaders are said to be more participative and democratic than men (Eagley & Johnson 1990). Lott (2007) argues the need to consider within-gender difference in regard to leadership behaviour, with factors in the leader's social context leading to variability in leadership style and approach. Blackmore (1999) further cautions that a focus on women's leadership styles can lead to 'universalizing the category of women' where women are still left to complement men, as well as essentialising practice to be 'naturally female and not constituted through the social practices of the contexts that shape what they are doing' (p. 59). This in turn can take the focus away from the structure and hierarchy present in the workplace, and place the focus back on the women needing to accommodate and complement male leadership roles.

In contrast, there is research which suggests that gender has no impact on the leadership traits of men and women (Kolb 1999; Oshagbemi & Gill 2003). Fuller (2015) suggests growing traction toward an androgynous approach to leadership adopted by both men and women which neither limits nor classifies maleness and femaleness. Such a tenuous polarisation of leadership styles works to perpetuate and paralyse contemporary understandings of gender. Rather, the focus ought to be on a set of generic competencies which become markers or benchmarks for aspiring leaders. Blackmore (1999) calls for 'an approach which views emotion and reason, justice and care as integral to each other, creates possibilities to develop feminist discourses of leadership that interrogate male/female dualisms, that offer substantive ethical positions but that can also provide an ongoing analysis of their political effects' (p.56).

Governmentality and Neoliberalism

The interplay between gender binaries and patriarchal hierarchy is complex and further complicated by how women and men may take up and respond to neoliberal discourses in their lives. The economic theory of neoliberalism involves the deregulation of markets and limited government provision of previously provided state support (Mizen 2002). In a user-pays welfare system, responsibility for wellbeing is appropriated as an individual responsibility. Advocates of economic neoliberalism have maintained a long-standing view that benefits to the market through privatisation, liberalisation and deregulation far outweigh any potential unethical commercialisation, economic havoc or social inequality (Brown 2015). But further to this economic impact, neoliberalism is an example of a discourse that becomes a process of governing as individual conduct is aligned with the socioeconomic objectives of the state.

Foucault (1988) developed the concept of governmentality as a way of thinking about power differently, where power is internalised rather than being imposed from outside. Governmentality has therefore been described as the 'the art of governance' (Foucault 1980) and 'government at a distance' (Miller & Rose 1993). It has further been described by theorists (Edwards 1997; Rose 1999a) at a broader social level as a mentality where the aims and the purposes of government are linked with the technologies of governing, through programmes, practices and techniques, and where technologies of the self interact with the technologies of governing. Rose (1996, 1998) describes this as occurring through the project for responsible citizenship being linked with the individuals' project for themselves. Power is therefore exercised through seduction rather than repression and through 'technologies of self' (disciplinary practices) that are described as self-steering mechanisms or practices such as self-reflection and self-examination in which individuals experience, understand, judge, evaluate and conduct themselves (Foucault 1988; Rose 1996).

In the social order of neoliberalism, subjects both position themselves and are positioned as 'entrepreneurial selves'. The term 'entrepreneurial self' is then used to describe the formation of a dominant subjectivity that includes engaging reflexively and continuously in the processes of constructing the self as a choice-maker (Kelly 2006). As Rose (1999a) theorises, neoliberalism functions at the level of individual subjects, who while in fact being extensively governed, define themselves as free. As Davies (2006: 436) argues, neoliberalism therefore governs by:

> [c]onvincing students and workers that there is no choice at a systemic level. Instead their power lies in their individual choices to become appropriate and successful within that (inevitable) system.

The concept of enterprise designates 'an array of rules for the conduct of one's everyday existence: energy, initiative, ambition, calculation and personal responsibility' (Rose 1996: 155). People are positioned as enterprising in which the capacity to choose is positioned as desirable and good. A progressive society therefore obligates modern individuals to be free to enact their lives as they desire (Rose 1999a). Rose (1998: 154) elaborates further:

> The enterprising self will make an enterprise of its life, seek to maximize its own human capital, project itself a future and seek to shape itself in order to become what it wishes to be. Thus the enterprising self is thus both an active self and a calculating self, a self that calculates about itself and acts upon itself in order to better itself.

Edwards (2002: 357) argues it is the 'ethos of enterprise that helps to re-shape subjectivity through self-fashioning in the processes of governing in advanced liberalism'. The ethos of enterprise is produced through technologies that, while not wholly deterministic, seek to govern the conduct of individuals. These technologies seek to produce individualised, responsibilised subjects. Governing in this way is not determining of people's subjectivities but, through the exercise of choice on the part of the individual, fosters and promotes certain attributes such as reflexivity, active citizenship and social responsibility (Edwards 2002; Rose 1998), as well as enabling individuals to develop their capacities to look after themselves (Edwards 2002). The neoliberal individual is therefore described as free from geographical, class or gendered constraints (Walkerdine 2003), with anyone able to gain positional advantage if they try hard enough (Nairn & Higgins 2007).

The entrepreneurial spirit, while present in many parts of life, is particularly evident in the world of work (Kauppinen 2013; Stokes 2012). Neoliberal power works through well-regulated freedoms and empowerment of individuals to act as appropriate neoliberal subjects, rather than through coercion or oppression (Rose 1998). In turn, in the workplace, success lies not in disciplining workers to bring about obedience but rather in making sure their aspirations fall into line with the objectives of the organisation and 'empowering the employees to fulfil their own needs' (Kauppinen 2013: 137). With the alignment of the needs of the organisation and the individual, 'the more the individual fulfils him or herself, the greater the benefit to the company' (Rose 1999b: 56).

Through this approach to both economic structure and governing from within, we have what Brown (2015: 48-49) defines as a:

> [p]aradox of neoliberalism as a global phenomenon, ubiquitous and omnipresent, yet disunified and non-identical with itself. This dappled, striated, and flickering complexion is also the face of an order replete with contradiction and disavowal, structuring markets it claims to liberate from structure, intensely governing subjects it claims to free from government, strengthening and re-tasking states it claims to abjure.

Methodology

In order to explore female teacher identities and leadership aspirations, the lived experiences of female teachers as entrepreneurial selves are examined to better understand whether they possess *choice* and *freedom* in realising their aspirations. Whilst there is a body of research focused on the impact of a feminised teaching workforce, little attention has been placed on the experiences of female teachers when working in single-sex male environments and the impact of a patriarchal environment on their opportunities and ambitions.

This paper emerges from research into the experiences of female teachers and leaders by focusing on fieldwork conducted across six boys' schools within the state of Victoria, Australia. Deliberate efforts were made to ensure that the construction of the study sample consisted of teachers with various backgrounds, experience and roles across schools with student populations from diverse racial, socioeconomic and geographical backgrounds. The sample purposefully included Catholic, independent and government schools. Six female teachers in each school were interviewed, resulting in a total of 36 teachers who participated in the study. As part of the consent form, interested participants were asked to identify their role at the school, how many years they had been teaching there and how many years they had been teaching in total. These criteria were then used to select a mix of six participants from each school to provide a rich experience base for the research in terms of teaching and leadership service.

A constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach (Charmaz 1995, 2002, 2006) was adopted, with data collected using a qualitative research design consisting of semi-structured interviews with the sample of female teachers and leaders. This method of interviewing became a valuable means of deriving a sense of the participants' subjective experience, and given the grounded, open-ended and exploratory nature of the interviews, the rich data generated provided an opportunity for complex analyses and reporting.

The interview was divided into two stages. The first stage required personal information such as the participant's name, age, school, years of teaching experience, teaching background and current role in the school. This information provided a starting point for the interview, establishing an initial discussion which then eased the interview into the next stage. The second stage centred on motivational factors in applying for their current job, challenges and difficulties, likes and dislikes, and issues and experiences confronted whilst working in an all-boys' school. The research focus for this stage of the interview was supported through the design of broad questions that sought to explore which aspects about working in boys' schools most affect female teachers, whether they feel supported and if in fact there are difficulties in obtaining senior leadership roles in boys' schools. The questions in the interviews focused on understanding each participant's experience of working in a boys' school. They were purposefully non-prescriptive in order not to drive the participants to preconceived conclusions, and broadly formulated in order to allow for individual interpretation. As data emerged, it became clear that many of the experiences of the participants in the study were similar, and through a process of coding, a set of common themes emerged which included: teaching, career advancement and leading in male-dominated work environments.

Findings and Discussion

It has been argued that neoliberalism governs by people making a choice to 'become appropriate and successful within that (inevitable) system' (Davies 2006: 436). This notion assumes a degree of control of one's destiny, the freedom to determine career trajectories. If this is the case, where, then, does that leave the women in this study located in traditional boys' schools who have been, apart from a few exceptions, cut out of leadership in a patriarchal schooling system?

The following section combines the findings from the interview data with discussion. Analysis of the interview data provides an exploration of the experiences of female teachers as they themselves have pursued leadership or have witnessed the futile efforts of their female colleagues who aspire to senior roles leading a boys' school. The women described a perceived need and desire to lead.

They described how this was then performed through the role of a responsible neoliberal subject with a focus on caring. This approach was viewed as a distinct but complementary way of leading not often seen or valorised in patriarchal institutions.

The women interviewed, many of whom had been teaching for years at their school, had aspired to leadership but had chosen not to leave when unsuccessful. Akin to an ethic of care, they spoke about what was unique in terms of a woman's way of leading – what they felt that they could contribute to the school that they felt the men could not. A strong sense of social responsibility to both the organisation and the boys was strongly represented. As Sophie, an early career teacher, commented:

> I think that's what we're missing down there is just, Year 7 and 8 particularly, the two men are very similar in personalities and pretty officious and I just think they need a female to tender things a bit. But they've both got assistants who are young males, well one's a young male, we got a new teacher here but an old boy of the school, and the other one's a very sort of almost army-like bloke and they just hit things in a way that I think there's something lacking (Sophie, School A, teacher).

But it was not just acting with a sense of social responsibility to the organisation. Daphne, who had been teaching boys for the last ten years, commented on how it was the personal responsibility (part of the ethic of care) of women to fill that gap and self-manage in a male-dominated environment. She said:

> Well I just think that women bring to a teaching environment something that the men don't and I think that there is great strength in that and that we just have to learn to use it. I think women, I suppose I'm generalising here, but I think that often women don't necessarily need to see themselves out the front leading, which has its disadvantages, but I think also it says something about women, just get on with it and do it (Daphne, School D, teacher).

The participants also spoke about filling a gap left by the male teachers. They described their impact on students as *real, different* and *meaningful*. Their connections with students led to a sense of achievement where they felt they had a positive impact on them, and as Rose (1999b) notes, 'the more the individual fulfils him or herself, the greater the benefit to the company' (p. 56). Comments included:

> You do have an impact because there's not a lot of women around, it's a very blokey environment and so as a woman I think you also have the advantage of being able to have a real impact on the boys in a way that sometimes men can't (Julie, School D, faculty head).
>
> I have a real sense that we are teaching the boys how to respect females. Like I feel our role is just so important, that the way they treat us will be the way that they will treat their wives, maybe the way they're treating mum at home and sisters at home. I think we have such an important role to play that I think we should acknowledge our gender, acknowledge that we do go about things in a different way (Rose, School C, teacher).

As Rose (1999a) theorises, neoliberalism functions at the level of individual subjects who, despite being extensively governed, define themselves as free. Kate, an experienced teacher and year-level coordinator, maintains that despite the lack of leadership opportunities at her school, female teachers have a positional advantage in filling the gap left by male teachers. She comments: "I believe very strongly in the female advantage" *(Kate, School B, year-level coordinator).*

She went on to say that women consistently positioned themselves as caring for the boys, focusing on building relationships in a way that their male colleagues were not able to do. She said:

> Well I think it's with relationships. You build relationships with the boys. You let them know that you care about them, you want them to do well. And there are times when I just find, you know, a boy can come in my office and you can read him and you say is everything alright, and they're coming in to sign because they're late and then you have a conversation and it leads to something and suddenly they're sitting down and telling you mum and dad have just separated….And you have a good intuition to pick up those sorts of things and I think women are very good at that, at reading the boys (Kate, School B, year-level coordinator).

Despite positioning themselves as appearing to be 'able to choose' to pursue a leadership role in their school, the women were unable to challenge the male-dominated hierarchy existing in the boys' schools where they were positioned as 'the other'. Female teachers' ambitions to break into the positions held by the men, often the 'old boys' of the school, were hindered by stereotyped views of what was deemed to be second rate leadership framed through a position of caring for the boys, and not the tough leadership required in heading a male dominated setting. Women were often overlooked even though they saw themselves as providing the care and compassion that was often lacking in patriarchal settings. For these women, their identity as carer is defined by the social and historical context of which they are a part (Stokes, Aaltonen & Coffey 2015). As Teresa commented:

> It would be nicer to see a few more women in positions of leadership. I think so. Only because I think sometimes what message can that send the boys in the community if for instance the leadership team's up on stage and they're all male, like everyone sitting up there is a male. And at the end of year we have this whole presentation night where all House Heads and Coordinators and whatever go up and there's like there's two rows of men and there's two women up there. So little things like that I think I wonder what message that sends to the boys and the community (Teresa, School E, teacher).

While Sophie, an early career teacher, commented:

> But at the same time I do believe that when you take a group of people together to talk through an issue, women just come at things from a different angle. They can see things that maybe others can't see, and I think we miss out on something when we don't have a female perspective being provided in key leadership decisions in this college (Sophie, School A, teacher).

For the following woman, who was asked to step in as the acting deputy headmaster of the school whilst they appointed a permanent replacement, her objective was still focused on caring for the boys through what she considered a female approach to leadership in the school, even when dealing with matters of discipline.

> And I spoke at a whole school assembly which we have here every Monday and I put a lot of thought into it. I had to speak about uniform … but I really put a lot of thought into how I'd approach it and it was said to me that I approached it in a very different way, and I talked about the need to belong and why we wear a uniform and how the boys come from such different backgrounds that we're trying to create community here and one way of doing that is putting aside the differences of their fashion and hair and all the rest of it and to comply with that in order for us to then actually deal with them as individuals. And both the boys and staff thought that that was a different approach and I think it's a female approach to how we approach topics. So it was great to have that opportunity …(Jane, School F, acting deputy headmaster).

Jane went on to discuss the unspoken understanding that despite 'acting' in the role, she would never be appointed deputy headmaster because she was a woman. From our discussion, there appeared to be an acceptance of the institutionalised privilege and discrimination as to who attained key leadership roles, and if you were an 'old boy' of the school with a desire to lead, you were assured that those opportunities would be possible.

Despite a desire to lead and the distinction women made in terms of their approach to leadership, analysis of the interviews suggest that boys' schools today remain transfixed by a hierarchy of male domination in senior leadership positions. Decisions are made by men and carried out by women, and regardless of aspiration, freedom of choice and opportunity is absent:

> Women apply; they just don't get the job, they just don't get the job (Joanne, School F, teacher).

Evident across all schools, except for one, was an unspoken 'glass ceiling', seen to prevent female teachers from attaining a position in senior leadership. Interestingly, the one school where female teachers were able to access middle management and senior leadership roles was situated in a multicultural residential and industrial suburb in the outer west of the city. Analysis of the interviews disclosed that the school experiences a high turnover of staff which opens up opportunities for early-career and female teachers. Yolanda, an early-career teacher, commented:

> I guess I was a bit surprised by that actually, now that you mention it, when I came here, because my experience of boys' schools like the ones that friends and brothers and so forth went to, there probably was much more of that predominately male staff, definitely male in the upper management positions. So I guess here is kind of unique (Yolanda, School D, teacher).

Jessica, also an early-career teacher, talked about how she was encouraged to apply for a middle management role in her second year at the school that she would not have considered otherwise. She said:

> Yeah, like it's noticeable that there's a lot of males that hold the positions, so until this year there's two of us who are House leaders, but last year there were four males and one female. …(the previous incumbent) I mean she got pregnant, she actually came to me and said I'm putting your name up for the position because I want a female, I don't want them to pick another male because then there'd be no females there….And when [name] came to me and said I want a female to take my spot, I hadn't really thought of it until she'd said that to me, but yeah, it is important that they have a female role model and a female leader and it's not just all males (Jessica, School D, year-level coordinator).

Another teacher spoke about the difference female leaders made to the overall feeling in the school. She described a more pastoral approach to students which was welcomed and appreciated by the school principal:

> It would never have occurred to me that they wouldn't respect any of the senior women. I think once they know you … I think yeah there are male teachers they play up for and female teachers they wouldn't put a foot wrong for. I think it's only maybe, you know, generally most of the time it's not about your gender and in this school I don't think it's an issue really with the teachers or students. I think [Principal] is quite supportive of women. I've heard him talk about … I think he thinks that women bring something else to the classroom, I think he likes … I've heard him talk about the teaching style or the classroom management style not being as aggressive. I think in the olden days this school I think the

> male teachers … I think there was a culture where it was quite aggressive and threatening and the students behaved because they were scared not to. I don't know but I get the impression that there are a lot of women here working now and the culture has changed … we get a lot of PD on classroom management, it's all very pastoral, there's no raising voices, it's really discouraged, we've got a really … our approach to classroom management is really far removed from that kind of aggressive, threatening style. And I think he sees that as something women bring or women are better, I don't know what it is. But he said something once a few years ago and I just thought, you know, that's the impression I got (Andrea, School D, teacher).

Unlike this school, where the principal welcomed women as part of the leadership of the school (although still for their pastoral, less aggressive manner), all other schools were seen to be unwilling to create gender balance. Teachers reported that they were blocked as a direct result of the existing leadership structures in their schools. This male-centred leadership structure was seen to be a hindrance to change. Catherine, for example, said:

> It's still a very, very male oriented environment. Our Headmaster is a male and our Deputy is a male. Our Admin is a male; our Curriculum Coordinator' is a male. And if you go to Assembly here, the official party are all male and it's been the case forever, really it has … When they sit in Assembly, there are no women on that stage, (just) men. And that has gone on for year after year after year … I mean, it'd be great to have a male Deputy and a female Deputy, but not in my lifetime (Catherine, School F, teacher).

For these women, their careers were not in their own hands – they lacked agency and choice. Catherine also described the paradox of watching the recruitment process knowing the outcome, remarking:

> They will always say best person for the job because that covers themselves … you know, you can read immediately who's going to get the next job. It's that clear … I think, in terms of trying to get a position of responsibility, … they won't say it clearly, but they'll always look at the males and see if a man could do the job: they get in first (Catherine, School F, teacher).

Token appointments were seen to be offered to women. Female teachers were more likely to be successful in attaining a position as an assistant to a male year-level coordinator, head of house or faculty head. Teachers also noted that female teachers were generally only given leadership roles in faculty areas that already had a predominance of women, such as the English faculty.

Reinforcing long-held views of systemic gender bias (Tallerico & Burstyn 1996; Strober & Tyack 1980), several teachers described promotions frequently going to male counterparts, despite the calibre of the female applicant. This was highlighted across all but one school where women had successfully filled replacement positions in leadership for a considerable period of time, but when it came time to filling the roles permanently, male teachers were selected. Liz explained:

> I was gobsmacked when she didn't get the job, and in fact (I) asked a few questions and all I got told is "Well, she wasn't an Old Boy, she wasn't male", and our current principal is an Old Boy. That person was shattered and moved on … I was very disappointed … I was very upset and considered it discriminatory (Liz, School C, teacher).

Female teachers also described feeling disheartened by the experiences of their female colleagues in pursuit of senior leadership opportunities. The lack of women in senior leadership roles in all but one school served as a disincentive for other female teachers. Teachers discussed disappointment in unsuccessful attempts to gain promotion. They described what they saw to be discrimination when it came to leadership appointments at the school. Tania revealed her intentions to apply for an acting senior leadership position at her school. She suggested that she did not feel that she would be successful, despite encouragement from her peers that she would be a most suitable candidate. She said:

> I'm actually applying for the Acting AP position but I seriously don't think I'll get it, and all the women say "You should get it, we'd really like you to have it!" But, you know, you're missing the vital organ to get it, you know, I am missing two things, I am not an 'old boy' and … I don't have the genitals that are required (Tania, School C, teacher).

As outlined, many teachers saw their career opportunities as limited at their school. Several teachers stated that it was impossible to attain senior leadership roles and that if they wanted further promotion, they needed to gain employment in a girls-only or co-educational school. Vicki said:

> I don't think that I'd ever be offered a higher role here than what I've got now. And if I was wanting any higher role I would have to leave … But if I did want any further promotion, I don't think it would be available for me here. And also, I don't think it would be available in any boys' school. I think to be at a very high level in a boys' school you have to be male (Vicki, School A, faculty head).

What is clear amongst the experiences of these women is that leadership aspirations do not come down to choice; individual interests and freedoms are limited within the governised structures of their schools. For these women, the choice they then felt they had to exercise was to define themselves as different from – and more 'caring' than – the men. But this was a choice made from very limited available options when the men controlled the access to power in the schools. As Kauppinen (2013) notes, success in the workplace lies not in disciplining workers to bring about obedience (in this case, not trying to overthrow men in their positions of leadership), 'but rather making sure their aspirations fall into line with the objectives of the organization' (p. 137). In this case, despite the actions of the male hierarchy in excluding women from power, the women still perceived they had an important role to play 'filling the gaps' arising from the dominance of male teachers and leaders.

Conclusion

The role of the women in boys' schools provides a strong reminder that without a change to structure, as Budgeon (2014) notes, access to social power will be limited and gender hierarchy will be preserved. This is despite 'empowerment' espoused by new femininities and the role of a responsible neoliberal subject to self-manage career advancement. The gender imbalance in school leadership has long been recognised, but for women keen on pursuing careers in leadership in boys' schools, this is almost impossible. Forces far greater than their aspirations render them immobilised – unable to attain the leadership jobs regardless of professional competence. In these schools it is clearly taking a long time to see a change in the stereotyped perceptions that men manage and women teach and nurture.

The analysis of the interview data strongly reflects what Brown (2015: 48) describes as the 'paradox of neoliberalism', where Rose (1999a) notes that the individual subjects who, while in fact being extensively governed (in this case within a patriarchal system), define themselves as free, and as Davies (2006: 436) argues, the 'individuals then find their power lies in their individual choices to become appropriate and successful within that (inevitable) system'.

In defining themselves as responsible neoliberal subjects, these female teachers carve out a place in boys' schools, creating a distinction in their style of leadership to enable them to feel they have a place in the organisation despite not being male or an 'old boy' of the school. Their leadership is marked by 'caring' (something they perceive will make them appropriate to and successful within that system). This is defined in terms of the needs of the boys rather than in terms of their own ambitions. Despite considerable gender inequity and lack of access to leadership, they still define the area they can influence in terms of the needs of the organisation that includes developing 'well rounded' young men as part of its mission.

This research found that leadership within boys' schools remains a male-dominated area. This position leaves limited scope (on the part of the women) and will (on the part of the men) to change the structure and hierarchy in the workplace. Ways of leading are still heavily based on female/male binaries that confirm the existing gender hierarchy. In these schools, this led to an essentialising practice of what it is to be 'naturally female' (Blackmore 1999), and in the process of self-managing placed the focus back on women to accommodate and complement male leadership roles. In such environments, Fuller's (2015) suggestion of a growing traction toward an androgynous approach to leadership involving women and men remains a dream for the future.

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