ENRICH THE NARRATIVE, EMPOWER THE LEADER

The role of narradrama in enriching the narratives of women in corporate leadership

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Declaration:

I declare that this research report is my own, unpaid work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Drama Therapy at the University of Witwatersrand. It is not being admitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

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1 Abstract

This research aimed to explore problem-saturated narratives about self-efficacy in leadership amongst a group of women leaders from corporate organisations in Johannesburg, and the effectiveness of *narradrama* (Dunne, 2009) a drama therapy method, in enriching these narratives. Analysis points to the pervasiveness of gendered notions of men and women in society and how this plays out in the contexts of corporate organisations.

The rationale for this study was that if corporate leadership is an historically socio-culturally male-dominated and gender-stereotyped domain from which women have been excluded, and in which traits stereotypically associated with women were undervalued, then dominant narratives embedded in this domain could be that women are not effective leaders, and that they do not belong. This could negatively affect perceived self-efficacy in leadership among women, and indirectly, efforts to address gender disparity in the context of corporate leadership.

Sociocultural development theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and empowerment theory (Rappaport, 1987, Zimmerman, 2000), both of which assert the primacy of the sociocultural context in learning and development, theoretically informed the research. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes.

The research showed that problem-saturated narratives about leadership self-efficacy did exist and that narradrama proved effective in fostering enriched narrative possibilities amongst participants.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

Studies suggest that gender diversity in corporate leadership coincides with better financial performance, and higher returns on equity and payout ratios, as well as higher levels of social intelligence in a group that contributes to higher performance (Credit Suisse, 2014; McKinsey & Company, 2016; Moodley et al, 2016).

In the private sector, Africa has more women represented on corporate executive committees, CEO, and board roles than the average worldwide (Moodley, Holt, Leke & Desvaux, 2016). South African women hold 28% of senior management positions, beating the global average of 20% (Grant Thornton, 2017). In 2013, women represented 20% of corporate boards of directors' in South Africa, compared with the highest of 39.7% in Norway, and the lowest of 1.5% in Pakistan, in a comparison of 3000 companies across 40 countries (Credit Suisse, 2014). The Business Women's Association of South Africa (BWASA, 2015) *Women in Leadership* 2015 Census, indicated that companies surveyed made significant strides in increasing the number of women holding directorship positions over the 5-year period from 2010 to 2015, jumping from 7,1% to 29,3% (BWASA, 2015).

In South Africa, due to our recent history of apartheid, the promotion of formerly disadvantaged people specifically black people, women and people with disabilities, has been placed at the top of policy agendas in an effort to create a more fair, equal and diverse corporate landscape, which is also likely to have contributed to the increase in women's representation in leadership roles over recent years. At the

same time, corporate organisations in other parts of the world acknowledge the issue of gender inequity, and the opportunities inherent in increased gender diversity contributing to stronger organisational performance, and have initiated strategic initiatives to address the disparities between men and women (EY, 2013; Credit Suisse, 2014; McKinsey & Company, 2016; Moodley et al, 2016).

The numbers are improving, and the case is real, but the news is not all good. An increase in representation does not equate an increase in power. Women are still under-represented at every level of the corporate ladder, and the higher they climb, the lower the representation becomes (Moodley et al, 2016, McKinsey & Company, 2016). Senior women in Africa occupy roles predominantly associated with support rather than roles with core operational accountability through which promotion opportunities are likely to be higher, a finding echoed in studies conducted in several other countries in America, Asia and Europe (Moodley, et al 2016; Credit Suisse, 2014; McKinsey & Company, 2016; BWASA, 2015). Cultural biases, workplace-related biases, and structure and policy obstacles continue to form barriers to women's advancement and contributions in organisations, and women continue to be paid less than their male counterparts for performing the same roles (Credit Suisse, 2014). On average, women are hired and promoted at lower rates than men and fewer women become senior leaders (McKinsey & Company, 2016). Education continues to reinforce gender role stereotypes about men and women, thus influencing the conceptualising and practice of business and leadership (Fletcher, 2004; Credit Suisse, 2014; Moodley et al, 2016, Grant Thornton, 2017). Women are

expected to be likeable, polite, etc. The list of challenges go on.

A review of the literature on corporate leadership, shows that there has been a shift over the past 30 years to recognising the need and value of styles of leadership that reflect qualities such as empathy, collaboration, and relationship-building; qualities that are historically, stereotypically associated with feminine behaviour, and therefore women (Fletcher, 2004; Jogulu & Wood, 2006; Evans, 2014). However, this *feminine advantage*, as demonstrated, does not appear to have translated into a remarkable increase in the representation of women in leadership roles, or a rapid decrease in the barriers women are presented with in aspiring to and performing leadership.

Against this backdrop it is important to consider why it appears to be so difficult to transform corporate organisational contexts around issues of gender equity. More specifically it may be useful to explore the narratives women leaders themselves hold of their leadership self-efficacy, and how this influences their performance of corporate leadership. The present study offers such an exploration.

Vygotsky (1978) postulated that social interaction, mediated through signs, speech systems, symbols and narratives – psychological tools - that have been historically socioculturally developed, are what people mediate their performance of life through (Wertsch & Tulvitste, 1996; Doolittle, 1997). These narratives determine identity management, legitimising behaviour, informing roles of required or desired

selves, and contributing to a coherent sense of identity (Sveningsson & Larsson (2006, in Carroll & Levy, 2011, p.220). The internalised narratives of individuals who have experienced consistent mental and emotional stress may be distorted, and these individuals could function out of negative narratives, rather than living from an innate positive drive towards wholeness (White, 2007; Pearson & Wilson, 2009; Dunne, 2009).

The historical landscape of corporate leadership discourse, development and practice is characterised overwhelmingly by male-defined, male-dominated and gendered notions and practices of leadership, from which women, and traits stereotypically associated with women, have been undervalued and/or excluded (hooks, 2000; Fletcher, 2004; Zulkifli, 2015; Evans, 2014). This is located within, and informed by, a much broader and more extensive sociocultural context of gender role stereotyping, gender discrimination and gender inequity (hooks, 2000; Antrobus, 2010; Fletcher, 2004; Zulkifli, 2015, Evans, 2014). Disturbingly, a growing body of research points to the potentially harmful effects of internalised acceptance of discrimination and stereotypes, which include impairment of self-concept and efficacy, and a sense of control, which are keys to mental health (Kira, Ashby, Lewandowski, Smith & Odena, 2012).

2.2 Rationale

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief that she or he is capable of performing a particular task successfully, using her or his skills (Bandura, 1977).

Against the backdrop of gender role stereotyping, exclusion and discrimination, it is possible that many women leaders have problem-saturated internal accounts and representations – narratives - of themselves as leaders. As corporate leadership is historically and contemporarily male-dominated and male-defined, women leaders would have learnt and internalised associated ways of leading and, since historical discourse on, and practice of, leadership has excluded women or undervalued traits associated with women. This could mean that women leaders are functioning from internal narratives of not belonging, or not having the right attributes for leading, which could affect their sense of self-efficacy negatively.

The researcher is unaware of any studies that have specifically employed narradrama as an approach in empowering the narratives of women leaders in corporate organisations, and this study contributes to informing this enquiry.

Additionally, the application of arts based methodologies in the corporate sector is a growing field of enquiry (Sutherland, 2012). There appears to be a growing need in the sector for more experiential leadership in development approaches which embrace the dynamic, interactional nature of organisational life in ways that are responsive to the actualities of leading, which has resulted in the increasing inclusion of arts-based methodologies in development activities (Adler, 2006; Atkinson, 2007; Clarke & Butcher, 2009; French & Grey, 1996 as cited in Sutherland, 2012, p26). This study therefore also contributes to the body of research relating to the application of arts-based methodologies within corporate organisations.

2.3 Aim and Objectives

This study is grounded in the assumption that our internally held narratives are socially constructed and influence our thoughts, choices and behaviours (Vygotsky, 1978; Rappaport, 1987; Wertsch & Tulviste, 1996; Morgan, 2000; White, 2007; Dunne, 2009). A related assumption is that narratives held by women's leaders, in the corporate sector, of their leadership legitimacy and efficacy are possibly problem-saturated (White, 2007; Dunne, 2009). These could be enriched through the claiming of, and performing into of enriched processes, tools and models within an environment of mutually supportive interactions (Rappaport, 1987; Holzman; 1996; Pendzik, 1997).

Through the dramatic medium, the facilitation of interactions in which empowering narratives can be collectively explored and performed, women leaders may be able to access and internalise a richer range of narrative options that contribute to strengthening their sense of self, community and leadership effectiveness.

The aim of this study is twofold. Firstly, it aims to establish if problem-saturated narratives about self-efficacy in corporate leadership exist among a group of women leaders. Secondly it aims to explore the utility of narradrama in the facilitation of more empowering narratives.

The key research question informing this study was therefore:

What role could narradrama play in empowering the personal narratives of women leaders about self-efficacy in corporate leadership?

3 Literature Review

The focus of this study was how narradrama (Dunne, 2009) as a drama therapy method, could be used to empower narratives about self-efficacy in leadership amongst a group of corporate women leaders. In order to establish a theoretical framework in which to position this study, this literature review will provide an overview of the historical development of corporate leadership within a broader socio-cultural context of gender disparity. The overview is grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Development Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which forms the primary theoretical framework of this study, and proposes that mental functioning and learning are a result of the social context in which people are located. Empowerment theory (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000)**,** forms the second aspect of the theoretical framework in which this research study has been grounded, and is concerned with empowerment as developed through social processes. Finally**,** narrative techniques (Morgan, 2000; White, 2007; Dunne, 2009) and Boal's (2008) applied drama and theatre which have been the techniques used for the drama therapy group interventions, are discussed.

The frameworks presented propose that people's performances in daily living are informed by the sociocultural context in which they act. Internal narratives, individually and collectively, are formed, shaped and changed by the sociocultural context as developed through history, as well as the constant interpsychic and intrapsychic processes taking place as we perform our daily living.

3.1 Women and Leadership

3.1.1 The historical context of women's participation in corporate leadership

Insights into the nature of corporate organisations come from an awareness that their underlying design and structure are founded on nineteenth century beliefs from patriarchal visions of the world, militarism, Darwinist social theories with their associated notions of survival of the fittest and natural selection, and the Newtonian metaphor of the machine (Rao & Kelleher, 2000). Wright & Rogers (2009) further point out that these beliefs have been informed by more than 7 000 years of human history in which male domination characterised gender relations.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, philosophers proposed the Great Man theory of leadership which assumed that the personal attributes of the great man determined the course of history (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). It was believed that these types of individuals possessed unique, heroic, attributes that set them apart from others and that these traits were responsible for their assuming positions of power and authority (MSG Experts, 2008). A leader became perceived as a hero who accomplished goals against all odds for his followers. This theory was constructed as a male model at a time when women were not visible in paid employment, and women were thus not considered as possible leaders (Jogulu & Wood, 2006).

Out of this theoretical body, propositions about leadership ability began to focus on the unique and exceptional abilities and traits of certain individuals, proposing that specific characteristics distinguished leaders from non-leaders, thus giving rise to trait theories (Bass, 2008). These theories were prominent in the literature from the

early 1900's up to 1947 and key traits of successful leaders were described primarily in masculine terms, including achievement orientation and task orientation (Jogulu & Wood, 2006; Bass, 2008; Batliwala, 2010).

Designing corporate organisations on these principles served to reinforce existing social relations, and led to hierarchical organisational structures and practices underpinned by the notion of power as a limited commodity, to be wielded by a few to control the many (Rao & Kelleher, 2000:75).

By the late 1940s, leadership researchers began to propose that individual traits alone were inadequate in explaining effective leadership and that behavioural and situational factors mattered as well, which gave rise to behavioural theories of leadership and later to situational theories (Bass, 2008; Jogulu & Wood, 2006). Behavioural theories achieved prominence in the 1960s, and situational theories in the 1970s, when the representation of women in positions of power or authority in organisations were still low, and therefore these theories would have been perceived as applicable primarily to men (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). Additional theories of leadership continued to be researched and developed relating to leadership styles, and the way in which leadership was performed.

During the 1990s, leadership descriptions and definitions began to include styles of leadership associated with characteristics usually attributed to femininity and women, such as relationship building, empathy and collaboration (Jogulu & Wood, 2006; Bass, 2008). Value thus began to be associated with feminine characteristics

in relation to leadership effectiveness, and gender differences began to be researched and incorporated into the literature (Bass, 2008). Leadership roles were still, however, predominantly occupied by men (Bass, 2008; Jogulu & Wood, 2006) and the heroic leadership model characterised by individualistic, mechanistic thinking and control continued to dominate the domain of leadership (Fletcher, 2004).

Contemporary, post-heroic, leadership models and approaches have brought into mainstream leadership discourse the importance of characteristics associated with more feminine styles in effective corporate leadership, and with it the contribution of women. Newer, emerging models of leadership recognise that today's informational, networked environments of business require less individualistic and more relational, collaborative and emotionally engaging – feminine - concepts of leadership (Fletcher, 2004). Research indicates that women are more likely to possess leadership attributes that are predominantly effective in contemporary contexts, as compared with their male counterparts (Jogulu & Wood, 2006, p246 citing a meta-analysis of 45 research studies conducted by Eagly et al, 2003). This is supported by research conducted by Evans (2014) which illuminates how female styles of leadership in general appear more conducive to the collaborative, emotionally connected approaches required of leaders today. The possibility of these findings resulting from women being socialised to perform in more empathetic and collaborative ways begs question here.

Evans (2014) also importantly draws attention to studies carried out by Hagberg

Consulting Group (1998) and Management Research Group (1999), which argue that women are not necessarily more democratic than men in their leadership styles. The results of these studies indicated that women tended have a higher task and results orientation at work than men, and that women also scored highly in relationship-oriented outcomes (Evans, 2014). Similarly, in analyses conducted, Eagly & Johnson, 1990 (cited in Jogulu & Wood, 2006, p242) also found that both women and men performed similarly in task and inter-personally oriented activities. Evan's (2014) and Jogulu & Wood (2006) drawing attention to women leaders' capacity for task and results orientation is important in moving away from gender stereotyping. The apparent value being associated with more feminine styles of leadership appear to be progressive in recognising that women can bring different qualities to leadership. However, what also appears to be occurring, is the continued reinforcing of gender stereotypes and the essentialising of women (Fletcher, 2004; Batliwala, 2011).

Despite significant developments in leadership theory and findings, women in senior corporate leadership roles continue to be underrepresented. Although women are occupying leadership roles more readily, and they appear to possess styles of leadership that are closely aligned with the types of leadership required on the current corporate landscape, women are still advancing into senior positions at slower rates than their male colleagues (Schein, 2001; Fletcher, 2004; Jogulu & Wood, 2006; Credit Suisse, 2014). Corporate rganisations continue to be structured in ways, culturally and in practice, that diminish rather than elevate women, and

these structures make it harder for women to be recognised as equal contributors to the meaning and social wealth of organisations (e.g. Fletcher, 2004, Jogulu & Wood, 2006; EY, 2013; Credit Suisse, 2014; Zulkifli, 2015; McKinsey & Company, 2016).

3.1.2 The Problem of Gendered Leadership

Bass (2008, p34, referencing Hammer, 1978) describes four stereotypes associated with corporate women leaders in the 1970s: The *earth mother* who was nurturing and caring; the *manipulator* who relied on feminine wiles to get her way, the *workaholic* who could not delegate, and the *egalitarian leader* who was unable to claim her power. He also references Kanter (1977) who classified women leaders working in a man's world as: the nurturing, caring *mother*; the *pet* little sister; the *sex object;* and the *iron maiden* (Bass, 2008, p34). These descriptions provide some insight into the gender stereotypical and mostly unfavourable ways in which women leaders in corporate organisations were perceived. These negative associations will have contributed to prevailing attitudes and perceptions that women do not belong in leadership, among men and women.

Such attitudes and perceptions will have been compounded by the prevalence of the *old boys' club*, which were exclusive informal social networks, in which primarily wealthy white men, deliberately and systematically ensured that they retained wealth and power through their business and political relationships (Rand & Bierema, 2009). This would have contributed to the prevention, and exclusion of women and minority groups from being successful in the business world (Rand & Bierema, 2009; Hillman, 1995).

Historically and socioculturally, corporate organisations have thus been informed by cultural values and patriarchal norms that have excluded women and that have valued perceived *masculine* traits, and therefore men, above feminine traits and women.

A survey carried out by Adler & Izraeli (1994, in Evans, 2014) in 21 countries notes that although there is an increase in women fulfilling leadership positions globally,

> certain stereotypical perceptions still prevail e.g. women's aptitude and qualifications, traditional attitudes concerning women's role in society, women's limited access to social networks and *old boy* associations to mention just a few (p546).

In studies carried out in USA, Germany, UK, Japan and China, centred on the psychological barriers to women's progress in management, results indicated that men still viewed themselves as more likely than women to possess the key characteristics associated with leadership (Schein, 2001), a phenomenon Schein termed "think manager, think male" as a result of her studies conducted in the 1970s which reflected the same trend. Schein (2001) found that in the US, over a twenty-year period between the 1970s and 1990s, women managers perceptions shifted to no longer sex-typing the managerial position and saw women and men as equally likely to possess the attributes necessary for managerial success. Men managers twenty years later, however, appeared to still consider men as more likely to possess managerial characteristics than women (Schein, 2001)

A study conducted by Boosyen & Nkomo (2010) in South Africa looked at the "think manager, think male" phenomenon whilst examining the combined effects of race and gender on the phenomenon. Results corroborated Schein's hypothesis, finding that both black and white men are less likely to attribute successful managerial characteristics to women, and that more black than white men appeared to hold this view (Boosyen & Nkomo, 2010). This study also found that black and white women did not attribute the likelihood of managerial characteristics more to men than women. Black women rated women as more likely to possess the requisite characteristics relative to men, whilst white women rated men and women as equal in possessing the requisite characteristics.

These studies indicate that the extensiveness of gendered notions of leadership that undervalue women appear to still be pervasive. Even though women may perceive themselves as possessing the attributes to function as strong managers and leaders, they remain located in a context where men do not appear to agree. This is a significant issue on a global organisational landscape where women leaders are in the minority and men make the decisions.

The strength of the gendered nature of thinking about managerial and leadership qualities may explain why efforts to enhance gender equity in corporate organisations continues to realise required shifts so slowly (Schein, 2001; Fletcher, 2004; Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Evans, 2014). Changes in women's participation and contribution in the working world, and in literature on leadership, have not significantly shifted the perception of women as less likely to possess the qualities

necessary for leadership success. The cultures, traditions and practices that women are located in impede their equality, and organisational barriers represent one aspect of a wide variety of discriminatory practices (Fletcher, 2004; Evans, 2014). For the successful woman leader, state Genovese & Thompson (1993), her leadership style and approach will have been influenced by the broader society's definitions and expectations of gender. This could mean that she redefined her role and transcended the dominant sociocultural narrative about gender, however, regardless, a woman leader will have learned consciously or unconsciously, how to cope with the fact that she is a woman in a man's world (Genovese & Thompson, 1993).

Hence, while the thinking and literature about corporate leadership appears to have changed at the macro level, the everyday lived narrative about leadership and leadership practices, remains fixed in old images of heroic individualism (Fletcher, 2004). In evolving leadership literature in a post-heroic leadership context, it is clear that both men and women display the attributes required for the kind of leadership current times call for. The issue, however, rests with the attributes themselves which are ascribed socioculturally to either men or women. Traits such as individualism, control, assertiveness, and skills of advocacy and domination are attributed to men and generally considered to be masculine, whilst in contrast, characteristics such as empathy, community, vulnerability, and collaboration are socioculturally attributed to women and generally understood as feminine (Fletcher, 2004). Traits historically associated with men have also been associated with

leadership, and those associated with women have been associated primarily with the realm of the family and caregiving. This exerts pressure on men and women to perform leadership in a way that corresponds with the gendered characteristics attributed to them. Fletcher (2004) proposes that even if feminine qualities are part of the style of a woman leader, and these qualities are recognised as needed for effective leadership, gender and/or power dynamics are likely to result in these aspects of her style going unnoticed. She also draws attention to the complexity posed by post-heroic leadership paradigms requiring men to attach value to traits socially attributed to femininity, which have been historically devalued. Leadership development and literature, posits Fletcher (2004), needs to consider how performing relational values that have been historically devalued, impacts leaders.

Because characteristics associated with post-heroic leadership are incorrectly associated with femininity and powerlessness, opportunities to perform more collaborative, engaging leadership styles, translate into performing femininity and therefore, performing powerlessness (Hillman, 1995) – on the part of both men and women. The ways in women perform leadership are rooted in the practices and paradigms defined and demonstrated primarily by men, in masculine terms that undervalue women. Therefore, how women perform leadership, even though they don't think they're less capable than men, may still serve to reinforce gender stereotypical behaviours.

The literature shows that corporate leadership is a highly gendered landscape, and that gendered sociocultural norms and narratives of how men and women should

be, continue to influence the ways in which leadership is performed and the expectations of those who are performing it. Social interactions that make up corporate leadership are opportunities not only to perform gender, but to perform power (Hillman, 1995; Fletcher, 2004; Antrobus, 2010), with women having less access to the tools of power than men. From this position, leadership can be considered from the perspectives of how it is performed and experienced, by women and by men. Neither women, nor men, however, are homogeneous groupings which is important to understand in efforts to avoid essentialising either.

Acknowledging the role of gender role stereotyping and power relations in corporate managerial and leadership analysis as key hurdles to women's opportunities can unite women leaders in their efforts for change and link these efforts to the broader intent of transforming the rights, freedoms, and opportunities of all women globally (Schein, 2001; Antrobus, 2010).

3.1.3 The queen bee phenomenon and benevolent sexism

Corporate women leaders themselves could be reinforcing gender discrimination and gender stereotypical behaviours (hooks, 2000; Derks, Ellemers & Laar, 2016; Sanderson & Grant, 2016). hooks (2000) states that although stereotypically women are identified as more caring and empathetic, how they appear to conduct themselves in relation to less powerful women suggest otherwise:

> The ethics of care women show in the ethnic or racial groups with which they identify do not extend to those with whom they do not feel empathy,

> identification, or solidarity. Women of privilege … have rapidly invested in the sustained subordination of working-class and poor women (hooks, 2000, p111).

The *queen bee* phenomenon is a dynamic whereby women leaders appear to conform and adapt within male-dominated organisational hierarchies, in which men are valued over women, by distancing themselves from less successful women and legitimising gender inequality. Research revealed three ways by which women do this: (1) by presenting themselves more like men and emphasising what they see as masculine and successful leadership characteristics; (2) by physically and psychologically distancing themselves from other women whom they perceive as less successful than they are, and (3) by endorsing and legitimising existing gender hierarchies (Derks et al, 2016). Derks et al (2016) argue that this phenomenon can itself be a source of reinforcing gender discrimination and gender inequality in organisations and that it is a response to the gender discrimination and identity threat that many women leaders themselves experience. Through the lens of social identity theory which posits that individuals base their identity partly on gender, Derks et al (2016) argue that the *queen bee* phenomenon is triggered in work environments in which women are devalued and negatively stereotyped.

This reinforcing of gender stereotypes and discrimination by women, could also occur as a result of what Glick & Fiske (1996) describe as *Benevolent Sexism*, a form of sexism that idealises and patronises women in organisations. Women are put on figurative pedestals and cherished by men for as long as they conform with feminine

stereotypes. Benevolent Sexism seduces women with the promise that men will protect, provide for and cherish them – echoing broader societal gender stereotypes and expectations - thus women often endorse this form of sexism as much or even more than men.

In attempting to change social practices, many women may dispute practices and decisions that disadvantage women in the workplace, but studies show that modern expressions of sexism can often implicitly discourage women from engaging in collective action attempts (Ellemers & Barreto, 2009 as cited in Derks et al, 2016, p459). Research further indicates that women who do challenge existing business practices may be disliked and devalued, even if their objections are valid (Barreto & Ellemers, 2015).

3.1.4 Gender Discrimination and internalising problem-saturated narratives

A large and growing body of research documents the profound relationship between perceived discrimination and health (Braebender and Mihura, 2000; Townsend, Major, Gangi and Mendes (2011), Kira, Ashby, Lewandowski, Smith & Odena, 2012; Hatzenbeuhler, Phelan & Link, 2013, and Richman, Blodorn & Major 2016).

Gender Discrimination has been attributed to numerous poor mental health outcomes in women including psychological distress, low self-esteem, anger, low self-efficacy, depression and anxiety symptoms as well as poorer physical health (Kira et al, 2012; Richman et al, 2016).

Trauma taxonomy has proposed a classification of various forms of trauma based on their severity and complexity. According to this classification system: Type I trauma consists of a singular event, while Type II is characterised by a complex and potentially repeated trauma that is discontinued such as physical abuse (Kira et al, 2012). Type III represents ongoing social structural violence that represents mostly inter-group traumas, and that are without anticipated end, such as racism, sexism, poverty and discrimination; and Type IV are traumas occurring across a lifespan, that are multiple, concurrent or sequential and that have potential cumulative effects. Type III traumas pose serious cumulative risks to an individual because of their impending negative effects. Kira et al (2012) found that gender discrimination contributes to an increase in Cumulative Trauma Disorder (CTD) symptoms in females which they state may be related to executive function deficits and life achievements (p353).

Research further found that when being evaluated by a man, women who chronically perceive more sexism would experience more physiological stress-related symptoms (Townsend et al, 2011). Studies also suggest that increasing identification and self-stereotyping are two potential ways to validate one's social identity in response to discrimination, and that discrimination predicted greater endorsement for unhealthy behaviour as self-characteristic (Richman et al, 2016).

The studies cited pose important implications for women in organisations and specifically, for this study, women leaders. Corporate organisational leadership is historically and currently male-dominated (e.g. Jogulu & Wood, 2006; Bass, 2008, Credit Suisse, 2014 and EY, 2013; McKinsey & Company, 2016). Women leaders are

confronted with gender discrimination and gender role stereotyping in the working environment, outside of it, and cross generationally (Rao & Kelleher, 2000; Jogulu & Wood, 2006, Wright & Rogers, 2009). Gender discrimination is embedded unconsciously in the processes that make up an organisation's culture, which could potentially have a profound effect on the individual and social identity of women leaders, on behaviours they choose to engage in and on their potential mental, physiological and behavioural outcomes, as a result of potential stress and trauma associated with the dynamics of discriminatory aggressions. Significantly, Bandura (1977) states that one of the contributing factors to a sense of self-efficacy is an individual's physiological state. Women leaders are thus potentially located in contexts that pose a consistent risk to their wellbeing, and this includes their sense of self-efficacy.

3.1.5 The invitation of Feminist Leadership

On this gendered corporate leadership landscape, and its associated health risks, it appears that leadership viewed as a means of social transformation and contribution, rather than as a product, is fundamental to shifting the performance of leadership for both men and women. This invites a consideration of feminist leadership which makes core the historical gender biases upon which modern organisations have been constructed, and is focused on social transformation and collective empowerment as primary aims (Batliwala, 2010; Antrobus, 2010). It is aligned with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural development theory in its argument that organisations are living, breathing microcosms of the socio-cultural contexts

that house them and the people who inhabit them (Rao & Kelleher, 2010). What is missing from mainstream corporate leadership literature, is the distinction between *feminine* styles of leadership, the attributes of which remain associated with gender-role stereotyping, and *feminist* leadership. Leadership that explores and exposes patriarchal, gendered structures and practices of leadership are required, and the only leadership that does this is feminist leadership (Antrobus, 2002, in Batliwala, 2010, p11).

Drawing on definitions and descriptions of feminist-oriented leadership, Batliwala (2010) offers the following as a composite definition of feminist leadership:

> Women with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive structures and processes to mobilise others –especially other women –around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic and political transformation for equality and the realisation of human rights for all (p14).

Feminist leadership is therefore about social justice; about advocating for women and others who are marginalised, and about attending to injustices on individual, social and institutional levels (Barton, 2006). Antrobus (2010) extends this in describing *feminist transformational leadership* which maintains focus on bringing about gender justice, and requires that leaders personally transform themselves, engage in consciousness-raising and internalise feminism.

Drawn from Batliwala (2010), leadership from a feminist, and feminist

transformational perspective can be seen to contain four primary domains: Firstly, *Power*: Leadership must endeavour to reconsider and transform how power is held, distributed, exercised and structured in organisational relations. This supports Fletcher (2004) who points out that one of the reasons why the so-called *female advantage* - the claim that women more naturally possess the collaborative and emotionally intelligent attributes requisite of post-heroic styles of leadership - has not materialised, is due to the way in which power relations and distribution in organisations disadvantage women leaders.

Secondly, *Principles and Values*: Several core values and principles are specified by Batliwala (2010) as critical to embracing feminist leadership, and include equality and inclusion; the rights of people to realise their potential and to have basic needs such as food and shelter met; freedom of choice and physical security; a healthy environment; democracy; respecting diversity and differences; and transforming the use of power.

Third in Batliwala's (2010) is *Politics and Purpose*. Politics is concerned with the analysis of socioeconomic realities and the ideological standpoint that informs this analysis, whilst Purpose is concerned with the longer-term vision and the purpose of the transformation which arises through the politics. It involves consciousness-raising and equipping people to articulate their politics and purpose clearly.

The fourth domain posited by Batliwala (2010) is *Practice*: This domain focuses on the daily performance and doing of leadership. It includes ways of working and how these are enabled in the following areas: Visioning; Political work; Strategising; Structuring and mobilising relationships; Communicating; Resourcing and Managing.

A final note in defining of the core tenets of feminist leadership and *feminist transformational leadership*, is the notion of the leader Self. Echoing hooks (2000) and Antrobus (2010), Batliwala (2010) notes that leadership is practiced by people and therefore, for the four domains defined to be shaped and transformed in organisations, the psychic structures that people bring to the role must also be transformed. The most important factors to consider, she proposes are (Batliwala, 2010, p30-31):

Personality and Self-Esteem: Facilitating and supporting the enrichment or transformation of internal narratives that may diminish the performance of feminist leadership;

History and Experience: Re-negotiating and re-defining experiences and attitudes about power;

Personal Social Capital: Optimising and leveraging the contribution leaders make to social capital through assets such as skills, networks and support systems;

Talents, abilities, inclinations: The unique qualities that leaders bring to their roles enabling them to be authentic in their effectiveness; and

Identities: The multilayered identities that leaders bring into leadership roles including race, class, gender, religion and sexual orientation. These influence the performance of leadership and influence responses to leadership challenges.

Expanding on the fourth factor identified by Batliwala is the notion of *intersectionality*, a core construct of feminist theory, which posits that multiple

identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination converge and impact each other (Davis, 2008). Ely & Padavic (2007) draw attention to expectations about *femininity* being influenced by social class, race, and ethnicity, and as a result produce different effects for women in organisations. They note as examples how the stereotyping of Asian women as extremely feminine locates them far from masculine images of success, and how a competent, assertive African-American woman would be perceived as self-controlling and aggressive (Ely & Padavic, 2007).

Gender identity has thus been shown to be intimately linked to racial identity (Andersen, 2005; Bell & Nkomo, 2001; McCall, 2005 as cited in Booysen & Nkomo, 2010), with the meanings ascribed to these identities being continually moulded by social structures and institutions. Gender becomes fixed in the context of racial structures that privilege some groups and marginalise others, thus differentiation of organisational positions will occur not only on the basis of gender, but gender as it relates to race and ethnicity (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010).

3.2 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Development

3.2.1 Sociocultural Theory of Development

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural development theory proposes a model of individual and collective development based on performativity and the internalisation of social practices (Peneul & Wertsch, 1995). Intermental and intramental functioning including voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, rational volition, intellectual speech and verbal thought – what Vygotsky termed higher mental functions – results from performing and internalising social practices (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1996; Bakhurst, 1996).

The inclusion of the socially developed psychological tools into human functioning, fundamentally alters the flow and structure of this functioning (Wertsch & Tulvitste, 1996). Vygotsky included language, counting systems, mnemonic techniques, works of art, writing, schemes, diagrams, myths, narrative patterns, and conventional signs as examples of psychological tools (Wertsch & Tulvitste, 1996; Hedegaard, 1996; Doolittle, 1997; Miller, 2011).

Socioculturally developed psychological tools, including narratives, are therefore what leaders – men and women – will mediate their performance of leadership through.

The development of behaviour and internal thought, from the perspective of sociocultural development theory, is therefore determined by the historical development of society (Holzman, 1996). In the context of corporate organisational

leadership, this would mean that leadership performance is governed by the socio-historical-cultural context out of which it developed. Given that powerful actors – the leaders - in corporate organisations are overwhelmingly male, the extent to which the values of masculinity permeate understandings of organisational reality, the role of leadership and what leadership constitutes, would significantly dominate how leadership is performed, taught and integrated into organisational cultures and structures.

The psychological tools of corporate leadership looking at imagery as an example, have included war, predominantly male-oriented sports, and machines as historically popular leadership metaphors (Oberlechner & Mayer-Schoenberger, 2002), which aligns with Rao & Kelleher's (2000) description of how 19th century sociocultural beliefs have informed modern day organisational structures and power dynamics.

Verbal language as a psychological tool, would also, according to Vygotsky's viewpoint, reflect stereotypical masculine values and styles of leadership such as competitiveness, task orientation, power and control; or serve to reinforce gender stereotypes that undervalue feminine styles of leadership, and/or women. Rabuzzi (1988, in Gergen & Gergen, 2011, p216) echoes this in asserting that 'finding voices authentic to women's experience is appallingly difficult. Not only are the languages and concepts we have…male oriented but historically women's experiences have been interpreted for us by men and male norms.' In a study conducted by Zulkifli (2015) looking into the image construction of the career woman in *Cleo* magazine, a publication targeted at women and published in South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore

and Australia, findings indicated that the articles advocated the importance of being professional by highlighting the *right* etiquette, the *right* language, and the *right* way to be perform perfectly. The image of the ideal career woman is an image of someone who has the right skills and attributes to be taken seriously, someone who does not make mistakes and who aspires to perfection, whose life outside of work does not feature as important, and someone who would suppress her feminine traits when necessary (Zulkifli, 2015).

Vygotsky's theory captures the reasons why gender stereotyping in the corporate workplace appears to be so deeply entrenched even though paradigms about what makes effective leadership appear to be changing. The broader society's expectations of the roles of women and men, how we should look, the characteristics we should display, the priorities we should have, and the successes we should aim for: These are the psychological tools of the broader socio-cultural environment through which corporate leadership is mediated.

3.2.2 Culture and Situational Specificity of Learning and Development

Vygotsky began to approach concept development from the perspective of how it emerges in particular spheres of sociocultural activity. He considered how intermental functioning in the institutional setting of formal education provided a framework for the development of conceptual thinking, and saw this context as primary in providing exposure to the tools and signs of a culture. Culture, Vygotsky viewed as something that comes into concrete existence through human social activity, and he regarded these social processes as the foundations underpinning the

emergence of individual and group mental processes (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1996).

In many ways, corporate organisational settings too are preeminent environments for exposure to cultural tools and signs, and as the corporate leadership literature reveals, the tools and signs of leadership have historically and socioculturally been primarily male-dominated, male-defined and gendered (e.g. Oberlechner & Mayer-Schoenberger, 2002; Jogulu & Wood, 2006; Bass, 2008, Batliwala, 2010; McKinsey & Company, 2016). Yet, few studies have sought to assess the relationship of gender to organisational culture, and organisational analysis and development inadequately focuses on how these contexts contribute to shaping and reinforcing sociocultural stereotypes and notions of gender (Mills, 1992; Ely & Padavic, 2007). Organisational analyses studies have also been carried out primarily from a male oriented perspective, or have treated women as peripheral to organisational life (Mills, 1992). Culture development and organisational analyses approaches thus inadequately integrate relevant aspects of broader social constructs in a comprehensive concept of culture (Mills, 1992; Ely & Padavic, 2002).

Attention is drawn to the situational context of the corporate organisation and how leadership is modelled, taught, languaged, interpreted and exercised – how it is performed. Consideration must be given to the implied internalisation and embedding of cultural norms and stereotypes in conceptualising and performing leadership, through the ways in which the organisation context itself reinforces the

cultural patterns and meanings associated with gender. In corporate organisational settings, where men have been the primary engineers and educators of leadership values and practices, within a broader sociocultural context of gender inequity, we must enquire into the framework that this provides for the development of conceptual thinking, and the performing, of leadership.

Echoes of what feminist leadership purport emerge as relevant here. Corporate leadership change and redefining cannot occur in a vacuum if it is to bring about the change in leaders that the current global commercial landscape requires. A broader understanding of the social forces that perpetuate gendered leadership and unequal power relations, and a commitment to transformation, are to be internalised individually and collectively in corporate organisations, and integrated in work and leadership practices, if leaders are to experience the possibilities of post-heroic styles of leadership.

Another link with feminist leadership, is the notion of *intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1993)* Vygotsky advanced that learning involves the whole person, and that activity, learning and development are inseparably woven together and emergent (Lave & Wenger, 1996; Holzman 2006, Doolittle, 1997). The process of learning and development is both individual and social, and in the process the individual and group are intersecting norms, ideas, concepts, beliefs, values, identities, interpretations, and meaning, as well as the learning object or intent. Members of a community of practice, such as corporate leadership, cannot be separated from the socio-cultural systems in which they are located and an adequate account of social

learning requires both the development of knowledgeably skilled identities in practice, as well as the reproduction and transformation of the community of practice (Doolittle, 1997).

Thus, leadership requires a much broader conception of, and approach to, individual and collective learning, development and change in corporate organisations, and more specifically for the purpose of this research study, to the development, partnership and elevation of corporate women leaders. Social activity and learning are inextricably linked, according to a Vygotskian worldview, and situational reflection that embraces intersecting sociocultural experiences and identities gives life to the possibility of transforming leadership performance and practice.

3.2.3 The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

A construct of Vygotsky's sociocultural development theory that this study sought to engage with, is the concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD). The ZPD is defined as the distance between what an individual can learn on her own and what she can learn with the help of another (Vygotsky,1978). It is an exploration in which the individual is cognitively prepared, but requires support and social interaction to fully develop (Pass, 2004). Instruction creates the ZPD, which Vygotsky said directs development and stimulates a series of inner developmental processes in the learner (Hedegaard, 1996). A teacher or more experienced peer provides the *scaffolding* to support the learner's developing knowledge, understanding or complex skills, as well as the understanding of culturally relevant psychological tools (Vygotsky, 1978; Hedegaard, 1996; Doolittle, 1997). Collaborative learning,

discourse, modelling, and scaffolding are strategies for supporting the knowledge and skills development of learners, and facilitating intentional learning within the ZPD (Hedegaard, 1996; Doolittle, 1997).

Vygotsky stated that learning activities that are relevant contextually and require application of skills and knowledge to real-world tasks, establish an environment in which the ZPD can be embedded (Doolittle, 1997). Organisational contexts, could therefore present as sites for contextually relevant, situationally specific environments in which the concept of the ZPD could be applied. The ZPD concept could form a container in which to explore, create and perform into alternative, more enriched signs and tools of corporate leadership.

Campione (1996) highlights a critique of the ZPD concept stating that direct instruction with strong teacher control could relegate learners to a passive role. Education and instruction as a method is one that is historically located in a teacher-student model where the teacher knows and the student doesn't. The danger of reproducing this approach in developing and changing corporate leadership, is that patriarchal models of power and control could be reinforced. Freire (1972) states that the more people accept a passive role imposed on them in learning, the more they could simply conform to a fragmented view of reality which could include their own subordination. Vygotsky did clarify that mental functioning is not simply conveyed by the teacher and absorbed by the student; it is actively co-constructed by the individual as a result of social experience (Doolittle, 1997), however, the literature does appear to indicate a leaning toward the necessity of instruction.

3.3 Empowerment Theory

Empowerment theory, which focuses on social change potential through individual and collective empowerment and the notion of mutuality in the empowerment process (Rappaport, 1987; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995), strongly informs the theoretical framework in which this research study is grounded. Theoretically, empowerment theory connects mental health to mutual help and the creation of responsive communities (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). It asserts that a strong group-based belief is important for members' empowerment and that group based beliefs within mutually supportive groups provide a structure allowing members to form their collective and individual identities around concepts of personal change (Rappaport, 1993 in in Peterson and Speer, 2000, p42).

Empowerment theory, advocating for equality in the learning process, and the co-construction of knowledge and opportunity, extends sociocultural development theory in that a group could form a structure for critically thinking about and co-constructing enriched narratives and practices within the situationally-specific context of the organisation.

The theory is understood as a multilevel construct that includes a psychological sense of personal control, as well as an interest in, and the study of and relationships within and between individuals, groups, organisations, and other settings (Rappaport, 1987; Carr, 2003; Radebe, 2007). Empowerment theory views *powerlessness* as a position which stems from the incorporation of historical

experiences, ongoing behaviour, and continued patterns of thinking, that are entrenched and reproduced by unequal power relations (Carr, 2003). The cultural context in which people are located therefore matters, and has an important influence on outcomes (Rappaport, 1987), an assertion echoed in sociocultural development theory (Vygotsky, 1978).

In an empowerment context, people concerned are collaborators who mutually influence the process of becoming empowered (Rappaport, 1987; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). In this process, the theory posits that praxis is essential since empowering action is augmented by critical reflection (Carr, 2003). Linked to this is the appreciation that the process of empowerment is developmental, not linear, and that its stages are circular and mutually reinforcing (Carr, 2003). Deriving from Freire (1972), *concientization,* which is the process of developing a critical consciousness of one's social reality through reflection and action, is therefore key to the realisation of empowerment (Carr, 2003).

At an individual level, the concept of empowerment proposes individual mastery over one's own life, democratic participation in the life of one's community often through mediating social structures, and a critical understanding of one's environment (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz & Checkoway, 1992).

At a social level, empowerment theory is interested in advancing a society whose social policies appreciate cultural diversity; the theory is organisational, political, sociological, economic, and spiritual (Rappaport, 1987). This supports feminist

leadership which too stands for broader social, economic and legal structures and relations being critically considered and transformed in the quest to eradicate gendered leadership, unequal power relations and the subordination of women (Crenshaw, 1993; hooks, 2000; Antrobus, 2010; Batliwala, 2010).

The discourse and practice of corporate organisational leadership, as discussed, have been historically informed by gender inequity and the valuing of perceived masculine traits above perceived feminine traits (e.g. Schein, 2001; Fletcher, 2004; Batliwala, 2010; Zulkifli, 2013; Evans, 2014); and these notions may, as the literature points out, be internalised by women leaders (e.g. Freire, 1972, Rappaport, 1987; White, 2007; Kira et al 2012), which could influence the ways in which they perform leadership. Vygotsky argued that humans, in the process of historical development

> 'change the ways and means of their behaviour, transform their natural premises and functions, elaborate and create new, specifically cultural forms of behaviour' (Vygotsky, 1934 in Wertsch & Tulvitste, 1996, p62).

Growth is a cultural activity that people engage in together, and through which alternate cultural patterns and meanings can be created. The application of the tenets of empowerment theory, within the contextual specificity of the corporate organisation, could contribute to the disruption of gender role stereotyping and gender inequity, through enabling collective consciousness-raising, critical thinking, and focus on behavioural and psychological change that transform these notions, thereby enabling the construction of new narratives, personally and collectively,

about corporate leadership.

Reporting on studies carried out, Zimmerman et al (1992) noted increased activism and involvement, and greater perceived competence and control amongst participants, as a result of involvement in community activity. They also reported that in a study conducted, empowerment was negatively related to isolation and positively related to willingness to be a leader (Zimmerman et al, 1992).

In study involving a large number of individuals in a single setting, findings indicated a relationship between the development of a psychological sense of community and commitment, and a few years later, life satisfaction as well (Maton & Rappaport, 1984 as cited in Rappaport, 1987, p134). In a corporate context, research showed that blending people in organisations in different ways offered the opportunity for them to connect in multiple ways, and that as the opportunities to connect with others increased, so did the empowerment of members (Peterson & Speer, 2000). Environments that develop a sense of community and commitment, influenced by criteria that are unique to the goals and purposes of the settings, could thus enable members to experience greater empowerment (Maton & Rappaport, 1984 as cited in Rappaport, 1987, p134). These studies findings offer support to the possibility of shifting notions and practices of gendered leadership in corporate organisations, purposefully, through concientization (Freire, 1972) and enabling the co-construction of new cultural practices and patterns. They further illuminate the possibility of generating a sense of individual empowerment amongst corporate women leaders, within a collective context, when the purpose and goals of gender

equality are shared.

An important proposition in empowerment theory is the notion that new experiences or special challenges could serve to trigger the empowerment process (Hart, 1996 in Carr, 2003, p14). This reflects the possibilities relating to women leaders' agency despite the barriers they face and draws attention to a possibility not explicit in Vygotsky's theory, which is that psychological challenges can at times, have positive effects upon the individual's ego functioning and adaptation, which include vigilance, healthy endurance, enhanced ambition, perseverance, and pursuit of knowledge about self and others (Akhtar & Wrenn, 2008). Davis (1991) asks why women continue to go along with power relations that could be repressive. She states that to view women as subordinate and powerless to bring about change relegates women to mere victims, so it is more likely that unequal power relations also serve as an enabling force, a force that triggers resilience and resistance (Davis, 1991).

3.4 Facilitating Alternative Narratives and Building Enriched Identity

The theory of *narrative identity* posits that human beings develop an internalised and evolving story – a narrative - about their experiences that weaves together their reconstructed past, perceived present, and expected future (Adler, 2012). From the perspective of Narrative, internal narratives determine how we interpret our experiences in both what we attribute meaning to as well as what we give expression to (Dunne, 2009). Through narrative, the self is portrayed as the subject of a multitude of experiences in the form of a story-like account (Sparrowe, 2005).

Vygotsky observed that mythological thinking was not only characteristic of children but also forms the basis of everyday adult thinking (Kozulin, 1996). As he explored the role of psychological tools in mediating higher mental functioning, Vygotsky became deeply interested in the human capacity to create elaborate symbolic systems of meaning 'which mediate our relation to the world through the power of representation' (Bakhurst, 1996: 200). Vygotsky asserted that these semiotic systems of mediation completely transform our psychological relation with reality (Bakhurst, 1996). This is aligned with the viewpoint of narrative approaches, the implication being that the system of meaning – including sociocultural meaning – that individuals internalise is what they will mediate intermental and intramental functioning through. It is not necessarily reality. Our internal narratives or stories shape our lives as we filter our experiences through the dominant memories, perceptions and beliefs of the narratives that we hold as true.

If narratives contribute to, and influence, these intrapsychic dynamics, they could provide access into an individual's state of agency and choice (Carroll & Levy, 2011). Narrative approaches seek to empower individuals and work from the basis of identity as being a socially constructed phenomenon. They thus avoid engaging with a person in a pathological or dysfunctional way which tends to marginalise the person (Morgan, 2000; Dunne 2009). This approach thus resonates with feminist leadership, sociocultural development theory and empowerment theory, all of which assert a socially constructed basis of identity development.

Problem-saturated narratives are often linked to what narrative therapists refer to as thin descriptions in that they restrict the roles and actions a person could perform, and the range of perceived identity, as they filter the problem-free experiences and events from memories and perceptions (Morgan, 2000; Dunne, 2009). In so doing, resourcefulness, hope, affirmation, and agency are also often filtered out (Dunne, 2000). In contrast, alternative stories that offer a richer description allow new descriptions of identity and values to emerge, opening up the possibility for individuals to experience the transformative power of stories that invite personal agency. This power, according to Dunne (2000), can help people change their lives. The extent to which narrative identity is successful in providing the self with a sense of unity is linked to mental health (Adler, 2012). Narrative approaches work with finding ways in which alternative stories can be developed and richly described, to create empowering narratives that could become identity-infused instead.

In a study tracking the coevolution of narrative identity and mental health on a week-by-week basis with a group of 47 participants, and designed to examine short-term personality change via an emphasis on narrative identity as it relates to mental health, findings suggested a significant increase in the theme of agency over the period of the treatment (Adler, 2012). The rise in the theme of agency 'concerned with the individual's autonomy, achievement, mastery, and ability to influence the course of his or her life' (Adler, 2012:368) was significantly associated with improvements in mental health. Alkire (2005, in Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007:380) asserts that empowerment involves an increase in certain kinds of agency deemed pivotal in a given situation. Empowerment, she suggests, is a subset of agency, and an increase in agency would reflect increased empowerment (Alkire, 2005, in Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007).

Our narratives do not occur in a vacuum. There is always a context in which the stories of our lives are constructed, and this context contributes to the interpretations and meanings that we assign to our experiences (Morgan, 2000). The context of gender, class, race, culture and sexual preference are examples of powerful contributors to the narratives that we form (Morgan, 2000; White, 2007; Dunne, 2009). Furthermore, not one story, but multiple stories or narratives influence a person's life (Morgan, 2000; Dunne, 2009). This is supported by May (1991) who advanced that cultural narrative patterns illuminate collective values, challenges and possibilities, and provide for individual meaning to be derived.

Narratives offer a way in which to try out new structures in life (May, 1991). May (1991) described myth as a set of narrative patterns through which individuals find a sense of identity, and stated that contain aspects such as values, beauty, ideas, behaviour styles, and challenging life situations. A brief review on myths about women leaders revealed the following: Women are genetically bad at math, science and technical fields; women are weak negotiators of salary and promotions, women don't ask for what they want as easily as men do (Brock, 2016); women leaders are ice queens, single and lonely, tough, weak, masculine, conniving, angry, a token, and/or a cheerleader (Pozzobon, 2013). Rappaport (1995) states that cultural narratives that are available to people who lack power, socially, economically or politically, are often narrow and defined for them. Communal support is needed for a new narrative to develop in which the individual's personal narrative can enrich or change (Rappaport, 1995). White (2007) extends this with a description of individuals having a psychological *landscape of identity* constituted of categories of identity that are culturally relevant. Categories include desires, drives, personality traits, personal properties, values, beliefs, hopes, and commitments, states White (2007), and people assign a range of conclusions about their and others' identities, which shapes how they experience their lives.

Sparrowe (2005) suggests that enriching the variety of alternative, positive plot lines in one's narrative could enable developing leaders to find in others new ways of being. One of the ways in which to do this is through accessing the narratives of other leaders or mentors from whom one could learn and drawing on their stories to

construct representations of a more enriched self narrative. This also echoes Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in which a less experienced individual learns from a more experienced peer or teacher.

Theoretical objections to using narrative approaches in the re-authoring of individual experiences appear to hinge on the concern that story telling could reinforce stereotypes of the dominant culture (Morris, 2004). A therapist who is culturally insensitive could inadvertently reinforce narratives that do not serve the individual/s. This could be addressed through empowerment and feminist leadership frameworks, which emphasise creating environments in which alternative narratives emerge collaboratively through the group. Facilitators and therapists must seek to foster engagements that enable individuals and groups to critically enquire into thin descriptions and problem-saturated narratives, engage in consciousness-raising dialogue, enrich narratives with empowering meanings, and co-construct alternative narratives. Collective and individual identities around potential personal change (Rappaport, 1993 in Peterson and Speer, 2000), could thereby be enabled.

3.4.1 Narradrama

Narradrama is a combination of the Narrative Therapy and Drama Therapy approaches (Dunne, 2009).

Drama therapy has been defined as 'the intentional and systematic use of drama/theatre processes to achieve psychological growth and change. The tools are

derived from theatre, the goals are rooted in psychotherapy' (Emunah, 1994, p3). Narradrama enables the invisible to become visible and for multiple perspectives to be observed (Dunne, 2009) in an externalised, imaginal space.

Narradrama aims to empower people through providing a pathway to enrich and re-author problem-saturated narratives (Morgan, 2000; Dunne, 2009) and thereby offers an approach to working with individuals and groups in seeking alternative, enriched and potentially more empowering stories, through dramatic medium. Participants are invited to constellate various elements relating to a problem story-line, enabling a contextualised projection of the narrative landscape to be brought into being and providing a distanced way of viewing the narrative. By looking at the image from different viewpoints, insights and expanded awareness can emerge as individuals take a meta-position in relation to her, his, or their, story and its elements (Dunne, 2009).

The enactment of life dramas involve a reliving of the experience, and in the process emotional catharsis is triggered in both the actors as well as the audience (Emunah, 1994). Theatrical characters enable the expression of what lies beneath the real-life roles (Emunah, 1994). Learning is thus reflexive as it emerges in the imaginal theatrical set-up in which participants do, make and voice a situation in the here-and-now. Extending this, Passila, Oikarinen & Harmaakorpi (2013), state that theatrically framed perplexed situations allow reflexivity to emerge and for participants to gain knowing together, thereby giving rise to the possibility of collective voicing.

In a leadership development study in which an arts-based methodology was

employed, the study found that critical reflexivity was stimulated amongst participants through the experiential and aesthetic nature of the process (Gaya Wicks & Rippin, 2010). The study also indicated that the methodology enabled participants to engage with more problematic and challenging material, in constructive and inquiring ways (Gaya Wicks & Rippin, 2010).

Narradrama, and other arts-based methods, illuminate several connections with the theoretical viewpoints presented in this study. Vygotsky stated that the unified learning-development process occurs optimally in the context of whole and authentic activities, in which individuals are encouraged to construct their own mental representations of the learning object (Doolittle, 1997). He stated further that for the construction of knowledge to occur, the individual must construct the new knowledge, its relationship to other knowledge, and in the process, establish how to use this knowledge effectively (Doolittle, 1997). This echoes the notions of critical reflection and praxis, key tenets of empowerment theory and feminist leadership, which are both stimulated through the dramatised scenarios. The possibility of consciousness-raising, as emphasised by feminist leadership is foregrounded in a dramatic scene where the invisible becomes visible and people are able to engage with what emerges (Emunah, 1994; Jones, 1996; Dunne, 2009). Narrative techniques, including narradrama, are focused on empowering people through facilitating the re-authoring and/or enrichment of their personal and collective narratives, thus implying a pathway along which to critically enquire into internalised narrative constructs and to create more empowering ones.

3.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this review was to understand the historical and sociocultural backdrop informing the ways in which women leaders have internalised, and the ways in which they perform, leadership in a contemporary corporate organisational context.

It further aimed to review literature on the application of narrative approaches, and empowerment theory, as vehicles through which the internalisation of negative problem-saturated narratives of leadership self-efficacy, could be enriched. Both approaches seek to empower individuals and work from the basis of identity being a socially constructed phenomenon, which is significant as the literature showed that gender stereotyping remains deeply entrenched in corporate organisations and that it poses serious potential risks to women leaders' wellbeing. Literature on feminist leadership showed that feminist leadership offers a frame and philosophy for integrating transformative development and practice in corporate organisational leadership. Little research was available on the application of Vygotsky's sociocultural development theory, empowerment theory and narradrama, in the context of corporate organisations.

4 Methodology and Design

4.1 Qualitative Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was employed for this study. Qualitative research seeks to understand a given research problem from the perspectives of the population it involves and is especially relevant in obtaining specific information about the values, opinions, and social contexts of particular populations (Yin, 2011). Key features of a qualitative approach according to Yin (2011) include studying the meaning of people's lives under real-world conditions, representing participants' views and perspectives, and covering the contextual – social, institutional and environmental - conditions within which they function. Extending this, Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge (2007) state that qualitative approaches take into account the complexities associated with real-world contexts in which perspectives and interpretations often vary. Particularly relevant to this study is that qualitative research is concerned with understanding the social world, including how opinions and attitudes are formed; how people experience their social location, and how and why cultures and practices have developed in the way they have (Hancock et al, 2007).

These were important factors in selecting a qualitative research approach: It aligned with the theoretical framework of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural development theory emphasising the sociocultural context individuals are located in and the influence this has on higher mental functioning. Vygotsky also asserted that learning takes place optimally in scenarios that represent real-life situations, and that involve

both social interaction as well as individual change (Doolittle, 1997). A qualitative approach to the research allowed for these principles to be incorporated into the research design. From an empowerment perspective, the contextual setting is also an important factor and creating settings in which people are able to participate in the discovery, enrichment and creation of their personal, and the community's shared, narratives, contributes to the enhancement of personal and collective empowerment (Rappaport, 1995). This intent was also fundamental to the research approach and intervention design, as the study was aimed at enriching problem-saturated narratives of women leaders participating in the study, implying both collective as well as individual levels of narrative. A qualitative approach, through the narradrama method, would enable the process of collective discovery and co-creation.

4.2 Research Sample

Women already occupying leadership roles in corporate organisations, or those aspiring to become leaders, were invited to participate in the study, as it enquires into narratives associated with practicing leadership in corporate organisations.

According to Patton (1990), there are no fixed rules for sample size in qualitative research, and sample sizes depend on 'what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the enquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources' (p184). Mason (2002) further states that sampling decisions may not be able to be finalised upfront,

and that a qualitative approach would usually sample until a theory-saturation point is reached. The focus must be on what requires comparison and the extent to which the sample generated enables this comparison (Mason, 2002).

A purposive snowball sampling method was employed to select participants for the study. The method involves primary data sources referring other potential primary data sources to be included in the research (Dudovskiy, 2016). Patton (1990) states that the reasoning and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in depth studying. He defines information-rich cases as cases from which a significant amount of knowledge and information can be gleaned about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research enquiry (Patton, 1990). In addition, an exponential non-discriminative approach to the snowball sampling was employed: The first subject recruited to the sample group provided several referrals who were included until primary data from an adequate number of samples were collected (Dudovskiy, 2016). Six subjects were invited directly by the researcher, and twenty-one were referred by these initial six subjects.

Of the total study sample of 27, all participants were women, two were aspiring leaders, whilst the years of experience of the rest ranged from 2 to more than 12 years. The age range of the sample was from late 20s to over 50 years. The racial mix of the sample was: Black: 10, Indian: 7, White: 7 and Coloured: 3. The sample represented three industry sectors, namely: financial services, professional services and cosmetics. Current roles of the sample group were varied and included representation from the following business areas: Human Resources; Learning &

Development; Talent & Acquisition; Tax; Organisational Transformation; Customer Experience; Marketing & Promotions; IT: Risk & Compliance, Business Engagement, Digital, Business Analysis, Business Information, and Development Capabilities; Internal Communications; Brand Management; and Change Management.

As a result of pre-existing professional relationships with several participants, the establishment of trust between the researcher and the sample group was established rapidly.

The duration of each intervention was approximately 3 hours. Intervention 1 had 12 participants, intervention 2 had 9 participants, and intervention 3 had 6 participants. Interventions 1 and 2 were held at the premises of the organisation by whom the participants were employed. Intervention 3 took place at an independent venue and was made up of participants from 4 organisations.

4.3 The Group Intervention:

4.3.1 A Group Setting

The beneficial factors of group therapy, as described by Yalom (1985), include: The instillation of hope, ignited by the development of others and the sense this generates of healing possibilities; the universality of experiences and the sense of being connected that this develops; the sharing of problems, insights help, and the experience of mutual support this creates; and the opportunity to develop insights and learn through relationships and the experiences of others (Yalom, 1985).

Rappaport (1995) states that people who seek individual or community change find it difficult to sustain the change without communal support that enables a new collective narrative to emerge, take root, and around which changes to their own personal narrative can be sustained (Rappaport, 1995:796). Women leaders, as illuminated in the literature (e.g. Credit Suisse, 2014; Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; McKinsey & Company, 2016) share the experiences of gender inequity and gender role stereotyping which may have contributed to shared narrow narratives, therefore, a group intervention to co-create alternative possibilities was meaningful for this research. Informed by empowerment theory, a group setting in which participants felt safe, and in which they could mentally and emotionally benefit through communal support, was fundamental to the approach (Rappaport, 1995).

The group approach allowed for the integration of Vygotsky's sociocultural development theory; grounded in the notions that knowledge is socially constructed, learning and development are interlinked that learning can lead development, and that the social context has a deterministic influence on development (Vygotsky, 1978; Peneul & Wertsch, 1995; Bakhurst, 1996, Hedegaard, 1996; Doolitte, 1997).

In the historical, sociocultural context of corporate leadership being characterised by stereotypically masculine notions (Schein, 2001; Fletcher, 2004; Batliwala, 2010; Zulkifli, 2013; Evans, 2014), this research sought to employ the concept of the ZPD as

a construct in which to facilitate the enriching of narratives about leadership self-efficacy amongst participants.

For the optimal application of the ZPD concept, three zones of the ZPD need to be engaged, namely the use of whole, authentic activities, the need for social interaction, and the process of individual change (Doolittle, 1997). Activities that are relevant contextually and require application of skills and knowledge to real-world tasks, establish an environment in which the ZPD can be embedded (Doolittle, 1997). The interventions were therefore designed to facilitate individual and collective engagement with participants' narratives about specific corporate leadership experiences. Narradrama was used to foster experiential, interactive processes through which participants could externalise problem-saturated narratives and co-construct alternate, enriched narrative possibilities of self-efficacy in leadership, in a mutually supportive group context.

Guided by empowerment theory, participants themselves, with the therapist, would co-construct the scaffolding of the ZPD. Mutual empowerment through growth-fostering dialogue, sharing of stories and insights, and exploration of enroling in empowered leadership roles through dramatic expression, were elevated and supported, thereby constructing the required scaffolding. Yalom's (1985) beneficial factors of group therapy were also considered as contributing to the scaffolding needed for strengthening of the Zones of Proximal Development (ZPDs) within the interventions. As problem narratives were externalised and explored, and alternative narratives authored, the benefits of the group process could serve to

strengthen the scaffolding that enhanced the individual and collective learning.

The approach was conducive to revealing group dynamics and norms which is important to the thematic analysis approach applied (Yin, 2011).

4.4 Narradrama as a method

4.4.1 Applying narradrama as a method

Guided by the framework of the narradrama method, participants were guided through a series of activities, reflections and discussions. They were observed and engaged through dialogue to identify possible shifts experienced through the process. Narradrama creates opportunity for individuals to perceive an expanded view of their experiences and meaning, and presents choice, within the dramatic medium (Dunne, 2009). Participants gained insights and meanings through their experiences, which were reflected in their enriched narratives.

The Narradrama method has 8 steps (Dunne, 2009):

1. Warming up to New Descriptions of Self Identity and Environment
2. Externalising the Problem
3. Possibility Extension (Optional)
4. Externalising Choices
5. Invite Personal Agency
6. Alternative Stories and Unique Outcomes
7. Restory Life

8. Closure, Reflection and Rituals

Step 3 involves exploring a particular theme for a longer time in order to free an individual from a fixed viewpoint (Dunne, 2009). This step was not applied as the interventions did not commence from a fixed narrative position, and nor did participants express any.

The rest of the steps of the narradrama method were used, however, given that each intervention was 3 hours, they were not engaged with as separate, individual activities. Some of the steps were combined into a single activity and explored in dialogue and discussion, and some activities were varied slightly depending on where in the discovery and co-creation process the groups were (see *Appendix 4* for intervention Session Plan).

The primary dramatic technique employed stems from Augusto Boal's (1979) applied drama and theatre (ADT) method; *Theatre of the Oppressed,* which is a form of emancipatory theatre. Boal contended that theatre has great power to convince because of its immediate contact with the audience, and that this power extends to the content as well as the presentation of the theatrical spectacle (Boal, 1979).

In the approach, a participant is invited to constellate a theme proposed by the group using the bodies of other members (Boal, 1992). The therapist engages the group in reshaping the image which is then dynamised – given life to – several times in order to co-construct an ideal model. This represents the 'ways of moving from the real (oppressive) image to the ideal (nonoppressive) image' (Boal, 1992, p185).

All participants were entitled to sculpt the image as part of the process of changing whatever they felt necessary to transform the scene and enrich the narratives.

This research therefore elicited narratives within the groups through the theatrical set up of scenarios associated with corporate leadership, which members could participate in and/or observe. Image theatre enabled making visible narratives that existed in the groups without them being directly questioned, and avoiding the possibility of any therapist biases influencing or reinforcing stereotypes. Vygotsky provided an understanding of individual growth and development as an ongoing collaborative and creative process through which we perform into new ways of being (Holzman, 2006). The application of the image theatre technique powerfully enabled the performativity of narrative possibilities through the dramatic medium.

The scenes created in the drama, thus acted as an externalisation of the dynamics and allowed members an opportunity to reflect, resolve conflicts, remove obstacles, and re-story within the dramatic or play medium (Jones, 1996). In the narradrama, members were invited to configure and reconfigure their images towards strength, and in so doing, they enriched their narratives. In a group context, feelings and experiences shared or enacted are empathised with and responded to within the group, and participants' experiences are thereby ascribed added meaning and validity (Jones, 1996). Mutual empowerment could thus be fostered in the group activities. Jones (1996) further states that

> [E]nactment is used in Drama therapy to achieve change. This process is concerned with the way in which freedom to explore personal material can be

> created within the changed, disguised use of the body. In taking on a dramatic identity an individual can move, speak, respond and feel differently. The physical change can create a freedom from the usual identity held by the client, and from their usual codes, rules and pattern of experiencing the self and their relationship with others and their situations. This freeing can open up new ways of being, behaving and relating. It can offer the client opportunities to connect experiences made whilst in disguise, or in dramatic identity, with those of their real life. The physical change in identity and their experiences in the dramatic world can result in a change in the client's usual identity and real life (p114).

Through asking real-life questions, and using the image theatre techniques to represent the responses to these questions, real-life situations were imaged, and as a result, the learning context became whole and authentic (Doolittle, 1997). Through the imaging and re-imaging steps, and deepening the narrative enquiries during the intervention as guided by narradrama, problem-saturated narratives shared within the groups became externalised. These could then be worked with in the image theatre to invite agency and strengths, and perform enriching.

Although image theatre techniques require minimal use of the spoken word, in order that the deeper meanings are revealed through the imagery (Boal, 1992), this was not strictly adhered to in the interventions. Participants were requested to avoid speaking, however, they found this difficult and the more insights and awareness emerged, the more speaking occurred. The therapist allowed this to continue as it supports group dialogue as emphasised in feminist leadership (Batliwala, 2010) and empowerment theory (Rappaport, 1987; 1995) as key to consciousness-raising. Also, it upheld the collaborative, partnership intent of the research, and the enabling

of ZPDs to be co-constructed by the participants.

4.4.2 The intervention process

This section describes the dramatic activities as they unfolded in the narradrama. An analysis of the data and findings is provided in Chapter 5, *Results & Findings*.

4.4.2.1 Warming up to New Descriptions of Self Identity and Environment

The first step invites individuals to alternative descriptions of identity and environment (Dunne, 2009). Arts-based practices are not common in daily corporate life, so the therapist considered this respectfully as part of the exploration by first using projective play with objects, before moving to embodied activities. Imagery and metaphor, as a starting point to convey feelings, attitudes and parts of self, invites curiosity, acceptance and the building of interest in the group (Pearson & Wilson, 2009). From a selection, participants were invited to choose an object that represented something that they valued about themselves, and to share this with the group. Jones (1996) posits that a clients' empathic involvement with an object is increased during projective play and thus emotional engagement is stimulated. Aesthetic distance can enable the person to engage with and claim aspects of themselves (Jones, 1996). In this way, step 1 involved warming up to engaging with symbolism and play as well as the narrative components of individual and collective strengths.

This step flowed into a dialogue about shared experiences of corporate leadership to

build on the sense of community and safety within the group.

4.4.2.2 Externalising the Problem and Externalising Choices

Steps 2 and 4 were combined into one activity. Prepared by the activities and dialogues in step 1, participants were invited to physically image how they as women perform leadership, how men perform leadership, and how they learn leadership, in a corporate organisational context. Through externalising, problem-saturated narratives become disentangled from the individual's identity, offering an opportunity to create separation between the person and the problem (Dunne, 2009). Externalising in the drama, allowed for feelings triggered through the theatre to be engaged with in a more distanced way, than engaging with them in real life; and so, the practice of theatre could thus be an effective tool for making visible, understanding, and reflecting on social and personal dynamics and problems (Boal, 1995).

Through the externalisation, participants were able to begin to see, from a safe distance, narrow narratives becoming visible, and in the reflection and dialogue, engage with the choices and strategies for addressing the problem. According to Emunah (1994), the dramatic enactments:

> lead to greater awareness and insight into roles, responses to others, ways of trying to control the responses of others, patterns and habitual scripts (p14).

4.4.2.3 Inviting Personal Agency

Step 5 followed reflection and dialogue about the narrow narratives that emerged in the previous activities, which had triggered in the participants their own questioning and surprise at what had unfolded. The purpose of this step is to reclaim strengths and inner resources, and to activate choice and agency (Dunne, 2009). Participants in group 3 were invited to share a story about a time when they accessed their strengths as leaders and made a difference to others, as well as felt great about themselves. Participants in group 2 formed a circle and together we did several rounds of naming and claiming personal gifts and strengths, and participants in group 1 used objects to symbolise and share strengths.

Through these activities, participants were able to make further discoveries about their strengths and personal resources (Dunne, 2009) individually and collectively.

By claiming strengths within the group context, participants were able to also experience themselves through the appreciation of other members. Sparrowe (2005) asserts that this could have a profound effect on the enrichment of a leader's self-narratives. Turner (2005), further asserts that an individual's psyche expands into a healthier configuration when strengths, resources or healthier, more empowering elements are added to their existing story-line.

After these activities, the group progressed into the next and final activity of co-creating enriched narrative possibilities.

4.4.2.4 Alternative Stories and Unique Outcomes, and Restorying Life

Step 6, Dunne (2009) describes as involving the illustration of alternative ways in which problems could be solved, which, in the dramatic activity, enables the performativity of moving forward into the future.

In the group interventions, this was achieved through inviting participants to image and dynamise leadership that reflects the strengths, gifts and resources that they had reclaimed in the previous step. Through a few iterations of imaging and re-imaging, groups in all three interventions, moved from imaging intimate, closed circle formations, to formations that were not circular but that were interconnected and finally - when men leader roles were introduced into the scenes again – to image formations that reflected engagement and partnership.

These scenes introduced new possibilities and descriptions that could begin to be integrated into conceptualising and performing corporate leadership as women. In reflections and dialogues following these activities, Step 7 of the Narradrama process was engaged with: Restorying Life. The possibilities of re-authoring narrow narratives about leadership self-efficacy were illuminated and shared in a mutually empowering context.

4.4.2.5 Closure and Reflection Rituals

In strengthening the symbolism of mutual support and closing with strengths, as the group had commenced, a simple closing ritual of sitting in a circle, selecting an

object to reflect a learning or gift from the process, and sharing this, was facilitated. This was followed by a social lunch as part of the closing ritual, that adequate time in addition to the 3-hour intervention, had been scheduled for. In a corporate leadership context, leaders have a lot to do and often little time in which to do it all. Taking the time to connect over a 'rich' lunch, was therefore an important symbolic way of celebrating the richer possibilities that the groups had co-created.

4.5 The role of the researcher

Rappaport (1987) states that the conditions of participation in a setting will have an impact on the empowerment of the members. Extending this, he further advances that one of the ways to learn about empowerment is through the role of the facilitator who, in collaboration with the people located in a specific context, seeks to create and understand the conditions that foster change in relationships and environments that lead to elevating empowerment (Rappaport, 1987). An important aspect of an empowerment approach, is that the research design, implementation and evaluation, redefines the researcher's role with the participant group (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000). The researcher's role becomes one of collaborator and facilitator (in this study, the facilitator was the therapist) rather than expert and this changes the power dynamics that are usually associated with researcher-respondent roles which could reinforce power stereotypes (Zimmerman, 2000).

Reinforcing power stereotypes is also a concern with the concept of the ZPD, as the

facilitator (or therapist) or another participant/s being identified as the providers of the instructional requirement of the ZPD, could also reinforce power stereotypes (Campione, 1996). The role of the researcher in the interventions was therefore also therapist as well as collaborator participating in the discovering, enriching and co-creating of narratives, and the scaffolding enabling the groups to get there. Therapeutic skills, guided by the narradrama method and Boal's (1995) image theatre techniques, guided the researcher's role as therapist. Collaborating with participants through sharing experiences and participating in some of the reflecting and activities, placed the researcher in a role of partnership with participants. This enabled the researcher to learn about participants' cultures, worldviews and struggles, and instead of advocating for participant, to work with them (Zimmerman, 2000).

4.6 Data Gathering

Data gathering in qualitative research is intended to establish evidence for the experience that the research is investigating, and evidence occurs in the form of accounts that research participants have provided of the experience (Polkinghorne, 2005, p138). Through the narradrama method, participants were guided through a series of semi-structured activities, discussion and reflections to enquire into their experiences as corporate leaders or aspirant leaders. In analysing the evidence, the researcher was able to generate a core description of corporate leadership as performed by the participants (Polkinghorne, 2005). Audio recordings, literature

and observation functioned as primary sources of data in this study. A secondary source was made up of the researcher's process notes taken during and after the group interventions, to record observations, insights and theoretical connections. Audio recordings were transcribed into electronic document format by the researcher for analysis.

The researcher engaged with the groups being observed and gathered data through direct contact (Polkinghorne, 2005; Dudovskiy, 2016). In this study, observation of participants in the dramatic activities was used to supplement and augment data derived from the reflections and discussions. The use of Boal's (1995) image theatre technique enabled the dramatic construction of real-life, contextual scenarios through which participants could be observed, and through which they could observe themselves.

4.7 Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis was applied to categorise and analyse the data gathered into main themes and their sub-themes. Thematic Analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Crowe, Inder & Porter, 2015). These patterns, or themes, capture something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. The significance of a theme is dependent more on its importance in relation to the research question than the

number of times it appears during the research, and as such a level of researcher judgement will prevail during the analysis (Polkinghorne, 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis was applied at a latent level which seeks to examine the underlying concepts, assumptions and ideas that could be informing the data content (Crowe et al, 2015). This approach is aligned with the theoretical framework, the viewpoints of which are interested in the socio-cultural contexts and structures that inform the production of individual and collective meaning and experience. The approach also supported the study's intention to identify underlying narratives and their sociocultural connections of participants in relationship to perceived self-efficacy. Themes that became apparent were thus analysed to provide a deeper analysis of possible connections with the theoretical framework, narrative approaches and drama therapy theory.

The Thematic Analysis process broadly encompassed the steps defined by Crowe et al (2015). Data transcribed was augmented with the researchers notes from observing the participants in the dramatic activities. Familiarity with data was generated by several readings of the data and generating initial codes keeping the research question at the forefront. Data was searched for themes and clustered into associated ideas. This was linked with the narradrama method which seeks to identify problem-saturated narratives as a platform upon which to develop more enriched, alternate narratives (Dunne, 2009). In searching for the themes, the researcher was therefore also guided by the narradrama method and how and when

the themes developed. As narrative themes became apparent, they were named, defined and described referencing the transcribed data and specific extracts which served to illustrate the meaning and importance of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, Crowe et al, 2015). The relationships of the themes to each other and the socio-cultural context within which they emerged, linking to the theoretical frameworks that this study was grounded in, were then explored (Crowe et al, 2015).

4.8 Ethical Considerations

The researcher's ethical clearance followed the guidelines set out in the University of the Witwatersrand's *Guidelines for Human Research Ethics Clearance Application (non-medical).* According to Yin (2011, p38), 'a strong sense of ethics is fundamental because of the numerous discretionary choices made by researchers and especially by qualitative researchers'. Any research involving human participants has as a primary responsibility, the protection of the subjects, and prior approval from the relevant authority is required, as well as the participants themselves (Yin, 2011).

The Ethics Clearance Certificate for this study was granted by University of Witwatersrand's Wits School of Arts (WSOA), protocol number WSOA161115.

Two group interventions were planned at an organisation with their employees and on their premises. In order to achieve this, meetings were held with two decision makers to explain the research and to request their consideration of the study. A

letter requesting permission to conduct the study at the organisation was sent following the discussions. Once permission had been received (*Appendix* 1), these individuals enabled the purposive sampling process by referring potential participants. Simultaneously, the researcher engaged individuals from other organisations who fit the sample profile, to invite them to consider volunteering to participate in the multi-organisation group intervention.

Information sheets (*Appendix* 2) explaining the purpose and objectives of the study, the reason for the individuals being invited, what they could expect from the process, and the consent required, were communicated to all individuals who expressed an interest in participation. In addition, as the therapist was not a qualified Drama Therapist, details of a qualified therapist to whom volunteers might go to seek counselling support were also provided. Volunteers were provided with consent (*Appendix* 3) forms electronically via e-mail in advance of the interventions in order to ensure that they had adequate time to read the information sheet, understand and sign the consent forms, and communicate with the researcher or research supervisor if they had any questions or concerns. Participation was voluntary and withdrawing at any time would cause no penalty whatsoever for any participants, and this was clearly communicated. Volunteers agreed to the research process being unable to guarantee confidentiality as the interventions were group processes and therefore confidentiality could not be controlled. They also agreed to anonymity. Interventions were audio-recorded, not video-recorded. No photographs of the sessions were taken, and participants were informed that their names would be excluded from any academic reports produced.

During each intervention, prior to commencing the activities, the researcher went through the information sheet, responded to any queries, and ensured all consent forms were signed and received.

4.9 Limitations of the Study

Potential limitations and challenges existed in the carrying out of this study. These, along with the ways in which they were mitigated, are described in this section.

Excluding men from the study could reinforce problem-saturated narratives women leaders hold of their male counterparts. This was mitigated by encouraging focus on self-growth and empowerment, as well as inviting an holistic perspective in terms of considering the effects that patriarchal attitudes and practices have had on both women and men.

This study did not analyse organisational factors that may have contributed to the narratives that became apparent during the processes. Literature reviewed largely informed the possibilities associated with this dimension of enquiry. Future research could shed light on the internal dynamics and structures of organisations, and how they reinforce or disrupt narrative patterns.

In the context of learning, Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development,

places emphasis on instruction and sets the teacher or mentor up as the person in charge or who knows more. This could serve to reinforce patriarchal power relations of dominance and subordination. In the research, this was mitigated by the application empowerment theory and narradrama, which foster a participant-led approach in consciousness-raising and the co-construction of knowledge and alternative, enriched narratives.

Working with concepts such as problem-saturated narratives, oppression, discrimination, and empowerment, could lead to the reinforcement of a sense of powerlessness in participants. It was critical that the approach of this study engaged with consciousness-raising and enriching narratives about corporate leadership self-efficacy, without reinforcing a position of powerlessness, and with reinforcing strengths and agency instead. A strong strengths-based approach was thus employed throughout the study, not only in the choice of methods, but also in how the therapist engaged with participants using solutions-focused, strengths-based language, questioning and reinforcement throughout.

The therapist had pre-existing professional relationships with some of the participants, and this could have triggered a 'step-child' emotional reaction in those participants with whom there were no prior relationships. The application of empowerment theory and narradrama, which foster a participant-led approach, will have served to mitigate against this reaction by enabling little opportunity for the therapist to focus on specific members of the group. Significant communication prior to the interventions as well as at the beginning of each, as well as the warm-up

activities, will also have contributed to mitigating this reaction.

5 Results and Findings

This research aimed to enquire into narratives that participants had of their leadership self-efficacy in a corporate organisational context, and the effectiveness of narradrama in facilitating an enrichment of these narratives.

Corporate leadership is historically, socio-culturally a primarily male-defined, male-occupied domain from which women, and traits associated with femininity, have historically been excluded (e.g. hooks, 2000; Fletcher, 2004; Zulkifli, 2015; Evans, 2014). The changing landscape of corporate leadership means that women today have greater access to leadership positions than in the past, however, research shows that the occupancy of women in senior leadership roles continues to increase at an alarmingly slow rate (Credit Suisse, 2014; McKinsey & Company, 2016; BWASA, 2017). This as shown in the literature, could be attributed to numerous structural, practice and cultural factors within corporate organisations, as well as the pervasive power of gendered notions of men and women in society and how this plays out in organisational contexts (hooks, 2000; Schein, 2001; Fletcher, 2004; Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Evans, 2014). If corporate men leaders performing leadership from this dominant narrative have been the models and teachers of leadership, then they will have reinforced the narratives that they hold true, and women leaders will have continued to learn that they do not belong in leadership roles.

This chapter illuminates the themes that became apparent through the thematic analysis of the data which includes reflections and discussions of participants, and

the researcher's notes about the ways in which the image theatre scenarios unfolded.

The themes discussed were not pre-determined, however, their identification was informed mainly by sociocultural development theory (Vygotsky 1978) and empowerment theory (Rappaport, 1987; Perkins & Zimmerman 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). Four main themes were harvested from the data, two relating to problem-saturated narratives and two to the enriching and re-authoring of narratives. These are:

1. Problem-saturated narrative theme: Women do not support other women
2. Problem-saturated narrative theme: We lead like men have taught us to
3. Enriched narrative theme: Owning our authenticity, with the sub-themes
    a. Taking Action
    b. Self-Awareness and Acceptance
4. Enriched narrative theme: Mutual empowerment through connectedness

The problem-saturated narratives will be discussed first as this aligns with the framework of the narradrama method.

Pseudonyms have been used instead of participants' names to ensure anonymity, and '*G*' indicates the group the participant was in, thus G1 means group 1 for example.

5.1 Theme: Women do not support other women

In all three groups, possibly indicating a prevalence of the narrative across diverse organisational contexts, notions of feeling unsupported by other women leaders, were expressed. One of the ways in which this can play out, according to Glick & Fiske (1996), is through women being seduced by *Benevolent Sexism*. Benevolent sexism occurs when women are complimented for conforming to gender stereotypes, and are then supported for as long as they do (Glick & Fiske, 1996). In this context women reinforce gender role stereotyping and discriminatory behaviour (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The following quote could illustrate this:

> ***Lindiwe, G1****:* Women do not support women. The progress that we've made and positions we are in, are because of men.

In these contexts, women can develop a sense that they are being done a favour or that they cannot refuse inferior or problematic roles lest they be accused of refusing challenging roles then complaining about inequality (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). By appearing to support women but actually giving them inferior roles with limited opportunities for development, those in power maintain the gender-biased power hierarchies but appear to be promoting gender equity (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Glick & Fiske, 1996). This is echoed by Freire (1972) who says that:

> any situation in which one party exploits or hinders the pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person, of another party, is a situation of oppression; and 'such a situation in itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with [the individual's]…vocation to be more fully human (p31).

In a related discussion in group 1, two participants, Lindiwe and Anna, questioned Neo about a story she shared of experiencing being stereotyped. In the story, a man leader to whom Neo reported, one evening when they were both working late, enquired into why she was not at home preparing dinner for her family instead. Neo interpreted his behaviour as sexist, since they were both working late so why should he question her. Lindiwe suggested the man could have been expressing genuine concern, whilst Anna questioned whether Neo's interpretation was due to her assumptions that the man was being sexist, rather than the reality which could have been different.

At first glance, Lindiwe and Anna's questioning appear to be logical. At a deeper analysis, however, it could also point to benevolent sexism playing out. In addition, it also raises other considerations: Firstly, as Derks et al (2016) posit, the participants challenging Neo, could be psychologically distanced from the issue of gender discrimination and role stereotyping as a result of assimilating themselves in a male-dominated leadership environment, and taking on associated characteristics and values. They could be playing out the queen bee phenomenon (Derks et al, 2016). This notion is extended in the following quotations from other participants regarding their perceptions of women leaders and not being supported:

> ***Anita,*** G2***:*** Women don't generally build up other women. I don't know if it's jealousy, but sometimes they seem to break others down in order to elevate themselves.

> **…** It can be quite cut-throat. I feel like I'm constantly fighting.

> ***Vanessa, G3***: I don't really think so [that it's harder for women to succeed] in our industry [cosmetics] because women rule…but the women in our company that are in those executive roles, they've also taken on that lack of emotion, lack of support. It filters down from the males to them.

> ***Tebogo, G1***: [Quoting Winnie Mandela]:
>
> The overwhelming majority of women accept patriarchy unquestioningly and even protect it, working out the resultant frustrations not against men but primarily against themselves…So men dominate women through the agency of women themselves.

These examples powerfully demonstrate the perception of women leaders not supporting other women, and distressingly, the seemingly violent and painful associations that this has, as elucidated in the language: 'cut-throat', 'break others down', and 'fighting'. The following unfolded in an image theatre activity, which highlights this perceived dynamic even further.

In group 2, participants were invited to set up and dynamise an image in response to the question: How do we (as women) learn leadership? Three participants volunteered. They started by enacting searching for something, but not being able to find it. One participant then lay on the floor, followed shortly by a second who then stretched an arm out across the other's neck. The third stopped, and looking at them said 'This is not the kind of leadership I wish to emulate.' The two participants

on the floor were invited to express what was happening for them; the first responded saying 'I'm looking at what's out there', whilst the other with the outstretched arm, said 'I'm stifling her a little'.

Freire (1972) states that the oppressed aspire to become like the oppressor, to imitate and follow him. Having internalised the image of the oppressor, they can sometimes manifest a kind of horizontal violence and attack their own. This could be implied in the image described, as well as the quotations, which raises yet another consideration; that women leaders could be mediating leadership through internalised psychological tools (Vygotsky 1978) of leadership, in this case, heroic notions of corporate leadership associated with masculinity and power (Bass, 2008; Jogulu & Wood, 2006, Antrobus, 2010), and *stifling* the competition.

Later in the process during reflections, group 2 participants began to enquire into broader organisational systems and their possible influences on perceptions of women's support of each other. The theatre activity had enabled a problem-saturated narrative to emerge and be externalised, offering participants the opportunity to view the problem from a distance (Boal, 1995). This opened up the space for consciousness-raising in the group (Freire, 1972, Rappaport, 1987, Antrobus, 2010) as illustrated by the following excerpts:

Pam, G2*:* Thinking about it, the number of positons in leadership available to

> women have been few. Maybe one of the reasons women haven't supported each other is because the system has forced us to compete…
>
> …I've heard it all but I haven't actually seen it. Have we been brainwashed? Maybe the system has created fear behaviour?

> ***Dawn, G2****:* There isn't support [referring to the workplace environment generally]. There's a lot of having to prove yourself all the time. Women do collaborate and support each other but we lead differently, we bring our emotions in and there should be more support.

Echoes of proposed underlying reasons for the *queen bee* phenomenon are evident in Pam and Dawn's quotations. *Queen bees* are not the reason for inequality but rather the result of inequality and structural disadvantages in the past which may force some women leaders to feel that they need to protect their roles and their territory (Sandberg & Grant, 2016; Derks et al, 2016).

However, as Ayanda's quote below points out, there are instances of strong support from other women:

> ***Ayanda****, G2*: I have been very lucky, in my career I have always had strong women mentors. I've had no issues and can't say that I haven't been supported by other women.

It must be noted that as senior leadership roles in corporate organisations are overwhelmingly occupied by men, there are less women mentors than there are men.

Pychological tools of heroic styles of leadership, being mediated by women leaders in social interactions, was also being questioned by Pam and Dawn, which reflected as well in what **Shamala, *G2*,** said:

> We judge each other, we all do it. We need to keep reminding ourselves that that's another person.

Shamala's quote points to the possibility of judging others as part of how leadership is performed. It also points to how embedded gender stereotypes and gender biases influence how women leaders are assessed and engaged with, including by themselves (Vial, Napier & Brescoll, 2016). Women who behave in bold and assertive ways, may be judged as aggressive and catty, and women leaders who behave in compassionate and caring ways, may be labelled as weak (Fletcher,2004; Vial et al, 2016, Sandberg & Grant, 2016). How women leaders behave, in accordance with dominant sociocultural narratives, will affect how they are perceived, and this includes how they perceive each other. This possibly played out in another image theatre scene which followed a similar unfolding in the three interventions.

Participants set up images in response to: As women leaders, if we set up empowered leadership, what would it look like? All three groups initially constellated images of standing circles with participants facing each other. According to Jung (1964), the symbol of the circle represents the Self, and expresses the totality of the psyche including its relationship to the environment (p266). The symbol of the circle represents inclusivity and is meaningful when considering that women, and traits associated with femininity, have historically been excluded from corporate leadership discourse and practice (Jogulu & Wood, 2006; Batliwala, 2010). A desire for wholeness could have been reflected through the circle image as illustrated by the words participants expressed when they were invited to share what was happening for them in the circle. These included: Collaboration, structure, strong, support, club, equal, exclusionary, something to work toward, sometimes I want this and sometimes I want something different, claustrophobic, and safe. The circle image may have also reflected a need for inclusivity and connectedness with each other. This is emphasised in the following quote from **Anna**, G1:

> We don't spend enough time talking about our leadership and the challenges we face. It happens a lot as adhoc conversations but not in deliberate connected conversations. We don't do golf and bosberaads like men do.

The three images morphed into wider circles – suggesting space perhaps, and room to move in the group. In groups 2 and 3, one participant stepped out of the circle. This role remained connected to the circle but rendered it open, and created some

distance with the rest of the circle. In group 2, significant discomfort was expressed by other participants when their member stepped out of the circle. In the enacted scene, the member who moved out of the circle, said she felt 'judged' by the other participants. Curiosity, more than discomfort with the difference was expressed in group 3, which could be a reflection of dynamics of situational specificity playing out in the group 2 scenario. Since group 3's participants were from varied organisational contexts, a group member stepping away may have been experienced as less of an issue that in group 2 where participants knew each other well and expectations of conforming might have been higher.

These dynamics playing out in the drama further illustrate the complexities associated with women navigating corporate leadership: The need to connect in the group conflicting with the need to be separate and unique, and distancing from the group potentially carrying the risk of being judged and labelled negatively and stereotypically.

Both groups engaged in significant reflection after these activities leading to the co-creation of an enriched narrative alternative around authenticity and acceptance. These reflections, as well as the earlier quotations of participants Pam, Dawn, Ayanda and Shamala, importantly illuminated the critical thinking that was occurring in the group process. Freire (1972) advanced that reflection within situational contexts facilitated critical thinking, allowing people to objectively perceive their

situational reality and thereby intervene and transform it. Carr (2013) states that unless women engage in consciousness-raising activities, they will be unable to see the links between everyday experiences and the realities of patriarchy. Such interpretation cannot occur if women are using the language of the oppressor (Carr, 2013) – the psychological tools of gendered leadership.

This leads to the second problem-saturated narrative theme that emerged in the groups: *Women lead like men have taught us to***.**

5.2 Theme: Women lead like men have taught us to

Reflecting on the enactments of how women leaders learn corporate leadership, as well as other activities during the interventions that highlighted related insights and dynamics, participants expressed their predominant learning of leadership from men, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

> ***Violet, G2****:* We're always looking for people to learn from and to emulate, it's difficult to find that connection in women leaders, so we end up emulating men.

> ***Pam, G2***: This [what was being enacted] resonates. I'm trying to find a [woman] mentor and can't think of anyone.

> ***Ayanda, G2*****:** I have been very lucky, in my career I have always had strong women mentors. I've had no issues and can't say that I haven't been supported by other women.

These quotes draw attention to women leaders mentoring each other, and the perceived difficulty in accessing women mentors. Again, as Ayanda reflected, women leaders do mentor each other, but the presence of women leader mentors will be relatively low because of their under-representation in corporate leadership roles. The more women mentor and support each other, and question the real issues underpinning their fear of supporting other women, echoing feminist leadership (Antrobus, 2010; Batliwala, 2010), the faster the inner queen bees will fly

away.

Violet's language raises a question from the perspective of the undervaluing of feminine traits, and the notion of the "think manager, think male" phenomenon (Schein, 2001). Not only are women mentors hard to find, but if those that are available are judged by internalised values that undervalue women, perhaps they will be less valued than men. The other side of this is also a consideration then; women leader mentors may also mediate their mentoring through the internalised psychological tools of gendered leadership that undervalue women.

No judgement was expressed regarding themselves or men leaders, but participants appeared to recognise that the models of corporate leadership that they have learned from and which they emulate, are primarily male. This is illustrated by the following quotes:

> ***Shamala, G2***: I'm stumped by the question [of how do I as a woman lead]. I know how to lead like a man. I'm a woman in a man's world.

> **Neo*, G1*.** It's lonely. Boardrooms are male-dominated, and how leadership is done is male-dominated. Often we think we have to emulate men.

> **Shenaaz*, G2*:** Many times we don't understand what is important to people.

> We lead with a book view of what is the right thing to do. We have a view of what it should be and we drive everyone around that view.

In reflecting on how they have learnt to lead theoretically and through emulating men, the quotations mentioned also reflect the process of consciousness-raising (Freire, 1972; Rappaport, 1987; Antrobus, 2010) as participants enquired into their models of corporate leadership.

Part of the emulating of men and masculine notions of corporate leadership, comes from the ways in which leadership and education appear to be entrenched in gender stereotyped notions of men and women. The teaching of corporate leadership continues to be mediated through what has been historically and socioculturally internalised, and which has been male-dominated, male-defined and gendered, as pointed out in the following quotations:

> ***Shenaaz, G2****:* At college, we were taught etiquette by a lecturer. How to dress, how to carry ourselves, how to behave in the corporate world.
>
> …Sometimes women ended up changing their career paths because there was no support in the structure, in behavioural aspects. As a woman I need to come in and change tapes, but I need to know how to do this with heels and lipstick.

Lindiwe, ***G1***: In IT women leaders taught people how to be tough, how to be like men. They didn't teach us how to be a good leader.

Rethabile, ***G3***: A simple thing like fashion…what do you do when you're in corporate? You wear a man's suit. It's physical. You have to sit there and be a man.

The stereotypes about the characteristics of successful corporate leaders and the gender roles of women are incongruent (Schein 2001, Derks et al, 2016; Fletcher, 2004). Corporate leadership, as illustrated by Shenaaz's and Lindiwe's quotations, is taught in ways that emphasise masculine models and notions of leadership, even in dress code as pointed out by Rethabile, that continue to stereotype women, and that encourage stereotypical masculine attributes (Schein 2001, Derks et al, 2016). Lindiwe's quote importantly points to the awareness that she was taught how to be like a man, not like a leader. This powerfully illustrates the notion that teaching an individual how to be like a stereotypical man could be equated to teaching her or him how be a leader.

In sessions 2 and 3, this may have been further illuminated during two image theatre activities. In the first activity, participants were invited to image and enact how women lead. Enactments revealed no apparent shared expression. Participants walked around, enacting different things, formed sub-groups or stood alone. When

invited to enact how men lead, both groups enacted confident movements, bravado, physical strength, puffed out chests, hands in fists on hips, being in charge and some sexual innuendo. All the participants imaged male leaders in a similar way. There appeared to be a unified expression of how participants perceived the ways in which men lead.

In another scene, in group 2, two men leaders (enacted by the therapist and another participant) were introduced into the scene. As they entered into the scene and began interacting with the participants playing the women leaders, the automatic reaction of the women leaders was to engage with in stereotypically masculine ways, emulating strong masculine characteristics such as shaking hands and adopting stances of physical strength. Participants were taken aback by what they observed and performed, as the problem-saturated narrative appeared to become externalised and visible in the drama.

White's (2007) notion of psychological *landscapes of identity* that are culturally constructed was foregrounded in the clarity and commonality expressed in how men perform leadership. Participants' conclusions assigned to how men perform leadership were revealed in the enactments. Boal (1995) said that theatre is the capacity that allows individuals to see themselves in action, in activity. These enactments reflected powerfully the collective narratives of corporate leadership being associated with stereotypical masculine qualities, again highlighting the

relevance of Vygotsky's sociocultural development theory, and also illuminating the effectiveness of the dramatic medium in making internalised narratives visible.

As the problem-saturated narratives became apparent, and participants engaged with them through the dramatic activities, reflections and dialogues, they questioned the validity of the narrow assumptions. Enriched possibilities including their possession of choices, strengths and resources that enabled them to be effective leaders were enquired into, elevating an exploration of inviting personal agency and alternative narrative possibilities (Dunne, 2009).

5.3 Theme: Owning our Authenticity

Working with the narradrama method, the groups then participated in discussions and dramatic activities to discover and reinforce their strengths, in order to connect with personal agency and invite alternative stories (Dunne, 2009). Expanding personal agency, according to Dunne (2009), enables individuals to recognise and connect with their strengths more deeply and to open up to alternative, *thicker* narratives. In a collective context, the goals of empowerment are enhanced when the members claim and give voice to collective narratives that sustain their personal stories in positive ways (Rappaport, 1995).

Several participants referred to authenticity as being key to their effective leadership, which is the third theme that became apparent in the research, with two sub-themes: Taking Action, and Self Awareness & Acceptance.

Wissing, Potgieter, Guse, Khumalo & Nel (2014), sourcing Seligman (2002) and Harter (2002), describe authenticity as owning our personal experiences, which includes our needs, thoughts, emotions, beliefs, values, aspirations and preferences. Authenticity is about acting in congruence with our true selves; it is about expressing what we think, what we feel, and what we believe (Wissing et al, 2014). Psychological agency involves a sense of autonomy, achievement, mastery, and ability to influence one's life (Adler, 2012).

Participants appeared to demonstrate re-connecting with these aspects of themselves as they asserted their own and each other's strengths and capacities.

This is reflected in the following quotations:

> ***Lindiwe G1***: In the past we may have been beaten up for being authentic and original, so we need to be conscious of ourselves.

> ***Shenaaz G2***: We need to transcend the stereotype expectations through deepening our authenticity.

> ***Anna G1***: We need to give room for patience, for socialisation, adapting. We need to understand that people will drop off, that we should not give up on them, not make assumptions that they're not into the process.

What Lindiwe, Shenaaz and Anna expressed about being authentic, aware and accountable, are examples possibly of narratives providing access to participants' states of agency and choice, (Carroll & Levy, 2011).

As expanded in the literature, women in corporate organisations may be subjected to subtle and implicit forms of oppression through gender discrimination, gender role stereotyping and the barriers they often encounter as leaders (Ely & Padavic, 2007; Batliwala & Friedman, 2011; Klenke, 2011, Kira et al, 2012). Participants also problematised the stereotypical expectations that women need to be friendly, unselfish, nurturing, have diffused boundaries, be polite etc., as illustrated by the

following quotations:

> ***Mayesh, G3***: It has been an upward struggle. The person I report to is an extremely dominant, strong male. I remind myself that I'm female and I'm not changing.

> ***Lesedi, G1:*** Does togetherness and harmony have to be *touchy feely*? Can we not portray it in another way? Caring can be demonstrated in many ways.

> ***Violet, G2:*** There are some relationships that we have to have the courage to not invest in.

These quotations, as well as the enactments mentioned of participants stepping out of the leadership circle formations in the dramatic activities, are possibly examples of the women leaders owning their experiences and expressing acting in congruence with their true selves (Wissing et al, 2014). By differentiating themselves from the oppressor (including the internal oppressor), women can begin to engage with possibilities for personal and social transformation (Carr, 2013).

Reconnecting with their strengths and authenticity, also reminded participants of their own accountability in their experiences of leadership, as well as the value they bring to others in being authentic, as demonstrated in the following excerpts:

Diana, G1: Authenticity brings creativity and contributes to the group.

Shenaaz, G2*:* If we are in positions of power as leaders, whenever we do things involving others, we need to ask about the cost. Are we hurting others? Are we uplifting ourselves at the cost of hurting others? We must ask how what I am going to do is going to help the next person.

Lindiwe, G2*:* Everyone in the session knows what needs to be done. It's about behaviour – about taking the steps to align the values of what we believe in with what we're doing.

The capacity of agency in themselves and each other may have been elevated in the sharing and performing of strengths, abilities and resources. The excerpts highlight Vygotsky's notion that development is a social activity of creating who we are by performing who we are becoming (Holzman, 2006). Augmenting this with narradrama, Pendzik (1997) states that activities that encourage people to act, help to consolidate positive self-image as they foster the internalisation of being capable of taking action and changing. Jones (1996) extends this stating that externalisation in the dramatic medium, can enable an individual to engage with and claim aspects of themselves.

These possibilities are elucidated in participants' reflecting on their capacity to be authentic through being reminded of their resilience and strengths, and their capacity to choose and act. What became apparent through the drama, was possibly

also how resilient and resourceful they, the participants, must be to navigate such contradictory, gendered territory, and achieve success; foregrounding Akhtar & Wrenn's (2008), and Davis's (1991) assertions that unequal power relations also serve as enabling forces that trigger healthy adaptation and resilience.

Reflecting on accountability, and choice to act, gives rise to the sub-theme of *taking action.*

5.3.1 Sub-Theme: Taking Action

The physical activities appeared to activate a sense of agency in participants that inspired reflection on responsibility for taking action in the real world. Jones (1996) affirms this connection stating that the process of engaging with life's issues through their dramatisation leads to a vital relationship between the way individuals perform life in the real world and the enactments they participate in during drama therapeutic processes. The symbolism of the physical activities appeared to have a powerful effect on the participants, as they reflected on moving beyond talking into doing. This is captured in the following quotes:

> ***Neo, G1***: Doing the activities links to taking action, to doing. If nobody acts, nothing is going to be formed.

> ***Tebogo, G1***: The act of putting one foot in, of taking a step forward is what is necessary for the support and balance to come about. It symbolised

commitment, something in common.

Diana, G1: We must become conscious every day of what we want to achieve toward what we say we believe in. Just the movement from sitting and talking around the table to the place where we performed - that symbolises putting what we want to achieve into motion.

Lewis (1993) and Pendzik (1997) refer to the empowering and cathartic effects of engaging the body in the physical movement and expression of an oppressive dynamic, and this may have been the case in the process. Lewis's (1993) links physical verticality and self-assertion, positing that the act of standing on our own two feet, of asserting ourselves in verticality, contains a force that enables us eventually to move forward. Pendzik (1997) also advances that action-oriented approaches appear to be key in the process of empowerment as they facilitate unlearning helplessness, encourage action and ignite movement beyond words only. Words are not inefficient, but they may be insufficient says Pendzik (1997).

Linked to the theme of Taking Action is the notion of praxis. Freire's (1972) notion of, and empowerment theory's (Rappaport, 1987; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) emphasis on, praxis, may have also been foregrounded. Several insights emerged through what may have been this dynamic playing out, as illustrated in the following quotations:

Shenaaz, G2*:* [The activity] triggered thinking about the degree to which we are responsible for creating our experiences and outcomes.

Busi, G1*:* In most instances leadership shows up as formalised and is expected to be very structured. When *other* is introduced through people, strategy, etc, a different way may be required. So the exercise highlighted that sometimes we have to learn new ways of doing things and sometimes we have to unlearn old ways.

Neo, G1: We were co-creating toward a vision. Even though I had a vision, when everyone else came into the image, we co-created. This speaks to leadership being inclusive, and to holding the uncertainty.

The praxis elements of reflection and action were occurring in the dramatic activities as unified experiences, thus as participants were performing scenes, insights and awareness developed which triggered choices to change their performances in the current scene or in a later one, symbolising action, and change. Busi's and Neo's quotes point also to the capacity to cope with frustrations and to hold uncertainties as one works to influence one's environment, a process involved in the development of personal empowerment (Rappaport, 1987).

5.3.2 Sub-Theme: Self Awareness and Acceptance

According to Sparrowe (2005), authenticity emerges from the narrative process in which others play a constitutive role in the shaping of the self. Telling one's story and being heard plays an important role in the restoration and strengthening of a sense of self and personhood (Pendzik, 1997). Stereotypically, women are expected to be polite and relational. As already stated, behaving in a manner that goes against this stereotype often gets women labelled negatively (Sandberg & Grant, 2016). There is little opportunity in day to day organisational activities for women to voice their feelings, their stories and their challenges, within a supportive, contained way that elevates the possibility of consciousness-raising. This leaves the act of deepening self-awareness largely an individual process, supported through friendship, external support, or formal and informal mentoring. Through the group's attention, respectful listening and understanding, participant's experiences, individually and collectively, are given legitimacy (Pendzik, 1997; Jennings, 1997).

Discussions appeared to become more liberating as awareness deepened in individuals and expanded in the groups. As more enriched, alternative narratives that included greater agency, action and authenticity developed, participants' reflections of awareness and acceptance appeared to capture this:

> ***Shenaaz, G2:*** We must become more conscious and self-aware, develop our maturity.

***Lindiwe, G1**:* I find reasons for why I'm not good, for why I may not be the best participant here.

***Tebogo, G1**:* We must become aware and conscious of what's happening, how people are responding, why am I reacting. We can make judgement calls that have more to do with our assumptions than with what a person is saying, or what is actually happening.

***Shamala, G2**:* Knowing that I'm different, knowing that I lead differently.

Through the reflective dialogues, participants appeared to be finding their way to themselves, not as victims but through giving legitimacy and expression to their feelings and experiences in the group, and through being witnessed, even though what they were giving expression to may have been challenging. Freire (1979) proposes that reflection upon situational experiences is fundamental to discovering ourselves and each other in the context of the situation. When we can perceive the situation objectively, we develop the capacity to intervene in reality as it is revealed.

Awareness, said Freire (1979), is characteristic of all emergence, a principle embedded in the method of narradrama which through the exploration of alternative or enriched narratives, seeks to enable greater awareness and

possibilities about the self to emerge (Dunne, 2009). **Shenaaz** G2, echoed this notion potently, when she expressed:

> The learning from our conversation is that just as we are, we can deliver the best that men can, and we need to believe that our best is good enough. So, as women we are ok. We don't need to do more to be like somebody else. That is affirming and shows that as women we need to be ok and accept ourselves.

Rogers (1980) and Maslow (1968) describe self-acceptance as central to personal growth, actualisation and the promotion and maintenance of interpsychic as well as intrapsychic wellbeing (Wissing et al, 2014). A sense of positive self-regard is vital for self-acceptance to come about, and vice versa (Wissing et al, 2014). Through narradrama, the improvised and evolving narrative invited individuals to discover alternatives and exceptions, and in so doing, assist them in re-storying their narratives (Dunne, 2009).

> Hopes, beliefs, dreams and visions can be linked to new descriptions of identity, allowing participants to see themselves and their actions from different perspectives, and thereby free themselves from the problem saturated stories that have held them back (Dunne, 2009, p176).

5.4 Theme: Connectedness and Mutual Empowerment

In the three interventions, the problem-saturated narratives were externalised and reflected upon, activities and discussions took place to recognise and reclaim personal strengths, and the groups had opportunities to embody leadership from a place of strength and engage with men and women leaders (in the drama) from this

place. In the narradrama activities, all three groups, started with imaging closed circles to indicate empowered leadership. The questioning of how closed leadership circles in the real-world risk creating a sense of exclusion and claustrophobia is captured in the following statements:

> ***Lesedi, G1***: Wondered about *thinking with only one mind*, and it made me uncomfortable in the first image.

> ***Tebogo, G1:*** There's the unwritten rule of who's in and who's not, and what the consequences of those things are.

> ***Jane, G1:*** There are lost opportunities in doing things in a particular way. We sometimes think that everyone's aligned and that how we're doing things appeals to everybody. We need to learn to appreciate different perspectives others looking in might have, the different angles. What does inclusivity mean? How can it be hindered?

These reflections highlight the criticality of consciousness-raising in the empowerment process (Freire, 1972; Carr, 2003): Participants were critically thinking about, and raising consciousness, about groupings that could inadvertently reinforce inequity and exclusion.

Through a series of imaging and re-imaging (another example perhaps of praxis activated) the groups constellated interconnected formations that were not necessarily circular but in which all members were connected. A common factor that appeared to lead to the interconnected formation in groups 1 and 2, was a central symbol around which everyone connected. In group 1 this was a sword, and in group 2 is was a circular bench. It is possible that this symbolised the need in the context of the organisation they were employed at, to convene around a shared purpose. These images possibly reflect Vygotsky's emphasis on the importance of situational specificity (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1996), as well Maton's & Rappaport's (1984 as cited in Rappaport, 1987, p134) proposal that goals and purpose in specific settings could contribute to a sense of empowerment.

At various stages during the group activities, participants reflected on their experience of participating in the sessions, discussing women and leadership, and what this meant for them regarding connecting more deliberately as communities. The following quotations capture some of the meaning participants expressed:

> ***Pam, G2***: We need to form our own groups – like men have golf days etc, we need to do things that bring us women together.

> **Dawn, G2**: We're missing women leaders getting together and talking. Sharing, supporting each other. It's a great opportunity to become more united.

These expressions reflected a recognition in participants that they do not convene as women often and deliberately enough, around the issues, challenges and opportunities they encounter, and to make a unified difference; they do not engage in consciousness-raising activities. As part of their collective re-storying, participants were recognising the value and need for deeper connectedness as women leaders.

Related to the recognition of a need for deeper connectedness, is the notion of social support in creating new, collective narratives that support more empowering individual narratives (Rappaport, 1995). This notion appeared to be highlighted in a deeper sense of authenticity linked with connectedness, that appeared to be generated through the mutuality of their experiences in the interventions. As 3 of the participants expressed:

> ***Shenaaz, G2***: We bring our whole selves to the group. Creativity comes when we make a difference to others. We must encourage each other and make time to have conversations.

> ***Ayanda, G2****:* Confidence, self-belief; we should use our strengths to build us up, we're not alone so sharing with each other brings additional strength.

> ***Lesedi, G1***: We're so focused on what's different, perhaps we could also begin

to look at what brings connection. First look at what's true to everyone, then focus on the rest.

Rappaport (1987) asserts that individual empowerment is enabled as mutually supportive groups provide structures that allow individual members to form their identities around concepts of personal growth. The context of a growth-fostering group, may have contributed to participants collectively participating in the discovery, enrichment and creation of their personal and community's shared narratives (Rappaport, 1987). Group processes committed to empowerment, offer opportunity to find power in unison that is likely to be more effective than individual efforts, and 'thereby acts as a forceful vehicle in relations with larger systems and communities' (Carr, 2003: 18). There appeared to be an awareness of this possibility reflected in the participants' reflections.

Final images in the sessions included men and women leaders (in the drama) standing facing each other in positions of engagement and partnership. Powerful reflections on engagement, inclusion and mutual empowerment, were expressed in this enriching of the group's collective narratives, as demonstrated in the following quotes:

***Shenaaz, G2**:* We've been pushed around. We need to keep on pushing back by engaging, engaging and engaging, because that will change the perspective.

Neo, G1: I had a conceptual idea of what I wanted. When everyone came in and started moving in the image, something formed. It shows that as a leader you cannot just conceptualise alone. When you put your conceptions into action, challenges could arise. We have to listen to feedback from internal and external sources, and adapt accordingly, that's what I realised in the process.

Tebogo, G1: Togetherness and strength comes from the closeness and the intimacy of moving in unison, and from a sense of unity. Power in togetherness comes when we're doing the same thing at the same time. When one person in the group begins to *shake* because she's worried about something, the rest of the group will hold her up.

Freire (1972) states that true solidarity is found in the abundance of acts of love, in its praxis. Love, he said is both the foundation of dialogue as well as the dialogue itself, and that because it is an act of courage, it is an expression of commitment to others (Freire, 1972).

May asserted that the liberation of women and men will become possible when each achieves a new narrative of the other (May, 1991). Paradoxically, we can only find our true selves when we are present to each other. This is meaningfully expressed in the following quotations from ***Diane*** and ***Dineo***:

Dineo, G3: I just felt so free [in the image], that wow, he's not a man, he's a person, he's my colleague.

Diane, G1: If we are going to penetrate this wall of gender exclusion or challenges, we cannot do it alone. We need men and women who will get into the circle and make this for the benefit of everyone.

Participants in the final steps of the narradrama, in re-storying their narratives, appeared to be enquiring from this place of love that Freire (1972) refers to. Men cannot return to women what has been taken over so many centuries of domination; women have to recover their spirit themselves (Toyoda, 2006).

6 Discussion

This study has made clear that sociocultural norms, images and narratives of how men and women should behave and the roles they should occupy, continue to influence the ways in which corporate leadership is performed (Genovese & Thompson, 1993; Schein, 2001; Fletcher, 2003; Evans, 2014). Corporate leadership continues to be a highly gendered landscape which continues to favour stereotypical masculinity and men. The continued diminishing of women and feminine traits, and their internalisation, can lead to diminished mental, physical, emotional and behavioural health outcomes (Braebender and Mihura, 2000; Kira et al, 2012; Richman et al, 2016). Although this was not the focus of this research study, it was important to include to further highlight the urgent need to transform thinking and practices that reinforce gender discrimination, gender role stereotyping and gender inequity in corporate organisations.

What also became apparent in this study is that whilst organisational systems and structures, and corporate leadership discourse, are evolving beyond what may discriminate against, or essentialise women unfairly, both men and women leaders are still located in a wider sociocultural context of gender discrimination and gender role stereotyping. Women have historically been oppressed and marginalised (e.g. Crenshaw, 1993; hooks, 2000); men, along with male values and perceived masculine traits, have historically dominated the domain of leadership (e.g. Rao & Kelleher, 2000, Schein, 2001; Fletcher, 2003; Jogulu & Wood, 2006; Batliwala, 2011); and gender role stereotyping often in ways that undervalue women, continue to

pervade sociocultural narratives (Mills, 1992; Genovese & Thompson, 1993; Schein, 2001; Fletcher, 2003; Batliwala, 2010; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Evans, 2014, Zulkifli. 2015; Derks et al, 2016). This context may, therefore, continue to inform, present contradictions to, and influence, the intermental and intramental functioning of corporate women leaders and the people they engage with, including other women leaders. This was powerfully demonstrated in participants enacting searching for the learning of leadership, as well as their reflections on emulating men leaders as this is what they know, and what is available.

In a recent corporate engagement, I was involved in designing and facilitating a series of communication sessions for a business division. The leadership team (made up of more women than men, and led by a woman) designed a presentation that included two motivational video clips: The first was of a military, battle scene and the second was a of football sports scene. Both clips featured men only and depicted leadership and team work as including competition, war, pain, dominion, heroism, loyalty and trust. At another company, a metaphor of motor-car racing was selected to frame activities and communications relating to the company's 5-year strategy. The leadership team engaged in a co-creation of an image that reflected the strategy which was subsequently placed on a wall inside the building. A large male figure dominated the image as a depiction of the leader. No images of women were included. It could be argued that these metaphors may have been relevant, and the researcher notes that an in-depth analysis of leadership metaphors was not undertaken. However, based on the literature, the theoretical frameworks of the

study, and contributions from the participants of this study, it is proposed that these examples do reflect illustrations of signs, symbols and narratives that have socioculturally developed, and that corporate leaders mediate their performance of leadership through.

Striking moments during the interventions, included an activity when participants in the role of women leaders in the drama, automatically began behaving in stereotypical masculine ways when participants enacting men leaders, entered the scene. Similarly, when invited to enact leading like men, all participants enacting, behaved in stereotypical masculine ways, but when invited to enact how they as women lead, there appeared to be no cohesive pattern. The latter by no means implies judgement, and may very well elucidate hetereogeneity and multiplicity in corporate leadership styles, however, the shared narrative of perceived masculine leadership attributes and how to engage with men leaders, was clearly expressed in all three interventions.

What appeared to be playing out in the imaging and enacting scenarios, were the identity conclusions posited by White (2007) that the participants had assigned to the identity of corporate leadership. Aligned with this is Vygotsky's assertion that the systems of meaning – including sociocultural meaning – that individuals internalise is what they will mediate intermental and intramental activity with. It is not necessarily reality. Thus, if reality involves the opportunity to fulfil the role of a leader, and all the skills and experience are relevant, but the semiotic system, or

system of meaning – the conclusions - being mediated through is one defined by gendered notions and gender role stereotyping, then the psychological relation with reality will be impacted. This is what potentially played out during the dramatic activities: The internalised meaning of leadership as a primarily *masculine* identity is what participants appeared to mediate the situation with, and so their relation with reality was impacted.

This goes deeper then than women emulating masculine traits and illuminates Vygotsky's assertion of interpsychological relations becoming intrapsychological mental functioning as procedures for tool use gradually become internalised intrapsychic procedures (Hedegaard, 1996; Kozulin, 1996). The teaching of corporate leadership - the interpsychic processes involved – would, following both narrative enquiry, empowerment theory and Vygotsky, itself be socioculturally located in male-dominated and gender-role stereotypical worldviews.

A need exists in corporate organisational analysis and leadership development for the co-creation of what leadership means and requires situationally, and how to address gendering and stereotyping in the workplace. Corporate organisations are social systems of sociocultural norm enactment, mediation and production; and are thus primary in the constructing, embedding and manifesting of how leadership is performed.

6.1 The risks of emulation

The theme of *Women leaders do not support other women*, entreats deeper enquiry

into the intermental and intramental functioning of women leaders in relation to other women. Women leaders are often the minority in the corporate leadership circles they function within, and this according to the literature and the research, poses numerous contradictions and challenges to women leaders. If, as Tajfel & Turner (1979, in Richman et al, 2016), propose, people are motivated to feel good about their ingroups and emulate ingroup behaviours as part of developing social identity, then women leaders may emulate their male peers, which could lead to triggering the *queen bee* phenomenon (Derks et al, 2016*)*. On the other hand, if they do not emulate their male peers, they risk being undervalued or judged in their ingroup and not fitting in; a disempowering location.

Of deep significance here is also the notion of internalised psychological tools. If traits associated with femininity and women have been historically and socioculturally excluded and undervalued, then the question exists of whether women leaders who have internalised these notions, mediate their interaction with other women from a psychological position of undervaluing them. From this stance, it is possible that the queen bee phenomenon also exists because women undervalue other women leaders and perceive their leadership as illegitimate.

6.2 Valuing empowerment

Rappaport (1987), states that the term empowerment implies a relationship between an individual and her or his community and environment. Part of the task

of corporate leadership then must be to understand the nature of these relationships for women leaders, and importantly how and when empowerment is elevated or diminished. From Vygotsky's (1978) viewpoint, the way women leaders engage with, support and engage about, other women, will be influenced by how the existing organisational social systems respond to those women.

Corporate women leaders, it must be recognised, are in extremely challenging positions. They are establishing self-efficacy and empowerment in primarily male-dominated leadership hierarchies in which perceived masculine traits are often valued above perceived feminine traits. Needing to be accepted and supported in one's peer group, located in the described socio-cultural setting, whilst supporting the empowerment of other women which may not be perceived as valuable: This is the situational context many corporate women leaders are located in.

One of the contributing factors to a sense of self-efficacy is the emotional and mental state that one is in (Bandura, 1977). This research has highlighted the consistent stresses that women leaders constantly navigate, which could be causing anxieties that diminish self-efficacy.

6.3 Questioning system-generated narratives

The critical reflection that occurred in the dramatic scenarios also appeared to raise

awareness of experiences of women being supported by other women, and as one of the participants reflected, it may be that the system has created a narrative of non-support and fear. The alternative narrative that emerged is that women do mentor and support each other, and perhaps as part of the re-storying, there is opportunity to become more deliberate about it, which is linked to the theme on *Connectedness and mutual empowerment.* What became apparent was that women leaders recognised their desire and need to convene more deliberately in order to develop and support themselves and each other, an activity supported by feminist leadership and empowerment theory. Arguably, another dimension of this process is required in corporate organisations, which includes men leaders, so that consciousness-raising can begin to occur in corporate leadership in general, which is ultimately what is needed to transform leadership. Back to women, May (1991) states that

> what has been lacking in our modern culture are myths and rituals to give significance to a woman's life apart from what she has in relation to a man…What rituals can do is transform necessary unremitting drudgery into something rich, satisfying, and filled with meaning (p189).

6.4 Co-creation of agency

As participants accessed strengths, agency and authenticity, the mutual support within the group appeared to deepen, which strengthened the related dialogues further. It is possible that as members shared stories and expressed themselves within the intent of the activity, as framed by narradrama, that this served to set up

a ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). A ZPD of agency and authenticity for instance may have become set up when the focus of claiming strengths and occupying leadership from this state formed the intent of the discussion. As members discussed insights, experiences, fears and strengths, it is proposed that the scaffolding within the ZPD strengthened thus allowing all members to be learners and teachers at the same time, co-creating the experience and allowing mental health and mutual help to play out (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Carr (2003), echoing Rappaport (1987) states that empowerment is praxis. He states that it is a non-liner process of collective dialogue that triggers social action meant to inspire positive change. What was apparent in all three interventions is that the process of narratives becoming externalised and enriched, as well as the process of members expressing more empowered views, were circular, more spiral experiences than they were linear. The unfolding and enrichment of narratives, in the narradrama, did not follow an exact sequence even though the interventions had been designed as such. As the dialogues and reflections occurred, and as activities were engaged in, varying interconnecting, deepening, and emergence occurred. Something raised at the beginning of a session might have been raised again, in a more expanded or deeper way in another stage of the session. The researcher suggests that this could be considered as interconnecting ZPDs. This is supported by empowerment theory which posits that the process of empowerment is developmental, not linear, and that its stages are circular and mutually reinforcing (Carr, 2003).

6.5 ZPD as a construct in corportate leadership development

The interventions themselves were ZPDs, and within them, several ZPDs were set up in relation to the key themes. As associated dialogue, consciousness-raising, enquiry and learnings occurred in each, the scaffolding in each continued to strengthen thus enabling the group, through mutual empowerment, to co-construct their learning and development. Echoing Doolitte (1997), Lave & Wenger (1996) state that researchers are interested in extending the study of learning beyond the context of pedagogical structuring to include the broader social world and the conflicted nature of social practice. The ZPD could thus be a construct applicable to corporate leadership development and change within an organisational context, and in the context of drama therapy, could also be set up with the intent and frame of an imaginal space using dramatic medium. Lewis (1993) asserts that the dance between the conscious and the unconscious is choreographed in the imaginal realm. This realm enables the possibility of being transported into a liminal world, a world separated from, yet connected with, reality in which individual change and development is possible (Lewis, 1993). Grainger (1990) too asserts that this dimension, free from distraction and irrelevance, is where we encounter the profoundest truth about ourselves.

The ZPD could be perceived as an imaginal realm that constitutes the distance between current performance and new forms of the performance that can be generated collectively in the possibility of transforming corporate leadership.

6.6 The burden of gendered expectations

The findings of Schein's (2001) and Booysen & Nkomo's (2010) studies highlight that corporate leadership development and relational practices must take into account gender diversity; that the prevalence of the "think manager, think male" phenomenon among men managers is concerning and requires deeper probing and addressing, and that future research should examine the complex role that culture plays in stereotyping of the managerial and leadership roles.

Participants in the study did not express that they thought men were better leaders than they were, nor that they themselves were less effective. What was apparent, however, was the sociocultural gendered expectations of women and the challenges these present. This raises enquiry into the cultural differences of women leaders and how this influences their intramental and intermental functioning, and also raises experiences of *intersectionality*.

Expectations about femininity and the role of women is constantly influenced by social class, race, and ethnicity, and as a result produce different effects for women in organisations (Ely & Padavic, 2007), and as some participants highlighted, who they are as leaders in an organisation, versus who they are expected to be as family or community members, are often incongruent. This incongruence is multi-faceted and multi-layered, depending on the cultural context and the possible and varied experiences of racism, sexism, ageism, classism, etc.

Interaction between leader perceptions and cultural context might reveal differences in gender role stereotyping according to Booysen & Nkomo (2010), a proposal shared by a Vygotskyian worldview, feminist leadership and empowerment theory. This study did not explore this phenomenon in depth, and it deserves stating that the positive expression of consciousness-raising and mutual empowerment in the interventions have highlighted the value of a deeper enquiry into women leaders' narratives as they are informed through intersectionality and cultural influences.

6.7 Conclusion

The possibilities that the findings of this study offer, rest in Vygotsky's assertion that in the process of our historical development, we change the ways and means of our behaviour, transform our assumptions, and create new, cultural forms of behaviour (Vygotsky, 1934 in Wertsch & Tulvitste, 1996). Culture creates changes in behaviour, changes in the functioning of the mind, and constructs new narratives in the developing system of human behaviour (Wertsch & Tulvitste, 1996). This possibility is elevated by empowerment theory's view that mutually supportive groups provide a structure allowing members to form their collective and individual identities around concepts of personal change (Rappaport, 1993 in Peterson and Speer, 2000). Maton & Salem (1995, in Rappaport 1995, p799), identify four components of empowering settings: (a) fostering strength-based belief systems that include

community, (b) having role structures that facilitate accessible opportunity, (c) embedding practices and cultures of shared leadership, and (d) peer-based support systems that build community. Narrative approaches such as narradrama offer a potent approach to describing and co-creating such environments. The positive possibility of perceiving corporate organisations as contextual sites where cultural patterns, meanings and narratives associated with gender could be disrupted and transformed for the greater good, is the possibility this study hopes to contribute to.

This study's findings showed that the internalisation of the notion that corporate leadership and masculinity go together, does render being a woman and being a leader as incongruent. Concern with the possibility of an internalised narrative in women leaders, that women do not belong in corporate leadership, was shown to have credence in the foregrounding of this incongruence during the dramatic activities and participant reflections. One such reflection clearly illustrating this is from **Mayesh**, G3:

> I think it's easier to make those [tough] decisions when you take away those emotions, and we tend to take on the image of the man because they are far less emotional than females. So, I think that as people progress higher and higher on that leadership continuum they become more and more masculine. I suppose it's easier because tough decisions will have to be made.

Bandura (1977) states that psychological processes serve as a means of creating and

strengthening notions of self-efficacy. Internalised notions of effective corporate leadership meaning the exclusion of women, could therefore negatively impact women leader's sense of self-efficacy in a corporate leadership context. This was also shown in the research, and is illustrated in the quote from **Shenaaz**, G2, in a moment of strengthening her sense of self-efficacy:

> … [J]ust as we are, we can deliver the best that men can, and we need to believe that our best is good enough. So, as women we are ok… That is affirming and shows that as women we need to be ok and accept ourselves.

The women leaders in this study, powerfully demonstrated that they navigate the gendered landscape of corporate leadership with potency and with curiosity. As has been stated, the flow of the interventions occurred spirally rather than linearly, thus expressions of authenticity, agency, mutual empowerment and connectedness were raised throughout the interventions. The narradrama process and image theatre activities, enabled these notions to be foregrounded and woven into the process of enriching narratives about self-efficacy in leadership. The narradrama process thus proved effective in enabling the enriching of narratives about leadership self-efficacy among the participants.

An important concluding statement in the context of this study, is that corporate organisational leaders are not necessarily deliberately disempowering women. From a Vygotskian, feminist leadership and empowerment perspective, what is apparent is that the broader sociocultural systems in which corporate organisations and

therefore corporate leadership are located, continue to reinforce gender stereotyping and therefore deterministically influence the intermental and intramental functioning of both men and women. This will be expressed in the organisational imagery, practices, language, behaviours, tools, development and culture. Bringing about gender justice therefore requires that corporate leaders personally transform themselves, engage in consciousness-raising and internalise feminism (Antrobus, 2010). Corporate leadership must commit to the exploration and exposing of patriarchal, gendered attitudes, structures and practices of leadership. As hooks (2000) declares:

> feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression… it is not about being anti-male, but focusing on transforming the problem of sexism. To end patriarchy, which is another way of labeling institutionalised sexism, people must realise that we are all participants in contributing to sexism until we transform ourselves and internalise feminist thought and action (pviii).

6.8 Recommendations

Based on the findings and potential limitations of this research study, the following recommendations are proposed:

6.8.1 Group Interventions

The interventions facilitated in this study were of a short 3-hour duration. This study would have therefore unlocked the possibilities of enriched narratives for

participants, and, the deepened benefit of strengthening these narratives individually and collectively requires a longer period. Employing the narradrama approach should take this into account in further application.

6.8.2 Corporate Leadership development

The application of narradrama and empowerment theory in corporate leadership development to illuminate the internalised narratives of both men and women leaders, could offer a powerful means of exploring the challenging topic of gender inequity and gender role stereotyping in corporate organisations, and take it beyond just quotas. Engagement with problem-saturated narratives in an externalised way that offers depersonalisation, disentanglement of problem from identity, and safe distance, could inform organisational initiatives and foster strengthening of relationships amongst leaders through mutuality. It could also contribute much to creating an understanding of the broader sociocultural systems that reinforce gendered practices of leadership.

Furthermore, incorporating situationally specific organisational factors into the consciousness-raising process through externalising issues and engaging with them, would offer potent possibilities for deepening understanding of organisational dynamics and practices that have the potential for reinforcing or disrupting gender-related narrative patterns in organisations. Further research is required to explore these possibilities.

6.8.3 Narradrama practice

Narradrama and image theatre proved to be effective in engaging women leaders in the exploration and enrichment of narratives in an embodied way. This links to the notion of performativity and the co-construction of knowledge and experiences through performing into ways of becoming. This could contribute to research involved with integrating arts-based methodologies into corporate leadership development and broader corporate organisational effectiveness analysis and development initiatives.

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8 Appendices

Appendix 1a: Permission letters to conduct research at Liberty

LIBERTY

LIBERTY GROUP LIMITED

Liberty Centre, 1 Ameshoff Street, Braamfontein 2001
PO Box 10499, Johannesburg 2000
t 0860 456 789 f 0866 880 717
e info@liberty.co.za w www.liberty.co.za

Directors: J H Maree (Chairman), T Dlot* (Chief Executive),
C G Troskie* (Financial Director), A W B Band, S L Botha,
A P Cunningham#, M W Hlahla, M G Ihley, M P Moyo, Dr S P Sibisi,
Y G H Suleman, J H Sutcliffe##, S K Tshabalala
* Executive Director, ## British
Company Secretary: J M Parrott

Liberty – an Authorised Financial Services Provider in terms of the FAIS Act
(Licence No. 24/59). Liberty Group Limited – Reg. No. 1957/001784/06

20th September 2016

Dear Vasintha Pather

I acknowledge receipt of your letter requesting permission to conduct group intervention/s at Liberty as part of your Masters programme in Drama Therapy. The intervention/s will involve women leaders and aspiring leaders, and Liberty will be provided with a relevant summary of the research findings once you have completed the programme.

I hereby confirm that you have permission to conduct the said group intervention/s with Liberty staff at Liberty's premises at 1 Ameshoff Street, Braamfontein, Johannesburg. This permission is provided in accordance with the detail contained in the request for permission letter from yourself. I will be your primary point of contact relating to decisions and planning regarding staff from the Individual Arrangements business unit.

Kind regards

Nobantu Masebelanga
Divisional Director HR: Individual Arrangements

Appendix 1b: Permission letters to conduct research at Liberty

LIBERTY

LIBERTY GROUP LIMITED

Liberty Centre, 1 Ameshoff Street, Braamfontein 2001
PO Box 10499, Johannesburg 2000
t 0860 456 789 f 0866 880 717
e info@liberty.co.za w www.liberty.co.za

Directors: J H Maree (Chairman), T Dlott* (Chief Executive), C G Troskie* (Financial Director), A W B Band, S L Botha, A P Cunningham**, M W Hlahla, M G Ilsley, M P Moyo, Dr S P Sibisi, Y G H Suleman, J H Sutcliffe**, S K Tshabalala
(* Executive Director, ** British)
Company Secretary: J M Parratt

Liberty – an Authorised Financial Services Provider in terms of the FAIS Act (Licence No. 24091). Liberty Group Limited – Reg. No. 1957/002788/06

3 October 2016

Dear Vasintha Pather,

I acknowledge receipt of your letter requesting permission to conduct a group intervention/s at Liberty as part of you Masters Programme in Drama Therapy.

The intervention/s will involve women leaders and aspiring leaders, and Liberty will be provided with a relevant summary of the research findings once you have completed the programme.

I hereby confirm that you have permission to conduct the said group interventions with Liberty's staff at Liberty's premises at Ameshoff Street, Braamfontein, Johannesburg. This permission is provided in accordance with the detail contained in the request for permission letter from yourself. I will be your primary point of contact relating to decisions and planning.

Yours Sincerely,

Bruce Adrain
Head: Innovation Capability
Group Enablement

Appendix 2a: Participant Information Sheet: Liberty

Research Title: Enrich the Narrative, Empower the Leader.

The role of narradrama in enriching the narratives of women leaders

Dear Colleague,

I am currently participating in a Drama Therapy Master's programme and am conducting a research study into the current narratives of women as leaders, and enriching these narratives.

Following Eleanor's invitation, I would like to also extend the invitation to you to participate in the study. Women currently occupying leadership roles, or aspiring to, form the participant profiles. The workshop intervention is based in Drama Therapy, and will be facilitated on the 03rd February 2017. It will take place at Liberty's premises in Braamfontein; a diary invitation has been extended. Your role will involve participating in the workshop process and discussions.

The study aligns with Liberty's commitment to develop women leaders and I believe your experience and insights would be of great value to this enquiry.

Data gathered will be reported in an academic research report, which will be available on the internet. A summary will also be provided to Liberty, which you will have access to. Discussions will be audio-recorded to enable accurate data gathering, and photographs may be taken during the process. Note that photographs revealing facial images will be excluded from reports produced. Participants will be requested to maintain confidentiality, but I acknowledge that this cannot be controlled.

In compliance with WITS ethics protocol, please complete the consent form provided and bring it to the session. Also, should for any reason participation in the study trigger troubling emotional responses, you may contact Sian Palmer, a registered Drama Therapist for support. Contact details: E-mail palmer.sian@gmail.com and mobile: 082 854 9821.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and declining to participate will involve no penalty or

loss of benefits. You may also choose at any time during the process to withdraw without any penalisation. This research does not involve treatment or payment.

I trust that this overview adequately explains the research approach and procedure. Should you have any queries, you may contact me or my supervisor. I look forward to an enriching process with you.

Yours Sincerely,

Vasintha Pather, Wits Student 8804018N
Contact: +27 (0)73 294 1571
E-mail: vasintha@inter-arise.com

Research Supervisor: Ella Kotze
Contact: +27 (0)82 721 7863
E-mail: ella.kotze@gmail.com

Appendix 2b: Participant Information Sheet: Multi-Organisation

Research Title: Enrich the Narrative, Empower the Leader.

The role of Narradrama in enriching the narratives of women leaders

Good Day,

As you know, I am currently participating in a Drama Therapy Master's programme and am conducting a research study into the current narratives of women as leaders, and how these narratives could be empowered and enriched through creative expression and collaboration.

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. Women currently occupying leadership roles, or aspiring to, form the participant profiles. The workshop intervention is based in Drama Therapy, and will be facilitated on Saturday 04th February 2017, at the Iskcon Centre, No. 11 11th Avenue, Rivonia Sandton. Your role will involve participating in the workshop process and discussions and I believe your experience and insights would be of great value to this enquiry.

Data gathered will be reported in an academic research report, which will be available on the internet. Discussions will be audio-recorded to enable accurate data gathering, and photographs may be taken during the process. Note that photographs revealing facial images will be excluded from reports produced. Participants will be requested to maintain confidentiality, but I acknowledge that this cannot be controlled.

In compliance with WITS ethics protocol, please complete the consent form provided and bring it to the session. Also, should for any reason participation in the study trigger troubling emotional responses, you may contact Sian Palmer, a registered Drama Therapist for support. Contact details: E-mail palmer.sian@gmail.com and mobile: 082 854 9821.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and declining to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. You may also choose at any time during the process to withdraw without any penalisation. This research does not involve treatment or payment.

I trust that this overview adequately explains the research approach and procedure. Should

you have any queries, you may contact me or my supervisor. I look forward to an enriching process with you.

Yours Sincerely,

Vasintha Pather, Wits Student 8804018N

Contact: +27 (0)73 294 1571

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Research Supervisor: Ella Kotze

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E-mail: ella.kotze@gmail.com

Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Research Title: Enrich the Narrative, Empower the Leader.

The role of Narradrama in enriching the narratives of women leaders.

Informed Consent Form for _____ (Name and Surname)

This Informed Consent has two parts: An information Sheet (to share information about the study with you) and a Certificate of Consent (for signature if you agree to participate).

Please tick the boxes to indicate your consent and/or agreement:

Information Sheet

- ❑ I agree I have been provided with an information sheet relating to this study, its purpose and approach. I have read the information sheet and have had opportunity to ask questions. Questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been provided with counselling contact details should I require them.

CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

- ❑ I consent to information I share being included in an academic report which will be available on the world wide web.
- ❑ I agree that my identity will remain anonymous. My name or facial image in photographs will be excluded from any reports produced from this study.
- ❑ I have been informed that what participants share about the process cannot be controlled as this is a group process, and agree therefore that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

- ❑ I consent to the workshop intervention being audio-recorded.
- ❑ I consent to photographs being taken on the understanding that photographs of facial images will be excluded from any reports.
- ❑ I have been invited by Vasintha Pather to participate in this research study and I consent voluntarily.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Researcher: Vasintha Pather, Wits Student 8804018N

Contact: +27 (0)73 294 1571

E-mail: vasintha@inter-arise.com

Research Supervisor: Ella Kotze

Contact: +27 (0)82 721 7863

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Appendix 4: Intervention Session Plan

Session Aim: To create an embodied experience of enriching personal narratives about self-efficacy in leadership

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	MOTIVATION	MATERIALS	TIME
Welcome, Check-In, Warm-Up, Focus and Bridge-In				
Welcome	Welcome and working alliance - Welcome participants to the intervention. Explain the purpose of the research. Walk through the information sheet and consent forms, remind participants that they are free to withdraw from the process at any time without any risk of being penalised, create participant register. - Remind participants that the session will be audio-recorded. Confirm understanding of confidentiality and anonymity as per the consent forms	Ensure that ethical standards are adhered to, and that participants are fully aware of the purpose of the research as well as how the intervention has been designed. Create a sense of safety through transparency, information-sharing and relationship-building with participants, to form a working alliance for the	Paper, pens and drawing materials for recording insights, ideas and reflections	08:30 to 09:00

	Provide an overview of the research aims and relevant key concepts eg. narrative, embodied, image etc - Explain process steps, the role of the therapist and the role of the participants - Agree venue logistics, start and end times, and establish any needs to be considered in the process Agreements - Dialogue any questions, queries and requests - Agree that techniques will be mostly embodied, and that any physical touch must be safe.	session. Create a collaborative container in which participants feel safe and in which a sense of mutual support and learning can be co-created.		

Check-In, Warm-Up and Bridge-In and **Narradrama step 1: Warming up to New Descriptions of Self Identity and Environment**	From a variety of objects, invite participants to select one that represents a personal gift or strength. Invite participants to take the introduce themselves and to share their strength or gift, and how the object symbolises this. Use objects to facilitate participants' representation of strengths. Symbolism involves the unconscious relating with reality, and can enable access to deeper meaning and aspects of the self (Jones, 1996, p222). Participant's empathic involvement with the objects increase as well, and thus emotional engagement is stimulated (Jones, 1996). The activity will also introduce the first step of narradrama, and enable participants to begin with tapping into strengths and gifts.	Facilitate participant arrival and presence in the space participants through introductions. Warm-up dramatic language and symbolic activity. Bridge in the approach of strengths. Bridge in the experience of mutuality. Begin to warm up expanded descriptions of the narrative self (Dunne, 2009).	Variety of objects from which participants may select	09:00 to 09:30

Warm-Up, Focus and Focus	Invited participants to walk around the room and experience the space. Offer different cues to invite different actions. Hand clap: Stop, stand still Walk: Continue walking Orange: Turn around Slow/Fast: Change pace Invite participants to use their bodies to image some of the strengths that had been mentioned in the check-in This will engage dramatisation of the 'warming up to new descriptions of self identity and environment'	Warm up the body, warm up participant occupation of the space. Facilitate focus on areas that will be worked on: imaging and strengths. Deepen warm-up of dramatic activity and symbolism.		09:30 to 09:40
Comfort Break (10min)				
Main Event: Narradrama				
Externalising the Problem and Externalising Choices	Image Theatre activities Group will move to an open space in the room Engage participants in playing with a few topics and imaging to demonstrate and ease into	Theatrical exploration of relationship with the topic, illuminates hidden perceptions, ideas and		09:50 to 10:45

	the technique. Start: Invite a participant to volunteer to create an image using the other participants' bodies, in response to: How do we as women do leadership? Boal (1995) says that the oppressed must create images of their reality, then play with the reality of the images (p44). Meaning and awareness will emerge in this interaction. Invite the actors to dynamise the image. Where, and when, relevant, invite actors to express what's happening for them in the roles. Bring dynamisation to a still image, and invite participants observing to share what's happening for them. Allow activity to come to a natural close.	assumptions (Emunah, 1994). Observe how participants image and enact the main theme. Potential exists for problem-saturated narrative to become apparent (Dunne, 2009).		
	Group Reflection Invite participants into a	Invite dialogue and reflection		

	circle. Engage in reflection as a group – observations, awareness, insights, impressions, interpretations?	to facilitate consciousness-raising and mutuality in the process.		
	Repeat above image theatre and reflection activities for the following topics: How do men do leadership? How do we as women learn leadership?	Observe patterns in the imaging activities, what is shared, what is not, the language participants use. Observe responses from audience.		
Comfort Break (15 min)				
Invite Personal Agency	Invite participants to think about a time when they behaved / chose / led in a way that made them feel good about themselves, and potent as leaders. In pairs invite them to share their stories with each other. As a group, each person will share their partner's strengths. Alternatively, invite participants to select objects to represent other	Invite personal agency and the recognition of strengths and resources. Create a sense of mutual and collective strength in the session, a sense that 'we' collectively reclaim these strengths. Connecting	Various Objects	11:00 to 11:30

	strengths and gifts they have as leaders, and to share these with the group (Do a few rounds). Facilitate reclaiming of strengths and inner resources, and activation of choice and agency (Dunne, 2009	with strengths in a mutual setting could support empowerment and agency strengthening in the group.		
Alternative Stories, Unique Outcomes and Re-Story Life	Invite a volunteer to who set up an image, this time imaging empowered leadership in this context, i.e. leadership that reflects and embodies the strengths reclaimed and shared in the group. Invite dynamisation and expression of the enriched possibilities. Before dismantling the image, invite each participant to share a word to describe a feeling state, image, hope or impression. Note: Allow the images to unfold to facilitate visibility of narratives to become apparent.	Participants have the opportunity to enrich their narratives from a more empowered space having recognised and reclaimed their strengths. New possibilities are enabled to emerge and enrich existing narrative (Dunne, 2009).		11:30 to 12:10

	Invite participants into a circle. Engage in reflection as a group – observations, awareness, insights, impressions, interpretations?	Observe patterns in the imaging activities and impressions. What has contributed to an enriched sense of self as a leader?		
	Repeat above image theatre and reflection activities to deepen access to strengths and agency, and to expand narrative enrichment. Work with the material that comes through the dramatic activities and reflections. Allow images to come to a natural close.	The improvisational nature of this step is important for giving participants the space to co-create and perform enriched narrative patterns (Emunah, 1995).		
Closure and Bridge Out				
Closure and Reflection and Bridge Out	In a seated circle, participants will be invited to share one gift they take with them from the experience.	Close with a focus on elevating strengths in individuals,		12:10 to 12:30

	Share lunch as a group as a closing ritual	and strengthening the mutuality through time spent.		