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A Voice for the Voiceless

Young Women's Leadership Experiences in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The purpose of the study has been to gain an understanding of how socio-cultural structures and gender norms affect young women's leadership possibilities. This has been explored through a qualitative case study focusing on how young women leaders, working with sexual and reproductive health rights issues, experience and pursue leadership in Zimbabwe. A theoretical framework based on contextual and relational understandings of women's leadership and theories of gender relations, intersectionality and body politics was used to analyze the empirical data. The findings revealed that young women leaders have to challenge gender norms and confront negative attitudes as they are perceived as going against women's expected role in society. In relation to other women leaders within the women's movement, conflicts between young and older generations were evident. Mentorship and cooperation was seen as main opportunities to facilitate for more young women to pursue leadership. The study's results showed that young women are put under a lot of pressure in terms of being leaders in an environment that is mainly dominated by men and older women, but also in terms of being role models for other "voiceless" young women.

Keywords: young women, leadership, SRHR, Zimbabwe, intersectionality, body politics, gender norms

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Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations Joint Program on AIDS
UNWOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WCoZ	Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe

1 Introduction

Globally, women are still far from enjoying equal rights and opportunities compared to men. This is evident within leadership, where women's full inclusion as leaders in political, social and economic decision-making is crucial to ensure the expansion of democracy, justice and human rights (UNWOMEN 2012: 8). Young women's leadership, here defined as the ability of young women to individually and collectively challenge existing structures, has been recognized as important in strengthening and enriching current women's rights initiatives (Wilson 2004: 17–19).

In Zimbabwe, women in leadership positions have increased in recent years, but overall, women's participation in different spheres of decision-making remains low (ZIMSTAT 2012: 42). The need for a greater inclusion of women in decisions-making becomes evident when looking at women's situation in the Zimbabwean society. Gender inequalities are visible in all spheres of society where women continues to be excluded from mainstream economic activities and where significantly less women are enrolled in higher and tertiary education compared to men (UN Zimbabwe 2010: 69; ZIMSTAT 2012). Furthermore, young women face sexual and reproductive ill-health due to early teen-pregnancies, gender-based violence (GBV), harmful cultural and religious practices and problems accessing youth friendly health services and information (UNFPA 2011). Women and girls are also denied rights and are discriminated against as a consequence of customary laws (based on traditional practices and values) being allowed to co-exist with state law in the "Lancaster House Constitution"¹ (McFadden 2001: 68; Raftopoulos & Mlambo 2009: 172).

A new constitution was agreed upon through a referendum in March 2013, where gender equality is one of the constitution's corner stones, emphasising equality in the social, economic and political sphere. This is realized through a call for government business and

¹ The constitution agreed upon after independence in 1980.

civil society organisations to ensure full and equal participation of women alongside men in decision-making. Furthermore, the new constitution is dedicated to improve the situation and rights of youth through ensuring that young men and women are well-represented in decisions affecting their lives (Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013; Lewis 2013).

With this changing context in mind, how can young women's leadership be strengthened in order for them to address existing barriers to achieve their full rights as young women? Many scholars (Elliott & Stead 2009; Fletcher 2004) have emphasized a need for further qualitative research of women's leadership experiences in different context, with some (Nkomo & Ngambi 2009) emphasizing the particular need for further research on women's leadership in African contexts. During recent years many young women in Zimbabwe, have through projects supported by international organisations entered the field of SRHR as young women leaders². This thesis is an attempt to pursue relevant and critical discussions about barriers and opportunities affecting young women leadership in Zimbabwe.

1.1 Purpose and research question

The overall purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of how socio-cultural structures and gender norms affect young women's leadership possibilities in Zimbabwe. A case study focusing on young women holding leadership positions within women's organizations working with young women's SRHR in Harare, Zimbabwe will be used. The main research question of the study is:

How do young women experience and pursue leadership in Zimbabwe?

² This is evident when looking at various international organisations projects' focusing on SRHR for young people and this was also observed during our internship at UNAIDS in Harare.

This research question will be investigated by looking at an individual and organizational level and also how structural factors affect and influence young women's leadership. Two sub-questions will therefore complement the main research question:

1. How do young women perceive barriers and opportunities to gain confidence and recognition as young women leaders?
2. How do young women leaders experience cooperation with other women organisations in pursuing collective recognition and influence?

This study is a contribution to the very limited academic research on African women's leadership. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, the new constitution which was agreed upon in March 2013 shows the relevance of the study from a development perspective in Zimbabwe. We believe that a better understanding of how young women experience and pursue leadership is crucial when addressing existing inequalities in the Zimbabwean society. Furthermore, the opportunities as well as the barriers young women experience are important to comprehend if young women are to gain influence in decision-making spheres.

1.2 Disposition

This introductory chapter have presented the study's focus on young women's leadership in Zimbabwe, as well as described the main purpose and research questions of the inquiry. In the following *Chapter two*, a background of Zimbabwe covering country facts, women's role in society and the women's movement will be outlined. This will be followed by *Chapter three*, discussing the methodology behind the study. *Chapter four*, will account for previous research on women and young women leadership and present a theoretical framework which will be used to analyse the empirical material. In *Chapter five*, the primary material will be presented and analyzed, and finally *Chapter six* will discuss the main conclusions based on the main findings and the theoretical framework used.

2 Background

2.1 Zimbabwe country overview

Zimbabwe³ is a low-income, landlocked country situated in Southern Africa with an estimated population of 12.9 million people (UN Zimbabwe 2010; World Bank 2011). The female proportion of the population is 52 percent of which 48 percent are in the age group between 15 and 49 years (ZIMSTAT 2012: 1, 3). Furthermore, the population is considered to be very “youthful” as the proportion of people under 15 years of age constitutes 42 percent (ZIMSTAT 2012: 3). There are two major ethnic groups, the Shona and the Ndebele. The Shona comprises the majority of the population, 71 percent, while the Ndebele make up 16 percent. Other minority groups comprise approximately 12 percent (INADEV 2000).

Zimbabwe is one of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa worst affected by the HIV epidemic, and in 2001 the prevalence was estimated to be 23.7 percent. However, there has been a decline in new HIV infections and in 2011 it was reported that among adults, 15 years and above, the prevalence lay at 13.1 percent. The HIV prevalence of 21.1 percent in women (age 15-49) is significantly higher than the prevalence of 14.5 percent of men in the same age group (UNAIDS 2012: 1).

2.2 Women’s status in society

African feminist scholars, Nkomo and Ngambi (2009: 62) argue that traditionally, in many African countries, women and men had different spheres of autonomy and influence. The

³ A British colony from 1897 under the name of Southern Rhodesia, Zimbabwe was one of the last colonies in Africa to gain its independence in 1980. Presently, the country is governed by a unity government consisting of the two main parties, MDC and ZANU-PF with Robert Mugabe as the president (Raftopoulos & Mlambo 2009: 228–230).

authors further claim that much of this was disrupted due to colonialism which altered the indigenous gender practices existing in pre-colonial times, where women held leadership roles such as “queen mothers”, “princess sisters” and chiefs etc. However, the authors stress, that clear gender hierarchies were also present in traditional African cultures but that these were reinforced and became more visible during European colonialism (Nkomo & Ngambi 2009: 62).

In colonial Zimbabwe, black women were defined as minors under the guardianship of husbands and male relatives where they were not allowed to own land nor make other important decisions about their livelihoods (Moyo & Kawewe 2002: 166–167). Furthermore, the British white settlers were believed to have gained compliance from black men by allowing them to remain in control over women, children and family assets through traditional customary law and practices (Hindin 2000: 259; McFadden 2003: 65). Women participated in the anti-colonial struggles and in the years following independence, legal reforms such as the ‘Legal Majority Act’ were past that increased rights for women (Ranchod-Nilsson 2006: 61). However, despite legal reforms women continued facing difficulties in exercising their rights and entering into the public and professional spaces due to cultural taboos and attitudes (McFadden 2005: 8). McFadden (2001: 67–69) argues that a dual system of laws, where customary law supersede the constitution continues to be used to ensure male privilege over women. This made it difficult for women to inherit land and own property among other issues.

Kambarami’s (2006) discussion on women’s status in the Shona culture can provide some insights of women’s expected roles in the Zimbabwean society. However, it should be noted that Kambarami takes a radical feminist stance, expressing stereotypical views of women’s and men’s expected roles. She argues that patriarchal practices in the Shona culture perpetuate gender inequalities and the male control over women. The author claims that at an early age, girls are socialized into taking on a dependent/submissive role within the family and that the female child is differentiated from the male child who is perceived as the main heir and future breadwinner. Therefore he is prioritized when it comes to education and other opportunities. Berger and White (1999: 6) state that in the Shona culture young girls (and boys) are taught to

respect older generations in all social relationships, as power and control is believed to increase with age. This also becomes evident through older women's "power over" younger women.

The Shona culture is, according to Kambarami (2006), conservative when it comes to discussing sexual issues. Girls are told "don't play with boys" and to preserve their virginity until marriage. Sex and how to practice safe sex is not discussed within the family. Traditionally, young women are first told about sex at the time of marriage and then the discussion is centred around how to please their future husbands (Kambarami 2006). In the traditional Shona society marriage was seen as sacred institution and through the practice of lobola, or bride price, the bride's family was provided with goods, money or livestock to compensate for the loss of their daughters' labour force. In the current Zimbabwean society, marriage is still believed to improve women's status, and if married, they are treated with greater respect (Chabata 2012: 12; Mugweni et al. 2012: 578). According to Kambarami (2006) women who seek education and career before marriage risk being labelled "un-marriageable" and stigmatized by family and members in society.

2.3 The history of the women's movement

Since the post-independence era, the Women's Movement in Zimbabwe has grown from a small handful of women to a broader and more diverse movement (Win 2004: 19). The women's movement represents a broad spectrum of women's organizations with a collective agenda emphasizing issues regarding women's political and SRH rights (McFadden 2005: 9).

The women's movement has since the 1990's brought together organizational and rural-based networks as well as key individuals forming a number of issue-driven and strategic coalitions (Raftopoulos & Mlambo 2009). In 1999, the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) was formed to strengthen the efforts made by the movement through pushing forward women's demands for constitutional change. The WCoZ has played an important role in extending the constitutional debate on women's rights to rural areas (Win 2004: 23).

It is important to recognize that there are differences among women within the WCoZ. Win (2004: 26) argues that sharing a “female identity” is not enough to build and sustain effective coalitions. In Zimbabwe, there is a lack of effective coordination between women’s organization. Limited resources have further resulted in a competition over resources and an increased polarization between women’s organizations (UN Zimbabwe 2010: 75). McFadden (2005: 11) also points to the fact that women are being caught between the socio-cultural expectations on women’s roles (being a good wife) and the new opportunities provided by engagement in activism for women’s rights. In addition, women engaged in politics and decision-making are often perceived by society as wanting to be like men or having “loose morals” (McFadden 2005: 11).

Women are included at all levels of decision-making but in a very limited way. Women’s participation in many spaces can be seen as “tokenism”. Women are included to appease women’s pressure groups, but in reality they have little influence over decisions that are made. According to Chitsike (2011), the political arena is, and has always been, male dominated. Women have had to fight for inclusion to remain in political positions, and “they have fought patriarchal attitudes perpetuated not only by men, but by other women who believe that a women’s place is in the home” (Chitsike 2011: 160). The author further points to the fact that many women are reluctant to vote for other women to take on leadership positions as they have been socialized into believing that women are not capable to lead (Chitsike 2011: 181). Furthermore, during elections in recent years women have been subject to extensive political violence deterring many women from exercising their political rights and taking on political leadership positions (Chitsike 2011: 169; Win 2004: 23). The weak law enforcement which according to Chitsike (2011: 161) is not “women-friendly” has led to perpetrators not being brought to justice for crimes committed against women.

3 Methodology

This chapter will account for the methodology behind the study discussing research design, primary and secondary sources, data-gathering tools and processes, as well as limitations and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research design

An interest in gender, SRHR and development issues led us to an internship at UNAIDS in Zimbabwe. During our time at UNAIDS we were confronted with a reality of young women facing serious health implications due to difficulties in exercising their SRHR. In this setting, we were also fortunate to meet many young women who advocate for young women's SRHR. They inspired us to pursue this study and share their experiences. The process of research design starts with the researcher bringing his/her own assumptions and beliefs into the research which in different ways influence the carrying out and writing of a qualitative inquiry (Creswell 2007: 15). Our approach to theory has been neither inductive nor deductive. Instead we have been using an iterative approach as we kept going back and forth between theory and empirical material (Bryman 2008: 12). This study is built on our assumption seeing reality as socially constructed by the way social actors think and communicate about it. Therefore we also believe there exist multiple and changing realities (Ong 2012: 424).

A single-case study of leadership within SRHR in Zimbabwe was chosen. The case study design is desirable within qualitative research to gain in-depth understanding of a contemporary social phenomenon in a specific setting "where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin 2009: 35). In adapting a theoretical stance viewing young women's leadership experiences as strongly influenced by the context in which it is practiced, the case study design seemed appropriate for this study.

Primary and secondary sources have been used to investigate the study's research problem. The main methodological tool to gather primary data has been that of in-depth interviews. Qualitative interviews are crucial in exploring people's perceptions and experience of their social reality as it allows people to express opinions in their own words (Kvale 2007: 12). In-depth interviews are furthermore useful in giving deep and nuanced accounts revealing relationships informants see between different phenomena (Mack et al. 2005: 30) This is well in line with our study's purpose of exploring young women's perceptions and experience of leadership through their own accounts. The interviews have been semi-structured with open-ended questions allowing for greater flexibility in terms of the wording and order of the questions. Mikkelsen (2005: 169, 171) states that semi-structured interviews ensure that all topics are discussed making some comparison between informants possible, while also consider individual experiences allowing informants to raise important issues related to the topic.

During our five-month internship in Zimbabwe, a valuable understanding of the context was gained through indirect observations. We wanted to give a deep and nuanced picture of young women's leadership experience. Therefore focus group discussions were not used as we did not intend, to reveal a common understanding of women's leadership from various people's perspectives in which focus groups discussions could have been useful (see Bryman 2008: 475-476).

Secondary sources in the form of academic articles, books, newspaper, interviews as well as various publications and reports from NGO's and international organisation's websites have been utilized. The use of secondary sources is critical in order to complement the primary data (Overton & van Diermen 2003: 42).

3.2 Empirical data gathering

The fieldwork was conducted in connection to our internship at UNAIDS in Harare between December and January (2012-2013). During the internship period we gained knowledge of our focus area (working mainly with young people's SRHR) and through participation in

various workshops and meetings we also made contact with many young women. This facilitated the fieldwork process. In the process of contacting young women for interviews, we did not present ourselves as UNAIDS interns, as we wanted our informants to view us foremost as researchers. Despite our effort, two of the informants we got in touch with (through recommendations from other informants) had met us before as representatives of UNAIDS, but in the end this was not something we felt impacted negatively on the interviews.

The main sampling strategy used to select informants for our interviews was purposive sampling. In purposive sampling the researcher actively selected participants he/she believes have the most knowledge and valuable information in the area being studied (Marshall 1996: 523). In light of the study's research question the informants were selected according to a few relevant criteria, including age, sex, and leadership position. The informants participating in our two pilot interviews proved to be extremely helpful as they recommended and put us in touch with other young women leaders. Therefore, even if not planned for initially, we also used snowball sampling where the informants interviewed put us in touch with other interviewees that suited our criteria. According to Mack et al. (2005: 5-6), snowball sampling is considered a type of purposive sampling as informants use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially participate. Overton and van Diermen (2003: 43) discuss the limitations of snowball sampling saying that it can run the risk of being very selective as some of the informants may want to exclude others. However, in our case this proved to be a good option, considering time constraints, as well as the very small community of young women leaders working with SRHR issues.

Thirteen young Zimbabwean leaders between the ages of 20-35 working for women's organization in Harare with issues surrounding young women's SRHR were selected for in-depth interviews (see Appendix II for informants' details). Initially, based on common definitions of young people found in academic literature, we decided that the age group to represent "young women" would be between 18-25 years of age. However, as we started the interview process and were put in touch with young women leaders working for various NGOs, it became clear that this narrow age group was not appropriate. In the Zimbabwean

context, local women's organizations defined young women as 15 to 35 years old⁴. Therefore we decided to adapt this more contextual definition of "young women" which we later found support for in previous literature on young women's leadership, as well as in Zimbabwe's new constitution.

The sample size depends on the objectives of the study, and the resources and time available. It is also determined on the basis of theoretical saturation - the point where new data is not believed to bring additional insights to the research question (Mack et al. 2005: 5). We found thirteen in-depth interviews to be sufficient in providing a rich empirical base to answer our research question. We also felt that after the last interviews no major new insights were given.

The sample of young women leaders represent a very small proportion of the population and the informants' leadership experiences can therefore not be generalized to other individuals. However as stated by (Creswell 2003: 146) the value of a qualitative study is to give detailed descriptions and subjective understandings of a certain issues in a specific context. We feel that the interviews have given us a lot of valuable information in this sense, and that the research problem needs to be understood through the young women's own experience and opinions.

3.3 Presenting primary sources

The interview processes started with two pilot interviews which served the purpose of refining the interview guide (see Appendix I) developing more relevant and focused questions for the remaining interviews. Pilot interviews may be helpful in gaining an estimate of time in which the interviews are conducted and issues that may arise from the interview process (Creswell 2007: 133, 138). We decided to include the pilot interviews in the final results as they provided us with relevant information.

⁴ It should be noted however, that young women under the age of 20 holding leadership positions were according to our informants very rare, which limited our age-span to women between 20 and 35.

We wanted the interviews to be conducted in a “neutral place” and therefore we decided against having them at the UNAIDS office or at the informants’ organizations. Instead, the interviews took place at various quiet cafés in Harare. This contributed to a relaxed and informal atmosphere during the interviews. The interviews started with an introduction to our study’s purpose and we ensured confidentiality. We asked for permission to use a tape-recorder which they all agreed to. We tried to let the informants elaborate freely on the questions avoiding directing the conversation too much. The interviews ranged from about forty minutes up to an hour. (For more information, see Appendix I)

3.4 Quality assurance

The relevance of reliability and validity in assessing the quality of qualitative research has been questioned by some researchers arguing that such criteria are “presupposing a single absolute account of reality” and therefore not necessarily applicable to qualitative research (Bryman 2008: 376–377). According to Bryman (2008: 377-379), Guba and Lincoln (1994) initiated this critique by proposing more suitable concepts to assess trustworthiness. The authors suggest four main assessment criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In our study, considering these criteria we have tried to ensure credibility of the accounts gained from our primary data and secondary sources through a process of triangulation where we have used several sources of data and theoretical perspectives. In addition, there have always been two observers critically examining the empirical findings, secondary data and conclusions drawn from these.

Our qualitative study has aimed to explore young women’s leadership in a certain unique context, and as argued by Yin (2003: 58) the aim of a case study is not to generalize beyond the specific context. The external validity of qualitative inquires are often considered to be weak. However assessing transferability, providing a thorough descriptions of the context in which the study takes place can. This according to Guba and Lincoln (1994) provide an alternative for making judgment about whether the findings are transferable to another context. We have in the study’s background as well as analysis section tried to provide a rich

description of the Zimbabwean socio-cultural, economic and political context, both from the young women leaders' accounts and local scholars' perspectives in secondary sources. We have tried to ensure dependability, that the study can be repeated with the same results, through critically discussing the different steps of the data gathering process⁵. We have also strived for confirmability throughout the research process. While recognizing that complete objectivity is not possible in qualitative research, as our findings are subject to our own and our informants' subjective interpretations. We have tried to be aware of our personal values/opinions and make visible possible biases in the study.

3.5 Criticism of sources

Overton and van Diermen (2003:42) state that “just because data is published or official, it may not be necessarily truthful or valid”. We have kept this in mind, using secondary data mainly from academic journals and articles and research that has been cited by other scholars. When using reports, it has been from well-reputed organizations and websites, always critically analysing the sources.

As argued by Mohanty (1984), western feminist research is commonly applied to analyses of women in low-income countries without taking their point of view into account. In our research we have tried to consider this through not only using secondary material from western scholars but also to the extent possible used various books and articles written by Zimbabwean or regional authors. When discussing previous literature and theoretical concepts, we have taken into account arguments and perspectives from different scholars. However, it should be noted that feminist literature on women and leadership is usually written by feminists with quite radical views. Some of the strong arguments presented by these scholars are not necessarily shared by us as and we have tried to distance ourselves from the literature by critically discussing some of these arguments. However, seeing that not much has been written about young women leadership in the past, this is the available literature.

⁵ We have kept field notes and complete interview transcripts.

3.6 Ethical considerations

There are ethical considerations which need to be taken into account when conducting interviews. Creswell (2007: 141) mentions ensuring confidentiality towards respondents as an important aspect. As stated previously, informed consent before the interviews, guaranteeing confidentiality and being clear about the rationale of the study was ensured from the beginning. As SRHR can be a sensitive subject, this has to be extra clear in order to achieve full confidence and trust from the participants. In order for us to keep the respondents anonymous we have used fictive names when presenting the data.

As interviewers we have an important role to play in interpreting the meaning of what is said but also to observe how the information is said and expressed (Kvale 2007: 2–3). Scheyvens and Leslie (2000: 119) discuss how power relations and injustices can play a part in research through aspects such as background and culture. The women we interviewed were very passionate and eager to answer and discuss our questions and we did not feel any kind of power imbalance. Instead, we felt that the fact that we were women from the “West” added to the eagerness of the informants wanting to “teach” us about their culture. As argued by Mikkelsen (2005: 330) there are dilemmas that come with gender-related research that researchers should be aware of. We did not experience any problems and the fact that we were asking questions that may seem sensitive (questions surrounding SRHR) was also taken into ethical consideration. This may also be due to our selection of young women who are already working with these issues and thus it was much easier to ask these questions than initially expected. It can be argued, as mentioned by (England 1994: 85; Mikkelsen 2005: 330) that due to the fact that we are young women interviewing other young women contributed to the relaxed atmosphere, where gender of the researcher and the informants influences the nature of the research. If we were men interviewing women, the answers would probably differ.

In Zimbabwe political matters are very sensitive. In our case we had to be careful in order to avoid our interviews being interpreted as political gatherings/discussions, especially preceding upcoming elections⁶. The thought that our questions were prompting answers that we were not entirely comfortable with made us a bit uneasy. However, when looking at our topic we realized that it is impossible to not touch upon politics, and seeing that Zimbabwe is a country where politics influence all spheres of society it would seem strange if this topic did not arise. Nonetheless, we made sure that the politics discussed were entirely linked to questions surrounding health and health rights thus not touching upon more politically sensitive topics. This is also one of the reasons why we decided not (and were also advised against) to conduct group interviews as this could open up for a political group discussion putting not only ourselves but also our respondents in danger. As discussed by Bryman (2008: 120) the “do-no-harm” principle is extremely important to consider when doing research on a sensitive topic.

⁶ It should also be mentioned that at the time of our interviews, there was an election planned to take place two months later and because of this, questions surrounding anything that could be interpreted as political was extremely sensitive.

4 Theoretical framework

This chapter will provide a theoretical framework which will be used to analyze the study's empirical data. Previous research on women and leadership including leadership in an African context and young women's leadership will be discussed. In addition, a women's leadership model will be presented and complemented with the perspectives of intersectionality and body politics.

4.1 Women and leadership

In early research on women and leadership, women's leadership success was seen as dependent on women's ability to display "male" leadership characteristics. Later, research has instead come to focus on "feminine" leadership in trying to understand how women lead differently from men because of their "female characteristics" (Stanford et al. 1995: 9–10). The literature on "feminine" leadership stresses how women tend to lead in a participative and democratic manner due to their female characteristics, and how this "female" leadership style can create advantages for women at the workplace (Wilson 2003). In their paper (2000: 151) Due Billing and Alvesson state that it is important to recognize the role played by "feminine" leadership literature in challenging male-dominance and the neglect of gender in leadership literature. However, the authors also argue that portraying women's leadership style as "cooperative" and "emotional" in contrast to men's leadership as "dominate" and "controlling", reinforces stereotypical views of women (and men) which are disconnected from the socio-historical and cultural context of leadership (Due Billing & Alvesson 2000: 147–148). Other scholars, also claim that the "feminine" leadership agenda reinforces stereotypical understandings of women leaders, which contributes to a situation where women are subject to unrealistic expectations of wanting to cooperate and support others, and where women displaying "masculine" leadership traits risk being labelled "untrue" to their own gender (Lämsä & Sintonen 2001: 257; Mavin 2008: 79).

Previous research addressing women and leadership have thus largely focused on women's leadership styles and characteristics with an emphasis on the individual's capabilities to effectively lead rather than on the socio-cultural environment and power relations in which leadership takes place (Elliott & Stead 2009). Elliott and Stead (2009) argue that our current understanding of women's leadership is built on a very narrow empirical research base in which individualistic leadership theories, based on male leaders' experiences in hierarchal institutions, continues to dominate the field. However, the individualistic view of leadership has increasingly shifted towards a perception of leadership as a collective and relational process, where leaders' influence and support is dependent on shared responsibilities and networks (Fletcher 2004: 648).

Many scholars are arguing for the use of more contextual approaches in analyzing women's leadership where gender is understood as something relational which is constructed through social interactions (Wharton 2012). Women and men "do gender" as they interact in ways that are seen appropriate to their gender (West & Zimmerman 2008). According to Wharton (2012: 211) gender must be understood as fundamental to leadership as gender norms are deeply embedded in organizational culture and structures. Fletcher (2004) stresses that greater attention must be paid to leaders' overlapping social identities (such as gender, race, class) and the social-cultural, historical and organizational setting in which they practice leadership in order for women's leadership experiences to be reflected in a deeper and more nuanced way. Elliott and Stead (2009: 149) stress that women's leadership experiences in different contexts need to be further investigated in order to better understand "the conditions under which women practice and learn leadership and to identify the ways in which women negotiate gendered process in order to maintain and sustain leadership". This study will adapt a contextual and relational understanding of gender and leadership as argued for by several scholars in this section.

4.1.1 African Feminism

African radical feminist scholars criticize Western feminist research for being inadequate in understanding women's particular leadership experience in an African context, not

considering world views and understandings of gender rooted in Africa (Nkomo & Ngambi 2009). Furthermore, it is argued that it is not possible to generalize all women in Africa under “African women”, as this falls short when addressing the diversity that exists on the continent (Mekgwe 2010: 190). This is also argued by Zimbabwean feminists who claim that placing Zimbabwean women and their experiences under the same category as “African women” becomes problematic (Mangena 2013: 12). Nkomo and Ngambi (2009: 60) emphasize the importance of understanding the strong influence culture has on the gender stereotyping, socialization, family, work and status of women in many African countries. The authors propose an understanding of gender and leadership as operating on several overlapping levels, from the societal; looking at the socio-historical, political, economic and cultural context, to the organizational; focusing on institutional culture, structures and practices, and the individual level; investigating women’s attitudes and behaviours and gender and cultural identities (Nkomo & Ngambi 2009: 61). As evident by the discussions above, other scholars have proposed similar views on how women’s different leadership experiences are best understood through contextual approaches considering gender relations and leadership as operating on several interwoven levels and in specific socio-historical and cultural settings. However, the relevance of further research applying these perspectives on women’s leadership experiences in an African context becomes clear through the authors’ discussion.

4.1.2 Young women’s leadership

Previous research on young women’s leadership is limited and the research that does exist tends to be very action-oriented, focusing mainly on how to achieve effective leadership rather than how to gain a deeper understanding of young women’s leadership experiences. However, Baric et al. (2009) discussion on leadership among adolescent girls can give some insights into leadership as operating on several levels influenced by different relationships. This can also be of interest when investigating young women’s leadership. The authors stress three areas critical for achieving efficient leadership. The first area “realizing the power within” relates to girls’ own sense of agency. The second area recognizes the importance of acceptance from family and peers as well as forming social networks in order to gain

legitimacy in the public sphere. The final area concerns taking action in ways that has positive influence on girls' own lives and the wider society (Baric et al 2009: 19-20).

As mentioned previously, Wilson's (2004) definition of young women leadership emphasizes leadership as both an individual and collective ability to challenge structures. This definition seems to go well in line with the relational and contextual approaches to women's leadership as discussed above. Wilson (2004: 18) emphasizes how important young women's leadership is at different levels, across different areas and movements in order to strengthen women's rights initiatives. In this context, the author stresses the importance of recognizing young women as a heterogeneous group consisting of young women with different needs. Aspects to take into consideration includes: location, socio-economic class, background, sexuality, race, ethnicity and religion. Wilson (2004: 17) argues that despite increased leadership opportunities that young women have compared to older generations, they continue to be restricted by traditions, socio-culture norms, politics, as well as gender and age bias.

4.2 The Leadership Web

In their study, based on accounts from in-depth interviews with women leaders, Elliott and Stead (2009: 66-67) found that women's leadership seem to emerge from several interconnected and dynamic relationships which operate on different levels. The study also showed that women's leadership experiences are affected by women's past and present experiences.

In their "the Leadership Web" (see Appendix III), Elliott and Stead (2009) describe three interconnected and overlapping spheres of influence reoccurring in the lives of the women leaders. These include: "relationship to others, relationship to place and relationship to work" (Elliott & Stead 2009: 67). The interaction with other people (the "relationship" levels) occurs at a micro level, but the authors also recognise how leadership operates at the macro level within a wider social environment (Elliot & Stead 2009: 87). The study's findings reveal that women leaders draw inspiration and support from relationships with family and friends outside of work, and that there leadership practice is influenced by the presence or absence of

mentors, role models and social networks (Elliott & Stead 2009: 68, 75). The study also indicates that women's leadership experience is affected by the relationship to place, where social, political and cultural values are attached to women's status and role in a certain society (Elliott & Stead 2009: 75, 78). Moreover, women's relationship to work seem to be of significance to their leadership practice, as women encounter barriers in terms expectations and perceptions from others but also overcome barriers through developing networks (Elliott & Stead 2009: 80, 86). Elliott and Stead (2009: 68) stress that the different spheres of influence affecting women's leadership have been divided to achieve clarity but in reality they overlap in multiple ways and should not be understood as mutually exclusive.

The social environment in which the three interconnected spheres of relationship operate can be explored through different "lenses"—such as gender, race or class (Elliott & Stead 2009: 87). This study will mainly focus on the gender aspect of the social environment showing how gender norms influence the three spheres of leadership.

4.2.1 Gender norms

A discussion on gender norms can deepen the understanding of the social environment in which women leadership is not practiced in a "gender neutral" environment. Women's leadership experiences is influenced by gender relations where women and men play an active role in maintaining or altering boundaries for their expected "gendered" behaviours through processes of negotiation and dominance both in the private and public sphere.

Harcourt (2009: 14) defines gender as socially constructed and fluid in a sense that it offers "social inscriptions that enable us to identify, learn and live as male or female in the places we inhabit" (Harcourt 2009: 14). West and Zimmerman (2008: 148, 158, 162) discuss gender as a practical accomplishment in social interaction where "doing gender" is a means to construct differences between men and women to be seen as "natural" expressions of masculine and feminine behaviour. The authors claims that, while doing gender appropriately might sustain hierarchal and male-dominant structures, failing to comply with expected gender norms might

make people question the motives and character of the individual (West & Zimmerman 2008: 148, 162).

Gerson and Peiss (2008: 140) emphasize the importance of seeing women as active participants in maintaining and altering gender relations, through interdependent process of domination and negotiation where women comply to or resist oppression demanding resources and equal privilege. The authors stress the human agency component of women's and men's participation in negotiations; however they also highlight the fundamental asymmetry inherited in the power relations, where women are already subject to various forms of domination (Gerson & Peiss 2008: 141). Women often lack power in comparison to men, where women have less access to resources and spaces in which to negotiate (Gerson & Peiss 2008: 141). In most countries women have been allowed greater entrance into the job market. However, boundaries within the workplace have increased in significance, placing women in subordinated position. This allows for male dominance to continue within new boundaries (Gerson & Peiss 2008:138).

The concept of patriarchy, referring to a social structure of male domination, has been subject to debate and contestation among feminist researchers (Bryson 1999). Bryson (1999: 312, 316) finds the concept to be politically useful as it make visible the fact that men are the "dominant and structurally privileged gender group" in many societies, however she also acknowledges the importance of keeping in mind women's different experiences. In this study, while recognizing the limitations of patriarchy, the concept will be used to describe women's oppression in connection to male power and privilege, keeping in mind that this concept is subject to change.

A discussion of the theoretical perspectives of intersectionality and body politics will follow, which will complement the three interconnected spheres in the "Leadership Web".

4.3 Intersectionality

The adaption of an intersectionality lens can add complexity to the understanding of young women leaders' relationship to others, relationship to place and to work. Intersectionality addresses power relations in the society in a more direct way than Elliot and Stead's (2009) Leadership Web. We believe that our analysis will be deepened by extending the web with this concept.

Women leaders are not a homogenous group, as leadership is experienced differently by women in different settings. Women's leadership practice is influenced by women's different (and overlapping) social identities, where some women leaders might face discrimination and challenges not only because of their gender but also due to their ethnicity, class and age. Thus, young women's leadership is affected by more than their "gender identity" and therefore relations to other women and differences between women leaders need to be explored.

Steady (2007: 139–140) claims that although it is widely recognized today that women constitute a heterogeneous group with different experiences, the concept of "gender" continues to be biased towards white Western women's realities, hiding other power relations based on ethnicity, class, age and religion, etc. The author stresses the fact that "gender" representing power relations between men and women is insufficient in understanding different structures of oppression that women might face in African socio-cultural settings (Steady 2007: 139-140).

The theoretical and methodological tool of intersectionality have, according to many researchers, transformed feminist thinking around gender in terms of greater emphasis on the necessity of seeing gender in a context of power relations which are embedded in several interwoven social identities (Lykke 2010: 50; Shields 2008: 301). Intersectionality can be understood as the overlap and fluidity between different social identities, such as gender, class, ethnicity, race but also age and sexual orientation. These influence how people experience their social reality and are perceived by others (Shields 2008: 301–302, 304). In the context of analyzing young women's leadership experiences the social identity of gender

but also that of age is relevant to highlight, not only power relations between men and women, but also between women themselves.

When discussing ageism, discrimination based on age, it is commonly assumed to be inflicted upon older generations by younger generations. Traditional patriarchal stereotypes are reinforced as women get older, implying that women's life cycle comes to an end when their reproductive age is over (Sen 1995: 36). Alpísar and Wilson (2005: 1) however, argue that young women, active, or wanting to become active, within women's movements and decision-making processes are subject to discrimination and stereotyping due to their young age. A greater inclusion of young women into women's organizations and networks is not prioritized by older generations of women who perceive young women as: inexperienced and unknowledgeable, as well as uninterested in political and feminist struggles (Alpísar & Wilson 2005: 5).

4.4 Body Politics

The concept of Body Politics can add yet another dimension to the understanding of women leaders' relationship to place and work. This is of relevance to understand the context of women's leadership practice in the field of SRHR.

Feminist researchers have increased awareness of how bodies are "gendered", emphasizing the cultural and social dynamics that produce difference and dominance out of female and male bodies (Lorber & Moore 2007: 5). Harcourt (2009: 22–24, 32) argues that bodies must be understood as a site of political, economic and sexual struggles, where identity and lived experience of the (female) body is a product of the interplay between power structures and human agency (resistance). Body politics highlight the close relationship between the private sphere (women's sexuality) and the political arena as crucial to understand gender inequalities (Schlyter 2009: 141). Harcourt (2009: 17) further argues that understanding gender relations that affect perceptions of the female body are important to be able to challenge and confront various sources of oppression.

According to Harcourt (2009: 25) body politics has often been an arena for women's mobilization and struggle to realize sexual rights, as well as an entry point for political voice and engagement in other spheres. Schlyter (2009: 13) also emphasize the fact that the fight for sexual and reproductive freedoms is central to body politics and that for women to decide over their own bodies continues to be a very contested right.

The power over women's bodies is manifested through violations of sexual and reproductive rights which limits women's decisions around sexuality and reproduction (Washington & Tallis 2012: 7). Washington and Tallis (2012: 8) stress that without addressing the context specific and cultural defined patriarchal control over women's sexuality, rights are difficult to ensure and safeguard. McFadden (2003) stresses that debates about female sexuality is gaining momentum in African countries due to the widespread HIV epidemic. In this context, sexuality is mainly seen as a reproductive choice and avoidance of disease, which limit women in achieving sexual freedoms and bodily autonomy.

In the theoretical framework that will be used for analysing the empirical findings, the "leadership web" has been modified through adding the theoretical perspectives of intersectionality and body politics. We believe this framework will add depth and nuance to the analysis of young women's leadership experiences in the field of SRHR in Zimbabwe.

5 Result presentation and analysis

In this chapter the study's findings will be analyzed with focus on young women's leadership experiences in terms of barriers and opportunities. Young women leaders' cooperation with other women's organizations in pursuing collective leadership will also be explored. The findings will be structured in accordance with the theoretical framework (the modified Leadership Web). The issue of gender norms will be a component evident throughout the analysis. However, it should be kept in mind that these sections—relationship to others, relationship to place and relationship to work—are overlapping, which will be accounted for in our concluding discussion.

5.1 Relationship to others and gender norms

5.1.1 What does it mean to be a young woman leader?

When interviewing the thirteen young women, they all gave their personal view of how it feels to be a young woman leader and what this means to them. *Mary*, a founding director of a local NGO in her early 30's, says:

I think young women leadership is the ability as a young woman to know yourself first and your needs, and then to be able to influence those around you in issues that affect young women. Because many times we have seen leaders and we have heard from leaders, but they have failed to really speak to the needs and aspirations of young women
-Mary

In the quotation above, *Mary* stresses the importance of young women leaders to know themselves and what they want, before they can start to lead others. *Belinda*, a woman in her early 30's working as a program officer for a local NGO, talks about what she perceives her role as a young woman leader to be and what motivated her to pursue a career as a young woman leader:

(...) and when people talk about women's rights, and even feminism, they talk about the lived reality of a woman. I think growing up and seeing the reality of women's experiences up to date, and my own experience as a woman, I think I have that passion. So naturally I am actively involved in the women's rights discourse and in the women's rights movement in Zimbabwe
-Belinda

Here *Belinda* points at the fact that lived experiences of young women need to be highlighted when discussing their leadership role. *Cynthia*, a mentee in a young women's leadership program in her early 20's, also emphasizes the importance of young women leaders to shape a different perception of young women. When asking about what the informants think are their most important responsibilities as young women leaders, several informants seem to agree with *Mary's* statement that leadership starts foremost with yourself. *Cynthia* states that you need to lead your life in the right way in order to lead other people. *Danai*, also a mentee in a young women's leadership program in her early 20's, expresses a similar view that leading the life you are preaching is crucial. These views presented correspond to previous research that lived experiences and awareness of your role as a leader is important for leadership, as presented by Elliot and Stead (2009). Furthermore Baric et al (2009) stress that it is crucial for young women to recognize their own sense of agency in order to motivate others.

Gaining leadership positions was not easy as there are certain things expected of them as young women leaders. When speaking about support from family in a career as a female leader, many informants found this important. Some informants were lucky to have supportive families, while others had to fight their way to gain recognition, such as *Mary*, whose family was supportive only after she gained recognition as a leader.

Several informants raise the issue of gender norms deeply rooted in socio-cultural structures and how these have prevented them and other young women speaking about certain issues, especially those concerning SRHR. *Belinda* stresses that it is extremely hard for young women to pursue leadership positions due to the fact that girls are raised to be "seen but not heard" and that their opinion is not sought for within the family. This often contributes to low self-esteem and confidence among young women. *Memory*, expresses her view on trying to find a balance between being a progressive woman and still respecting family, cultural and religious expectations. She states the following:

I want to make sure that my career doesn't result in me being 'two-faced' being this very vocal young person who is advocating for women's rights and being this on the other hand young woman who is so stuck up to culture and religion that I also may be subject to the things I preach against
-Memory

As the quotation suggests, for *Memory* finding a balance between her leadership role and cultural and religious expectations is important. She continues the discussion emphasising that for her this balance lies in the human rights aspect: for everyone to be seen as equals in society and for women and men to have the right to the same opportunities. Informants also believed that they did not see a lack in support as a barrier but rather, as their leadership role grew, so did the acceptance and recognition from family. This is in line with what Elliot and Stead (2009) argues that women leaders draw their inspiration and support from family and friends, outside their professional work. They are also influenced by the setting, i.e. what is expected of them culturally and how they can balance these different roles.

5.1.2 Going against the “good woman definition”

To be a progressive and outspoken young woman in Zimbabwe, many informants say that it usually means that you consciously have to go against family and socio-cultural expectations. Several informants mention that women who are talkative, advocate for change and challenge gender norms are seen as “rebellious” or as “radical” feminist who will not be able to get married. Moreover, as *Ruth* emphasises, being married comes with a certain level of respect both from women and men. She says that people might question or ignore what young women have to say if they are not married because ‘what do they know?’ It is especially sensitive when a young unmarried woman talks about SRHR issues. In the cultural context, talking about sex is taboo, or as *Ruth* says, women who speak of these issues are often perceived as having “loose morals” or even being labelled “prostitute”.

According to most informants, young women in Zimbabwe are expected to get married, have children and be “good wives” taking care of their husbands and homes. *Kudzai*, emphasises this and she claims that young women do not have the authority to discuss anything to do with their own family since they are expected to belong to another family when they get married.

However, when they get to their new families, they are considered ‘outsiders’ and are therefore not able to speak their opinion. She poses the question:

If this is how you are trivialized within your own family, how much power does it take away from you? You start to feel that the things you have to say have no meaning and that removes you from community process
-Kudzai

The quote suggests that if young women have limited possibilities for decision-making within the family, they will have little confidence to make their voices heard within the community.

Mary believes that one of the reasons for people looking down upon young women leaders is the fear of women challenging male dominance and privileges in society. *Belinda* argues that the fear of “punishment” (being socially excluded) prevents women from engaging in leadership: “There is punishment that comes with being outspoken, there is punishment, or should I call it backlash that comes with not conforming to the ‘good woman definition’”. This experience is also documented in the literature by West and Zimmerman (2008) who argue that women, who do not comply with what is expected of them, experience people questioning their character and motives. *Kudzai* also talks about a fear among young women of being “punished”; meeting resistance from family and peers being pushed out and not getting married. Many of the informants also explain the struggle with trying to live up to family expectations while being a SRHR leader. *Faith* mentions the fact that women leaders always have to explain themselves in for example why they choose to not get married and instead pursue a career. This, she stresses, creates a conflict where young women leaders are constantly questioning themselves and if what they are doing is the right thing, and at times this limits them. *Ruth* discusses marriage as a “symbol” and claims that the moment people see that she is married (see her wedding ring), they treat her differently:

(...) and they look at my fingers and there’s no ring. And one of the reasons why I actually don’t put my ring on is because I get stereotyped. The moment people see that I’m married, their tone changes
-Ruth

Ruth claims that if people know that a woman is married, she is seen as respectable, and if she is not married and wants to talk about SRHR, she is believed to have loose morals. Due to this

fact, *Ruth* chooses to sometimes take off her ring, depending on the situation and the reactions she wants. This is mentioned by Gerson and Peiss (2008), who argue that even though it might be hard for women to comply with their cultural and societal expectations, they are not seen as victims, but rather they are active in changing and challenging gender relations. *Melody*, a woman in her early 30's and founder and director of a local NGO, also discusses the significance of the wedding ring, but takes the opposite approach. She says that she is not respected or listened to when discussing certain issues (such as GBV) due to the fact that she is not married. *Melody* feels like people question her motives: so what input can she have? So she says that she is prepared to start wearing a wedding-ring, even though she is not married. If this will allow for women to listen to her and in the end help them, it will be worth it, she says.

5.2 Relationship to place and gender norms

5.2.1 Challenging stereotypes

In feminist literature, it has been argued (see for e.g. Bryson 1999) that the concept of patriarchy can make social structures of male-dominance and privilege visible in a society. Several informants mention patriarchy as one of the major reasons why women are not given the same opportunities for leadership as their male counterparts. *Tendai* emphasizes this restriction, saying that women are not allowed to enter the male-dominated spheres, and that:

The challenge with men is that they think if a woman gets into a space she's going to get certain privileges that will strip away part of their ego or part of their dignity or part of their reputation
-Tendai

The quote suggests that men dominate the spaces of influence and are reluctant to let women enter due to fear of competition. *Mary* also discusses this limitation and claims that due to patriarchy, women have very little access to the political sphere. She stresses the fact that this is where the important decisions are made, and that young women also need to be part of this puzzle. She claims that due to male bias, even the few women who do get access to these

spaces tend to adopt “male leadership characteristics” or turn into men rather than changing that space.

Many informants argue that the barrier gender stereotypes bring is that the social-economic environment is in favour of men as opposed to women. This socio-economic space is a no-go for women and several feel they often become ‘objectified’ during meetings because they are women. The stereotyping has led to, as *Faith* expresses, men pretending to let young women in and take their opinions seriously, but when the final decision is made, they are different from those ideas you contributed with. A common notion that was brought up was that in meetings, women’s expected role is to pour tea and take minutes. *Belinda* explains how hard it is for women to be given opportunities to speak and participate in meetings saying:

Here I am at a meeting, there are eight men, ten women and all the women are silent, and I am the only one that’s speaking. There must be something wrong with me; there must be something wrong with me
-Belinda

She argues that it is so unusual for women to speak when men are present, that when she gives her opinion, she is immediately seen as going against the norm of how women should act. This often makes her question her own actions.

According to *Kudzai*, the abusive language used toward women also creates a hostile and violent environment, preventing young women to participate in certain spaces. She says that women are believed to stay at home, and if they are out at night, they will be labelled sex workers and are at risk of being arrested by the police. *Precious* also mentions this violence, claiming that the police violence, which she herself has been victim to, is a result of imposing laws that specifically target women. She says that the laws have lead to women being arrested in bars or on the streets accused of loitering, engaging in sex work or soliciting. She shares an incidence when she confronts a police officer during a protest march:

This[police violence] is something very personal to me, I know what police brutality is, I know what it means to be arrested by a policeman here in Harare, and for them [the police] to go and say: it’s just because you are young women, this is just young women, and you are all sex workers anyway
-Precious

As suggested by this quotation, *Precious* has faced first-hand the stereotypes that prevent many young women from becoming active in decision-making spheres and the violence it results in.

5.3 Intersectionality

5.3.1 Young and old working together, why does age matter?

When asking about cooperation with other organizations, one of the informants highlight the fact that one of the greatest battles facing young women is the fact that they are grouped not only by society but also by the women's movement. A common reason for why young women leaders are being faced with resistance is that of ageism, and this was a reoccurring theme brought up by many informants. One informant remarks that young women's issues are generalized and not prioritized and they are lost within the broader challenges facing women. The fact that they are young, they are perceived, by the older generation of women⁷, as immature and inexperienced to take on positions of leadership. When talking about ageism, as mentioned by Sen (1995), there is discrimination toward older generations by younger generations. However, these findings point at the opposite, where instead young women are being discriminated due to their young age. This corresponds with the arguments made by Alp sar and Wilson (2005) who discuss the fact that young women who want to be included in spaces of decision-making are often met with stereotypes and discrimination. One informant, *Precious*, highlights this fact saying that in terms of recognition from the older generation, they are just seen as young women with little experiences. She continues to argue that this has led to young women always having to legitimize their cause in order to gain recognition. She says that there is a delicate balance between their ages, the work that they do and to be taken seriously:

⁷ Most informants referred to the "older generation" as women above 35 years of age who had been part of the women's movement for several years.

The fact that you are young at times act out of favour of you because whatever you are saying is reduced to your age or the fact that you are just a young woman, so what do you know? What have you experienced?
-Precious

As the quotation suggests, young women are stereotyped when it comes to their age, where older women connect age to young women being too inexperienced to be able to take on leadership roles. When discussing the women's movement *Tafadzwa* goes to the extent to say that: "There is no women's movement in Zimbabwe. There is a collection of women's organizations that say they are working for women but whether it's a movement, whether we have a common purpose, that's something else". *Tafadzwa* is referring to the fact that she feels that the women's movement is divided and that there is a conflict over priorities. *Tendai* discusses the fact that she believes that the older women have monopolized the women's rights movement, reluctant to let the younger women in. She says that sometimes when they are working with the older women and trying to bring in new ideas, they are not receptive at all. However, *Tendai* also emphasizes the fact that that there has been conflict between young women as well, where they do not share ideas with each other as they are afraid that their ideas will be stolen.

Belinda discusses the negative attitude that the older generation has toward the younger women due to their age, and she asks: what counts as a young woman? She is now 33 years old, and she perceives herself as being "stuck" in between young and old. She says that she has not yet had her opportunity to speak because the older generation sees her as too young, while the young women leaders will soon no longer consider her to be young anymore. *Belinda* believes that many women leaders who are over thirty years feel the same way. The informants stress that young women are becoming "double-oppressed", not only because they are women, but also due to their young age. These findings go in line with the intersectionality approach used by Lykke (2010) and Shields (2008), emphasizing that gender must be analyzed in a context of power relations, embedded in several interwoven social identities.

Tafadzwa points at the fact that many of the older women were brought up in a system with many inequalities. Through this, they think that it is unfair that the young women get to live a life that is “god-free” while they had all the boundaries set by society. In relation to this, the informants discussed how it is difficult to work with the older generation when talking about SRHR. *Precious* says that speaking of issues surrounding reproduction is much more acceptable but not the sexual part of it. She continues to say that because of this reluctance to talk about sexual rights, issues of abortion is not acceptable to discuss, while maternal mortality is always brought up. She continues to argue that it needs to be recognized that these two go hand-in-hand. *Tafadzwa* also points out the fact that when we talk about sex we say that it needs to be safe and satisfying, while they (the older women leaders) say:

Oh but wait wait wait! What do you mean safe and satisfying?! You need to understand sex is a duty, you have sex with your husband, and it's for procreation! What do you mean satisfying?
-Tafadzwa

However, *Tafadzwa* furthers this argument to say that the more these older women are engaged, the more they understand and start disclosing some of the challenges within SRHR.

Another issue discussed was the conflicts and competition over funds, spaces and influence. *Ruth* brings forth this discussion, emphasizing the fact that women are fighting over a small space. The problem *Ruth* sees is that all women are clustered into one section, the “gender section”, instead of moving out into other spaces such as education, politics or the economy. She states that: “We are still circulating at one point, it's because our cake piece is shrinking, and now we have to pull each other out to make sure that we do not all sink”. She concludes by saying that at the moment, everyone within the women's movement is more focused on survival rather than development. *Belinda* claims that one of the reasons for this is where competition for funds becomes a means of survival, where many women need to “tailor-make” their interventions and projects in order to please the donors and receive funding. It is not uncommon that some organizations want to hide their interventions from others because of the competition over resources.

5.4 Body Politics

5.4.1 Women's sexuality and the "culture of silence"

Several informants, talk about the "culture of silence" around women's sexuality where talking about women's SRHR is seen as taboo and issues surrounding sex should not be brought up before young women are married. According to *Tafadzwa* this leads to young women not feeling comfortable around SRHR issues, not knowing their rights and not seeking services because they are afraid of being judged.

Many informants also say that traditionally, the "aunties" are the ones to educate young women about sex. However, this is only allowed in connection to marriage where girls are taught how to please their future husband. Furthermore, many informants point at the fact that "aunties" often lack correct information. *Faith*, points out that you don't talk about sexual pleasure for women but instead sex is always portrayed in a protective manner. An example of this is "you shouldn't sleep with boys", but if young women do not even know what sex means she says, how can they have enough information to make informed decisions and protect themselves? *Belinda* means that this lack of knowledge and access to correct information about SRHR among young girls prevents young women from standing up in certain areas because they don't know what the issues have to do with them. The view of the informants are correspond with that of Washington and Tallis (2008) who argue that without addressing context specific and cultural control over women's sexuality, rights are difficult to ensure and safeguard.

When discussing young women's leadership more specifically how it is to advocate for SRHR issues as a young woman, several informants highlights the fact that politics are centred around women's bodies. *Kudzai* argues for this saying that:

As long as we are in these bodies, there are struggles that we are going to have (or do have) and that in order to cross certain barriers we have to walk a journey to make peace with our bodies, acknowledging what this female body enables and what challenges it presents, because that awareness allows us to better navigate the territory in terms of leadership
-Kudzai

As the quote suggests, young women need to be aware of the political nature of their bodies and what it means to speak about their sexuality in order to manage the leadership role. *Mary* also argues that as a young woman leader, in order to be able to influence people around you, you have to be aware of yourself as a young woman; know your body and its needs, know your aspirations and goals. She claims that:

Because politics are around our bodies! Just because you're a woman you can't have access to this, just because you're a woman I can do this to you, just because you're a woman we can't respect what you say
-Mary

The quote suggests that women have little control and power over their own decision-making because of their gender. *Mary* continues to say that there is also gender bias towards women's physical appearance. If women have a small-built body, they will not be taken seriously, and she experienced this first hand. She was asked to have an older woman to represent her cause because she was not seen as mature (both body-wise and age-wise). *Belinda* also discusses this, stating that "sometimes one of the things that I see is the size of your body. Before I had a small body, I was smaller than this [the body she has now], and a small body comes with quite a lack of respect". She claims that when she was younger people would not respect her because she had a small-built body, something that is a sign of immaturity in the Zimbabwean society.

According to *Tendai*, when engaging young women in leadership processes, it is not possible to ignore the political nature of their "body space". She continues to say that if young women know how their bodies work, it translates into the overall well-being in their lives and allows them to be more confident in other spaces such as political, economic and social spaces. *Rufaro* explains the fact that many young women are not aware of their own bodies and this becomes a huge barrier to leadership. She claims that if young women don't know themselves and their SRHR, it will be difficult for them to pursue leadership, to give correct information and to lead others. *Rufaro* states that: "Body Politics is very important, so if you don't know your own body, how naïve are you going to be to allow someone else to understand it". This reiterates what has been argued by Harcourt (2009) that understanding that the female body is

a site of ‘political struggle’ where unquestioned gender systems hold in place particular understandings of sexual practice. However, women also have the possibility to challenge inequalities.

5.5 Relationship to work

5.5.1 Towards cooperation and mentorship

Previous researchers (Baric et al 2009; Elliot & Stead 2009) discuss the importance of women working together and networking in order to gain legitimacy and overcome barriers. Several informants discussed this importance of a collective cooperation. Some were more positive than others, recognizing the fact that it is important to respect the older generation of women activists, to understand and acknowledge the struggles that they went through. *Mary* says that it’s all about using a respectful approach when working with the older generation and understand that younger woman are entering spaces where women have been operating for a long time.

Belinda believes that in order to bring about change, it is important that all women are working toward the same goal. She says that each woman brings a unique and different “block”, and when these blocks are working together rather than competing, they can complement each other. *Rufaro* points out that this competing nature within the movement is an unhealthy mindset. According to her, if you take the good from both and merge them, you can come up with something very brilliant. *Memory* also emphasizes the fact that in order to make headway in society, women need to work together.

Another solution of this rivalry lies in mentorship and there were some informants who were more positive toward mentorship and cooperation, while others were convinced that it was time for a generation-change. The informants who were positive toward mentorship said that it was important that it was mutual, that the young women could learn from the older and vice versa, but also that there should be mentorship between the young women themselves. *Rufaro* was one informant who was advocating for improved mentorship saying that it is important

for other young women to realize their rights, be motivated and stay positive. However, she also highlights just how hard it is to come by, she states:

Most of us are selfish; it is not easy to find a female to say: give me your hand and I will hold it and walk with you, because they are too busy trying to see how they can outrun you, be better than you or make sure that you don't get to where you want to go
-Rufaro

According to *Rufaro*, leadership is something that should be shared and working together everyone can achieve a common goal. *Mary* emphasizes what good can come out of cooperation stating that:

We are working in different sectors, in different spaces, and even different geographical spaces, so there is really no need for us to see each other as competition but rather see each other as blocks that are building together towards transforming our society
-Mary

As the quotation suggests, by working together, the women can complement each other's strengths toward positive cooperation. However, there were some informants who had different views. Two informants mentioned that in order for there to be progression within the women's movement, the older women needed to learn how to "pass on the torch". The same informants say that if the older generation does not acknowledge the youth, soon it will be too late, they will be gone and no one will be left to educate the younger generation. A few informants said that they hope that the older generation will be more open to mentorship in the future. One informant gives a drastic input stating that: "I think there are a lot of young women out there who have got brilliant ideas who just don't have the capacity and the support to do what they want to do." She claims that there is much more opportunities for collaboration between younger women where there is better understanding and potentials. *Kudzai*, sees it as her responsibility to mentor other young women to provide a space for them to discover themselves and find confidence. She expresses this vision in the following way, stating that it is her personal desire to:

(...) be a part of facilitating a process that creates an awakening in individual young women that makes them realize their agency, their potential, the power they hold, that they can do whatever and that there is power in the collective
-Kudzai

She talks about a collective transformation that comes with increased individual awareness and consciousness, which also includes a change of attitude where young women start acknowledging who they are and what has made them who they are.

5.5.2 Opportunities – young women as positive role models

When discussing the opportunities that exist for young women to take on leadership positions and gain rights within SRHR, the emergence and growth of social media is emphasised by several informants as a form of information assimilation. Moreover, providing correct information in schools and curricula is highlighted as a critical point by many informants. *Tendai* argues for this information sharing stating that:

Opportunities that we have is an emerging young women’s movement to take a lead in SRHR information because we cannot really separate SRHR issues and other development aspects of our lives as young women
-Tendai

In the quote, the importance of young women being at the forefront of the SRHR struggle is emphasised as young women’s SRHR is closely intertwined with other development issues. When discussing the role that these young women feel that they have in providing opportunities and being role models for other young women, several informants said that it was two-fold. They feel that other young women expect them to provide direct solutions and never fail, and for them to live up to everything they preach about. *Memory* believes that it is important to let people understand what you are able to achieve, and that change is gradual. Furthermore, *Faith* says that she feels like these expectations has created a “template” for her on how to act and behave which sometimes forced her to be more mature than her age. Several informants express the fact that these expectations make it difficult for them to separate their private from their professional lives. However, most informants also spoke openly about how they were passionate about their role as a leader providing opportunities for other young women. *Precious* sees herself as a young women’s right activist everywhere she goes. She claims that:

I have a responsibility so that every young woman is safe in Zimbabwe and I think that all the other young women I work with, or interact with, are looking at me and thinking: this is your

responsibility! If you see an injustice happening around issues to do with young women's SRHR you are supposed to act. I see myself as an agent everywhere I go, I am a women's rights activist
-Precious

As suggested by the quote, leadership for young women comes with great responsibility in always having to be prepared to help other young women in all situations. Several informants agree that young women expect them to represent their issues and be a voice for the voiceless, providing them with information and create spaces for interaction. *Belinda* also discusses the positive aspects of leading others emphasizing that because of her experiences; she could not see herself doing anything else. Through her work she hopes to create change, opening up spaces for other young women. *Mary* reflects over the positive aspects of being a role model stating that:

I think when they look at me as a person they are also looking at that representative voice and being that one who speaks truly to young women's issues (...)just that true sister who always has in mind other young women and sisters
-Mary

In this quotation, *Mary* points to the great satisfaction it gives her to be able to help and represent the issues of other young women. *Kudzai* highlights the fact that furthering the agenda for young women is her desire, saying that:

I feel like that's really my personal desire to be part of facilitating a process that creates an awakening in individual young women that makes them realize their agency their potential and the power they hold
-Kudzai

The quotation suggest that in being a role model *Kudzai* see great potential in facilitating for other young women to pursue leadership. When asking *Memory* about what other young women expect from her, she claims that "they expect me to speak on the behalf of the voiceless young women out there". Tafadzwa says:

For me the most important thing is to keep getting the message out. That's what I want be known as the girl who doesn't shut up! The one who keeps talking, and talking and it gets embarrassing!
-Tafadzwa

The quotation above, points to the important role of young women leaders to represent the voice of others. Several informants feel that this is what they were meant to do, provide

information and positive encouragement to those young women who lack confidence and knowledge about their rights, both within SRHR but also the opportunities that exist for them to become agents of change in their communities and societies.

6 Concluding discussion

The purpose of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of how socio-cultural structures and gender norms affect young women's leadership possibilities in Zimbabwe. This was investigated through posing the question: "How do young women experience and pursue leadership in Zimbabwe?" The study's findings, based on a unique case, indicate that gender norms rooted in socio-cultural structures through socialization and societal expectations strongly influences young women's role in society. The young women feel that they are constantly questioned and put under a lot of pressure for challenging gender roles, and that this at times limit them in terms of gaining confidence as leaders. The findings also show that a competition over influence between young and old generations of women within the women's movement act as an impediment to collective leadership. Negative perceptions of young women from both women and men prevent young women from gaining recognition and influence as leaders. However, the young women leaders see great opportunities to challenge these barriers through mentorship, cooperation, as well as greater self-awareness and knowledge of SRHR among young women.

6.1 Gaining confidence and recognition as a young woman leader

It becomes clear that young women pursuing leadership are perceived as going against gender norms and cultural expectations. Young women's leadership comes with a "struggle" where young women are often faced with negative attitudes and resistance. Challenging gender norms seems to go hand-in-hand with an internal struggle within young women. The fear of being socially excluded while also having a desire to balance societal expectations with the leadership role becomes a great barrier. Young women portray leadership as a salient facet of their identity, which remains visible in their private life. In viewing themselves as role models, young women leaders take great responsibility in helping other young women both

through work and in their spare time. This makes the private and public sphere of their lives difficult to separate. There are very few young women leaders advocating for young women's SRHR in Zimbabwe. This places young women leaders in a position to change young women's situation, but it also puts a lot of pressure on them as leaders to succeed and make a change.

The young women are pushing for equal leadership between men and women, however at the same time they emphasize the importance of being aware of their female identity and sexuality. When discussing their role as women leaders in society they constantly stress how they are different from their male counterparts. We believe this might reinforce some of the gender roles that exist in the society. This is also reflected in the feminist literature on women's leadership, where gender identity and differences between women and men's leadership experiences is emphasized. Therefore the focus in the literature also contributes to reinforcing gender differences. This contributes to scholars failing to instead see the similarities in leadership experiences of e.g. young women and men (both sharing the "label" of youth). It is also important to recognise the differences between women in leadership positions within and between different settings. African feminists stress the fact that the context, history and culture where women's leadership is practiced have to be considered. Here the emphasis is put on a collective "African woman" identity. Although the cultural legacy and traditions is important to consider in many African countries, there are certain issues which are context specific when looking at young women leadership. Therefore it is not possible to generalize the experiences of all African young women leaders, or even the experiences of Zimbabwean women leaders. As discussed above, it becomes clear that the feminist scholars' emphasis on the "female identity", "the African woman identity" when investigating women's leadership, contributes to a view where gender relations are static. This fails to recognize the dynamics of women's leadership experiences.

In light of this discussion, we find the intersectionality perspective to be important when studying young women's leadership experiences as it highlights their different and overlapping social "identities". Of these identities, gender might not be the most prominent one in all contexts. Our study shows that the intersectionality approach is essential, as a focus

on solely gender is not sufficient to understand young women's leadership experiences. The study shows that age in relation to gender is important.

6.2 Support, resistance and mentorship

It is evident that young women's relationships have great influence on how they experience leadership. A lack of support or even resistance from family, relatives and friends is a struggle the young women leaders have to take. This has not prevented them from pursuing leadership. There exists an understanding among the young women leaders that support comes gradually with greater understanding among family members of the important work they do and the influence they have. The issue of support appears to be closely connected to the setting in where leadership is practiced. In the Zimbabwean socio-cultural context, women are not expected nor encouraged to take on leadership positions. The relationship with colleagues (working within the field of SRHR) also influences young women's leadership practice to a great extent. These relationships both create barriers for young women's leadership in terms of conflicts over influence and space, but also provide opportunities through cooperation and collective action.

Gender norms are also visible in the organizational setting, where young women are expected to take on certain responsibilities. In this environment, young women leaders feel that they have to challenge these "stereotypical" expectations. Male-dominance in different spheres of decision-making is perceived as a great barrier for young women to gain recognition as leaders and to access certain spaces of influence. Patriarchy was constantly brought up by the young women as an impediment to leadership. However, patriarchy is something the young women believe they can challenge and a strong women's movement can change. It is important to consider how patriarchal relations are experienced by young women. However, it is also important to consider the role of older women, sometimes referred to as the "gatekeepers of patriarchy", in upholding patriarchal structures. It is important to emphasise the fact that patriarchy is not static; it changes over time.

It can be seen that age creates asymmetry in the power relation between women, preventing young women from gaining recognition within the women's movement. In the Zimbabwean society, status and recognition is attached to age. Our findings show that in Zimbabwe age is a factor that strongly influences women's leadership. However, in other countries (e.g. Sweden) status might not be automatically attached to old age (in some circumstances rather the opposite). Thus, in other countries, age might not be a strong factor preventing young women from pursuing leadership. In this study we have come to an understanding that age, or other identities that might intersect with gender, needs to be a point of emphasis when investigating young women's leadership. Once again, the importance of the intersectionality perspective is evident. It provides a lens to better understand relationships between women leaders, and how women might face different barriers and opportunities as leaders in Zimbabwe.

Mentorship is brought forward as an important opportunity for young women to pursue leadership. The young women leaders express that older women within the women's movement are still using "old" methods in their advocacy work for SRHR. The young women find that this needs to change. They see opportunities in using "new" methods, such as social media, to engage and disseminate SRHR information among young people. We believe that a mutual-learning process is important, where young women can share new ideas and strategies (such as social media) with the older generation. Furthermore, older women can strengthen young women in their leadership role by sharing important knowledge and wisdom. However, for mentorship to be feasible, older women need to be receptive to new ideas and young women need to respect the knowledge older women have. It is also essential to recognize that a gradual shift in power where young women leaders are permitted greater entrance into important spheres of decision-making is unavoidable and crucial in order for the women's movement to progress. Through mentorship, and building on strengths and contributions from both age-groups, the women's movement will not only evolve and grow but more efficient programmes targeting young women can be developed.

6.3 SRHR- an important case

In the process of investigating young women leadership in Zimbabwe it became clear that most young women are active within the area of SRHR. In recent years, many local and international organizations have sought to address the SRH needs and rights of young people by increasingly engaging them in various initiatives. We believe the “SRHR case” has been important for investigating young women’s leadership in the Zimbabwean context. It is evident that young women’s struggle for recognition as leaders starts with gaining greater knowledge of their own SRHR. The perspective of body politics proved useful for understanding leadership within SRHR, as most of the informants believe that women’s control over their own bodies and sexuality is fundamental in order to challenge existing gender inequalities and gain influence in society. Being aware of their SRHR facilitated for them to take on leadership positions and lead others. It becomes clear that leadership within SRHR is a starting point for young women to pursue leadership in other decision-making spheres.

Elliott and Stead’s “Leadership Web” provides a useful frame for understanding women’s leadership experience through relationships to others, work and place. However, in understanding the reality of young women leaders within the field of SRHR we believe the framework is inadequate without the additional perspectives of intersectionality and body politics. These concepts add complexity to the understanding of the relational and contextual aspects of women’s leadership experiences, stressing: the dynamic nature of gender relations, women’s overlapping social identities and the political nature of women’s sexuality.

6.4 Looking forward

Zimbabwe’s new constitution committing to achieve gender equality and engage young people in all spheres of decision-making show the relevance of the study. With this crucial commitment in place, it looks like young women leaders have a bright future in Zimbabwe. The young women leaders that we interviewed were modest in the fact that they themselves

actually provided great opportunities as role models for other young women pursuing leadership. However, in order to ensure that their participation will be meaningful, we believe a greater understanding of how young women experience opportunities and barriers to leadership is important. It should be emphasised that the leadership experienced as portrayed by the women in this study might be different from the reality of young women in other parts of Zimbabwe. It is therefore important for future research on young women's leadership to investigate leadership in rural areas and to explore women's influence in other spheres of decision-making such as economics or politics.

Considering the very limited research on young women's leadership in Zimbabwe, Africa and globally we believe more qualitative research focusing on the lived experiences of young women leaders are needed. More research is crucial to better understand the barriers preventing young women from pursuing leadership and how these can be addressed through various opportunities. We believe that in order to fully understand the experiences of young women leaders, it is important to look past the label of "gender" and instead look at the past and present experiences and relationships that define these young women. They all contribute with a unique personality, leadership style and experience. This needs to be recognised and commended in order to further young women leadership in Zimbabwe.

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8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix I

Interview guide

1. The interview recording commenced with the informants being asked for some personal details, including: name, age, nationality, language/ethnic group and education, as well as organization, position at organization and years of employment.

2. The questions in this interview-guide were all covered during the interviews however the specific order of the question and the follow-up questions asked depended on the informant's answers. It should be noted that during some interviews, only one or two questions were asked and the informant themselves led the discussion into the other questions/areas of interest.

Individual Agency

1. Explain briefly the position you hold at your organization. How and why did you gain this position? What inspired you to pursue leadership?
2. How do you at your organization work with issues regarding SRHR?
3. How would you define young women leadership?
4. In what way do you believe young women leadership is important in the area of SRHR?

Relationships

5. In what way have you felt supported by family and peers working with SRHR and pursuing leadership?
6. How do you perceive your possibilities to work with other organisations?
7. In what way do you think you (a young woman in a leadership position), are perceived by others - in society and at work?

8. What expectation do you think other people have on you as a leader within SRHR? How do you feel about these expectations?
9. What forums, if any, exist for young women to influence decision-making in regard to SRHR issues?

Societal and cultural environment

10. In your Shona culture, how are SRHR issues talked about? How are you perceived as a young woman leader advocating for young people's SRHR?
11. How do views differ between young people and the older generations when it comes to SRHR issues?
12. What do you perceive are your most important responsibilities being a young women leader in SRHR? How do you hope to influence and inspire other young women? What expectations do you think other young women have on you as a young woman leader?
13. In what way do you feel you have the possibility to influence (as a young woman leader) in the area of SRHR?
14. What is needed for more young women to take on leadership roles and promote SRHR for young people?

8.2 Appendix II

Informants' details

Date	Name (fictive)	Age	Education
2012-12-12	Melody	Early 30's	University degree
2013-01-16	Ruth	Mid 30's	University degree
2013-01-18	Danai	Early 20's	Currently enrolled at University
2013-01-11	Faith	Mid 20's	Currently enrolled at University
2013-01-25	Kudzai	Upper 20's	University degree
2013-01-18	Cynthia	Early 20's	High-school degree
2013-01-09	Precious	Late 20's	University degree
2012-12-11	Memory	Mid 20's	Currently enrolled at University
2013-01-10	Tendai	Late 20's	University degree
2013-01-17	Rufaro	Early 30's	University degree
2013-01-15	Belinda	Early 30's	University degree
2013-01-11	Tafadzwa	Late 20's	University degree
2013-01-23	Mary	Early 30's	University degree

8.3 Appendix III

The Leadership Web (Elliott & Stead 2009: 67)

