

# Reflective Journeys of Five Women Agriculturists in Australia: A Qualitative Study

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## Abstract

*Women comprise the minority in production agriculture leadership, and their leadership roles in agricultural industries are rarely explored. The purpose of this study was to explore the reflective journeys of five Australian women in production agriculture. The central research questions asked were “What lived experiences helped you obtain your leadership position and what leadership characteristics do you identify as essential in your success?” This study used a phenomenological approach, as reflecting upon the subjects’ past cultural experiences was crucial in understanding their current positions in life and leadership. Five women in agriculture from Australia served as the participants for this study, and they were selected based upon their leadership presence in Australia. Specific themes were generated which included (a) childhood experiences, (b) current family dynamics, (c) hardship, and (d) perception of leadership style. The perception of leadership style is further divided into three sub-themes: (a) self-perception of leadership, (b) leading by example, and (c) outreach efforts for women in the industry. The five women whose personal journeys were explored are primarily concerned with improving the knowledge given to them and presenting new opportunities to other women when they can. Some recommendations for future research are “What are the reflective journey stories of women agriculturists in the United States?”, “What are reflective journey stories of men engaged in agriculture industries?” and “What mentoring strategies are being utilized to recruit and retain women in agriculture industry fields?”*

**Keywords:** women; Australia; agriculture; social learning theory; leadership

## Introduction

During the past 70 years, women have become more involved in obtaining employment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b). After World War II, less than one-third of women held jobs until they quickly filled positions from the 1960s to the 1980s before it decelerated in the 1990s (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b, p. 1). In 1999, women represented 60% of the labor force, which has been their highest involvement (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b). According to

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the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015b), the labor force comprised of 57% of women in 2014. Additionally, the number of women holding educational degrees tripled from the 1970s to 2014 from 11.2% to 40%, respectively (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b). Working women in 2014 earned 83% of men's earnings contrasting 62% of men's earnings in 1979 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b). In addition, the percentage of women working with children has increased over the years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b).

In 1962, 54.4% of mothers worked whereas in 2014, the number of working women who were married with children included 61.8% with children under three, 64.3% with children under six, 75.8% with children aged six to 17, and 70.1% with children 18 years of age (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b). Women were most employed in 2014 in "financial activities (53% female), education and health services (75% female), leisure and hospitality (51% female), and other services (53% female)" (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b, p. 2). Conversely, women were significantly "underrepresented in agriculture (25%), mining (13%), construction (9%), manufacturing (29%), and transportation and utilities (23%)" (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b, p. 2). Although women have made great strides in the labor force, they are still absent from top leadership roles, especially those in agriculture (Kark & Eagly, 2010).

The statistics mentioned above reflect the women in the United States but there is also the same gap of women leaders in Australia. Women comprise 46.2% of the workforce in Australia but get paid 16.2% less than men (Australian Government, 2016). Ninety percent of women ages 20-24 have graduated from high school, 39.6% of women ages 25-29 have received a bachelor degree, and only 5.7% of women ages 15-74 have obtained a postgraduate degree. However, women in leadership positions in Australia, compared to men, are drastically lower. Women account for 14.2% of chair positions, 23.6% of directorships, 15.4% of CEOs, and 27.4% of key management positions (Australian Government, 2016). However, there are 25.1% of reporting agencies who have no women in leadership positions. Overall, women are underrepresented in Australia, especially in male-dominated professions.

Women who enter male-dominated professions, such as agriculture, may be perceived as inherently unsuited for such work (Akeredolu, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Doss et al., 2011). This misconception results from complex gender dynamics and established expectations within industries, such as agriculture, traditionally led by men (Akeredolu, 2009). This lack of acknowledgment may lead women to collectively withdraw from engaging with their industries and fail to seek out leadership roles. However, women are being encouraged to view leadership as the opportunity to influence others and create positive change (Longman & Madsen, 2014).

Women have a remarkable capacity to learn from relationships and connections with others (Kante & Blackwell, 2009; Wells, 1998). Often, due to lack of "education, self-confidence, or an appropriate place in society to offer their leadership capacity" (Kante & Blackwell, 2009, p. 515), women cannot offer their attributes in the workplace. Therefore, female leaders are likely to endorse the contributions of others as significant when reflecting upon their journeys into leadership. This emphasis on association with colleagues and mentors is important in realizing leadership opportunities for women often stem from human connection and relationship building (Longman & Madsen, 2014). Furthermore, mentorship can be critical for the future success of women in leadership fields (Longman & Madsen, 2014) and provide more opportunities for authentic leadership to occur.

Women's typical leadership style may be considered more authentic than men (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). Authentic leaders display genuine self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency (Avolio,

Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). As women leaders seek to promote opportunity and outreach to other women, one should understand how these leaders first became inspired and how they were encouraged to seek out advancement in their chosen career path. This process requires one to reflect on one's own journey on how the position was obtained (Kolb, 2015).

Understanding one's own journey provides the opportunity for reflection and recognition of self-value (Bennis, 1989). This understanding of past experiences could be used to promote further potential leadership capacities of other women. However, there is limited research that is focused on women's journeys in agriculture to help inform others of this effort. Previous literature related to women in agriculture in the *Journal of Agricultural Education* has been focused on university deans (Kleihauer, Stephens, Stripling, & Hart, 2013) and women in both secondary and post-secondary agricultural education (Baxter, Stephens, & Thayer-Bacon, 2011; Enns & Martin, 2015; Kelsey, 2007; Kelsey, 2006; Murphrey, Odom, McKee, & Christiansen Wilkens, 2016). Also, the American Association for Agricultural Education's National Research Agenda Research Priority Area 3: Sufficient Scientific and Professional Workforce That Addresses the Challenges of the 21st Century poses the research question, "What strategies are effective in recruiting diverse populations into agriculture and natural resource careers?" (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016). Therefore, this article will help inform the reader about creating a diverse workforce by describing woman's lived experiences on their journeys to reach a leadership position within her selected agriculture field.

### Theoretical Framework

Krumboltz's (1976) social learning theory of career selection served as the theoretical framework for this study. Social learning theory of career selection seeks to explain the factors influencing career decision making (Krumboltz, 1976). The social learning theory is divided into four categories: (a) genetic endowment and special abilities, (b) environmental conditions and events, (c) learning experiences, and (d) task approach skills (Krumboltz, 1976). Genetic endowment and special abilities refers to characteristics such as race, sex, physical appearance and characteristics, and abilities (Krumboltz, 1976). Environmental conditions and events refer to events or actions that are out of a person's control, such as the number of job opportunities, natural disasters, educational system, family training and experiences, and community influences (Krumboltz, 1976). Learning experiences refer to an individual's current behaviors which are a direct reflection of their past experiences, the consequences developed from those experiences, and observational learning (Krumboltz, 1976). Task approach skills refers to the work ethic, skill set, and values a person has developed from prior experiences (Krumboltz, 1976).

The social learning theory also asserts how "internal (personal) and external (environmental) influencers (constraints or facilitators) shape the nature and number of those options and the way in which individuals respond to them" (Krumboltz, 1976, p. 71). Additionally, the theory discusses generalizations made about the self (Krumboltz, 1976). Individuals create observations of themselves in comparison to those around them (Krumboltz, 1976) and develop "self-observation generalizations" by comparing their own performance to past performances and with others resulting in the creation of generalizations (Krumboltz, 1976, p. 74). Additionally, self-observations include the individual's preferences of how they complete tasks or handle situations (Krumboltz, 1976).

### Purpose and Central Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the reflective journeys of five Australian women in production agriculture. The central research questions asked were "What lived experiences

*helped you obtain your leadership position and what leadership characteristics do you identify as essential in your success?"*

### **Methods and Procedures**

In order to fully comprehend the experiences participants shared, the study was performed using the qualitative mode of inquiry (Creswell, 2013). This study sought to understand past experiences of women leaders in agriculture as well as their leadership style. The qualitative approach is justified in that it seeks to understand the phenomenon (Flick, 2014) of women's experiences of their leadership journeys. A phenomenological approach was utilized to gain entry into the conceptual world of the women in order to understand how and what meaning they construct from their lived childhood experiences, adulthood personal and work experiences, and leadership experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Gathering information from interviews, observations, documents, and pictures provided the researchers with a bank of data from which themes could be created, interpretations made, and a "rich, full picture of a research situation" painted (Wright, 2003, p. 8). Interviews were conducted with the participants; observations before, during, and after the interview sessions were conducted by three individuals involved with the research project and included taking detailed notes on body language, word descriptions and analysis, and behavior related to the interview and discussions opportunities (eating supper with participant, guided tours, etc.); documents (articles, accolades, etc.) related to each woman's lived experiences were collected by the researchers; and pictures of the participants accomplishments, family photos, work experiences, and so forth. These materials were collected over a six-month period.

The sample for this study consisted of five women in agriculture from Australia. Women from Australia were selected from the Australian Women in Agriculture Organization, and the selection was based on the woman's leadership presence in Australia. These women were considered leaders amongst their peers in their selected agriculture venue and had received recognition for their innovation in agriculture. In an effort to protect the identity of the women, there will be limited background information given about the participants and names were assigned to each participant based on the products in which they either produce or represent. The agricultural names selected were the winemaker, viticulturist, rose grower, citrus producer, and the pig farmer.

The methods employed to collect data in this study included three to four hour in-depth, audio-taped interviews, in which the primary researchers asked open-ended, non-leading questions (Creswell, 2013). The central research questions focused on having each woman explain her journey (past and present) to her current leadership role. The interviews focused on revealing the influences and experiences that helped to develop each woman into the leader she is today. This open-ended approach enabled the researchers to gain an understanding related to each woman's unique lived experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Additionally, the researchers were participant observers for one to five days in each woman's environment. A participant observer interacts with the participants in the environment, so they can experience the environment like the participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The interview transcriptions were open-coded to discover the main concepts and categories (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researchers analyzed the in-depth interviews, along with the researchers' field notes, which captured the thoughts related to the women agriculturists and their environment. These field notes were used in the data analysis to assist the researchers in recalling what had occurred during the field experience. Furthermore, data were examined using several methods, which included identifying significant statements and elements of meaning; creating

textural and structural descriptions; and recognizing descriptions which revealed commonalities among the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Data were analyzed and coded by two researchers independently. The researchers then discussed each individual's coding schematic and agreed upon four themes. Those four themes are hardship, childhood experiences, current family dynamics, and perception of leadership style. After the themes were developed, three sub-themes emerged related to the perception of leadership style. Those sub-themes are self-perception of leadership, leading by example, and outreach efforts for women in the industry. After the themes and sub-themes were identified, a male, secondary researcher confirmed the emerging themes and subthemes sorted into the aforementioned categories were representative of the data.

In an effort to reduce the impact of bias on the data collected, several validation strategies were employed to document the accuracy of this phenomenological research study. Prolonged engagement in the field and the triangulation of data sources, methods, and investigators were techniques used to establish credibility (Creswell, 2013). From the researchers' observations, a thick description of the women's life experiences and their environment was constructed to help readers determine the transferability of the research. Dependability of the study was established through peer review by another researcher trained in qualitative analysis throughout the research process and who had not conducted the interviews. Additionally, member checks from participants related to data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions were conducted to confirm credibility of the study.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

Prior to launching the study, the researchers reflected on qualities possessed which may have impacted the relationship with women in the study. The researchers hold a strong passion for agriculture and women in the agricultural field, which may result in a more focused analysis on each woman's journey to their current leadership position. The researchers who conducted and analyzed the data were female and possess moderate feminist beliefs. This may have influenced the interview questions asked of participants pertaining to leadership positions in agriculture, a predominantly male field. In an effort to keep a neutral viewpoint, the researchers reflected on their biases of the research topic, assumptions of the outcomes of the study, and each occasion of contact with the women agriculturists to maintain as impartial of a position as possible. In addition, the researchers also structured the research question and probing questions in such a way that did not lead or guide the women in their responses.

### **Findings**

The following results are divided into four sections: (a) childhood experiences, (b) current family dynamics, (c) hardship, and (d) perception of leadership style. The perception of leadership style is further divided into three sub-themes: (a) self-perception of leadership, (b) leading by example, and (c) outreach efforts for women in the industry.

#### **Childhood Experiences**

The childhood experiences for these five women included their agriculture exposure, familial upbringing, and sacrifices they made for their family. While it is usual for those involved in agriculture to have been raised in farm settings, three of the five women interviewed had limited exposure of the industries they would later lead. The winemaker revealed:

I was interested in wine at quite an early age . . . But I did not grow up in a wine region, so growing up, it was not considered a normal career. It was an opportunity to do something a little bit creative and scientific and live in the country. And it is still an industry that has a positive vibe to it, I think . . . you are making something that is not too serious.

The rose grower expressed that rose growing was not her background but her dad's exhaustive efforts to better his children's lives with agriculture was important.

My dad was adamant to put all the kids through private schools... and to have everything that rich people have, that's why we ended up being big into horses because that's what rich people do... and but by the time I was born my mum and dad had moved up into the Eastern Hinds and bought a coffee farm and ended up buying out all the neighbors and he had a plane that used to go back to manage other farms, so I was born on a very big, extensive coffee farm... I went to boarding school and... when I came home from the holiday, they were very focused on the business and making sure it ran... my dad was very... conscious about money and making money.

The citrus producer and viticulturist both identified their upbringing as being from small towns. The citrus producer's father worked as an agronomist in the wheat industry and she did not become exposed to the citrus industry until she began working in the citrus pack house at a young age. The viticulturist explained she was a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation viticulturist and described her family farm as a *fruit block*.

My family had a property for about 50 years and it was called a *fruit block* so it is a *cockle* term for a little bit of everything. I loved growing up on a fruit block and I got to drive tractors when I was 8 years old. When I was in year 9, I was talking to the school teacher and I had been plowing out in the vineyard and I would have literally been 12 or 13, so a tremendous amount of responsibility at a young age. I loved the responsibility and I loved growing things and I loved the practical hands on experience.

In contrast, the pig farmer, though raised on a sprawling farming operation, found her enthusiasm for agriculture later in life.

It was only when I was about 25 that I took any proper interest in the farm, but I had a lot of farming experience . . . I studied a non-agriculture career, but it has been great to have [agriculture experience growing up] because it makes that side of things here very easy for me.

In addition to each woman's agriculture exposure, character traits from family members shaped their views and perceptions of the world in which they live. When analyzed, origins of the women's behaviors became clearer. For example, the citrus producer discussed the restrictive nature of her familial raising, and she suggested her parents' decisions still heavily influence her choices today as a working mother.

I did not have any support from my parents . . . I had actually applied to join the Navy as a physical instructor and got accepted, but I was not allowed to go. So you know, I would never do that to my child . . . having parents who restricted you [as a child] makes you a much better parent yourself.

Furthermore, the viticulturist described her upbringing as resilient and found a way to survive after losing her father.

My father died when I was very young, my mom was not able to provide the amount of support perhaps you may need at that age so I was pretty resilient, looking after myself and my brother from the age of 13. And you do not have much choice but to sink or swim. I always wanted to do my best and excel and I have just found ways that I can do that within my circumstances at the time.

### Current Family Dynamics

Women in this study described their current family support system as *crucial* to their success in their current leadership positions, but each woman was actively involved in creating a career path for herself. While these women are successful in their positions of leadership, some argued many of their challenges may have been lessened if they were men in the industry. While most parents' experience is gained from both work and their children, those whom were studied contended society and cultural beliefs charge women with responsibilities not always equally burdened by men. For example, bearing children requires time away from the office. Moreover, most women, should they choose to work after having children, are expected to maintain an equilibrium between career and motherhood to fulfill all responsibilities. In the experiences of the women interviewed, to falter in either is to be undeserving of both. In the view of the viticulturist, who was not married or had children but was involved with raising her niece stated, "It is about creating boundaries in your work and life balance so you can maintain a bit of personal time as well as wanting to change the world." The rose grower (wife and mother of three children) detailed the startup of her rose-growing business and the difficulty she felt as a new mother in ensuring her dedication, both to career and childcare. The rose grower commented, "Between taking car seats out [to make room for roses to deliver] and putting car seats back in, we decided we needed to buy a van . . . but we had very little cash flow." By contrast, the winemaker, who stepped into her leadership role while raising two young children and two stepchildren, fundamentally disagreed such a defined work-home balance was essential. The winemaker elaborated, "I work full-time, raise the children, and I am a wife. Each of these take time. I think the work-life balance is more like, 'you make choices and decide you roll with the decisions that you make' . . . work-life balance is probably just a myth."

It was also evident with a few of the women that spousal involvement in agriculture in addition to communication with their partner was key to blending their professional and personal identities. Some of the women's partners maintained the home-front in order for the women to be successful entrepreneurs. As the pig farmer revealed, "If you asked my husband about the farm, that is probably the hardest aspect of our marriage . . . we do not argue about personal life things; it is always something to do with work. Also, he is my support person at home while I am managing farm duties." In addition, the rose grower discussed how her and her husband began marketing their roses as a team:

My husband...[joined] a rugby club and we signed our little boys up, we are a rugby family...that was our social life. So on the weekend we would go and watch rugby and we socialize with people that we did not know. And it was a comradeship that was probably our godsend and it was really good for my mother and father in laws because they have a connection to a rugby club...and when we first got our roses we took our bucket of roses down to the rugby and we would sell our roses to the rugby players...it was our first little bit of marketing to our local community.

**Hardship**

Each woman studied discussed her personal struggles within the agricultural industry and those endured outside of it. When asked what hardships each endured some detailed turmoil within the industry related to gender stereotypes and other's perceptions regarding their status as women in powerful positions. Each participant experienced hardship in her life, yet the rose grower's situation was much more histrionic than the other four women. The rose grower, a political refugee to Australia and rose grower by trade, eventually was able to protect and provide for her family amid dire straits. Despite the turmoil in and around her life, she exhibited unfathomable capabilities in leadership and admirable determination to overcome her circumstances and thus created a better life for herself and for those who depended on her. To explain further, the rose grower was living in a Country that was extremely unsafe and unfortunately her and her family were given 45 days by the government to leave their farm or would risk being incarcerated. Also, people living around them who were farming were being murdered for their land. As the rose grower explained:

we depleted our fund and expanded our farming business in 1998, and then the murders started happening. The first major murder that made a big impact on our life involved four friends being abducted...my little girl was 3 days old...she was born on the 12th of April and the murders started happening on the 15th of April."

The rose grower explained her family was trapped in their house one night before they could leave the Country and she reflected on that experience:

My little five-year old boy . . . said to me 'mummy, are we going to die today?' . . . we just went . . . there are people dying around us, we need to get on a plane and go . . . we cannot raise a family when you are going to lose your life just farming.

Although not as grave a situation as that of the rose grower who was forced to flee her homeland in search of safety and stability, the other subjects described struggles of their own. The citrus grower stated:

Out in the citrus industry, it is still a man's world . . . some of your older people . . . will target us [females] because they think we are weak targets, but it is getting fewer and fewer because they know we are not weak targets because not only are we very passionate about our industry, but we also have the knowledge, and we have the skills to back it up . . . however, it is still not unusual for me to sit as the only female in a room of 200 men.

The winemaker assessed her own power play dynamics between men and women in the wine industry. She acknowledged the disparity but did not view it necessarily as a concern that required urgent oversight or rectification. The winemaker revealed:

I think most women in the wine industry are pretty comfortable being in a male dominated [field] . . . But one of the biggest hurdles for women in leadership is gaining the support of men and that women and men are equal so both can contribute to home and family life.

The viticulturist also lamented the lack of women in visible leadership roles is a hardship. She was simply unaware of how any woman could advance through an industry to which she wished to contribute. The viticulturist emphasized how few channels exist for women to promote themselves or further progress in their own industry. The viticulturist mentioned:



There have not been too many women who have been at my level as mentors for me to be able to look up to . . . You have to keep struggling to find those opportunities as a minority . . . I was looking for that next opportunity, and I really struggled to find it, and now in hindsight, I think I was probably treading water for three or four years.

Through perseverance and exhaustive outreach to discover opportunity, each woman overcame what hinders most others and became leaders in fields traditionally dominated by men. All five women achieved leadership positions within their respective industry, yet they remain the minority. As the viticulturist stated, “At the moment, we are top heavy with men. There is a thick layer of men . . . the challenge for us is to take the goodness of what we have learned but not to repeat the mistakes or any bad culture.” The viticulturist further stated her gender may have been a factor in her decision to conceal medical information when she was first getting footing in the industry. The viticulturist commented:

I nearly went blind when I was about 30. So I was juggling having medical appointments and trying to keep it quiet . . . if people think that maybe I could not physically do my job because I am a female anyway . . . it makes one feel vulnerable at times.

However, each woman stated her experience with hardship extended beyond office place sexism or professional discrimination and included disparity manifested in their personal lives. The citrus producer reflected upon an all-encompassing dark period in her life. The citrus producer revealed:

I found myself alone with three children . . . and maybe \$27 in the bank. No house. No anything. Moved into a little unit, me and my children; and that is where I started my own business, when I started to drive myself forward . . . I had been down in the deep dark depths; I drug myself out. I proved to myself whatever I needed to do, I could do.

### **Perception of Leadership Style**

When asked to describe their leadership styles, the women’s responses were diverse. Their answers, however, revealed substantively similar outlooks on leadership and the power their positions can yield in influencing other women to pursue similar work. The following results are divided into three sub-themes: (a) self-perception of leadership style, (b) leading by example, and (c) outreach to women in their industry.

**Self-perception of leadership.** When probed about their perceptions of how they lead others, the women delivered varied ideas about leadership roles and styles. However, all women agreed contributing to their own agriculture industry was the primary goal in seeking leadership roles. The winemaker stated:

I really like . . . making a positive contribution to the broader industry. Leadership is a lot about actually having the initiative to get outside and think hard about the industry, putting your hand up . . . look for inspiration . . . and it is amazing how it snowballs from there . . . I knew I was more driven by being inspired than being told . . . I really like to foster people’s own roles with clear objectives from my experience . . . and by approaching change by harnessing support from people.

The viticulturist spoke subjectively on the importance of investing in the industry she has helped build – an industry for which she passionately wishes to improve. The viticulturist mentioned:

I would like to think I give as much as I have the capacity to give. It is my industry so I have an invested interest in wanting to see it do well. I want to have a thriving industry that is sustainable and profitable and resilient going forward.

The citrus producer also believed the key to leading effectively lay in efforts put forth by true motivation and extending enlightened encouragement to others who will follow. The citrus producer stated:

My leadership is that, if you go out there and do it, you will actually . . . inspire people with your knowledge and your passion, and they will want to come along for the ride . . . You cannot drag them along; you have got to inspire them with that.

**Leading by example.** While acknowledging various other factors shaped their leadership style, all five women mentioned holding positions seldom held by other women through community leadership and the broader agricultural industry. This visibility, as expressed by the women, would provide other women a basic template to emulate and embellish for themselves; thus, the reason each woman was involved in community leadership. The viticulturist believed in leading by example, as a true leader inspires rather than instructs. The viticulturist commented:

[I encourage women in the agricultural industry] by being in the industry myself . . . just seeing someone you can relate to doing something is a great way of encouraging someone . . . I remember sitting there and going, ‘Wow, I did not know you could do all this.’ If you can, lead from behind rather than from in front [by] encouraging those around you . . . the opportunity for us to be the change we want people to see, to build a positive culture going forward and to make sure we are known for being generous, inclusive, and a conversational industry.

Similarly, the citrus producer implored women interested in non-traditional roles to make choices reflecting their strengths and to take action in these roles. The citrus producer stated, in place of the unproductivity commonly found with being a mere figurehead,

I have proved to them I do not just sit in a back room. I am actually out there . . . I have never just sat and said ‘This is what the industry needs to do.’ I have actually been out there doing it.

Echoing her sentiment of the significance of visibility and reinforcement within agricultural fields is the winemaker and her belief that:

Leadership in the industry has been about taking the challenge and being prepared to do a little bit more . . . embrace other women when they are at the table and . . . see them in the same positive light . . . we encourage and embrace the idea of more women going into the industry, and [we offer any] support we can.

**Outreach efforts for women in the industry.** All five women interviewed championed the significance of extensive outreach efforts to other women within their respective industries. The

rose grower stated, “I am just really big on that—mentoring and helping other people. I have got to that sort of stage in my life where I want to help people.”

Underlining the importance of open and honest communication industry-wide, the citrus producer detailed how to engage with others about agriculture in general. She also advocated more leadership positions for women within the field. The citrus producer revealed:

[I promote] how to tell your story, how to have the right conversations at the right time ... [that is] the only way we are going to get people to appreciate agriculture and realize that, pardon my [bad manners], it is not just shoveling [expletive].

The viticulturist viewed her outreach role to women within the industry to be straightforward. She mentioned simply providing resources and encouragement to other women will lead to increased involvement across a range of agricultural industries. The viticulturist mentioned:

What I am trying to do now in the industry is make sure that people have access to all the contacts and knowledge, so that they can contribute sooner, and they are being challenged in their roles...I am now thinking what can I do to support, especially other women who actually get their foot in the door and encourage them to put their hands up for opportunity...each time I seek out a new opportunity, it makes it easier for others to do the same, and that lifts the bar across the whole industry.

### **Conclusions**

The participants represented a broad range of industries within Australian agriculture, and the findings from this study emphasize the women—including and especially that of their leadership development—ultimately are generated by lived experiences (Kante & Blackwell, 2009; Wells, 1998). In addition to their human experiences, one’s genetic endowment, environmental conditions and events, and learning experiences influence the nature of career decision making (Krumboltz, 1976). An individual’s parents’ values, hobbies, skills, careers, and wealth impact the individual’s life choices (Krumboltz, 1976). By examining women’s individual learning experiences and environmental conditions, the personal and professional environments each has constructed for herself then may be understood and valid conclusions may be drawn (Bennis, 1989; Krumboltz, 1976).

The citrus producer did not have the support she needed from her parents during her upbringing, so she chose to shape her career path differently. Moreover, the winemaker, citrus producer, and rose grower were not raised around their current employed agriculture industry. The pig farmer and viticulturist were raised around their agriculture industries, although the pig farmer did not take interest in her field until later in life. Therefore, the environment in which one is raised can influence and shape one’s career journey, and depending on the environment, the career can be rooted in a person’s upbringing or despite the person’s upbringing. Overall, one’s childhood dynamics appear to have shaped and guided their chosen career pathway.

In addition, current family dynamics play an essential role in an individual’s career and lifestyle choices (Krumboltz, 1976). Women face choices of not working or only accepting part-time employment because of her duties as a wife and mother (Krumboltz, 1976). However, having the responsibility of family and full-time employment can be challenging for women (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The rose grower faced challenges with her young children and maintaining her new rose business, but she prevailed through those trying times. Spousal relationships may alter the

traditional roles to help maintain the familial duties and career aspirations but the pig farmer's husband provided her with the assistance she needed at home in order to be a successful leader in her industry. Therefore, one can conclude that careers can impact how a family operates but those roles do not have to determine whether success is achieved.

This study found leadership was generally promoted as a trait to be carefully cultivated, but women leaders may meet additional resistance (Doss et al., 2011). As expressed by the viticulturist, "If you are a female in the industry, you may have to work twice as hard to be thought of as half as good." The influence of others was also noted in this study. While the women reached a general consensus that their parents and upbringing contributed to their character-building during childhood and early development, they mostly agreed, as they matured, they turned more to their individual industry for inspiration and guidance. Female mentors in production agriculture remain a rarity, but that has provided motivation for each woman in this study to become an example for her daughters and other women who lack professional or personal inspiration (Longman & Madsen, 2014).

In relation to Krumboltz (1976) social learning theory category of environmental conditions and events, all five women of this study detailed stories of themselves in times of stress and hardship. The study also found the strain of such circumstances created a pressure each woman used as a learning experience to build herself up by driving herself forward (Krumboltz, 1976). In spite of the rose grower's horrifying experiences, she preached, "You just keep going." In addition, the five women who participated in this study believed mentoring was key to increasing and maintaining the number of women in agriculture. As stated by the viticulturist, "I am now thinking what I can do to support, especially other women who actually get their foot in the door and encourage them to put their hands up for opportunity."

Each of these women recognized the importance of task approach skills such as self-development and the value of support from others necessary to achieve their leadership goals and contribute more to the organization in which they serve (Kark & Eagly, 2010; Krumboltz, 1976). Similar to Longman and Madsen (2014), the women were eager to share their knowledge and to present others with similar opportunities for success. Each emphasized that one cannot *take* people along but can only inspire and encourage. These five women also have faced personal struggles both within the industries they lead and achieving balance in their families. They simply wish to engage with the industries to which they have dedicated themselves and to inspire others—especially women—to contribute to the agriculture industry. Moreover, these five women aspire to inspire other women to become involved in the agricultural industry.

Though spanning an entire continent and representing vastly different industries of agriculture, this study shows the five women agree to advance the image of women in agriculture in Australia. The agricultural industry itself seems to drive each woman, once established within her field to be passionate, authentic leaders (Avolio et al., 2009). As a leader in her industry the rose grower said, "I want to better myself [in this position by] mentoring and helping people. We can help people not make the mistakes we made to get here." Each woman in this study also has her own view of leading others from being a positive contributor to the industry, searching for inspiration, encouragement to others, passion about the industry, leading by example, and providing motivation to others. Furthermore, these women have learned their own leadership tactics through personal experiences and their time spent in the agricultural industry (Krumboltz, 1976).

Similarly, subjects who had experienced sexism within their own industry now busy themselves with reforming their field from within. Despite previous research by Doss et al. (2011) which stated that women who enter male-dominated professions may be perceived as inherently

unsuited for such work, these women are changing current perceptions by actively involving themselves in businesses in which they have earned the right to operate and utilizing their leadership skills to do so. Simply acknowledging that women are affecting change, top-down, further promotes gender equity by combating the archaic attitude that women are not natural leaders and unfit for such status (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women in this study faced some stereotype related to their gender, and they have used those experiences as a learning opportunity to better themselves as an individual and leader for their family and the field of agriculture (Krumboltz, 1976).

Speaking to the responsibility these women feel as minority leaders, the citrus producer detailed, "It is up to us women who have managed to step outside our comfort zone to motivate." The five women whose personal journeys were explored are primarily concerned with improving the knowledge given to them and presenting new opportunities to other women when they can. In conclusion, each of the woman are promoting their industry and engaging with other women to help advance leadership roles for women in agriculture industries.

### Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Individuals working with women may take this information into consideration when training women for leadership roles. Individuals such as employers, educators, and mentors to women may utilize this article as a guide to help advance the diversity in agriculture industry careers. In addition, this article provides details that may assist an employer in understanding some of the underlining stresses of women in leadership roles. Additionally, those working in any field, especially a male-dominate field, could use this information to better understand the women's personal and professional struggles. Similarly, understanding different individual perspectives can only improve the strength of an organization and develop better professionals: male or female. Also, the hope is that other women are inspired to attain leadership roles in agriculture after reading these five women's stories and encourage more gender equity in the field of agriculture. Likewise, the hope is to increase the number of women who enter into agriculture industries and advance the body of literature related to women in agriculture fields. However, after considering the results of this study and its implications, some recommendations can be made for women in agriculture attaining leadership. Future research should include:

1. What are reflective journey stories of men engaged in agriculture industries in Australia?
2. What are the reflective journey stories of women agriculturists in the United States?
3. What are reflective journey stories of men engaged in agriculture industries in the United States?
4. What mentoring strategies are being effectively utilized to recruit and retain women in agriculture industry fields?

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