LEADING TOGETHER

Young Women Building Collective Power in Canada

A REPORT BY:

g(irls) 20

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From girl power to #girlboss to Beyoncé's anthem "who run the world? Girls," a lot has been said about the spirit and power of girls in popular culture. In the last decade, we've also witnessed the rise of young women as the face of international movements in traditional media and social media, with the backlash and violence that follows

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All of the participants at some point put their hand up to do something, and took action

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This includes Malala Yousafzai from Pakistan, a champion for girls' rights everywhere, and Greta Thunberg in Sweden and Autumn Peltier in Canada, who are driving a contagious climate crusade. But are everyday young women seen as leaders in their own communities and given the resources to succeed at scale? How do we provide support and create a shift from recognizing and celebrating one young leader to seeing young leaders everywhere?

This report is about the experiences of young women in leadership: how they navigate leadership spaces and define their work. Many of the participants we interviewed for this research say they became leaders because of a void—they didn't see anyone who looked like them to look up to. Others were part of formal programs that supported their leadership skills development and growth. All of them at some point put their hand up to do something, and took action. In this report, we learn how young women and non-binary youth

are claiming space in a range of sectors, as well as the challenges they face in doing so, and rethink and redefine leadership in the process. These leaders highlight the importance of mentors, networks, and resources in their successes. They share with us who is making room at the table and the systemic level changes that will support more leadership opportunities for young women throughout the country.

G(irls)20 is a non-profit organization working to advance the full participation of young women leaders in decision-making spaces to change the status quo. We place women ages 18–25 years old at decision-making tables across Canada and around the world. Through programs like our Global Summit and Girls on Boards, we invest in young women with education and training, network-building, and access to opportunities. We are committed to supporting and growing young leaders.

The research in this report focuses on the experiences of young women in Canada, between the ages of 18 and 25. Youth identifying as trans or non-binary were also invited to participate in the research, though they represented a small number of research participants. This age group is the focus of our work at G(irls)20: youth who are just starting to be recognized as adults. Many are studying at college and university, while others are beginning to launch their careers and starting full time work. They are balancing a range of responsibilities and expectations as well as wielding great ambition. Young leaders often come of age at this time with a critical eye and hopeful heart, through an evaluation of generations before them on what has been, but also what could be.[1] We work with this age group intentionally; it's an age where young people are defining who they will be and the shape of their careers. For young women launching their careers, it's also the beginning of a leaky pipeline,
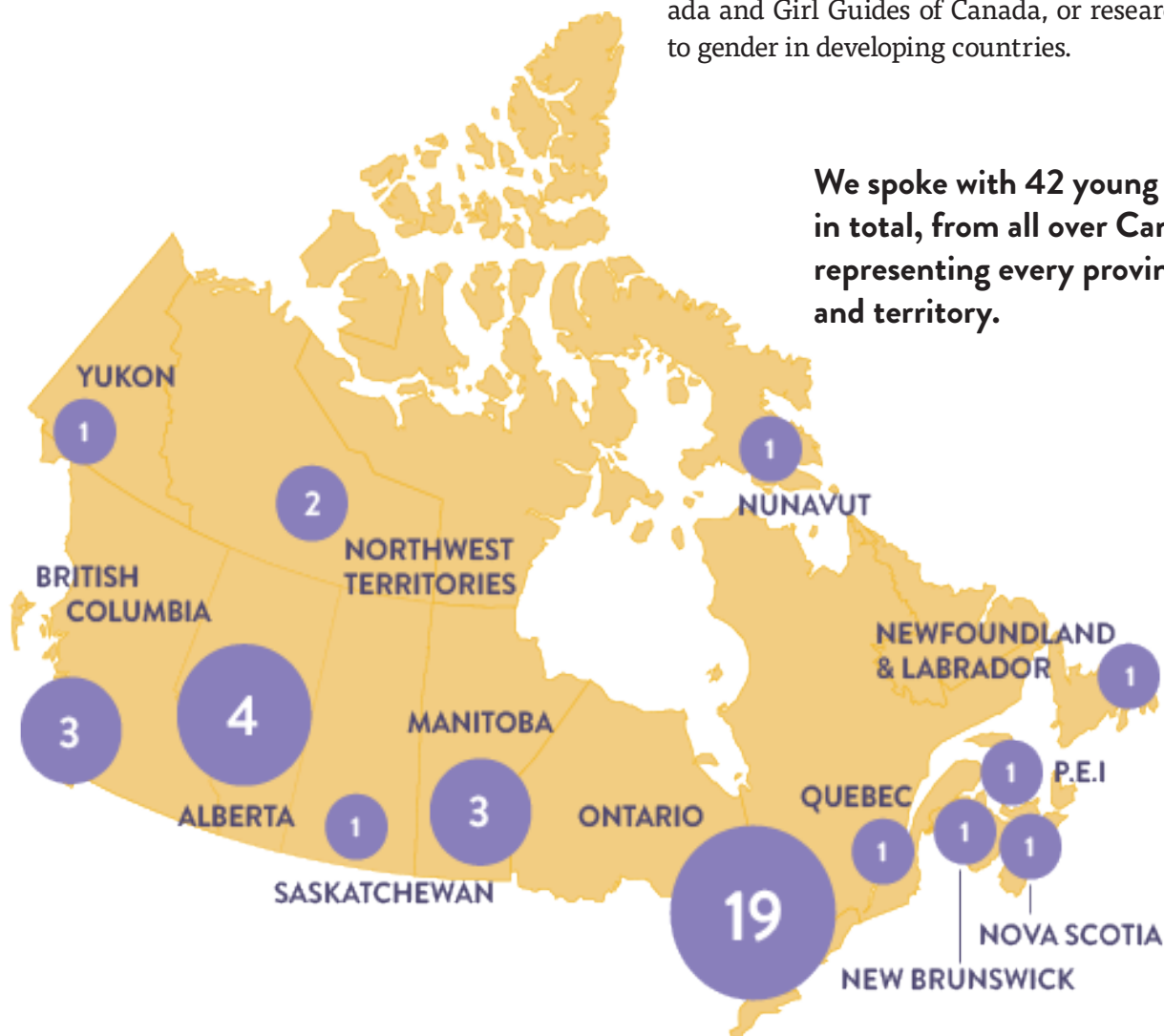
where men begin to outpace women in being promoted to leadership positions. Data from the United States demonstrates, for example, how women will hold 46 per cent of entry level jobs, but only 37 per cent of managerial jobs, followed by only 33 per cent of senior management jobs. The challenge of women in leadership begins early.[2]

Much has been studied and written about leadership, but not specifically on the this particular age group, and little has explored how young racialized and Indigenous leaders navigate historically white spaces. Most of the research and writing done on women and leadership to date (from McKinsey and the Harvard Business Review to Catalyst and the 30% Club) focuses on older women in exec-
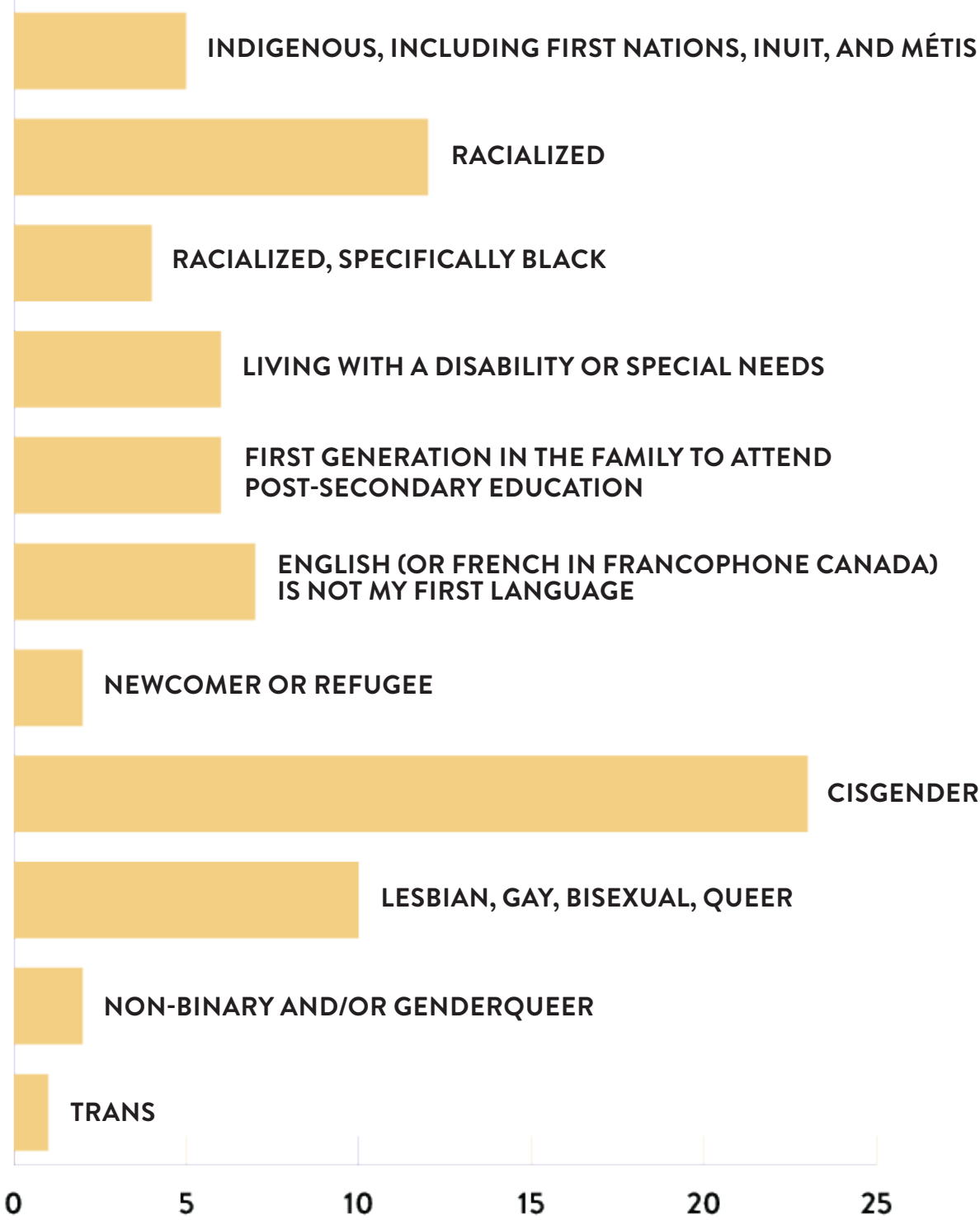
Young leaders often come of age at this time with a critical eye and hopeful heart, through an evaluation of generations before them on what has been, but also what could be.

utive roles. Research in Canada on girls and young women in leadership is fairly limited, aside from the work and reports done by organizations committed to younger girls like Plan International Canada and Girl Guides of Canada, or research related to gender in developing countries.

We spoke with 42 young leaders in total, from all over Canada, representing every province and territory.
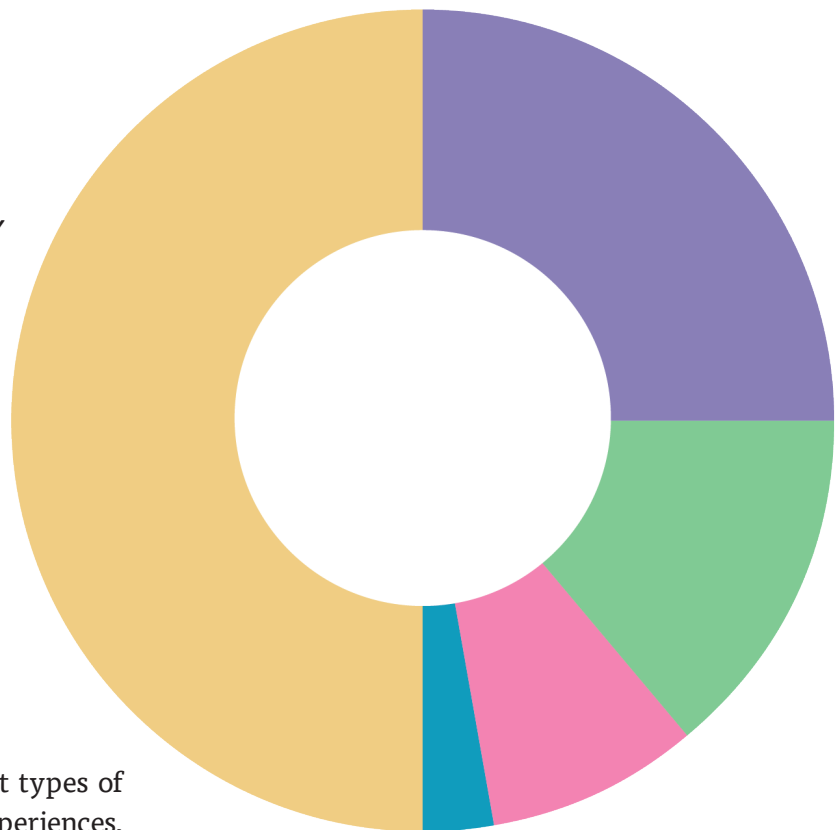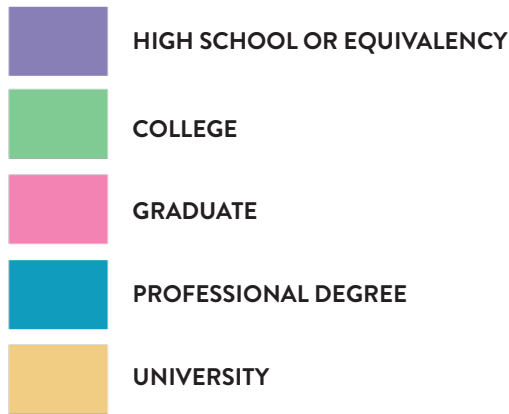
Interview participants described said they identified as...

Category	Value
INDIGENOUS, INCLUDING FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, AND MÉTIS	5
RACIALIZED	12
RACIALIZED, SPECIFICALLY BLACK	4
LIVING WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS	6
FIRST GENERATION IN THE FAMILY TO ATTEND POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION	6
ENGLISH (OR FRENCH IN FRANCOPHONE CANADA) IS NOT MY FIRST LANGUAGE	7
NEWCOMER OR REFUGEE	2
CISGENDER	23
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, QUEER	10
NON-BINARY AND/OR GENDERQUEER	2
TRANS	1

*Please note there are overlapping, intersecting identities which is why the total exceeds the number of interview participants. Also demographic data was not mandatory.

Interview participants had a range of of educational backgrounds, including:

- **HIGH SCHOOL OR EQUIVALENCY**
- **COLLEGE**
- **GRADUATE**
- **PROFESSIONAL DEGREE**
- **UNIVERSITY**

We wanted to hear from different types of leaders from different identities, lived experiences, and parts of Canada. For this research, we spoke with leaders in the G(irls)20 network, plus had conversations with youth involved with Plan International Canada, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, and YWCA Canada, and leaders identified through social media, other media, or referrals. We interviewed young people across the country who have demonstrated leadership in a variety of fields, including science, politics, activism, education, and community work. They bring a fresh and flexible perspective to their work, and told us their approach to leadership is collaborative as well as critical, with a focus on inclusivity and collective power. We invited youth who identify as trans and/or non-binary to participate in the research but recognize the scope of this paper and the research questions does not fully illustrate the additional or different barriers they may face in leadership spaces.

This qualitative research was conducted through online focus groups and phone interviews in English in November and December 2019. The interviews were semi-structured, designed around a standard set of questions, but with room to accom-modate questions and conversation. We spoke with 42 young leaders in total, from all over Canada, representing every province and territory. The youth we spoke with joined us from a range of locations, including bedrooms, university residences, workspaces, with their child, and while in transit.

To close out the decade, Teen Vogue declared the 2010s to be the "decade of the rise of youth activism," and the next decade will be the decade of "youth change-making".[3] It is important to understand how young leaders come into and shape their work, as well as identify the barriers and access to leadership opportunities. This report focuses on age and examines the intertwined relationship between gender and leadership, explores how society might reimagine leadership, and outlines the tension and trap of tokenism. It also provides recommendations (policy, partnerships, and programming) for groups, organizations, and companies looking to work with young women, from young women and non-binary youth themselves.

The participants bring a fresh and flexible perspective to their work, and told us their approach to leadership is collaborative as well as critical, with a focus on inclusivity and collective power.

GENDER & LEADERSHIP

Intersectional Leadership: Ensuring that society's definition of leadership is not defined by gender roles, race, class, sexual orientation, ability/disability, and/or religion.

Close your eyes and think of a leader. Are they a man or a woman, or someone gender non-conforming? Are they young or old? Do they speak loudly or softly? Are they in front of the room or in the back? Gender is a social construct, assigning roles and traits typically to a binary of man or woman, girl or boy. Younger generations are now very aware of these boxes and limitations, especially when it comes to their identity, agency, and power. In the arena of leadership, how does age and gender intersect, along with race, education, sexual orientation, and living with a disability? Especially since all of this is intertwined with how structural and historical barriers have contributed to rigid gender and cultural stereotypes.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "leadership" as "one who leads." Followed by "one who leads a body of armed men; a commander, a captain."[4] This formal definition highlights the gendered history of the word "leadership" and the male-dominated roles associated with it in the military. "One who has the charge of (animals)" and "leads a person by the hand or an animal by a cord" are also included in the full definition, another responsibility traditionally given to boys and men in farming. With this etymology in mind, is it possible to see a leader without seeing gender first?

It's important to remember that gender and sex are different, even though these words are often used interchangeably in conversation and on application forms. Gender refers to the roles, behaviours, attributes, and opportunities that society considers appropriate for girls and boys, women and men, or other genders. Gender interacts with, but is not the same as, the binary categories of biological sex.[5]

Gender is where feminist and LGBTQ2+ movements meet, because the marginalization of women, queer, and trans people share the same root cause: power and rigid gender roles.[6] The women's movement has worked hard to challenge the belief that sex and gender should define roles in society and has been fighting gender-based discrimination and violence resulting from that belief for over a hundred years. "Intersectionality," a term coined

Is it possible to see a leader without seeing gender first?

by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989[7], connects social movements by incorporating the intersecting identities of women and LGBTQ2+ people. Intersectionality is a feminist lens to examine power. It looks at how gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ability/disability, religion, and other individual characteristics "intersect" with one another and overlap. The young leaders we spoke with in our research referenced intersectionality often, directly and through their lived experiences in leadership. For many research participants, gender is inextricably linked to society's ideas of leadership, and gender roles affect the spaces they enter. An exploration of what gender means to the rising generation became necessary to understand how youth experience leadership.

Participants in this research were asked to define what gender means to them, and the an-

swers were consistent: it is a social construct, a broad spectrum, and deeply personal. Many were cautious to define what gender is for anyone else other than themselves. "For myself, it's a definition I'm still trying to figure out because I've been mostly molded by what society's expectations are, the things I see around me, that have put it into a black-and-white binary," explains Kaitlyn Gillelan of Stratford, PEI. "I'm on a journey to figuring that out."

Womxn is a term that also came up in our research discussions, which challenges gender norms and includes non-binary folks. Womxn removes the word "men" from "women" by adding an "x." It is referenced in this report and used by some of the young leaders in their work. The term became popular through the 2017 Womxn's March on Seattle, initially proposed by non-binary organizer Ebony Miranda.[8] They explain that the word encompasses "women and those affected by misogyny, or women-related issues." The word is also a nod to the gender inclusive term Latinx (instead of Latino or Latina).

Research participants told us over and over that the mainstream definition of leadership is masculine and usually has a male face. It's attached to someone in front of the room, with the microphone, often the CEO. As one young leader says, the leader is "the person talking the most." There is a notable tension and gap between society's definition of leadership and how leadership was defined by young leaders we spoke with. And if you don't fit society's definition of a leader, your authority is in question. Akosua Bonsu, a young leader from Winnipeg, Manitoba, highlights how society's definition of leadership is very masculine. "Society may see a white man doing something, and they may see a Black woman doing something; they are doing the same thing, taking the same initiative, yet the white man is seen as a leader." One may be seen as demanding, the other in charge. This has been noted by Black women leaders all the way up to Ottawa; former Member of Parliament Celina Caesar-Chavannes has shared how in her experience, Black women needing to be "twice as good, twice as fast, twice as everything, because that is what we were taught. That is the only way we can succeed."[9]

The youth we spoke with see gender as something that is self-identified and self-defined, that can be presented in a number of ways. It also

is different across cultures and beliefs, and different genders have different challenges and roadblocks. While some people have a clear idea of their gender at a young age, others may take longer to figure out how they feel about their gender and how they move through the world. Gender was also defined as internal and external. Internal is how you feel and identify, and external is how you display that to others (these may or may not match and can change over time).

The young leaders in this report recognize the challenges and marginalization that comes with their gender in leadership, but also the strength, energy, and power. In the 2019 federal election, Mumilaaq Qaqqaq was elected as Member of Parliament (MP) for Nunavut at 25 years old. "My whole life has been a series of being underestimated," she says. "That personally gives me a drive to just push my limits and prove to people I can do whatever I set my mind to." Despite the limitations placed on her for being a young Inuk woman, this is a source of power for the new MP.

Rayne Fisher-Quann, a student activist from Toronto now studying in Vancouver, British Columbia, agrees. Rayne helped organize the 2018 Ontario province-wide #WeTheStudentsDoNotConsent sex-ed protests. "Young women are the most powerful demographic in the world," she declares. "People have been telling us for a really long time, that we're not worth anything. And that we're not smart and that we don't have any power and we shouldn't be trying to make people listen to us".

"We're really angry. I think there is a lot of power when a really large group of people are angry," she explains. "We're seeing a lot of young women tap into their power in a way that hasn't been done before." The young leaders we spoke to are changing the way power is yielded in leadership roles as well as redefining how young people lead.

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—**Mumilaaq Qaqqaq**

REIMAGINING LEADERSHIP

A broader, more collaborative definition of leadership invites more people, perspectives, and skills to the table, creating a space for others to flourish and work as a team.

This rising generation is redefining leadership, yet many of the young women leaders we spoke to admit they are hesitant to call themselves leaders, even though they know they have leadership skills and others refer to them as leaders. This is likely because society's definition of a leader remains a well-paid older white man (likely straight, cis gendered) speaking loudly on a mic. In a study about young women in leadership, understanding how research participants see the word leadership is an important place to start. "How do you define leadership?" was the first question

> ## *"[Leadership is] not about leading in the front, but pushing people from behind."*
>
> ## *— Kimberly Coulombe*

asked in research interviews, and responses often started with "wow" or "ok, hmmm." The leaders we spoke with are most focused on doing their work which involves leadership skills, and not on being recognized or being given a title like "leader." Kimberly Coulombe is the founder of Youth Inclusion and works on getting youth involved in their local communities in Montreal, Quebec. She shies away from the

title of leader and thinks a lot of young women do as well. "We're not used to seeing people like us as people who have power," she explains.

Rather than seeing one leader, participants frequently spoke of the collective, group, or community. Kimberly says leadership is "not about leading in the front, but pushing people from behind." This involves emotional leadership and resilience and inspiring people to give their time, much different from a more corporate approach to leadership, which can be driven by fear (e.g. not making your numbers or being promoted). Sarah Jama is a community organizer in Hamilton, Ontario, who says leadership is about working with people. "Leadership is the ability to see a problem and issue in society and work collectively with community to be able to address it," she says. "If you're doing it alone, then you're not really exhibiting leadership." Sarah admits she hates the word leader and prefers to focus on the task at hand. "The word leader gets thrown around a lot ... my work speaks for itself."

Conversations in this research reveal leadership does not necessarily mean becoming a founder or organizing a massive event. Leadership is not one size fits all. "It can be about big things, but also small things," explains also says Teagyn Vallevand, from Whitehorse, Yukon. Morgan Baskin of Toronto, Ontario, expresses this as well. "Leadership comes from people who want to do something, to make something better. That can be something super tiny or trying to change the whole world. That then requires rallying other people. Leadership doesn't come from someone saying you are in

charge of something." To this generation, leadership seems to be defined by taking action to create change.

Participants instead gravitate toward a more inclusive definition of leadership, which calls a larger group to action and encourages those in leadership roles to build a team over an individual's power. This reimagined definition recognizes everyone can be a leader, and that the ultimate challenge for leaders is to bring out leadership in others. A broader, more collaborate definition of leadership invites more people, perspectives, and skills to the table, creating space for others to flourish. This broader definition of leadership flips the traditional notion of walking into a room with a leader in the front, to walking into a room where everyone around you is a leader. Many of the leaders we interviewed feel we are all leaders in different ways. One can be a leader socially, politically, or economically, and leadership can look different in different parts of the country. How leadership is defined changes across cultures and geographies. Abbey Gartner is a facilitator at BYTE, a "by youth, for youth" organization in Whitehorse, Yukon. When asked about leadership, she pointed out that leadership looks different in the North. It can be learning traditional languages or young people speaking out in the open about harm reduction.

As young women leaders redistribute power, some are committed to challenging who gets to hold traditional leadership roles. Morgan made headlines in 2014 when she ran for mayor of Toronto as a challenge to Rob Ford at 18 years old. Stepping into a space traditionally held by older men, she pushed the public's idea of who can and should run for public office. MP Qaqqaq explains "women are too often made to feel that we're challenging some sort of norm when we're in those (leadership) positions. To start normalizing those types of things, you put women in those positions. You make it normal."

Morgan says that while she has always felt like leader from her early days in Scouting, at this current moment in her life she is intentionally not being a leader, as a mental health choice. She is stepping back, to take time away from "being responsible." A few participants mentioned struggling with anxiety. Morgan's decision speaks to the responsibility and pressure that often comes with leadership, and an example of how young leaders can avoid burnout through pacing leadership work and opportunities, knowing when to step forward and when to step back. Young women stepping into traditional leadership spaces face pressures that older, whiter men could not imagine. We also do not know how many young women and non-binary youth step back from leadership positions after experiencing sexual harassment or violence, for example.[10]

"If you're doing it alone, then you're not really exhibiting leadership."

— Sarah Jama

MP Qaqqaq says we too often talk about leadership in terms of hierarchy, in a way that positions leaders above everyone else. "You start having discussions around the bigger picture. When we start putting people into boxes and start restricting them, unfortunately too often we believe it. And that's where we decide to stay." This more inclusive and comprehensive definition provided by the young leaders in this report deserves consideration and adoption at large; leadership that is collective and not defined through gender and age.

TRAP OF TOKENISM

As companies enthusiastically embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts without empowering marginalized youth to make real decisions, many young women and non-binary youth become disengaged or cynical.

The youth we spoke with want to be heard. They often feel they are brought on to a project with a keen interest in their experience or perspective, but not given serious consideration or resources to execute projects. They say there is great interest and talk of diversity, but without inclusion the result is tokenism: the

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practice of making only a symbolic effort, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of equality or diversity within a workforce (e.g. checking boxes and maintaining appearances). As companies enthusiastically embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts without empowering marginalized youth

to make real decisions, many young women and non-binary youth become disengaged or cynical. This is the trap of tokenism; the real opportunity lies in working with young women and then giving them the trust, space, and power to lead.

It wasn't too long ago that the majority of women in Canada weren't in the labour market. In the early 1950s, one-quarter of women aged 25 to 54 had a job or were looking for a job (data is not available for younger women, still considered "children" in the statistics).[11] This started to change as social norms regarding gender roles evolved, according to Statistics Canada. Canada's first female Member of Parliament was legally able to run (and won!) only 100 years ago. But, for women of colour (predominantly Chinese, East Indian, and Japanese) it would take another two decades to even achieve the right to vote, and another two more decades until First Nations women were granted the right to vote under the Indian Act.[12] Canada did not see a Black woman elected to a provincial legislature until 1974 (and to Parliament only in 1993); Black women continue to be significantly underrepresented among our elected leaders.[13] When we think about the challenges young women and non-binary leaders face today, we must be reminded that our leadership spaces were not built by or for women. In many cases they were built on the explicit exclusion of women of colour and Indigenous women. It is under the weight of this reality that young women and non-binary youth in Canada are

courageously seeking to claim or redefine leadership spaces.

At G(irls)20, the "trap of tokenism" is inescapable. While we commit to changing the status quo and transforming the halls of power, young women become solo trailblazers, sent to policy conferences and boardrooms to claim power and clear the path for more young people from diverse backgrounds to share power as well. We know the result can be taxing. Young women in our programs enter traditionally male spaces where they can experience micro-aggressions and in some cases outright exclusion. They are enthusiastic but exhausted. The interview subjects in this report share stories to shed light on this trap of tokenism.

"I feel very supported and people are happy to do programs like G(irls)20, and men will go for coffee with me if I want to learn about their job and offer me advice," explains Victoria Morton in Toronto, Ontario. "As soon as it's in a boardroom, or as soon as it's me presenting an idea or saying something I know, I feel like I have to walk around with a scientific bibliography at all times to prove my point." She says that's often when the support fades.

Feedback and engagement is welcome, but young women's ideas should be treated with the same attention and respect as others at the table.

The sustained work of equity, diversity, and inclusion advocates has led to many young women leaders being invited to participate

> ## "If we invite women and marginalized folks into spaces and those spaces aren't safe for them, we are setting them up for failure."
>
> ### — Akosua Bonsu

in an effort to include their perspectives. But without being heard or given proper resources, many interview subjects feel that it's a symbolic and empty gesture. The result is tokenism, simply having the appearance of having young women or other racialized and/or marginalized folks in the mix. The feeling of not being heard extends to older women as well. In 2016, The Washington Post reported that some of then U.S. President Barack Obama's female staffers employed a meeting strategy called "amplification."[14] When a woman made a key point, other women would repeat and "amplify" it. This forced the men in the room to pay attention, listen, and recognize the contribution.

Companies and organizations (especially managers and human resources) need to be more attune to the issues and systemic barriers young women and non-binary youth face. "If we invite women and marginalized folks into spac-

es and those spaces aren't safe for them, we are setting them up for failure," explains Akosua. This is often referred to as a glass cliff.[15] The term was coined in 2004 by British professors Michelle K. Ryan and Alexander Haslam to describe the phenomenon that women are more likely to occupy precarious positions with higher risk of failure, because they are appointed to lead organizations in crisis or because they are not given the support and resources required to succeed. Support and resources can include adequate time to deliver on goals, budgets, training, and board support, but also institutional knowledge of issues. For example, with young trans leaders there is a basic lack of understanding about what it means to be trans, as well about as trans issues. This extends to gender-non-conforming leaders as well. With structures historically built for older men, a trap can emerge when inviting in new people to the table. This trap is magnified with Indigenous, Black, racialized, and/or LGBTQ2+.

A second layer to the trap of tokenism emerged during our interviews as the participants in this research stress that they are not a monolithic group, and one young person can't be a "know-it-all" for their community at large. There is no "cookie-cutter" young woman. Each has her own experiences, education, and expertise. Young leaders say they often feel pressure and "carry the weight" to speak on behalf of all young women, including responding to some of the questions asked in this research. "All of us come with our own unique skill sets and perspectives," says Helen Cashman, a young leader in Calgary, Alberta, involved with G(irls)20's Girls on Boards pro-

gram. "I think there is often an overemphasis on what can I bring as a young person as opposed to what other skills I bring from my education and work training that I can actually bring to your board."

Young women know they are undervalued. Imagine what could be possible by taking them at full value and recognizing their lived and work experience, education, new ideas, and candid feedback. The problem with tokenization is that it leaves no room for growth or scale. How does one get promoted, if there is no true space or opportunity to succeed? If a group, organization, or company is working with young women in any way (programming, marketing, education, etc.), young women need to be at the table, contributing.

True opportunity is paying young women for their work, at the same rate as young men, then recognizing good work with a path to promotion. This is something that came up frequently in interviews: young women's work is undervalued and often expected to be volunteer work. Research by Girl Guides of Canada found a nearly $3.00 CAD gender pay gap for girls that starts in full-time summer jobs in their teen years.[16] Beyond money and budget, other needed resources identified by research participants include physical space (for organizing, meetings, events), positions with influence including speaking opportunities, and input on hiring and governance. This support isn't needed because young women aren't capable of having a seat at the table, rather the table itself doesn't account for recognizing the experiences and expertise of young women due to gender and age bias and institutional and systemic barriers.

> *With structures historically built for men, a trap can emerge when inviting in new people to the table. This trap is magnified with Indigenous, Black, racialized, and/or LGBTQ2+*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing the gendered nature of leadership and a new larger and more inclusive definition of what leadership could be, how can we create more opportunities to help cultivate the next one thousand or one million Gretas, Autumns, and Malalas. What do youth want and need in leadership development from organizations, government, and companies looking to engage and work with them? These recommendations are from the young leaders we interviewed, with calls to action for employee policies and paths for promotion, leadership opportunities and development for rural, newcomer, and Northern youth, as well as structured intergenerational mentorships.

THE "ABOUT" PAGE

When asked about signs or signals that a group or organization might not be friendly to young women or non-binary youth in leadership roles, the young people we spoke with pointed to policy and power. If the C-suite or hiring panel is all men, how can a young woman trust things might be different for her? If a young racialized woman can't find a senior woman of colour on a company's website, where is her path for promotion? If there aren't policies or benefits for parents, how can a young mom or future parent expect to feel supported at work?

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Ambareen-Rose Velji, a young leader in Markham, Ontario, mentions the importance of putting proper support systems in place for programs and workspaces including accessibility, mental health services, and child care support. Larissa Crawford, from Calgary, Alberta, is a young leader and says child-friendly spaces in offices are important. "I remember at York University, the Indigenous office actually had a whole section for toys, and it was really accessible for me as a young mom. It was the only reason I was able to work, because I could bring her [Larissa's daughter] in, and it was very accessible. It's a huge barrier to so many young women in school and offices." This illustrates the importance of pushing beyond conversations about supporting parents at work to creating family spaces and parental policies in companies, as well as in organizations committed to developing youth leadership (e.g. universities, non-profit programs).

LOOKING TO THE TOP

Many young leaders say they turn to a company or organization's website to see who is on the board of directors and in leadership roles. Kaitlyn says she speaks to women in roles she's going for who work for the company or organization, as part of her research. "I very directly ask, how their experience has been and just get a feel from that perspective. And I feel if I am doing that, typically if I'm going out of my way to ask that question, there are flags." She shares a recent example of applying to become a volunteer firefighter in her community and feeling very uncomfortable in the fire station. When she asked to speak to a female firefighter, there was hesitation in providing contact info. The same thing happened when she asked how many women were firefighters and no one could give her a clear answer. Organizations need to realize that having women underrepresented as employees, without transparent data, proper diversity and inclusion policies, and/or goals in place, is a big barrier to recruiting younger women.

VALUING YOUNG LEADERS

Young leaders want to work with groups, organizations, and companies that truly value what they have to offer. Participants in this research say they look to a company's "About" page when trying to evaluate if young women are valued. This is where they review policy and company culture and examine who is in positions of power and who is not. Questions young leaders ask in this background check include: Who in the community is the company or organization already partnering with? What policies are specifically for women and non-binary employees, as well as youth? Are there resources or benefits in case of a life emergency? Is there a dress code for women, and is it oppressive to women of colour? Are people asked for their pronouns?

Companies and organizations reading this report should reflect on what values, policies, and signals are currently presented on their websites and in interviews. Are the above questions ones that can be answered or explored?

UNHIDING OPPORTUNITIES

With the majority of national organizations for young women based in Toronto (as along with four universities and five colleges), young leaders in rural and smaller communities say they have limited programs, networks, and opportunities. Programs that are successful with second (or more) -generation Canadians, might come with barriers for newcomers (cultural and/or economic) that require education. And young leaders in remote communities in Northern Canada face additional barriers of having to fly out and take an airplane to reach many programs and events. Keeping Canada's vast size in mind, it's important to identify communities with fewer leadership tracks.

REALITIES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Alyssa Frampton grew up in a small fishing community in Newfoundland. One hundred fifty people were in her school, from kindergarten to grade twelve. She says finding guidance and leadership was hard, and most people she knows did not go to university. When Alyssa decided to pursue post-secondary education, she says she didn't know how to apply to schools. Plus, there is additional pressure for women to stay in her hometown and have children. She credits a nearby Boys and Girls Club with developing her leadership skills and offering new contacts.

Emma Green from Saint John, New Brunswick, grew up on a small island off the coast of her province. She was in class with the same six students from kindergarten to grade eight (the class had six students total). Living in a small town, she built her confidence in smaller leadership roles, like becoming the captain of her high-school rugby team. At university, she discovered numerous leadership opportunities available to her. "I never heard of this," she exclaims when describing all of the programs. Emma admits she's "low-key" envious of young women who had leadership opportunities earlier than she did but says "it's so great to see young girls getting their stuff together, doing these amazing things."

IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Programs that are successful with second (or third, etc.) -generation Canadians often come with barriers for newcomers, including cultural and economic challenges. Linxi Mytkolli from Toronto, Ontario, highlights the challenges newcomers face with accessing programs. "I immigrated with my family when I was really young and we did not have the privilege to play sports or to do any extracurriculars. I never had that opportunity." She says she often thinks of youth who don't go through the post-secondary education system, and wonders where those young women gain leadership skills. "A lot of opportunities online ... people are almost never paid for their time. That's a huge barrier. If you didn't have that financial freedom to access those opportunities growing up, what happens to you once you enter the workforce?"

"I'm also an immigrant, and I came here when I was nine," adds Uswah Ahsan, a leader in Ottawa who grew up in Mississauga, Ontario. "Leadership, leadership camps, sports leadership and all of that are very mainstreamed in Western society and Western culture. My parents didn't know what those things were." She says her parents were very wary of sending their daughter to a weekend camp, and people who get into those programs have excellent English (her accent at times prevented people from understanding her). She suggests reducing barriers for newcomer families to help make programs more accessible.

NORTHERN COMMUNITIES

"Opportunities are everywhere, if you know to look for them," explains Abbey from Whitehorse. This raises the question: how does a young person even know or learn how to look for these opportunities? Many youth are not familiar with leadership programs and conferences without family support, or if they are not already identified as a "leader" in their community and connected with people and organizations that frequently share and promote paths to learn and develop leadership skills. In Northern communities, participating in leadership programs comes with many hurdles. Ruth Suwaksiork, a leader in Arviat, Nunavut, explains the numerous challenges and sacrifices that come with living in a more remote area of the country. Participating in opportunities outside of her community requires flying out by plane (which is expensive if expenses aren't covered) and significant time away from her family and community, which is important to her. This is a very different experience from young city dwellers, who can walk or take public transit to a variety of workshops, programs, meetings, or events.

Beyond promotion and outreach, national programs should look to partnering with grassroots organizations, immigrant groups, and local community hubs (schools, leaders) to broaden their reach and representation, especially in the north and east coasts of the country. It's important to recognize that there are young leaders in all parts of Canada, and to accommodate this by making programs and opportunities so accessible and discoverable that one doesn't have to know to look for them.

STRUCTURED INTERGENERATIONAL MENTORSHIPS

A diversity of mentorships and role models were credited by the young leaders we spoke with, from family to peers to formal career mentors. However one participant summed up the limitation of mentorship as having drank enough coffee. Coffee chats have become a metaphor for mentoring and networking, but mentees are looking for more meaningful interaction and guidance. There is a desire for formal and accessible mentorship programs within organizations and companies, where both parties feel they are growing from the exchange, as along with sponsorship. Mentorships can benefit both parties and ideally include resources, as well as shared identity and experiences with gender, race, culture, and other intersections.

MENTORSHIP BY MANY

Mentorships and role models help young leaders navigate their work with advice and direction, as well as provide paths to possibility. "Mentors have been the most catalyzing forces in my career," says Larissa. The leaders we spoke with point to a wide range of mentors who help them, both formally and informally. These mentors include family members, teachers, professors, sports coaches, elders, chiefs, and people they have met through organizations and in leadership programs. These are adults in their lives who take them seriously and are invested in their success. We also heard there is a need for more than one mentor in one's life, and it's natural for mentors to come and go. Many of the young leaders we spoke with are already offering mentorship support themselves to younger people in their lives.

MENTORSHIP OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS

"You can't be what you can't see," says Marian Wright Edelman, Founder & President of Children's Defense Fund. The spirit of this famous quote was referenced frequently on the importance of mentorship, as well as the desire to find mentors with the intersectionality of race, culture, LGBTQ2+, and/or gender as the mentee. According to 2019 research by Nanos Research for Plan International Canada, more than three in four young Canadian women with a mentor have a woman as their mentor. Just under one in four report their mentor is a man, and one per cent report their mentor is another gender.

Not everyone is easily able to find a mentor they can relate to. A young leader expressed amazement and frustration with finding mentorship with the focus group she was a part of in this research. "Where is everyone getting mentors from?" she asked. She says never saw anyone with her specific intersectionality (young woman, first-generation, Bengali, working in legal consultancy or government). Through voicing this in our research, she has been connected with a potential mentor in her city that fits the criteria she is looking for. Fae Johnstone describes themself as a "transfeminine troublemaker." As a young trans leader in Ottawa, Ontario, they have "mentors-ish." Fae says that in Ottawa there are "five trans people everyone knows." In this comment, Fae is reflecting on the reality that so many trans folks in her community have died. Trans people are targets of specifically directed violence, including assault, murder, and suicide. In Ontario, 20 per cent of trans people have been physically or sexually assaulted.[17] Mentorship, and the availability of mentors who reflect one's own identity, is an intersectional issue and differs for different com-

munities. Mentorship programs, run by companies or non-profits, must consider these realities when designing programs that are intended to serve all youth.

Mentorship can also have its limits, with young leaders feeling they have enough programs and coffees available to them, but instead needing the support that comes with sponsorship where you bring people along with you. They also note the importance of friendship and peer support, as well as their phones being equipped with social media as a network with access to different types of leaders. Jathusha Mahenthirarajan, a young woman who identifies with the term leader, has her own non-profit in Richmond Hill, Ontario, called L.I.G.H.T. She says she builds on the mentorship she provides with more active sponsorship. "If I have access to space that other womxn don't, I advocate for their presence and voices in that space. If people ask for recommendations for certain opportunities or roles to be filled, I put forward the names of young womxn." Jathusha adds that peer mentorship provides great opportunities for validation, especially for racialized young women, and skill sharing (e.g. helping or giving tips on a skill like photography and videography).

MENTORSHIPS AS AN INTERGENERATIONAL EXCHANGE

The spirit of a skill sharing was expressed again through intergenerational mentorships. The young leaders collectively stress the importance of mentorship in their growth and success, but they also point to the wide range of skills they have to offer including tech savviness, new ideas, and feedback from a demographic many organizations and companies are trying to engage. By leadership designing formal mentorship programs within organizations and companies with internal and/or external matches, both the young leader and senior leader could benefit and grow from time spent together. It could also provide new opportunities to connect for young people looking for mentorship, and senior employees looking to learn new skills, hear different perspectives, and share their expertise and networks. Intergenerational mentorship by its design values and recognizes the contributions and leadership of the younger person in the pair. Shared interests (e.g. social committee, addressing the climate crisis at work) can also build a meaningful two-way mentorship. No matter the generation, it's important to ask questions to determine what mentees are looking for and to determine parameters like frequency and resources. "I want a mentor" is not enough.[18]

Instagram is a space where young leaders are building their network and connections, and discovering role models. In an Instagram chat G(irls)20 conducted in support of this research, young women shared their thoughts and experiences with mentorship. We heard a range of qualities a mentor should have, including experience, active listening, compassion, a network, responding critically, and kindness. In regards to what mentees don't want from a mentor, "just advice" came up. Young leaders say they are looking for someone who is available and isn't judgemental or patronizing and doesn't expect them to already be at the mentor's level. These responses point to the importance of building an authentic relationship, as well as the earlier theme of valuing and listening to young women.

In business, mentorship is identified by women entrepreneurs as one of the most valued types of support, even more so than financial support.[19] According to Women and Gender Equality Canada (formerly the Status of Women Canada) research shows that 88 per cent of entrepreneurs with mentors survive in business, compared to a 50 per cent failure rate for those without a mentor. By mentoring someone, one can find a valuable outlet to apply career lessons learned and give back, obtain fresh perspectives on one's own career, and contribute to the advancement of women in Canada's economy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This qualitative research is based on interviews with 42 young leaders between the ages of 18-25* in every province and territory. The interviews took place by phone or web conference in November and December 2019, some one-on-one and some in focus groups. The interviews were semi-structured with a standard set of questions but with room to accommodate more questions and conversation. Additional demographic data is outlined in the beginning of this report.

Interview grouping: We found these young leaders through three groups.

> Group 1: The G(irls)20 network in Canada. This group includes past delegates of G(irls)20 Summits, Young Directors in our Girls on Boards program, and members of the G(irls)20 community at large.

> Group 2: Partner organizations. Working with national civil society organizations including Plan International Canada, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, and the YWCA, we spoke with young leaders connected with their programs.

> Group 3: Individual youth. This group includes leaders making news in traditional media and social media, as well as young people who were recommended we reach out to.

Each participant was offered a $15 Amazon gift card to recognize their time and contribution.

Embracing the popularity and power of social media as a leadership, listening, and organizing tool for young leaders, we also hosted a Twitter and Instagram chat on December 9, 2019, to extend the reach and engagement of our research. To read the online conversation, search the hashtag #WithGirls20 on Twitter or view the archived stories in our Instagram menu.

*With the exception of one participant, MP Mumilaaq Qaqqaq, who was elected at 25 years old, but has since celebrated a birthday

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ABOUT G(IRLS)20

G(irls)20 is a registered Canadian charity located in Toronto, Ontario. Launched in 2009 at the Clinton Global Initiative, G(irls)20 places young women at the centre of decision-making processes. Through our signature programs, Global Summit and Girls on Boards, we make strategic investments in young women through education and training, building networks, and access to unparalleled opportunities. While advocating for change at the global level through the annual G(irls)20 Global Summit, we are invested in changing the status quo for women at decision-making tables in communities across Canada by placing young women on boards. Visit www.girls20.org.

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