Gender Differences in Headteacher Leadership and Management Styles: *A Study of a number of Headteachers in Maltese Secondary Schools*

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Abstract:

The gender issue figures prominently in leadership and management studies. The question is whether there actually is gender stereotyping in leadership and management styles, or whether there is cross-gender homogeneity, or even evidence of androgyny. The aim of this research was to investigate this question within a number of local educational settings. The research consisted of structured interviews with eight headteachers, four female and four male, in state, church and independent secondary schools in Malta. A self-report questionnaire was also administered to the eight headteachers on the subject of leadership and management styles. The results show up the myth of gender differences in educational leadership and management. Apart from a few exceptions, there was broad cross-gender homogeneity between the headteachers. There also emerged an ideal 'headteacher leadership style' with equal numbers of female and male characteristics. The findings have important implications both for the practice of educational leadership and management in contemporary schools and for future research on this subject.

Introduction

In leadership and management studies, the gender perspective is of outstanding importance. Leadership and management theory is dominated by a masculinist discourse. In fact a stereotyped way of thinking that identifies management as largely 'masculine' still exists nowadays, although this approach has been questioned and problematized. Research shows that there are gender stereotypes associated with leadership and management.

Women are perceived as caring, nurturing and collaborative, while men are supposed to be much more analytical, decisive, data-rational and competitive. Stereotyping is a reductionist process. Collard (2001) has drawn attention to the fact that the use of essentialist typecasts has been disputed by Reynolds (1995), Grogan (1996), Coleman (1998) and Connell (1995) among others. Yet typecasting is still used as an investigative tool in the examination and analysis of educational leadership.

In contrast with these simplistic polarities, there is the view of androgyny in leadership and management. Successful leaders and managers are seen to employ an amalgam of male and female characteristics and leadership styles, irrespective of their gender.

Previous Research

There is a considerable corpus of research worldwide on gender and on women in leadership. This concerns both leadership in general and educational leadership and management in particular. In the USA we find research by Shakeshaft (1987), Chase (1995) and Grogan (1996). In the UK research on this subject has been undertaken by Al-Khalifa (1989), Adler et al (1993), Ozga (1993), Hall (1996) and Coleman (2001). In Australia we find research by Blackmore (1993, 1994) and Limerick and Lingard (1995). In New Zealand this subject was investigated by Strachan (1993) and Court (1994), in Canada by Young (1992) and in Israel by Chen and Addi (1993). Many of these writers have focused on the sameness among women in organizing and leading educational institutions.

One of the first systematic analyses of gender differences in leadership was carried out by Eagly and Johnson (1990). This study yielded mixed findings, with no differences between men and women leaders regarding task-oriented and interpersonal oriented styles, and marked differences in the adoption of democratic leadership. Women adopt a more inclusive and participative leadership style, while men tend to use the directive, controlling style.

According to Fitzgerald (2003), the vast body of research on gender and leadership can be categorized under three domains. The first domain or 'gender script', as Blackmore (2002) suggests, consists of studies about data, attitudes and opinions. The second domain regards career patterns (discourses of opportunity) while the third domain deals with power and how it is exercised by women leaders (discourses of privilege). Fitzgerald (2003) rightly criticized the fact that in many of the above-mentioned studies, gender is presented as the sole determining factor, while other

dimensions of identity such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, location and beliefs have been totally discounted.

Researchers have employed male and female stereotypes in their investigations of gender and leadership. In fact fundamental differences have been recorded between male and female leaders in their leadership practices and beliefs by researchers like Hemphill (1961), Berman (1982), Gilligan (1982), Helgeson (1991), Eisler (1995) and Shakeshaft (1987, 1995) among others. These writers have reported that men are more directive and bureaucratic in their leadership styles, while women are more collaborative and relational. The female stereotype of leadership style was found to be more related to effective management:

> Women's traditional and stereotypic styles of communication are
> more like those of a good manager than are men's stereotypic styles.
> Shakeshaft (1989, p.186)

Moreover, Rosener (1990) argued that women leaders benefit from certain positive attributes acquired through their socialization (cf. also Corson, 1992). These include predisposition for participation, a more conversational approach, willingness to share information and a refusal to covet power for themselves.

It is claimed that nowadays organizations are increasingly sympathetic to qualities associated with the feminine rather than the masculine stereotype (cf Gronn, 1999). This trend forms part of the 'feminization of work' and stems from factors like the increasing number of women at work, the de-layering of hierarchies and the de-coupling of work units. Recent research has shown that contemporary organizations require female sensibilities rather than male ones:

> Traits that are needed in this more fluid context are not those
> culturally ascribed to men – rationality, self-interest, toughness,
> domination – but, rather, are traits traditionally held to be feminine
> ones.
> Fondas (1996, p.288)

Moreover, the gender-centred perspective holds that the individual's attributes vary according to gender (cf. Betz & Fitzgerald 1987; Henning & Jardin 1977; Loden 1985). According to this approach, women leaders adopt a feminine leadership style characterized by caring and nurturance, while male leaders adopt a masculine leadership style which is dominating and task-oriented (cf. Eagly et al, 1992). Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992) developed the concept of a unique female leadership style – "Women leadership" – characterized by behaviours that empower, restructure, teach, provide role models, encourage openness and stimulate questioning.

Ozga synthesizes the literature findings about feminine educational leadership style as opposed to the masculine:

> Women's leadership styles are less hierarchical and more
> democratic. Women, for example, run more closely knit schools than
> do men, and communicate better with teachers. They use different,
> less dominating body language and procedures…Women spend less
> time on deskwork than men, visit more classrooms, keep up to date

> in curricular issues… Their language is more hesitant and tentative, their agendas more informal and flexible, and there is less distance from subordinates… Women emphasize cohesiveness. They are much less individualistic and spend time on fostering an integrative culture and climate… They do not engage in displays of anger as control mechanisms… Group activities are much more highly valued by women than men.
> Ozga (1993, p.11)

As pointed out above, this feminine leadership stereotype is more congruent with new 'softer' management discourses which focus on people-oriented management as a new source of efficiency in postmodern organizations (cf Blackmore, 1999). At this point it would be interesting to identify and discuss the gender associations, if any, of transformational and transactional leadership.

Transactional leadership with its emphasis on a series of exchanges of one thing for another, and transformational leadership with its emphasis on vision, motivation and empowerment are distinct leadership styles. Writers like Avolio & Bass (1988) and Bycio, Hackett & Allen (1995) speculated about possible gender differences in the use of transformational leadership. Carless (1998) investigated whether female and male managers in Australia differ in their utilization of transformational leadership. The findings showed that superiors and managers themselves rated female managers as more transformational than male ones, especially in interpersonally oriented behaviours, e.g. participatory decision making, praising and caring for individual needs. This is also borne out by Druskat (1994). On communicating a vision and use of innovative problem solving, however, male and female managers perceive themselves quite similarly. Roberts (1985) carried out a longitudinal study of a female school superintendent and found an overlap of charismatic and transformational leadership styles.

Coleman's (1996) findings from interviews with five female headteachers in the UK showed that they saw themselves as transformational leaders. Yet this work also yielded female headteachers' perceptions of their own styles which "could have been made by any headteacher, male or female" (p.168).

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) contains twenty attributes associated with masculine and feminine behaviour. A similar list was derived from the literature by Gray (1989, 1993). Coleman (1996) lists the attributes of the feminine and masculine paradigms:

The nurturing 'feminine' paradigm	The defensive/aggressive 'masculine' paradigm
Aware of individual differences	Evaluative
Caring	Disciplined
Intuitive	Competitive
Tolerant	Objective
Creative	Formal
Informal	Highly regulated
Non-competitive	Conformist
Subjective	Normative

Table 1 'Feminine' and 'Masculine' Paradigms after Coleman (2003, p.31)

In the work of these writers the intention is certainly ***not*** the stereotyping of male and female leaders. Indeed Bem (1974) and Coleman (1996, 2003) identified androgyny as a major leadership phenomenon, cutting across gender leadership stereotypes.

In educational research on gender and leadership styles, there has been an increasing emphasis on androgyny. As far back as in 1974, Bem identified, though not in educational settings, the most effective leaders as androgynous, showing a wide spectrum of qualities from both the masculine and feminine paradigm lists. Coleman (1996) found that female headteachers exhibited both feminine and masculine qualities, and hence could be identified as androgynous leaders, able to select from a wide range of qualities. Blasé and Kirby (1992) and Rhode (2003) found similarities between male and female leaders in motivation strategies and in delegation.

Moreover, male and female headteachers' perceptions of their own leadership and management style are quite similar, with their preferred style tending to be more feminine than masculine. Coleman (2003) reported that from her research it emerged that:

- Gender may not be a determinant of leadership style, but has an influence on self-perceptions of men and women leaders;
- The orthodoxy of the male "macho" style of leadership widespread among males is something of a myth;
- The majority of male and female headteachers shared values about themselves as leaders who are collaborative and people-centred, a style that has more in common with the female than with the male leadership stereotype.

From an investigation of all female headteachers in England and Wales, Coleman (2000) found that the majority are consultative and people-centred; however, she did find that 15% use a style of management and leadership that is closer to the stereotypical masculine style which is markedly more directive. From this research it emerges that headteachers are androgynous leaders in that they are prepared to employ qualities and styles of leadership that cut across gender stereotypes, irrespective of the individual headteacher's biological sex.

These research findings are further strengthened by others. Hall (1996) in her investigation of six UK female headteachers, found that

> The women heads in the study developed the confidence to enact their own interpretation of management and leadership, based on characteristics that are neither exclusively masculine nor feminine.
> (p.153)

Gronn (1999) makes the very important point that

> There would seem to be little merit, then, in claiming that there are gender-derived styles, when in actual fact the leader style differences within gender categories…are likely to be at least, or more, significant than those thought to exist between categories.
> (our italics; p.153)

Thompson (2000) in a study of a number of male and female educational leaders found that there are no significant differences between male and female leaders, which is in sharp contrast with the stereotypical assertions of some earlier research. This evidence suggests that women employ leadership behaviours not necessarily congruent with the female stereotype. Thompson suggests three possible reasons for this:

- Women are prepared to use a diversity of leadership styles;
- Female gender stereotypes are continuing to be diluted;
- Women have shown equally effective leadership skills all along.

Thus it is clear that in educational institutions, as in other organizations, gender is not the only, or primary, determinant of leadership style.

It has also been established that a principal's leadership style does not necessarily remain constant throughout incumbency, but may change radically in mid-career. Oplatka (2001) studied twenty five female primary headteachers in Israel and investigated what happens to their managerial styles after a number of years in headship. The results revealed that thirteen out of the twenty five female principals experienced cross-gender transitions in managerial styles, while the rest did not change at all. Hustler et al. (1995) also reported changes in headteachers' leadership style.

Consequently this research suggests that in mid-career, women principals may experience a change from 'feminine' to 'masculine' managerial styles, or vice-versa. This reinforces the questioning of analytical dualism and suggests that gender may interact with yet another factor, namely, mid-career stage, in determining the adoption of a particular managerial style.

Methodology

[a] The Interviews
The present authors opted for the use of the interview, of 2 hour+ duration, with eight Maltese heads of school in the secondary sector. The interviews were designed as structured and consisted of a number of open-ended questions - for the sake of comparability - grouped under seven areas or themes.

1. Autobiographical details
2. Communication
3. Delegation
4. Human Relationships
5. Perception of Headteacher's Role
6. Leadership Style/s
7. Concluding Remarks

[b] The Questionnaire
The present authors also felt the need to investigate the relation, if any, between gender and secondary school headteacher leadership style/s in a more structured and formalized way. This was effected through the use of a self-response questionnaire for the same sample of headteachers based on that used by Coleman (2000). Coleman's questionnaire was modified so that it could be administered to both female and male headteachers within the Maltese secondary school context.

We wanted to see whether the female and male headteachers perceived themselves as falling into the male/female leadership paradigms, or whether there was evidence of leadership androgyny. We wanted to do this without falling into the essentialist pitfall. This was done through Question 8 in which the headteachers were asked to tick the qualities that applied to them from a jumbled list of male and female gender paradigm qualities as provided by Gray (1993).

	MALE Paradigm	FEMALE Paradigm
Caring		√
Intuitive		√
Non-competitive		√
Subjective		√
Highly regulated	√	
Normative	√	
Evaluative	√	
Objective	√	
Creative		√
Aware of individual differences		√
Tolerant		√
Informal		√
Conformist	√	
Competitive	√	
Disciplined	√	
Formal	√	

Table 2   Question 8: Qualities and their correspondence to Male, Female Paradigms

This would allow for a quantifiable investigation of the topic under discussion.

Context

The research was carried out in eight Maltese secondary schools, four of which have female headteachers, and four male. Out of the eight secondary schools, two are Church schools, two state Junior Lyceums (entry into which is regulated by the Junior Lyceum Entrance Examination at 11+), two are state Area Secondaries (for students not successful in the Junior Lyceum Entrance Examination) and two are Independent, fee-charging secondary schools. The four schools with a female headteacher are all-girls schools, except for the independent school which is co-educational. Conversely the four schools with a male headteacher are all-boys schools, except for the independent one which is co-ed. The eight secondary schools are located in the centre, northern and southern parts of Malta; the catchment area of the schools is spread over all parts of Malta. Table 3 gives the relevant details about the schools in which the research was carried out, as well as the letter designation assigned to each school to preserve anonymity.

	SCHOOL DETAILS	CHURCH	INDEPENDENT	STATE AREA SEC	STATE J L
F E M A L E HDS	No. of Pupils No. of Classes No. of Asst Hds No. of Teachers Location	407 15 1 31 Centre	364 14 2 28 Centre	657 25 3 52 North	1,050 32 4 92 South
	Letter Designation	**SCHOOL [A]**	**SCHOOL [B]**	**SCHOOL [C]**	**SCHOOL [D]**
M A L E HDS	No. of Pupils No. of Classes No. of Asst Hds No. of Teachers Location	246 10 1 23 Centre	407 15 3 33 South	450 22 3 41 North West	1,008 31 3 90 Centre
	Letter Designation	**SCHOOL [E]**	**SCHOOL [F]**	**SCHOOL [G]**	**SCHOOL [H]**

Table 3   The School Context of the research

The eight headteachers with whom the research was carried out ranged in age from the 30-39 age bracket to the 50-59 age bracket. The relevant biographical information regarding the eight headteachers is given in Table 4 below. Once again, to preserve absolute confidentiality and anonymity, the eight headteachers were assigned letter designations.

		CHURCH Sch	INDEPENDENT Sch	STATE AREA SEC	STATE J L
	Headteachers	**Head: [a]**	**Head: [b]**	**Head: [c]**	**Head: [d]**
F E M A L E	Age Group Marital Status No. of Headships Years of Headship Yrs of Dep.Headship	50 – 59 Unmarried 2 18 0	30 – 39 Married 1 4 3	50 – 59 Unmarried 2 12 7	50 – 59 Unmarried 1 9 5
	Headteachers	**Head: [e]**	**Head: [f]**	**Head: [g]**	**Head: [h]**
M A L E	Age Group Marital Status No. of Headships Years of Headship Yrs of Dep.Headship	40 – 49 Unmarried 1 14 0	30 – 39 Married 2 8 0	50 – 59 Married 1 3 4	50 – 59 Married 2 10 4

Table 4   The Headteachers: biographical details and letter designations

The interviewer took down copious notes during the eight interviews and these were subsequently transcribed.

After each interview, the eight headteachers were given the questionnaire which they were asked to fill in and return by post. The response rate for the eight questionnaires was 100 %.

Results

[The Interviews]
Headteachers' Satisfactions and Frustrations

In discussing the satisfactions and frustrations personally associated with the headteacher's role, this sample of eight heads showed a certain male – female dichotomy. In their answers and perceptions regarding satisfactions and frustrations, the female headteachers were more people-focused than the males – "creation of new opportunities for children" (Head **a**); "happy and fulfilled teachers" (Head **b**); "praise by outsiders" (Head **c**) [Satisfactions]; "the need to push teachers all the time" (Head **d**); "lack of understanding and appreciation by some teachers or parents" (Head **a**); "value problems among students (Head **b**) [Frustrations].

The male headteachers, although referring to persons and human relationships, placed a greater emphasis on structures and systems – "success of children after five years in school" (Head **h**); "transformational role of the Head" (Head **e**); "the opportunity to put into practice one's passion for education" (Head **f**) [Satisfactions]; "difficulties when it comes to student referrals"(Head **g**); "lack of resources and the funding system" (Head **f**); "red tape and additional work imposed by Central Office" [Frustrations].

Communication
When asked to comment about methods of **communication with teaching staff**, all four female headteachers stressed the importance of communication by word of mouth on a one-to-one basis as well as the grapevine. In the case of male heads, only one mentioned one-to-one communication by word of mouth. Moreover one of the female heads specifically stressed the relational aspect of communication – "Friendship is the crux of the matter" (Head **c**). This is an interesting echo of the "warm and friendly social style" attributed to female heads by Jirasinghe and Lyons (1996).

All the headteachers, both male and female, listed a wide variety of communication channels. These included staff meetings, memos, notice-board, pigeon-holes, circulars and weekly activity sheets. Interestingly, none of the four female headteachers mentioned electronic communication, while three out of the four male heads (Heads **e**, **g** and **h**) referred to the use of e-mail communication with all or part of the teaching staff. A possible reason for this divergence may be either the female headteachers' age (three of them being in their late fifties) and / or the stereotypical association of the male gender with technology.

The school morning assembly, as a means of **communication with their students** was mentioned by all the eight headteacher interviewees. A clear-cut difference emerged, however, in the communication patterns of female and male headteachers in relation to their students. The four female heads used such phrases as "one-to-one", "friendly dialogue" and "personal meetings with individual students who know they are under cover when they speak to me" (Heads **b**, **c** and **d** respectively). They all emphasized the great value they place on informal meetings with individual students. This conversational approach by female heads is in line with the findings of Rosener (1990) in his study of women leaders. On the other hand, none of the male heads

referred to such meetings, though this does not mean that none of the male heads under study ever have such meetings. What the male heads mentioned as their preferred methods of communication with students were "class visits to keep contact" (Head **e**), student newsletter (Head **g**) and school web-site (Head **h**). One of the male heads stated explicitly that his communication with students is "mostly delegated…in fact I feel the lack of it" (Head **f**).

With regards to **communication with parents**, the same pattern emerged. All the female headteachers stressed their frequent use of "informal", "personal", "one-to-one" and "individual" meetings with parents. Head **c** also stated that she places an emphasis on "friendship and diplomacy" with parents. Out of the four male heads who were interviewed, the only two who mentioned personal meetings with parents added that these meetings take place "in problem cases" (Head **e**) and "only when necessary" (Head **f**). What the eight headteacher interviewees had in common was the use of formal / official meetings held on a regular basis and circulars to parents. It is also interesting that three female heads, namely Heads **a**, **b** and **d**, specifically mentioned the use of telephone conversations with parents (cf. Berman, 1982, on the longer average duration of phone calls among women secondary principals).

There were gender-related responses regarding the use of **the grapevine**. Here all the four female heads as well as Head **h** answered that they make use of this channel of communication. These interviewees added such comments as "You get feedback from trusted persons among the staff" (Head **b**) and "Mind you, it is done in friendship; as a result you can do pastoral work, even with teachers and parents" (Head **c**). Male Head **h** said he uses every possible means of communication. Head **g** – a male – took the grapevine to refer to what students say as they are leaving school. Two male headteachers, **e** and **f**, gave a negative answer, saying that they never use the grapevine. "There's a bit of a barrier, you know; at times I feel an alien among the staff" according to Head **e**, and Head **f** answered that he preferred "honest meetings with individual teachers".

Delegation

The overall picture of the delegative style of Maltese headteachers that emerged from the answers given by the eight interviewees is one of homogeneity rather than male-female dichotomy. As far as delegation is concerned, the present sample of eight Maltese secondary school heads do not perceive themselves as operating in significantly different ways. This recalls the conclusions reached by Hall (1996) that delegation is universal in secondary schools. She goes on to say that the difference is not a gender-based one within the secondary sector, but one between secondary and primary. All the headteachers under study, in keeping with Rhode's (2003) findings, delegated a wide variety of tasks and responsibilities to assistant heads, subject co-ordinators and members of the teaching staff.

Human Relationships

Women's focus on relationships – Gilligan's (1982) ethic of care – is emphasized in the literature, with Shakeshaft (1989) stating specifically that women spend more time with people and consider relationships with others as central to all actions of their administration. In the present sample, this was not borne out in the sense that all the heads except two (one female – Head **a** and one male – Head **e**) stated that they give paramount **importance to human relationships** in the running of their school. So

there are no inter-gender differences whatsoever, a result more in keeping with the androgynous school of leadership (Coleman, 2003, Gronn, 1999). When the question was broken down to human relationships with members of the SMT, teaching staff, pupils, parents and minor staff, an identical pattern emerged. The six headteachers referred to above reiterated their commitment to human relationships, making such comments as

> I give them the feeling that I have full confidence in them – a
> sense of belonging (Head c about Teaching Staff)
>
> and I show personal interest and treat them as individuals…I
> give great importance to empathy. (Head h about Parents)

Two exceptions, Head **a** and Head **e**, attributed their weakness on human relationships to the heavy workload that leaves no time for inter-personal relations (Head **a**) and to "the fear that these relations may complicate matters" (Head **e**).

In the present research there was no sharp male-female divide in the headteachers' answers regarding **people- or task- orientation**. Only one male and one female, the same as above, declared themselves "task-oriented". Words and phrases drawn from the "female" paradigm like "human" (Head **b**), "role-model" (Head **c**) and "trust and care" (Head **d**) were used by the majority of the headteachers whether male or female.

All the eight headteachers asserted that they accord enormous importance to caring and support. For example, Head **a** said that she takes into consideration teachers' family and medical problems and gives them the necessary support. In the case of students, she said

> Behind bad behavior, there is always the child trying to say
> something to me.
> That is why I believe that I have to provide care and support
> for them. (Head a)

Similarly one of the male heads was very articulate in emphasizing the centrality of care and support in his personal vision:

> Caring and support are extremely important – the corner-stone
> of my beliefs. I strongly believe that children have to be happy
> at school… I try to show solidarity and give support to teachers
> with personal problems in their family and home background…
> I'm thinking at the moment of particular cases of parental
> separation, court cases… (Head e)

Specific reference to the headteacher's care and support for parents was made by female Head **c** and male Heads **g** and **h**.

Consequently, the findings of the present study, like Coleman's (2002), explode the myth of the female head as being more caring than the male. In fact the feminine paradigm cannot be used to distinguish the female from the male leader, as far as the qualities of caring and support are concerned. In fact a pattern of psychological

androgyny comes across very clearly as a characteristic of the self-perceived leadership and management of the eight headteachers under study. The findings showed more intra-gender differences than inter-gender ones, with individual variations rather than gender stereotypic ones standing out.

Perception of Headteacher's Role
The homogeneity of the headteachers' responses regarding the areas of **curriculum**, **pastoral care** and **discipline** clearly indicates that no gender-based divergence regarding these fundamentals of education exists among the heads under study. The heads, both female and male, asserted that they give maximum importance to these three areas.

This same homogeneity across gender emerged in the headteachers' comments about the importance they give to **Vision and Mission** in their role as heads of school. References to the implementation of the school motto, to the school mission statement printed in the students' school diary, to the teachers' contribution to the formulation of the mission statement, as well as the emphasis on values and on a sense of direction for the school indicate that all the headteachers had reflected quite deeply upon the subject.

The headteachers identified a number of strategies that they use in order to bring out the best in their teachers. Praise as a form of **motivation** was referred to by female Heads **b** and **c** and male Head **f**. It is interesting to note that the use of flattery is included in Bem's (1974) Sex-Role Inventory as an attribute of the feminine paradigm. Blase and Kirby (1992) identify the power of praise as a strategy used by effective principals to bring out the best in teachers. Female Head **b** referred to money incentives while female Head **d** said that "coating the pill" works wonders in encouraging teachers to give of their best. Motivating by example and personal enthusiasm was mentioned by female Head **a** and male Heads **e** and **h**. Other strategies included communicating the vision (Head **a**), "fostering respect and friendship" (Head **c**), empowerment (Head **f**), giving the teachers a sense of identity and belonging (Head **g**) and trust (Head **h**).

Regarding the **School Development Plan** it emerges from the present study that the male headteachers are more ready than their female counterparts to retain responsibility for the SDP rather than delegate it.

To conclude, a homogeneity across gender emerged in this section on Perception of Headteacher's Role. The only gender differences were in the use of praise to motivate teachers (predominantly a female characteristic) and in the headteacher's retention of personal responsibility for the SDP (more common among the male heads).

Leadership styles
The next part of the interview focused more directly on leadership style. When talking about the **Autocratic** style of leadership, two female heads (**a** and **c**) admitted to adopting this style sometimes, one (Head **b**) rarely while female Head **d** said that she feels the need to be autocratic "one third of the time". The male heads were more evenly divided, with Heads **f** and **h** saying that they rarely adopt this style, while Heads **e** and **g** said that they adopt it sometimes. The emergent pattern suggests that the female heads under study are more ready to admit that they feel the need to be

autocratic in certain situations. This is reminiscent of the findings of Coleman (2002) that women headteachers are more likely than men to choose words like autocratic to describe themselves, probably not to appear "feminine" in the sense of "soft". According to Blackmore (1999), for women to succeed in the world of work, they had to overcome their conditioning as women and develop "male" aggressiveness and assertiveness.

When asked to reflect upon their use of the **consultative** style, all the eight headteachers immediately answered "Yes". Some of them made a number of interesting qualifiers to their answer. Female Head **c** added "always" while "frequently" was added by Heads **b** and **e**. Heads **a** and **d** said that they consult "with my Assistant Heads". The three male Heads **f**, **g** and **h** added: "depending on the context", "depending on the nature of the decision in question" and "because I believe in dialogue and consensus". The divergence seems to lie in the qualifiers rather than in the "yes" answer.

Moving on to a discussion of their use of the **participative** style, the female heads came out as more ready to describe themselves as participative than the males. The four female heads immediately answered "Yes" to the question, with only Head **d** adding somewhat reluctantly "Yes…sometimes", while Head **b** emphasized "Yes…very frequently". When it came to the male headteachers, Heads **e** and **g** answered "Yes" and, when probed to give concrete examples, began to talk in general about the importance of participation. Head **f**'s answer was:

> Not that much…although I am participative with my Assistant Head and his team…you know, ultimately I have to be the leader.

Head **h** said that he uses the participative style "***only*** after I have carefully identified the matter…and individualized the teachers". These findings are in line with Eagly and Johnson (1990), Lipman – Blumen (1992), Eagly, Makhijani and Klosky (1992) and Watson (1988) who found that women leaders are more self-reportedly participative than their male counterparts. Charters and Jovick (1981) stated that "more participatory decision making appeared in female-managed schools" (p.322). Jirasinghe and Lyons (1996) found that women headteachers tended to identify themselves as more participative and consultative.

In our present research, it also resulted that the four female heads all reported themselves as being empowering, while the four male heads emphasized their willingness to be empowering rather than their being actually so:

> …as in delegation, I make it a point to seek out only those people who are willing and able – when you can find them! (Head e)

> I try to give people responsibility…I try to empower them…but there are a number who do not want it… (Head f)

Among the headteachers who reported **change of leadership** style over the years, there was an opposite cross-gender development, with males changing from people-centred to more task-oriented and discipline-focused, and females changing from more autocratic to more people-oriented.

According to Coleman (2002), transformational leadership appears to favour the stereotypical women's style since it is essentially based on relationships (Burns, 1978). Carless (1998), Bass and Avolio (1994), Urch Druskat (1994) and Bass et al. (1996) found that women are more transformational as leaders than men. This was not borne out by the present study where, out of the sample of eight heads, three female and three male heads shared a perception of themselves as being, and/or setting out to be, **transformational** – without ruling out the use of **transactional** leadership in certain circumstances. Several recent leadership studies (cf. Gronn, 1999) have presented transformational leadership as the most effective style to which headteachers should aspire. This may have influenced the way in which the heads in the present study expressed themselves about transformational leadership.

Headteachers' Concluding Remarks

To round up the interviews, the headteachers were asked to make their **final comments** about their favourite leadership style. All the headteachers reiterated their preference for a particular leadership style, echoing their answers to a previous related question. When asked whether they think this style is effective, six heads – three females and three males – answered in the affirmative. Female Head **d** said "Not always…especially with the children", while male Head **f** said "I hope so". On being asked, more specifically, about their teachers' response to their leadership style, an identical pattern emerged, with the same six heads saying that their leadership is well-received by their teachers, while Head **d** frankly replied "I don't think so" and Head **f** said "I don't know".

The next question was aimed at exploring the heads' feelings regarding their teachers' attitude to their leadership style. They were asked whether they bother about how they are perceived by their teachers. Their answers showed complete cross-gender homogeneity. Female Heads **a** and **b** and male Heads **e** and **g** immediately answered "Yes".

> I do bother, yes, though eventually it does not stop me from doing what I have to do. (Head a)

and

> Yes, I do bother…but eventually you have to grow a thick skin. (Head e)

Female Head **c** and male Head **h** answered that it does not really bother them.

> I don't mind at all, as long as I have an easy conscience. You do need to feel accepted…but as long as you're OK with yourself, it doesn't matter, does it? I believe in something and stick to the point. (Head c)

Head **h** just answered "Not at all!"   Female Head **d** and male Head **f** took a more middle stance:

> I don't always mind…it depends…as long as things get done, I
> don't bother so much. (Head d)
>
> I do think about it, but it does not bother me all that much. I
> try not to be too paranoid. (Head f)

These concluding remarks by the eight headteachers, when analysed, reveal a strong pattern of cross-gender homogeneity. Even here the intra-gender variations far outweigh the inter-gender ones. This pattern acted as a final confirmation of the findings that emerged from the whole interview with the exceptions of communication and certain aspects of leadership style.

 [The Questionnaire]
The headteachers' self-report **Questionnaires** showed that in choosing adjectives to describe their own leadership and management style, the people-centred aspect of leadership was the one most strongly emphasized by equal numbers of female and male heads. Similarly equal numbers of headteachers of both genders claimed that they set out to promote personal values in their schools. Finally, rather than perceiving themselves as operating within the strait jacket of a polarity between the feminine and the masculine paradigms, the headteachers under study opted for an "ideal headteacher leadership" paradigm – an androgynous paradigm consisting of a perfect balance of feminine and masculine qualities. In fact, in the last and most important section of the questionnaire, the headteachers were asked to select qualities that they perceived as applicable to their own leadership and management styles. (N.B. The list consisted of Gray's 1993 Gender Paradigm qualities in a jumbled form).

The following table gives the Rank Order of these qualities:

Headteacher Qualities	Feminine/ Masculine Paradigm	Female Heads	Male Heads	Total
Caring	(F)	4	4	8
Aware of individual differences	(F)	4	3	7
Tolerant	(F)	3	4	7
Informal	(F)	3	4	7
Highly regulated in Management	(M)	3	4	7
Creative	(F)	3	3	6
Normative	(M)	4	2	6
Evaluative	(M)	3	3	6
Objective	(M)	2	4	6
Disciplined in your work	(M)	4	2	6
Chosen by a minority				
Non-Competitive	(F)	2	1	3
Intuitive	(F)	2	0	2
Subjective	(F)	2	0	2
Competitive	(M)	1	1	2
Formal	(M)	1	0	1
Conformist	(M)	0	0	0

Table 5: Headteacher Qualities in Rank Order

- The headteachers, both male and female, chose in their majority a number of qualities deriving equally from the feminine and masculine paradigms. This fact indicates an emerging pattern of androgynous leadership favoured by the eight headteachers, irrespective of their gender.
- This is in accordance with – but not completely so – the findings of Coleman (1996). Whereas Coleman found that headteachers, in their majority, chose six qualities from the feminine paradigm and four from the masculine, we found that the eight headteachers under study chose five qualities from each of the two gender paradigms. Otherwise our findings are very much in line with those of Coleman.
- This pattern of androgynous leadership which emerged from the questionnaire administered to the headteachers cross-validates the picture which emerged from the interviews that showed very strong cross-gender similarities in headteacher leadership and management.

Feminine Paradigm	Female Heads	Male Heads		Masculine Paradigm	Female Heads	Male Heads
Caring	4	4		Highly Regulated	3	4
Aware of indiv. diff.	4	3		Normative	4	2
Tolerant	3	4		Evaluative	3	3
Informal	3	4		Objective	2	4
Creative	3	3		Disciplined	4	2
Chosen by a minority				*Chosen by a minority*		
Non-Competitive	2	1		Competitive	1	1
Intuitive	2	0		Formal	1	0
Subjective	2	0		Conformist	0	0

Table 6: Headteacher Qualities – Feminine and Masculine Paradigms

- A further proof of this "androgynous" leadership that emerged from the results of the Questionnaire is the fact that the "feminine" qualities of "Caring" and "Creative" were chosen equally by males and females, while "Tolerant" and "Informal" were chosen by more males than females.
  From the masculine paradigm, equal numbers of males and females chose "Evaluative", while more females than males chose "Normative" and "Disciplined in your work". This cross-gender "voting" is a phenomenon also noted by Coleman (1996).

- There is a clear rejection by the eight headteachers under study of the "feminine" qualities of "Non-Competitive", "Intuitive" and "Subjective" and of the "masculine" qualities of "Competitive", "Formal" and "Conformist.". This rejection of the qualities of "Non-Competitive", "Subjective", "Formal" and "Conformist" was also found by Coleman (1996).

The eight Maltese Secondary headteachers under study showed in their answers to the questionnaire that they cannot be differentiated in their leadership style on the basis of gender stereotype. Indeed, rather than choosing a "feminine" or a "masculine" style of leadership, they opted for an "ideal headteacher leadership" paradigm consisting of a balance of feminine and masculine qualities. This "androgynous" style favoured by the eight heads in the questionnaire corroborates the cross-gender homogeneity in the

answers given by the headteachers in the interviews, with exceptions limited to communication and certain aspects of leadership styles

Conclusion

These findings explode the myth of gender-based leadership dichotomies. Even in Malta, where gender discourse has persistently tended to be strongly polarized, there is evidence that emergent forms of gender discourse are now increasingly characterized by homogeneity rather than by dichotomy. The findings of this study indicate that even in the important field of school leadership, there is a prevalent discourse of cross-gender homogeneity rather than the traditional, polarity-based one.

Moreover, as a result of the feminization of work and the "softening" of managerial theory, an androgynous and even increasingly feminine leadership paradigm is nowadays normatively preferred.   This is evident in contemporary leadership literature and academic courses. This type of leadership is presented as the 'best' and 'most effective' for modern-day organizations. Thus it is possible that female and male headteachers are making a conscious effort to adopt this style, and claiming its adoption. During the two-and-a-half to three hour interviews, the headteachers under investigation were engaged in an exercise of sincere reflection. The examples they gave contributed to a sense of sincerity and cohesion in their genuine effort to implement their aspirations: an "Ideal Headteacher Leadership" paradigm, rather than the old feminine-versus-masculine dichotomy.

The chief implication of the findings of the present research is one that concerns contemporary educational leadership. Nowadays the normatively preferred style is the androgynous one – indeed, according to some, one that is increasingly feminine. What the present research shows is that, based on self-perception and reflection on their own educational practice, headteachers as educational leaders are opting more for a discourse of gender homogeneity and androgyny rather than for one of gender polarization and dichotomy.   This is deemed as normatively appropriate for the modern organizations called schools, both in the literature and in actual practice.

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