Gender and School Leadership:

The experience of women and men secondary principals

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Abstract

Men usually outnumber women as leaders in education, although in many countries, the number of women in leadership positions is slowly growing. However, women in leadership roles tend to be seen as exceptions to the rule and are subject to stereotyping. This paper draws on research data from two large surveys of all the women and a one in three sample of men secondary school principals in England and Wales.

Findings from the surveys are used to show that, even though the number of women in leadership roles is growing, leadership is still identified with men. Women experience the role of principal differently from men; for example, most are aware that they have to justify their position as women and are conscious of sexism. Occupying the role of principal appears to have serious implications for women in relation to marriage and family. However, contrary to masculine and feminine stereotypes, the self-perceptions of both men and women principals are similar in relation to their management and leadership style. Both men and women see themselves as collaborative and people-centred leaders, incorporating a number of both 'feminine' and 'masculine' qualities, but tending towards the 'feminine'.

There are implications drawn from the data in relation to: equity and the difficulties posed for those who do not fit the norms of leadership; the continuing stereotype of the authoritarian 'masculine' leader and the work life balance for women and men in demanding leadership roles.

Gender and School Leadership: The experience of women and men secondary principals

Since the mid 1990s I have been researching women and educational leadership, focussing on secondary headteachers or principals. Most of this work has been done in England and Wales, but I have also had involvement in projects in China (Coleman et al 1998) and Singapore (Morris et al, 1999) and supervised doctoral research on women and educational leadership in Hong Kong and Israel. Although the group on which I chose to focus my main research was the women principals of secondary or high schools in England and Wales, I think that the conclusions are relevant elsewhere. Reviewing literature on women in leadership indicates that the experience of the women secondary principals in England and Wales is similar to the experience of women leaders not only in secondary but also in primary and tertiary education in the UK and internationally. There are also great similarities with the experience of women in leadership and management in fields other than education.

My research first took the form of in-depth interviews with a small number of women principals in one county in England (Coleman, 1996a, 1996b). In these interviews I tested out some of the themes that emerged from a search of the literature on women in educational management (Coleman, 1994). After the qualitative small-scale research I decided to take a more quantitative approach and surveyed all the women secondary principals in England and Wales. At the time of the survey the women represented about one quarter (n. 670) of all secondary principals. Despite a basically quantitative approach, the survey contained many open-ended questions and therefore produced a great deal of qualitative data. The outcomes of this survey are reported in full in Coleman (2000, 2001). More recently I conducted a companion survey of the equivalent number of male heads (n. 670) which represented a one in three sample. Response rates were good, with 70 percent of the women and just over 60 percent of the men returning questionnaires.

The findings of both surveys are reported in full in Coleman (2002) and are the main source of data for this paper which reflects on gender and leadership in the light of the experience of women and men secondary principals in England and Wales. Through the presentation of some of the data on these women and men I would like us to reflect on three areas:

- the equity implications from the data;
- that there still exists a stereotypical if outdated norm of leadership that endorses masculinity and therefore male leaders;
- the implications of the findings for work-life balance of principals and other educational leaders.

Background

Most leadership positions in education are held by men. The proportion of women managers and leaders is gradually increasing in the UK (DfEE 2002) and elsewhere, but in most countries, both developed and developing, men are more likely to be leaders in education (Davies, 1998, Coleman 2002). The proportion of men and women leaders is more balanced in some countries than others, for example, in Australia and parts of the USA, affirmative action has had an influence and it may have an impact in South Africa where the constitution aims for equity in respect of race and gender. Cultural factors can affect the balance of men and women leaders. For example, the tradition of domestic help in Singapore, which frees some classes of women to concentrate on work means that there are a relatively large number of women principals there (Morris et al, 1999). In Israel, there is a majority of female secondary school principals, but there, Goldring and Chen (1994) claim that the locus of power has tended to shift out of the school towards the male dominated ranks of senior local administrators.

Outside education, the difficulties of women in breaking through the glass ceiling are well documented (for example, Davidson and Cooper, 1992). In the UK, a national survey in 1998 indicated that only 3.6 percent of all directors were women (Vinnicombe, 2000). Sinclair (1998) reports that around ten percent of director positions among the largest 500 companies in the USA are held by women and only 2.7 percent of the directors of the top 596 Australian companies are female. It would therefore appear that in general, despite equal opportunities legislation and awareness of the concept of the glass ceiling, the chances of women obtaining leadership positions continue to be considerably less than those of their male peers.

What are the figures for women and men in secondary schools in England and New Zealand?

Table 1: English secondary schools 1997– 2002 Percentages of men and women heads, deputies and teachers

	1997	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**
Heads men	74.3	72.3	71.2	70.6	68.8
Heads women	25.7	27.3	28.8	29.4	31.2
Deputies men	64.9	64.6	63.9	63.2	61.8
Deputies women	35.1	35.4	36.1	36.8	38.2
Teachers men	47.8	47.1	46.7	46.2	45.7
Teachers women	52.2	52.9	53.3	53.8	54.3

(DfES 2002)

Fitzgerald (2003) quotes Ministry of Education figures to show that in New Zealand in 2002, 73 percent of the principals were male and 27 percent female, with 39 percent of the teachers being male and 61 percent female, a similar, but slightly stronger bias towards males in leadership than that shown in the English figures.

The statistics set the scene, but in a sense they are irrelevant to the main argument of this paper which is, that no matter what the statistics indicate, there is a continuing predisposition to expect that the leader or manager will be male, and that the experience of being a leader in education and elsewhere is qualitatively different for women and men.

There are of course many similarities in the experience of the women and men principals, they are both handling a job which makes many demands on individuals including on their personal lives and those of their families. It was fascinating that the surveys revealed that both sexes identified the same dominant style of management and leadership, one which is actually stereotypically feminine. Despite these important similarities, there are particular ways in which the experiences of women and men differ quite radically and it is some of these major differences that I would first like to explore. These relate to: the experience of being a principal, and the differential impact on the family life of men and women.

It seems to me that this important leadership role, that of secondary school principal is shot through with the distinctions that are made in society between men and women and that these distinctions make invisible barriers and difficulties for women who are occupying roles or seeking to occupy roles as leaders. The concept of patriarchy and the dualism that underpins our thinking about men and women labels and influences our perceptions of the worth of both. Paechter (2001, p. 48) refers to:

> dualisms deeply implicated in gendered power/knowledge relations, aligning themselves with and underpinning the distinction between masculinity and femininity. They include participation in civil society versus rootedness in hearth and home, hardness versus softness, activity versus passivity, reason versus emotion ...

This dichotomy of concepts places more value on civil society than domestic, on hardness, activity and reason rather than softness, passivity and emotion. This dichotomy is the foundation for how we view the roles that men and women play in society. The cultural identification of women as caring, domestic and implicitly of lesser importance and status than men impacts on the experience of women in positions of leadership which are identified with stereotypical masculinity. This stereotypical, or 'hegemonic masculinity' as Collinson and Hearn (2000) term it also has implications for men who choose not to operate in traditional ways. One male principal responded to the question about being a man in leadership:

> there are disadvantages as well [of being a man], e.g. being expected to be part of the ‘men’s club’ and spending time talking to those boring men. I don’t.

However, the tensions between our often unconscious expectations of women and men are particularly apparent in the role female leaders play in schools and elsewhere:

> Those women who have achieved positions which are held predominantly by men have realised, consciously or unconsciously, that there are social roles and expectations governing the role of females from the culture. They must become ‘abnormal’ women; they must transcend the social expectations of femaleness in order to aspire to the socially prescribed role of leader. And because they do not fit the expectations of the attributes of leaders, they are also ‘abnormal’ administrators. Their position as administrators makes them ‘insiders’ to the organisation, but their ‘abnormal status as women makes them ‘outsiders’ in their organizations. (Schmuck, 1996, p. 356)

The identification of management and leadership with the male is pervasive. Schein, (1994) has shown that unconscious or semi-conscious assumptions about maleness and leadership are held by most men, to a lesser extent by women, and by both younger and older age groups in a range of international settings. As identified above (Schmuck,1996), these views shape the way that women leaders are perceived and perceive themselves.

The principal is male

One of the clearest messages to emerge from the responses of the principals in my surveys is that the women feel 'noticeable' in their position as a leader, they feel that they have to justify themselves as women and as leaders and that they have to prove their worth and work harder than the men. Gender is not often an issue for men in a society where they are still seen as the natural leaders. It is difficult for men to recognise that society favours them for leadership roles. Generally the men had not questioned their right to be in a leadership position. One of the male heads said:

> You have to prove your worth at whatever level if you are to obtain promotion – it is not a matter of gender.

However, some commented on their possible advantages as men:

> People tell me they prefer working for a man!

> No examples, but a strong opinion that I have been challenged less as a result of being male.

> There remains some suggestion of exclusivity in some areas – or is it my imagination?

Men recognised that they were helped by their physical appearance particularly in certain communities:

> Working class parents will accept things from me that would cause a woman more problems.
>
> I believe being male is an expectation of some parents in a 'tough' school and area.
>
> Most of our parents are Asian, with traditional outlooks. Many fathers prefer to deal with a man. However, I constantly seek ways of getting women colleagues to take a full share of working with such parents – i.e. it is important to change some parental perspectives and stereotypes.

Although most of the men did not feel that their gender had any relevance to their position as principal, a small number did feel that they had suffered from sexist stereotyping as a male, particularly in relation to the role of deputy principal where some men perceived a bias for women, believing that schools tend to seek a balanced senior management team. The statistics of men and women deputies do not bear out this perception.

As mentioned above, the women principals were more likely than the men to feel that they have to 'prove themselves' and to believe that they have to work harder than men to 'earn' their place. Many referred to the long hours of work that they were prepared to undertake. The need to work harder is fuelled by the stereotypes about women being distracted by their domestic commitments and by their own expectations that they must live up to, or even exceed the performance of a male head:

> Not allowed to make mistakes, judged more harshly than men, more is expected of you, you have to be efficient and nice.
>
> Women need to be twice as calm as their male counterparts and demonstrate their toughness in difficult situations and in a crisis.

Most women felt that gender was relevant to proving their worth, and most of their comments were about the stereotyped views attached to a woman in a leadership position. The women who reacted most strongly about proving their worth were those whose femaleness was most apparent, that is those who were married and had children and those who were heads of co-ed rather than all girls' schools. Being perceived as responsible for a family helps to shape stereotypes about women and what is appropriate work for them. Shakeshaft (1989) concluded from her research findings that:

> Thus home and family responsibilities provide obstacles for women in administration in two ways: the woman not only must effectively juggle all of her tasks, she must also contend with the bulk of male school board presidents and superintendents who erroneously believe that not only is she unable to manage the balancing act but that it is inappropriate for her to even attempt it. (p. 113)

Most of the women felt the need to break away from domestic role stereotyping and consequently underplayed the domestic part of their lives to display their commitment to their work:

> As a Deputy I had to make a conscious effort not to do what was expected, e.g. always make the coffee for the (otherwise all male) SMT meeting. It was

> quite difficult … as they demonstrated such a high level of planned incompetence, but we got there in the end.
>
> Work extra long hours, not take time off for my own health or my children's, take on extras like conference work.

In general, the identification of women with domestic tasks and childcare seems to enhance the essentialist stereotype which places women as 'carers' rather than managers and leaders. Small and in themselves, unimportant incidents continually reinforce this stereotype. It was quite usual for visitors to automatically presume that the female principal was the secretary or of lower status to an accompanying male:

> I have worked as a head with male deputies - it is always assumed I am the secretary or at best a deputy by first-time callers who don't know the school. (female principal)

A man commented that:

> I worked as a deputy with a woman head and on more than one occasion when we attended conferences together it was assumed I was the head.

The view that women in leadership roles have to be better than a man to get the job was endorsed by a large number of the women heads. The following common perceptions are illustrated by quotations from the women principals.

Women are expected to work harder:

> Working harder and being more efficient than anyone else.
>
> I always felt that I had to be first into school and last to leave. (I still do!)

Women are expected to work better:

> You have to be seen to be twice as good as male colleagues.

Women are expected to please everyone:

> By working harder than anyone. By juggling the demands of home with school and trying to do the 'right thing' by everyone.

Women are expected to give birth in off-duty hours:

> Providing superhuman commitment, energy and hours either side of maternity leaves!
>
> (Coleman, 2002, p. 85)

In my surveys I asked both women and men about their experience of sexism and discrimination, both at the time of appointment and in relation to their work as principals. Two thirds of the women, particularly those in co-ed schools, those who were married and had children said that they had experienced sexism. The younger principals reported experiencing sexism more often than their older colleagues (see table 1) despite changing legislation and attitudes. It may be that the younger principals were more sensitised than their older peers to such attitudes.

Not all of the women reported sexism and discrimination. There is a tendency for women who have been successful in their career to disregard such attitudes as irrelevant to them. The heads I interviewed were dismissive and talked about just

getting round barriers if they met them. American research with nineteen women in educational management reported similar findings:

> All women reported their femaleness made a difference in their jobs, yet only two principals noted behaviours which they labelled 'discriminatory', although several women reported examples of differential treatment such as, 'they have been less than accepting of me because I am a woman.' How can we make sense out of the fact that they received differential treatment, yet deny the fact of personal discrimination? (Schmuck and Schubert, 1995, p. 282)

Table 2: Percentage of women principals stating that they had experienced sexism in applications

Descriptor	Percentage
Over 50 years of age	61.5
Under 50 years of age	64.5
Heads of girls' schools	54.3
Heads of other schools	67.8
Children	67.4
No children	57.1
Married	63.4
Single	56.3
Separated	76.9
Divorced	63.0

Some of the examples of sexism related to earlier experiences in applying for a range of jobs, including head of department and deputy head. Despite the fact that equal opportunities legislation has been in place since the 1970s, there are many examples of sexism reported in the survey that could easily have justified legal action. The quotations in Table 3 below are taken from women principals.

Table 3: Types of discrimination experienced by women principals at the time of application

Type	Example
Overt discrimination	"The headmaster wouldn't even consider appointing a woman to this post."
Direct discrimination	"Told I would have to be better than the male applicants."
Sexual harassment	"Groped by an interviewer over lunch" comment on "my long legs and pretty face."
Indirect discrimination	"The sportsmen have the real advantage." "Governors wanted to go back on the appointment of a female head when she discovered she was pregnant."
Prevailing social values	"I am still receiving post addressed 'headmaster'." "Not applied to me personally, but a general atmosphere that some jobs including headship are for men."

(Coleman, 2002, p. 47)

Once established as principals, the women were strongly aware that men found difficulty in dealing with female leaders, for example:

> I inherited a school with a good number of staff who didn't want a female head. The secretary and caretaker threatened to resign, some male teachers made it clear they didn't want a woman telling them what to do (female principal).

Men were also aware of this stereotype:

> When first appointed as a head of physics with a female head of science it was apparent that they expected me to recent having a woman above me (male principal).

Difficulties for women principals working with male colleagues occurred more with older men, with colleagues who had been passed over for promotion and in gaining the confidence of a predominantly male senior management team. The women also experienced difficulties with their role in regional meetings, and were particularly aware of their isolation as women leaders in the Local Education Authority (LEA).

> A very 'male' attitude exists at headteachers' level in the area, it is apparent at heads' meetings. The LEA [(which I greatly value) is very male dominated in many respects.
>
> An LEA officer (senior) tickled my neck once in County Hall! He didn't do that to any of the others (all men). I intend to one day point this out to him but I'll choose my moment.
>
> Secondary Heads' meetings in that authority were painful in the extreme at first, an old boys' club of really unreconstructed men in waistcoats -- I felt completely marginalised. But they too were capable of change ….

(Coleman, 2002, p. 80)

The men were asked the same questions as the women, and in relation to sexism they usually commented on what they had seen women experience. A few did feel that they had experienced discrimination as men, mainly if they had applied to be head of a girls' school, or if they felt that a woman was preferred as deputy head in the interests of getting a male/female balance at this level. There was also the rare comment that related to the concept of the dominant type of hegemonic masculinity, (Collinson and Hearn 2000), raising the question of gender discrimination against males who do not conform to a stereotype, as well as females:

> People make assumptions about male behaviour and about how males will operate. Men who are unconventional face prejudice. (male principal)

However, this was an isolated example of one man feeling discomfort because of stereotypes related to male gender.

Table 4: Types of male experience of discrimination

Awareness of discrimination against women	"Some schools with male dominated management and a determination to maintain this."
Positive discrimination for women (SMT balance and women heads for girls' school preferred)	"Some posts where it became clear that a female appointee was required."
Discrimination against men who do not conform	"Men who are unconventional face prejudice."

(Coleman, 2002, p. 48)

One factor that impinges on the gendered experience of principals is that quite a large number of the women secondary principals (approximately one third of all the women) were heads of all girls' schools. As such they were less likely to report experience of sexism and discrimination, as both men and women felt that women were generally preferred for all girls' schools.

> Then I applied for an all-girls' school, which I had not done previously. This immediately brought me my first interview and I got the job. At my first Secondary Heads' Meeting I realised that I was the only women secondary head in that Borough – there was, after all, only one girls' school! (female head)

The statistics bear out the fact that women are preferred for girls' schools; very few men are heads of such schools. However, being principal of a girls' school carries with it a possible disadvantage for the women, as they were seen as having less relevant and important experience in a single-sex school.

> I've never got anywhere with applications for co-ed schools, but I have always been in girls schools, therefore 'limited' experience! (female head)

No such experience of being seen as 'limited' was reported by men who worked in boys' schools.

Positive aspects of being a woman principal

The stereotyping of leaders as male does perversely benefit the women who break the mould and take on the role of principal. There is a surprise element about being a woman in a man's role that can bring positive outcomes. The women relish their power and status and their ability to deal with situations in unorthodox ways - as women. They feel less constrained than their male colleagues by stereotypes about how a (male) leader should behave, for example in dealing with situations where men might be expected to be aggressive.

> Men (staff or parents) are less aggressive – they don't have to maintain their 'macho' image with me.

> Angry teenage boys are not threatened by a woman – reason can prevail before the discipline.

> Avoidance of confrontation. Ability to be myself rather than play the role of 'headmaster'. I'm glad to be a woman in this job.

They felt free from the normal stereotypes surrounding principals. They considered this freedom to be hugely advantageous. As one of them told me:

> Because there is no stereotype for women [heads] you can be more relaxed, it is not so stressful.

Some felt being female allowed them to ask for help more easily, or that they were: "less afraid of admitting ignorance or being tentative".

They reported having an easier relationship with other women (staff and mothers) and girls. This may be particularly useful with relationships with parents, as contact is often through the mother. The fact that some of the principals are mothers themselves and can understand the difficulties that parents and female staff may face is also an advantage. Some felt that they were able to bring benefits from their experience at home to their career in school:

> As a mum as well, I can see issues from a parental viewpoint. [Headship involves] similar skills to running a busy household with five in the family.
>
> Most teachers are women, most heads of department at my last school were women (married and mothers), we understand the demands of family/parenthood/career and shared and supported each other.

Several of the principals referred to the particular skills of women in times of heightened emotion, and their ability to empathise with others. This was mentioned in relation to traumas like the death of a pupil or in cases of abuse. Again, they felt free of the 'male' stereotype of leader:

> It's easier to deal with emotions and to show feelings.
>
> I can touch children of either sex (a hug when upset) without people suggesting ulterior motives.
>
> (female heads)

The unusual aspect of being a woman in a male role can definitely be an advantage, particularly outside the school. A new government pilot scheme might require a balance of men and women, or the selectors might be more aware of women who stand out from the crowd of men. As a result:

> I do tend to be invited to working groups as the 'woman'.
>
> Because we are in a minority, I feel officers in the county make a conscious effort to involve us in county initiatives.
>
> It opens opportunities for my own development because there are so few female headteachers. Achievements are more readily noticed/recognised by colleagues within education for the same reason.

This advantage lies in the women being perceived as different by gatekeepers who are predominantly male. Favouring women as rarities is unlikely to increase the numbers of women principals or in other positions of power and may result in some women resenting the entry of more women into senior roles. The ‘queen bee’ syndrome is recognised amongst women in power (Schmuck and Schubert, 1995, Blackmore,1999).

In a society where men hold most of the power, some of the heads admitted to deliberately playing up their sexuality and attractiveness to further the school's interests.

> The Chief Education Officer is susceptible to feminine charm.
>
> With older men, I deliberately use appalling wiles.
>
> I'm a hypocrite! I use feminine tactics to get my own way – especially with the governors – as they are the ones who like a stereotypical image!
>
> (female heads)

So we return to the identification of women with their sexual role and in particular to the inter-relationship of family and work life. How does the role of principal impact on the domestic life of women and men?

The impact of being a principal on the family life of men and women

The most obvious difference between the men and women principals is that the vast majority of the male principals are married (over 95 percent) and have children, but that marriage and children are very much less common amongst the women of whom only about two thirds are married and half have a child.

Table 5: Marital status of female principals under and over 50 years of age

Marital status	Under 50	50 and over	All
Married	70.6	64.1	67.2
Single	18.5	19.9	19.5
Separated	3.2	2.9	3.3
Divorced	7.7	13.1	10.0

The difference between the younger and older female married principals lies more in the proportion that are divorced than in the proportion who remained single. There are considerably more broken marriages amongst the women than the men of whom only 1.5 percent are divorced and one percent separated. This difference seems to indicate a greater strain on marriage for women principals than for men principals perhaps because of their tendency to be married to other professional high flyers:

> Exposure to stress at work can create tension within marriage, due to negative moods and preoccupation at home, so it can be argued that the potential for tension is greater when there are two stressful jobs. (Lewis, 1994 p. 234)

Whether single, divorced or separated, a third of women principals live alone in comparison to the five percent of the men who do so. The figures for all managers in the UK are similar to those for the principals (Davidson and Cooper, 1992).

When it comes to having children there is an even greater difference in the experience of the men and the women. Over 94 percent of the male principals have a child or children compared to only 51.7 percent of the women. The fact that nearly half the women are childless contrasts with a figure of about 20 percent for the female population overall (Office of National Statistics, 2001). An interesting finding was that the proportion of women under 50 who have children is much lower (statistically significantly so) than for the women over 50, but the numbers of men having children hardly differs between the two age groups.

> Women 50 or over with a child or children 61.6 %
> Women up to 50 with a child or children 44.4%

It looks as if many of the younger women principals are choosing not to have children, in spite the existence of maternity leave which guarantees job security for women taking the statutory break. Maternity leave does nothing to help the women who return to work with the demands of the responsibility for a family in addition to maintaining their management role at work.

There is no doubt that the difficult job of being a principal did impact on the family life of both men and women. One male principal commented:

> Within my marriage arrangement the ‘man’ has the public career. I could not do what I do without my wife. In a real sense it takes two people (seven if you include my children) to do my job. All of us have made great sacrifices. Time will tell whether we have been wise. PS not one of my children has the slightest interest in being a teacher. (male principal)

The remark that it took two people to do the job of principal probably reflects the experience of many of the men, but very few of the women.

Responsibility for children

The job of being principal is undoubtedly a 'greedy' one with most of the women and men principals rating 'hard work' as one of the reasons for their success. However, those women that were married with children and the men principals who were almost all married with children experienced their responsibilities for work and home very differently.

Both the men and women were asked about the work of their partner. In most cases the men had wives or partners who had subjugated or delayed their career so that they could bear the major responsibility for domestic responsibilities and childcare. The women principals did not have this option. Only three of the partners of women principals were identified as house husbands and most of the women had used a combination of child-minders, nursery or nanny for childcare.

Table 6: Nature of childcare adopted by the principals

	Women %	Men %
Child-minder	49.7	27.2
Nursery	27.1	8.3
Relative	19.2	10.0
Husband/wife	3.8	70.9
Nanny	20.5	2.9

The tension involved with work demands and the care of children meant that many women expressed guilt:

> I suffered – not the children.

One principal vividly expressed her guilt about working during her daughter's babyhood and childhood:

> One of the fears I had in my mind of course was that she might be damaged by the terrible life I'd given her. And until she was quite grown up, I used to wonder whether she would be damaged. (female principal, quoted in Coleman, 1996a, p. 328)

Worries about the welfare of children were not confined to the female principals, but the men did not see the problems in terms of their own guilt. The following comments are from male principals:

> concerns for our daughter having to adjust to changes in circumstances owing to child-minder variations.
>
> Moving to different areas of the country, had to build new network – no assistance.

Responsibility in the home

The burden of domestic responsibilities was very different for the women and men principals. Almost all the men were married whilst about a third of the women were not. For the women principals who were married, most of their husbands/partners were also in demanding jobs (about 60 percent in education). There was some evidence of sharing particularly in the responses of the younger women principals, although the older women had tended to take the main responsibility in the home.

Most of the cases where the husband/partner took a lead were where that partner had retired.

Table 7: Sharing domestic responsibilities with husband/partner
(Responses of women principals)

	All	Under 50	50 or over	Children	No children
More responsibility taken by the respondent	43.4	40.2	46.9	47.5	36.6
Responsibility shared 50/50	38.0	41.7	33.1	34.8	43.0
More responsibility taken by husband/partner	18.7	18.1	20.0	17.6	20.4

(Coleman, 2002, p. 64)

The responses of the male principals were very different indicating a much more traditional pattern with the domestic responsibility normally being taken by the wife/partner.

Table 8: Sharing domestic responsibilities with wife/partner
(Responses of men principals)

	All	Under 50	50 or over
More responsibility taken by the respondent	2.5	2.2	2.8
Responsibility shared 50/50	24.4	20.4	27.7
More responsibility taken by Wife/partner	73.1	77.3	69.5

(Coleman, 2002, p. 65)

The small number of male principals taking more responsibility are those individuals who were widowed or whose wife was an invalid.

The wife/partner of the male principal generally tended to take major responsibility for the domestic tasks. The 73.1 percent of cases in the survey, matches the findings of Davidson and Cooper (1992. p. 142) who report that 73 percent of women in the UK do nearly all the housework and that men in dual-career families have an average of six hours more spare time at weekends than do their wives (Davidson and Cooper, 1992, p. 142). Burke and McKeen (1994, p. 67) report that for dual-career couples, the women average 30 extra days per year of ‘second shift’work compared to their husbands or partners.

In most circumstances the responsibility for domestic arrangements is more likely to fall on the woman. Lewis (1996, p. 7) points out that:

> Initiatives such as childcare assistance enable women to act and succeed as surrogate men, putting in long hours of work and acting as though they have no primary responsibilities for family. This does not challenge beliefs and values about traditional ways of working and about the interdependence of work and personal lives.

Career decisions

The women principals who were married were more likely to be operating in a dual career household than their male colleagues. The younger women principals and those that were childless appear to be in relationships where it is relatively common for them and their partners to give each career equal weight. It was almost equally common for them to be prepared to move to follow their partner in a job change.

Table 9: Moving to follow partner (women principals)

	All	Under 50	50 or over	Children	No children
Principal changing jobs to follow husband/partner	37.7	30.0	47.4	41.5	31.8
Husband/partner changing jobs to follow principal	22.5	26.2	16.4	19.5	24.7

The male principals were generally in more traditional households where it was rare for the woman's career to take precedence.

Table 10: Moving to follow partner or operating two households (men principals)

	All	Under 50	50 or over
Principal changing jobs to follow wife/partner	1.8	2.2	1.4
Wife/partner changing jobs to follow principal	49.0	48.6	49.3

A picture emerges of two basic models for principals' households, one for the women and one for the men, although there were differences between the households of the younger and older women principals.

In the households of the married women principals, particularly the younger ones, the partners tended to have similar careers, and domestic responsibilities were to some extent shared. However, it was notable that even though the older women were in dual career households, they still carried the main domestic responsibility. In the other model, that of the men principals, the domestic pattern was traditional, with the man's job taking precedence over his partner's and with little sharing of domestic responsibilities.

So far we have been concentrating on the ways in which the life of the women and men principals was different.

Women are conscious of having to explain their position as leaders in schools, with the possible exception of all girls' schools, where a female principal is more the norm. Women feel that they have to justify themselves as leaders and are likely to meet with gender based resentment from colleagues and staff. Women principals are less likely to be married or have children than their male counterparts. If they are married they may feel that it is necessary to play down the domestic aspects of their lives, although at the same time they are quite likely to be taking major responsibility for childcare and other domestic arrangements.

We are now going to move away from the differences experienced by men and women principals and concentrate on the similarities that were found in their reported leadership and management styles.

A gendered leadership style?

The dualism that underpins gender stereotypes affects perceptions of how women and men lead and manage. Women are stereotyped as nurturing, caring, kind and probably rather soft in their approach. The alternative stereotype for men is that they are aggressive, decisive, firm and probably an authority figure. Gray (1993) used these stereotypes for discussion in the training of principals in England. I presented his list of stereotyped qualities to the principals in my surveys without identifying them

as being feminine or masculine, asking which of the qualities they perceived themselves as having.

How the principals perceived themselves in terms of gender paradigms

Table 11: Qualities identified from male and female paradigms of Gray (1993)

Quality	Women	Men
	% who felt they had this particular quality	
Female paradigm		
Aware of individual differences	86.0	84.0
Caring	79.4	84.2
Intuitive	76.2	66.0
Tolerant	68.7	79.6
Creative	63.0	54.1
Informal	59.4	60.4
Non-competitive	21.5	17.0
Subjective	13.8	13.3
Male paradigm		
Evaluative	61.1	70.0
Disciplined	60.4	51.0
Competitive	50.6	57.3
Objective	50.6	61.7
Formal	14.9	18.2
Highly regulated	13.2	11.4
Conformist	10.9	13.6
Normative	4.0	7.0

The outcomes show considerable similarity in the ways that the women and men saw themselves as leaders. There are only small differences, and sometimes these run counter to intuitive expectations, for example more men than women identified themselves as caring and tolerant and more women than men identified themselves as disciplined. Men were more likely than women to identify themselves as having the masculine qualities, but overall both men and women favoured the feminine qualities. Men do not see themselves in terms of the traditional male leadership stereotype. Some of the comments made by individual male principals bear this out. There were limited examples of men who had overtly rejected what they saw as a stereotypical male management style and adopted a very different and more 'feminine' style, which sometimes led to difficulties. For example men principals stated:

> It may have been a disadvantage to arrive as head in a very 'male/macho' school and try to change the ethos.
>
> I used very particular 'female' traits to improve relationships at the school and engender trust and respect. I followed a very 'male' headteacher!

These comments echo the call of Collinson and Hearn (1996, 2000) and others for a re-assessment of men in management and for the concept of a masculine style to be replaced by one of 'masculinities'.

Internal validation for the responses to the gender paradigms was provided by asking the principals to provide unprompted three adjectives that they felt best described their leadership style. All the adjectives together were grouped into the following categories:

1. A collaborative style of management; e.g. consultative, open, participative (feminine).

2. A people-oriented style of management; e.g. team related, supportive, caring. (feminine).

3. An autocratic/directive style of management: e.g. decisive, firm, strong (masculine).

4. An efficient style of management; e.g. energetic, focused, hands on, planning (masculine).

5. A values style of management; e.g. visionary, fair, honest, trusting (neutral).

Table 12 Styles of management identified by adjectives chosen

	Women		Men	
	No. of words	% of total	No. of words	% of total
Collaborative	458	38.5	401	40.0
People oriented	283	23.8	212	21.3
Autocratic/directive	177	14.9	119	11.9
Efficient	139	11.6	126	12.7
Values	132	11.1	138	13.9

The majority of both men and women chose 'feminine' adjectives. There were relatively few differences between the men and the women overall.

The women were slightly more likely to choose words that related to people, but also those words categorised as directive and autocratic (masculine). It was particularly the older women who chose such words, raising the question of whether they had become more autocratic as they got older, or whether they had been appointed at a time when women had to be more 'masculine' if they were to be successful. Only a small minority of both men and women chose the more 'masculine' adjectives and also the 'gender neutral' values adjectives.

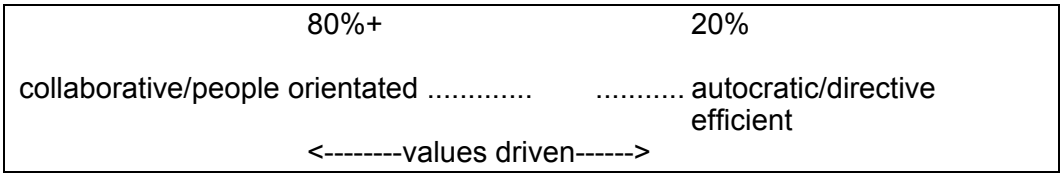
In choosing their adjectives, it is quite likely that the principals were aware that being collegial is now considered the preferred style for principals (Wallace, 1989; Bush 1995) and that they should try to move towards that style. In a review of leadership theory, Leithwood et al (1999) state that transformational leadership is seen as the one most likely to:

> offer a comprehensive approach to leadership that will help those in, and served by, current and future schools respond productively to the significant challenges facing them.
>
> (Leithwood et al, 1999, p. 21).

Men in particular may be consciously attempting to take on this more 'feminine' style of leadership now that it is normatively approved.

Overall, the favoured styles of the majority of the principals, male and female is ‘collaborative’ and/or ‘people-orientated’, that is they see themselves as operating within a 'feminine' stereotypical range with only a small minority of principals operating in a more typically 'masculine' way and choosing either an 'efficient' style or a directive/autocratic style. The ‘values' adjectives do not seem to be linked with either of these two basic types.

Figure 1: Spectrum of styles of management



There is a pervasive stereotype which identifies management and leadership with maleness but it is a stereotypical masculinity which does not align with the way that most men and most women principals see themselves as operating. The idea that men work in certain ways and women in others is obviously not the case. Presenting either stereotype does a disservice to both sexes, but the dominance of the male stereotype of a tough leader and the female stereotype of a caring leader does more damage to women:

> Presenting women as a homogeneous category recycles the modernist storyline that women, because of their differences, even in leadership, merely complement men.
>
> (Blackmore, 1999, p. 58)

The preferred mode of leadership of both men and women appears to be collaborative and people-centred, but:

> There is no ungendered experience, only experiences of men and women of different sexuality, race and ethnicity. Ultimately such dualisms maintain unequal power relations.
>
> (Blackmore, 1995, p. 53)

Despite similar styles, the men are seen as being in the 'correct' place and the women as challenging the norm.

Conclusion

The data presented indicate that the role of leader of a secondary school, is still seen as being naturally a male one, and that a woman in the role therefore deals with prejudice. Gender in the context of leadership is seen to be a woman's problem and gender discrimination is much more likely to be perceived by women than by men.

In the introduction to the paper, I indicated that we might reflect on three areas:

- the equity implications of the data;
- that there still exists a stereotypical if outdated norm of leadership that endorses masculinity and therefore the male leader;
- the implications of the findings for work-life balance of principals and other educational leaders.

I would now like to turn to the first of these, the equity implications.

Despite equal opportunities legislation and a profession that is numerically dominated by females, women are still at a disadvantage in becoming leaders. The figures quoted at the beginning of the paper bear this out. Although there is a trend of a slow increase in the proportion of women leaders, there is not a dramatic change.

The surveys indicate that being a woman and a principal is a very different experience from being a man and a principal. The evidence of sexist attitudes from colleagues

and peers is strong and women leaders face stereotypical presumptions about their abilities from staff, governors, parents and students. This paper has focussed on women, but many of the findings about stereotypes could equally apply to leaders from minority ethnic groups. The small number of women heads in my survey who were from an ethnic minority commented on the double difficulties they faced in overcoming both gender and racial stereotypes with staff and parents in particular.

Legislation is insufficient to overcome deep-rooted stereotypes. Even if numbers of women leaders continue to increase, the dominant image of the leader and manager is of a male. Therefore women who take on the role of principal are constantly dealing with the inherent contradiction of being in a powerful position but at the same time not being what is expected. It is difficult to see what can be done to remedy cultural norms that are so persistent.

The second area for reflection is the stereotypical and outdated norm of leadership that seems to exist as a back cloth for the work of principals and other leaders. Both male and female principals are aware of the stereotypes about leadership held within their role set who seem to expect an authoritarian and traditional figure. Such a stereotype automatically acts against women, who by virtue of gender do not conform to what is a basically male blueprint.

There is another side to this stereotype which can favour women. Many of the women principals saw advantages in being a women principal because they were different and freed from the constraints of the masculine stereotype. They felt freer than their male colleagues some of whom resented this out of date image of the tough male leader. Although male principals may see themselves as caring and tolerant, this is not the image stereotypically held by parents, students or governors. So the men are in some ways also trapped by a stereotype of male dominance. Blackmore (1999, p. 209) points out that:

> the continued association of strong leadership with hard masculinity provides no alternative conceptualizations of masculinity for those men who seek leadership, but who, as many women do, reject the values of competitiveness, coercion and control and seek to reconceptualise leadership in more socially just and inclusive ways.

Men and women and the schools that they lead will benefit from the abandonment of the out of date conception of authoritarian leadership.

The third area for reflection was that of work-life balance. There is no doubt that being a principal or any other leader in education is a demanding role that will take an emotional and physical toll through the day to day demands of working with large numbers of staff and students and through the long hours that are entailed. These constraints apply to both men and women, but the difficulties of carrying out the job without the support of a partner who subsumes their own career interests put an additional burden on many women, who are still likely to take on the weight of overall domestic responsibilities. The difficulties of balancing work and home apparently have an impact on women who become principals. They are less likely to marry but when they do, are more likely to experience a break down of marriage and are much less likely to have children than their male peers. Presumably many women are deterred from applying for leadership roles in view of the obvious difficulties of successfully balancing the work of a principal with a fulfilling family life. The women principals in my survey are most likely to put their success down to hard work and to the adoption of a traditionally 'male' pattern of work. At the beginning of the twenty-first century it may be time for a radical reassessment of work patterns and expectations of leadership in education.

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