

Gender and educational leadership in England: A comparison of secondary head teachers' views over time

Abstract

In the context of gender being a barrier to accessing leadership, this paper presents a comparison of the views of men and women head teacher (principals) of secondary schools in England in the 1990s and in 2004. The same survey instrument was used on both occasions.

The perceptions of the head teachers show change in some areas and no change in others. Overall, women are more likely to become head teachers and are now less likely to be categorised into pastoral roles, but in some cases women still meet prejudice from governors and others in the wider community. Women head teachers are more likely to have partners and children than in the 1990s, sharing equally or carrying most of the domestic responsibilities, whereas male colleagues are most likely to have partners who take the majority of responsibility in the home.

Essentialist stereotypes about women and men as leaders still prevail, although both the women and men head teachers see themselves as adopting a traditionally 'feminine' style of leadership. Women head teachers are likely to see some benefits in being a woman in a role stereotypically associated with men. However, there has been an increase in the proportion of women who feel that they have to prove their worth as a leader, and this may be linked with increased levels of accountability in schools.

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Introduction

Gender is just one of the ways in which individuals can be marginalised in accessing and exercising leadership but its influence and impact is pervasive both through time and across national borders. In particular women leaders may be seen as 'outsiders', as leadership is unconsciously identified with men (Schein, 1994, 2001). There is a stereotype of hegemonic masculinity that consciously and unconsciously influences our expectations of what a leader 'should' be. As a result, women, and others who do not correspond to the leader stereotype: male; heterosexual; white; middle class, may feel and be perceived by others as outsiders in a leadership role. Studies of leadership and gender in education in a range of countries have identified similar gender barriers. For example in the UK (Acker, 1994, Coleman, 2002, Evetts, 1994, Hall 1996, Ouston, 1993, Ozga, 1993), in the Netherlands, (Kruger, 1996, Ruijs, 1996), in Australia (Blackmore, 1989, 1999), in the USA (Grogan, 1996, Shakeshaft, 1989, Schmuck, 1996), in Israel (Oplatka, 2001, Addi-Racah, and Ayalon, 2002), South Africa (Chisholm, 2001), the West Indies (Morris, 1999) and wider studies in Africa and Asia (Davies, 1990, 1998). The question of whether women lead differently from men has been explored and largely rejected on grounds of essentialism (for example Gold, 1993, Hall, 1996, Blackmore, 1999, Coleman 2002).

This paper considers how the perceptions on gender and leadership of women and men secondary head teachers/principals in England have changed over the last decade. The focus is on England, but most of the factors reviewed are applicable internationally (see above). Gender is a key factor denoting a leader as an 'outsider' and it is the factor on which the paper focuses here. However, findings may have resonance for other groups who are perceived as outsiders, for example on the basis of ethnicity or sexuality (Lumby with Coleman, 2007).

The comparison of the perceptions of the head teachers about gender and leadership are drawn from two rounds of surveys, the first undertaken in the late 1990s: women in 1996 and men in 1998 (Coleman, 2000, 2001, 2002) and the second of both women and men in 2004 (Coleman, 2004, 2005a).

The context of the last ten years

The broad context for the years spanning the time covered by these surveys is one where women in the UK and elsewhere in the developed world have made some limited progress in accessing leadership positions. For example in England in 1997, 26 per cent of secondary principals were women in a teaching force that was 52 per cent women (DfES, 2004). In 2004 approximately one third of secondary principals in England were women although women then made up 56 per cent of the secondary teaching force (DfES 2006). The increase in the proportion of women reaching headship over the years between the surveys has therefore been against a background of increasing feminisation of the teaching workforce and where men still are proportionately much more likely to achieve leadership status than are women.

Equal opportunities legislation has provided a basis on which women and others who have faced discrimination are enabled to take a more equal part in all aspects of society. The awareness of work life balance issues means that there is more acceptance of the idea that men will play a meaningful role in the home and that some employers are adopting 'family friendly' policies. Such advances are endorsed by the UK government (Flexibility Limited, 2006). However, during the period covered by the surveys, culturally and politically, feminism has been in retreat with the majority of women denying that there is discrimination and unwilling to label themselves as 'feminist' (Howard and Tibballs, 2003, Oakley, 2002). A review of the progress of gender related legislation and its impact in Australia and Canada concluded that public attention to equity issues is no longer centred on gender but has moved on to race and sexualities (Gaskell and Taylor, 2002). Recent interviews with women at work in the UK (Hanman, 2006) indicates that they do not like the image of feminism, see feminists

as 'man-haters', and find feminism unfashionable, believing that admitting to being a feminist would be dangerous to their career prospects. Against this background of some positive changes for women but a growing negativity towards feminism, the paper sets out to compare responses to the two sets of surveys.

The surveys

The overall numbers and percentages of women and men secondary principals surveyed and their response rates are given below in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

The high response rates of the 1990s in comparison with the somewhat lower rates in 2004 may indicate both that principals are now less likely to respond to academic questionnaires due to increased work load, and that there is less interest and urgency in relation to gender in the later period.

The research has provided a repeat cross-section data set (Dex and Vignoles, 2007). That is, the data were derived from the same survey instrument used at different times, so although the respondents of the two surveys are not the same population, the perceptions of the earlier cohort of head teachers can be compared with the later group to examine change. Although a proportion of those who answered questionnaires on both occasions would have been the same people, it did not prove possible to identify them. However, those that answered both would have been in the older age-groups in the second round of surveys, where age appeared to make very little difference to the responses of the head teachers.

Key issues

The survey instrument was based on literature largely of the 1980s and 1990s (see above) that recognised that work and life were 'highly gendered' and looked at reasons why women

were less likely than men to become leaders in education. These studies reviewed in Coleman, (1994) identified the following broad factors:

- overt and covert discrimination against women at the time of appointment;
- women were believed to lack confidence in applying for promotion and were thought to be relatively hesitant in making career plans;
- women were stereotyped into 'caring' pastoral roles that were then not seen as fitting them for leadership;
- there were multiple difficulties for women in combining a family and career;
- essentialist stereotypes held that women are less likely to be good leaders than men e.g. they tend to be passive and gentle while men provide a preferable style of stronger and more decisive leadership.

Additional factors emerged from the first round of surveys (Coleman, 2002) and two are added to the list above:

- the importance of geography, in particular that women are more likely to be educational leaders in urban areas: the 'London effect';
- women reporting benefits in being the 'outsider' leader.

The findings from the surveys of the 1990s are reported more fully elsewhere (Coleman 2000, 2001, 2002) therefore this paper focuses more on the data from the 2004 survey comparing against the earlier surveys to present an overall picture of the extent and nature of change.

Overt and covert discrimination

In 2004, half of the women secondary heads said they had experienced discrimination in relation to applications and promotions. This represented a reduction from about two-thirds in the earlier survey. However, it was more obvious from the 2004 than the 1996 survey that some of the respondents appeared to be capable of holding conflicting and ambiguous views, stating that there was no discrimination whilst recalling actual examples of how they had experienced it. One woman said: 'too difficult to specify, just feelings/perceptions/manner of being talked down to, therefore I have said "no" [to a question asking if she had experienced sexism.]' This response of denial of discrimination whilst recounting examples of it certainly shows a lack of consciousness and may also reflect the current general distrust of being labelled a feminist. In Britain in the 1980s and 1990s, notably in the Inner London Education Authority, but also elsewhere, there were efforts at consciousness-raising in relation to gender and other equity issues that are not paralleled in the twenty first century. Deem and Morley (2006) found that there was a general lack of knowledge of social justice issues amongst staff of higher education institutions in contrast to the 1980s and 1990s, when union and pressure group action was seen to bring a 'radical edge and commitment to redistributive social justice'(p. 198).

The holding of ambiguous views and antipathy to feminism has been noted elsewhere. In a recent study of aspiring educational leaders in the USA, (Young and Mountford 2006) where efforts were made to raise the consciousness of the prospective leaders of gender issues, it was found that they exhibited a range of resistance techniques in relation to feminist positions. For example, distancing – the claim that although sexism may exist, it does not happen here. Another technique identified is opposition – the denial that discrimination exists any more, even sometimes 'flipping' the discrimination to claim that, for example, it is now men who are discriminated against whilst women are favoured. Similarly, Rusch and Marshall (2006) are working on a conceptualisation of 'gender filters' operated in educational leadership that includes denial, anger and 'posturing and intellectualising' (p. 235). Evidence

from the two rounds of surveys shows distancing and denial and these are more apparent in the 2004 study than in the earlier studies of the 1990s.

In both the 1990s and in 2004, those women who agreed that they had experienced discrimination (half in 2004, two-thirds in 1996), were most likely to link it to their domestic and family responsibilities reporting that interviewing panels showed concern that domestic responsibilities might impact on their ability to do their job. Although considerably less direct and indirect discrimination was reported in 2004 than in the earlier surveys, there remained a perception of a usually covert preference for male leaders, mainly on the part of governors in both primary and secondary schools.

I overheard governors talking at an interview saying that I could not get the job as they needed a man on the staff! I didn't get the job (woman in her late 30s).

In application for head teacher post in a boys' school, feedback from the school to a referee was about a governor not voting for me, as they can't have a woman heading up a boys' school. He was outvoted though and I was appointed (woman in her late 40s).

I was the only female on all male shortlist – a male got the job following a long line of male heads! LEA advice - Don't bother applying the governors won't appoint a woman (woman in her late 40s).

In 1996, the examples of overt and covert discrimination were vivid, often including memories of women old enough to have experienced working life before the Sex Discrimination Act. In 2004 reported discrimination tended to be less dramatic and more covert. Although only half of the women felt that they had experienced discrimination, there was an increased tendency for some of the respondents to use techniques of denial and other gender filters.

Career planning and confidence

There was little change in this area between the surveys. Women remain less likely to plan careers that include senior roles, and still appear to have less confidence in applying for promotion than their male colleagues. In both the 1996 and 2004 surveys about a quarter of the women heads stated that they had never planned to be head teacher, compared to a much smaller proportion of the men who said they had not planned. The situation does not seem likely to change as young women middle managers engaged in the course 'Leading from the middle' (Coleman, 2005b), who might be expected to have senior leadership ambitions, showed both a lack of clear career planning, aspiring to only the smallest of promotions, and demonstrated a belief that men are preferred for senior posts. The following comment illustrates this stance as well as indicating that this young woman had not really engaged with this issue previously:

If you are interviewed I think, I don't know why, the bloke gets the job, it's the confidence the presence; it's how we perceive people to be rather than what they are. It is a perception, someone will walk in – the impression is he will be able to deal with this, manage this. (woman middle manager, early 30s)

Women in both head teacher surveys were less likely to have planned their career than their male colleagues, who tended to have thought about senior leadership when they were young, even whilst still at school. This early planning was very rare amongst the women respondents. In both surveys a large minority of women and a slightly smaller proportion of men admitted that they had doubted their own ability to become a head teacher, but the belief that women have to be seen to be 'better than men' in order to get on is still prevalent amongst the women in particular.

The evidence indicates that there are underlying issues in relation to confidence and career planning that affect the way that both sexes plan and rate their chances of success with little change between the times of the two surveys.

Stereotyping into pastoral roles

The 2004 data showed a real change from the 1990s in that there was less evidence of women being 'steered' into pastoral posts with nearly as many men as women deputy heads having responsibility for pastoral and curriculum matters. This change probably shows a recognition amongst women who aspire to leadership roles as well as those who make appointments that a range of experience is necessary for a realistic application for headship.

[table 2 about here]

Although automatic gender stereotyping of jobs is less common than previously within the schools themselves, difficulties in accessing promoted posts are still likely to be affected by a climate where potential employers such as governors, who are likely to bring attitudes from the wider world of work, are perceived to prefer men in leadership roles.

Difficulties for women in combining family and career

There have been some marked changes in the proportion of women head teachers who are married or with a partner and who have children but little change for men over the span of the surveys.

[table 3 about here]

Although 63 per cent of the women in the survey of 2004 have a child or children, this is in comparison with 90 per cent of the men. It still seems to be the case that many women are opting for career routes other than headship or other senior posts because of the difficulties of combining such a responsible and demanding job with raising children. Apart from the many women who make a decision to place family first and fit their paid work round the family, broadly, there are three routes that women may take in relation to career planning and families:

Having children and deferring promotion;

'Choosing' not to have children and focussing on career;

Managing a dual career household with shared responsibilities.

Those who are ambitious may defer their career. For example an older woman candidate for 'Leading from the Middle' stated that: 'in terms of promotions I stopped looking at anything else when I had kids.' But she had now returned to actively pursue her career. Another identified the difficulties that women with children can face in schools:

Women teachers have difficulties with their work/life balance – there is no time off work for the kids. You cannot go back into teaching at the same level you were after the kids. People are less friendly than ever towards part-time work and job sharing – it makes life difficult for time-tablers etc.

(Coleman, 2005b)

Some women may opt to prioritise their career over family and 'choose' not to have children. This was more common in the 1990s when 67 per cent of the women principals were married or partnered and only 52 per cent had a child or children, in 2004 although the proportion of women who were married/partnered and had a child or children had increased, they were still much less likely to have a partner and children than their male colleagues. The survey did not include questions about sexuality, and the survey responses therefore will include those who are in same sex partnerships as well as those in heterosexual relationships.

Women head teachers were and are still likely to be working a 'double shift' (Acker, 1994, p. 183) particularly when they have children. Women heads who have children are much more likely to take more responsibility for child-care than their own partners whilst male colleague heads usually have partners who take major responsibility for home and family.

[table 4 about here]

Although in the time between the surveys there has been a reported shift towards more sharing of domestic responsibility and more responsibility being taken by the partners of the

women principals, the position for the men principals has stayed remarkably constant. In three-quarters of the households of the men head teachers, their wives or partners take the major responsibility for all domestic matters, whilst the partners of women heads take major responsibility in only just over thirty per cent of the homes. The way in which society is structured still means that women are likely to take on more domestic responsibility than men, and that bearing and raising children combined with career advancement cause particular tensions for women.

The head teachers were asked about the care of elderly relatives and in both sets of surveys about twenty per cent stated that they had responsibilities for (mainly) elderly parents. This tended to increase with the age of the respondents, and was reported by slightly more women than men.

Despite the difficulties, since 1996 there has been an increase in the proportion of women who are both head teachers and mothers. This is likely to be due to a range of factors, including the existence of maternity leave which will have changed expectations over the last twenty or thirty years on the part of both aspiring women and those who employ them. It may also be that at a time when there are recruitment and retention difficulties in relation to head teachers that appointing bodies have less choice and are therefore more likely to appoint women than previously. Even though more women are managing to combine career and family there is a real discrepancy in the allocation of domestic responsibilities and the levels of support that male head teachers and female head teachers report.

Essentialist assumptions about women as leaders

Leadership styles

Barriers to promotion are strongly linked to the perception of women primarily as carers and therefore as outsiders in the field of leadership: 'it is the link, between masculinity and rationality that ensures and sustains gender inequalities on all levels.' (Ross-Smith and

Kornberger, 2004 p. 299). This link may have taken on fresh sustenance from the current 'masculinist mode of the market with its technicist emphasis on systems and outcomes' (Reay and Ball, 2000, p. 156). Indeed the current policy context may impact more on women than men partly because of their visibility arising from their 'outsider' status as leaders (see below).

Underlying many of the theories of leadership and management, there are a number of binary divisions (e.g. Blake and Mouton, 1964). Feminine and masculine stereotypes of leadership are also basic expressions of a dualistic view, but serve to essentialise the ways that women and men lead. Whilst the traditional identification of leadership with stereotypical male attributes continues and is influential in public perceptions, these stereotypes are not helpful to women, as they define women's leadership as a deficit model. In addition the target driven, competitive environment that is now the norm in education may reinforce the traditional, stereotypical male model of leadership to the disadvantage of women leaders (Blackmore, 1999). There is actually a contradiction involved here, as feminine styles of leadership are more in keeping with those styles that now gain general approval, for example, the transformational leadership style (Leithwood, et al, 1999,).

Findings on leadership style only relate to the perceptions of the head teacher/principal, but in both rounds of surveys the norm that most men and women principals seem to aspire to is the 'feminine' style of management. When men and women were asked to sum up their leadership styles the most common adjectives that they independently produced were:

- open
- consultative
- collegiate
- supportive
- collaborative
- democratic
- coaching

The style of leadership indicated by these adjectives appears to be the most popular amongst men and women both in the 1990s and in 2004. In 2004 a small change was that adjectives that might be seen as more 'masculine' were chosen marginally more frequently than in the 1990s, and they were slightly more often chosen by women than men. Typical of these were:

- decisive
- determined
- visionary
- challenging
- authoritative
- strategic.

It might be speculated that the impact of British government policy can be seen by the nomination of words associated with national programmes of leadership training in particular the categorisation of styles of leadership. Hoyle and Wallace (2005, p. 103) note the 'specialist language' that has been developing in education over the last 20 years fuelled by policy and training courses heavily influenced by private sector management. For example the following words chosen freely by head teachers did not appear in the 1990s selections but were reasonably popular in 2004:

- inclusive
- affiliative
- coaching
- authoritative
- visionary

There are certainly no grounds for the assumption that women will choose 'feminine' adjectives and men 'masculine' adjectives. In fact there was a slight tendency for women to choose more masculine words possibly indicating that some still feel that to be leaders they should adopt an archetypal 'male' attitude. This is illustrated in the following section.

Being a leader: conforming to the (male) norm

One of the ways in which women cope with leadership roles and being perceived as an 'outsider' in leadership terms, is to try twice as hard to conform to the male model of career and the perceived male model of leadership. At least 80 per cent of women and men in all the surveys credited their career success to hard work and long hours rather than personal qualities or academic success.

The stereotypical male model of career involves putting work first at all times, and women may struggle to combine this attitude with having children. For example Smithson and Stockoe (2005, p. 160) talk about 'doing macho maternity' in extreme cases women taking off less than two weeks for maternity leave. The example is of women bank managers, but women head teachers in both surveys made similar points. A young woman head in her late 30s reported in 2004:

I was interviewed for headship one week after having my second child. I was breast-feeding in the car outside as no provision could be made in the school. Seriously I thought I must be mad!

Women heads also commented on taking off the minimum time for maternity leave through timing their babies to be born in the summer holidays. A woman secondary head in her late 40s commented in 2004 that she was: 'Personally determined that other staff would see my 110% commitment so my children probably suffered.' In the 1990s surveys there was probably more evidence of women saying that they tried to act as a role model to younger women, showing them that it was possible to combine motherhood and career. It was more common in the 1990s for women to take several years off for child-care, this had become very unusual by 2004 when the expectation was that women would take a relatively short maternity leave.

Being a leader: essentialist stereotypes

Just as half the women principals in 2004 felt that gender impacted on their access to leadership, about half of the women heads in 2004 had an awareness of gender as a negative factor when they are in role. Again this proportion was reduced from about two-thirds in the earlier survey. The fact remains that at least half the women secondary heads in the 2004 survey were aware of resentment and/or surprise from peers, colleagues and others in finding a woman in the position of head teacher. In particular those that come from 'outside' the school tend to be patronising. These are governors, parents and other visitors such as builders, although male teachers and male head teacher colleagues may also share an expectation that the head teacher 'should not' be female. Some of the women heads' perceptions indicate that there is a stereotype of hegemonic masculinity, a traditional, authoritative male head, against which they feel they are measured. In 2004, a woman head, still in her forties commented:

I was constantly challenged by male colleagues in the early years of headship and even described by a governor as 'a mere slip of a girl'. Members of the local community expressed their doubts as to whether I would succeed in the headship.

Women as 'outsider' leaders are also judged differently to men:

Within my LEA, there are situations in which I have had to push for the needs of my school and am seen sometimes as difficult where a male head is seen as firm and assertive, but I can live with it! (woman, early fifties)

Given these perceptions, the policy context of 'blame and shame' may make women heads feel particularly exposed. Moreau et al (2005, p. 40) interviewed women teachers who: 'All pointed to increased bureaucracy, demands for accountability – to pupils, parents and the state – and described the ways in which they felt their occupation had become driven by the need to demonstrate measurable outcomes.' In this climate, where their status as heads is

questioned anyway, it is likely that women leaders will be seen as responsible for problems in their schools because they are women. In 2004 over 70 per cent of women secondary heads felt that they had to prove their worth as a woman leader. This was ten per cent more than in the 1990s. Although the number of men who felt they had to prove their worth had also risen between the times of the two rounds of surveys, the more managerialist culture prevailing in 2004 did seem to take its toll of women more than men. As mentioned above, women as leadership outsiders tended to feel more exposed as leaders. The male respondents made no specific mention of the impact of policy initiatives but although they were not asked directly about this, a number of women referred directly or indirectly to pressure arising from current policy:

Leading a school from Special Measures. Governors had made it clear that they wanted a male head. Male governors I feel do put this kind of pressure on women (woman late forties).

One week into headship a male governor said: ' You've got one year to turn the school around or you're out' (woman early fifties).

So far in this paper the comparisons between the 1990s surveys and those of 2004 have been based on broad issues raised through an earlier literature search. However, two further issues that emerged from the 1990s survey are:

- the importance of geography, in particular that women are more likely to be educational leaders in urban areas, the 'London effect';
- women report benefits in being the 'outsider'.

The importance of geographical factors

Working with male head teacher colleagues presented challenges in 1996 and still does so, particularly in more conservative rural or shire communities. In both surveys it was notable that London had a greater proportion of women head teachers than the rest of the country. In 2004, 43 per cent of secondary heads in London and 40 per cent in Birmingham were women. It is likely that these women will have different experiences to the women who work in the South-West and North-West of England where they are 24 and 23 per cent respectively of all head teachers (Coleman, 2005a). Similar examples of women experiencing stereotypes and discrimination exist in both surveys, but in 2004, a woman head in her late forties, from one of the Shire Counties stated that:

My current LEA has several senior officers who treat me differently, as I am the only female secondary head in the LEA. This is a very serious issue that affects my working life.

Another reflected that she had been: 'frequently asked in Scotland how a woman would cope with being in charge, but in North East England attitudes were even worse!'

It has been suggested that a part of the heritage of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) has been the impact on equity that has gone some way to support women in leadership roles in the capital (Edwards and Lyons, 1994). London women in the surveys were less likely to mention experiences of sexism and discrimination than their colleagues elsewhere, particularly the Shire Counties, whilst, the possibly more sensitised London men were more likely to identify sexism amongst their male colleagues than men elsewhere in the country (Coleman, 2002, p. 147). London may have a particular heritage in relation to gender equity, but similar trends can be seen elsewhere in the world where an urban/rural split exists in relation to the appointment of women to leadership positions (Coleman et al, 1998).

Benefits of being the outsider

As well as negative experiences related to their gender, at least half of the women principals in 2004 considered that as 'outsider' leaders, their status carried benefits. This was a reduction from two thirds in 1996. In both surveys about 20 per cent of the men stated that their sex was an advantage to them as a leader. This relatively small proportion was despite a general recognition from men and women that men tend to be preferred for leadership. The reduction from 1996 to 2004 in the proportion of women identifying benefits from their femininity may relate to the fact that women no longer carry quite the same shock factor as leaders that they did in 1996 when women heads tended to be picked out to take part in any new scheme. Women in 1996 commented on being included in LEA and professional development initiatives simply because they were women. This was not reported to the same extent in 2004. There is a tension here as women who are seen as novelties experience some benefits. The novelty value decreases with the appointment of more women and so therefore do the benefits. There are well reported instances of women resenting other women's success (Matthews, 1995) which act as a testament to the wish of some successful women to maintain their special status in such circumstances.

Still in 2004, half the women considered their gender a benefit, but as in 1996, benefits relate to the power of males. In particular, the perception of the ability of a woman leader to 'defuse' the situation where males: boys, fathers or colleagues were angry. The women believed that as women, they could handle aggressive situations more easily than a man, who might feel that they had to stand up to anger and return aggression in kind. A further advantage they mentioned was that in a society where men are often the gatekeepers, they could exploit their femininity in order to obtain benefit for their school. The following comments are from women in their forties in 2004.

I can usually gain 'extras' and more discount when negotiating with male reps.

You can charm when necessary, e.g. when trying to raise £50,000 for specialist school sponsorship.

However, women also commented on the advantage they had in working with other women, particularly mothers and women teachers. Women heads commented:

Parents see you as a mother as well as a head, i.e. feel that you understand in difficult times.

Staff are able to talk to me about personal issues. Parents and children too I suppose.

In the earlier survey of the 1990s the women expressed how their gender seemed to give them freedom to operate in ways untrammelled by the sort of expectations that men heads may experience. In the 1990s, a woman head, talking about the relative freedom she experienced said:

Sometimes you can get away with things because you are a woman, because you are breaking new ground. I've worried about the amount of time I spend talking to staff, but it is one of the best ways of moving things on and giving them confidence. Because there is no stereotype for women [heads] you can be more relaxed, it is not so stressful. (Coleman, 1996, p. 172)

Some of the same relish in women's leadership and management is evident in what Chisholm (2001, p. 398) refers to as 'maternal feminism' with some women asserting, a 'version of the "strong woman" whose strength lies in her leadership qualities derived from motherhood'. Similarly, in describing female principals in Trinidad and Tobago, Morris, (1999, p. 347) mentions that: 'the values and beliefs that they brought with them to the task of managing their schools stemmed from their family influences as well as their educational and life experiences.' She interprets their attitudes through reference to the 'ethic of care' (Gilligan, 1982, Noddings, 1988).

However, women taking part in the 2004 study did not identify this sort of freedom in their leadership, and there are some indications that this has been reduced by the policy context of latter years. It may be that the stress on accountability, reaching targets and dealing with regular inspection has reduced the potential for any deviation from the expected norm for both women and men.

Conclusion

There are perception in England and elsewhere that gender problems have been overcome (Oakely, 2002). Women tend to deny that there is a problem whilst at the same time they are able to give examples of their own or others' experiences of discrimination. In research carried out for the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Howard and Tibballs (2003, p 7) concluded that:

Although there was little support for the idea that women, as a group, are unequal in society today, paradoxically, most women respondents felt that they had experienced discrimination, either directly or through family and friends. This is particularly true for young women, and women with families at home. The main concerns are a lack of support to combine work and family roles, and sexism – in their working, personal and social lives. Yet most women were reluctant to talk about these experiences as inequalities. Women may have less well paid jobs, or do much more domestic work, but people see this as a result of individual choice and natural gender differences, rather than bias in society as a whole.

Similar views emanated from the women principals in the surveys, although even in 2004 half of them (two thirds in 1996) did say that they had experienced some type of discriminatory behaviour. A difference in the experiences of the two cohorts of women was that in 1996 there was more general reporting of discrimination both inside and outside the school. In 2004 overt sexism was much less likely to appear in relation to career opportunities inside

schools, where most people seem to have accepted that women and men should be treated similarly in career terms. In 2004 discrimination and sexism was mainly reported in relation to those outside the school or at its margin. For example, members of the governing body who are responsible for the appointment of the head teacher, are still perceived as favouring men for the role. However, in 2004 there were still many examples of women reporting a very real gender bias from colleague heads and from their LEA. The reduction in the reporting of discrimination may be related to some real changes, but the ability of some of the women to report discrimination whilst at the same time denying that it exists does indicate a problem in relation to consciousness of gender equity issues. However, both sets of surveys seem to indicate that there is a difference between the metropolitan areas and the more rural or suburban areas in relation to the climate for women leaders.

Although more women were managing to be both mothers and head teachers in 2004 than in 1996, the difficulties faced by women in combining career and family remain basically the same over the last ten years with many more women than men principals opting to remain single and/or childless or being divorced. Whilst the vast majority of male principals are married or have a partner and have a child or children, a large minority of women principals do not. The expectation that women will take maternity leave rather than having a more extended career break may not in itself have been helpful to women, as it has fuelled the expectation that women will take only short breaks for childbirth and childcare. Although women principals are a little more likely to be helped by their partners in their domestic life than they were in 1996, the same proportion of men principals (around 70 per cent) hand over all or most of the domestic concerns to their partners. Only two per cent of the men take more responsibility than their partners for domestic affairs against over 40 per cent of the women principals.

Stereotypes identify women as nurturing, and stereotypes place them in the home. The combination supports the idea that men are often seen as more 'natural' leaders. However, the findings of both rounds of survey showed that the men and women more or less equally rate themselves as mainly 'feminine' in their leadership style.

Most women leaders feel that they have to prove themselves as leaders and the managerialist accountability of latter years may have enhanced that, with ten per cent more of women (70 per cent) feeling that they have to prove themselves in 2004 than in 1996. Women head teachers, sometimes playing up their femininity may feel that they have advantages as women. However, this is mainly in the context of there being 'male gatekeepers' who are holding the power. The positive experience of 'freedom' in being a female principal is less common in 2004 than it was in 1996.

Overall, there is a slow trend of improvement in equity for women within the institution and within the home, but underlying this there remains a patriarchal power structure fuelled by stereotypes and preconceptions which are slow to wither away which may even be bolstered by the current managerialist target oriented culture of schools.

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Table 1 Sample and response rates of surveys of head teacher/principals in England

	Women 1996	Men 1998	Women 2004	Men 2004
Number	670	670	490	490
Sample of whole population	100%	25%	50%	20%
Response rate	70%	60%	56%	40%

Table 2 Curriculum and pastoral responsibilities as a deputy head for women and men

%

	Women 1996	Men 1998	Women 2004	Men 2004
Curriculum	54	77	76	82
Pastoral	38	14	56	51

Table 3 Partnerships and children %

	1990s		2004	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
With partner	67	95	78	96
Separated	3	1	2	1
Single (and widowed)	19	1	11	1
Divorced	11	2	9	2
Having a child or children	52	94	63	90

Table 4 Sharing domestic responsibilities with partner % (secondary principals)

	1990s		2004	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
More responsibility taken				
by the respondent	43	4	33	2
Responsibility shared 50/50	38	24	35	26
More responsibility taken by				
partner	19	73	32	72

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