Representations of leadership within a gender perspective among secondary school students
Rappresentazioni della leadership presso gli studenti della scuola secondaria in una prospettiva di genere

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ABSTRACT

This work focuses on the analysis of the attitudes of young people towards leadership with a view to gender, with the aim of investigating some cultural implicits that can influence the future choices of students and which, precisely for this reason, must be taken into consideration in the educational field. In particular we decided to focus our attention on two dimensions that affect the construction of the image of leadership and which can constitute both obstacles and driving forces in promoting female participation. On one hand we tried to analyse the stereotypes of leadership with a view to gender, and on the other hand we looked into the awareness that young girls and boys have concerning female participation in the labour market. We were particularly interested in understanding if and to what extent the construction of the image of leadership with a view to gender could be influenced by stereotypes and prejudices that lie behind the segregation mechanisms that lead to the glass ceiling phenomenon.

Here we present the results of a survey which involved an initial explorative qualitative phase and a later stage of quantitative investigation involving almost 1900 students enrolled in the last year of secondary school in Italy (in the provinces of Bologna and Rimini). These young males and females were delivered a multi-purpose questionnaire including a series of questions on the image of leadership with a view to gender, among perceptions, experiences and future projections.

Questo lavoro si concentra sull'analisi in una prospettiva di genere degli atteggiamenti dei giovani nei confronti della leadership, allo scopo di investigare alcuni impliciti culturali che possono influenzare le scelte future degli studenti e che, precisamente per questa ragione, devono essere prese in considerazione nel campo educativo. In particolare, abbiamo deciso di focalizzare l'attenzione su due dimensioni che influenzano la costruzione dell'immagine della leadership e che possono costituire sia ostacoli che forze motrici nel promuovere la partecipazione femminile. Da un lato, abbiamo condotto un'analisi sugli stereotipi della leadership in chiave di genere; dall'altro lato abbiamo osservato la consapevolezza che i giovani e le giovani hanno riguardo alla partecipazione femminile al mercato del lavoro. Ci siamo dedicati in special modo a capire se e fino a che punto la

costruzione di una immagine di leadership con una prospettiva di genere possa essere interessata dagli stereotipi e dai pregiudizi che soggiacciono a meccanismi di segregazione e che conducono al fenomeno dell'incapacità di avanzamento di carriera (cd. "soffitto di vetro").

Presentiamo qui i risultati di una inchiesta che comprende una fase esplorativa iniziale e un successivo stadio di ricerca quantitativa che coinvolge circa 1900 studenti iscritti all'ultimo anno di scuola secondaria superiore in Italia (nelle province di Bologna e Rimini). Questi giovani ragazzi e ragazze hanno ricevuto un questionario multi-tematico, che comprendeva una serie di domande sull'immagine della leadership in una prospettiva di genere – tra percezioni, esperienze e aspettative future.

KEYWORDS

Gender, Leadership, Education.
Genere, Leadership, Educazione.

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1. Introduction

As stated in the United Nations Report "Women's Empowerment gender gap" (UN Lopez-Claros, Zahidi, 2005), despite the increase in the number of working women, no country has managed to fill the gender gap in the economic participation of women. Obviously some countries (particularly in Northern Europe) are closer to bridging the gap, while Italy lies in last place in the statistics concerning female participation in the labour market. The data of the Italian National Statistics Institute (Istat) for 2008 show a great divide between the rate of male employment, 70.3%, and female employment, 42.7%. This figure is even more serious when compared with the European average, deviating by almost 12 percent, and when compared to the targets set by the Lisbon Summit aiming to take female employment to 60% by 2010 (Eurostat, 2006).

The phenomenon of gender segregation in positions of power can be read both as the cause and the effect of the low participation of women in the labour market. If women are less present in many professional roles, they have difficulty in reaching positions of power, and equally the scarcity of women "at the top" hinders the development of gender-oriented labour policies and *women-friendly* organisations. More women in positions of power, in particular in politics, allows or would lead to an improvement in women's conditions, while social and economic development could fuel women's drive to improve their own status in political and decision-making contexts. Stevens (2007) underlines the causal circularity that links the mechanisms for access to roles of power with economic characteristics and social structure. Alongside the phenomenon of vertical segregation, also known as the "glass ceiling", widespread horizontal segregation leads the majority of women workers to be grouped in certain types of occupations (OECD, 2005).

To understand the working condition of women in Italy we need to analyse the features of our welfare system: indeed, welfare models constitute a further element hindering or driving female participation in the labour market and in positions of power.

In Italy, now and in the past the prevailing model is that of the *mediterranean* and *male breadwinner* (Ostner, 1994). In this model, society or the State places all or most of the responsibility for care (of children and the elderly) on the family, forced into a role of absolute centrality and equally total invisibility in the man-

agement of personal services. To assure the care which is not provided by the Italian welfare system (e.g. the persistent scarcity or cost of pre-school services or non-residential care services for the elderly), Italian families are implicitly bound to maintain a division of roles characterised by the *male breadwinner*, i.e. the man who produces the income and holds the social rights and the woman who, with no institutional recognition, looks after the children and the elderly (Naldini, 2000; 2003). The more or less accentuated social support to this model, accompanied by poor public services for children and the elderly, generates a system of expectations over family and parental solidarity by the State. Women's role in the labour market will be hard to change without a review of this model. We should also underline that in the past decades family needs are changing with the increase in female participation in production processes, but a void re-mains in the fulfilment of those tasks which were previously solely the woman's responsibility. One of the main hindrances to female employment remains the birth of a child, after which still too many women leave their jobs (Zajczyk, 2007).

In spite of the still low female employment figures, Italian women continue to study more and better than men. As Sartori and Tamarini suggest (2007), a male gender gap is emerging in the Italian school system (as in many other countries), while there is still a female gender gap in the labour market. The data of the Ital-ian Ministry for Universities and Research shows that in 2008-2009 57% of stu-dents enrolled in University were female, compared to just 25% in 1950. The 2010 report of the National Council of Economics and Labour highlighted that educa-tion levels of women workers are higher than those of men, despite the fact that women still have difficulty in accessing all occupational roles and positions of power (almost 19% of female graduates, compared to little over 12% of males, and more than 49% of female school leavers, compared to less than 43%). De-spite better results in education, women are still penalised, and such penalisa-tion is particularly strong for women graduates. Male graduates in fact reach management and intellectual positions much more often than females, many of whom on the other hand tend to fill technical or administrative positions. Males with secondary school diplomas are much better represented among managers and specialist workers, while the majority of females with the same diploma work as office staff, sales staff and in social services (Cnel, 2010).

2. Leadership and gender

To analyse leadership in terms of styles and models, here we refer to the ap-proaches analysing leaders' behaviour rather than their characteristics and traits (Dello Russo 2008, 2010). We start from the assumption that we are not born lead-ers but we become so by learning a broad and complex set of knowledge and competencies.

In analysing leadership and gender, literature offers different approaches to studying the styles of male and female leadership; not being able to cover the breadth and complexity of this topic, in this work we shall refer to the distinction proposed by Court (2005) in two broad areas: the cultural feminism approach and the post-structuralist feminist approach. Cultural feminism starts from an analysis of the man-woman differences which enhance female experiences in working contexts, considering women as the bringers of different and often superior val-ues and characteristics to those of men, above all in terms of values and morals (Gilligan, 1987). According to this approach, these differences must be enhanced in order to guarantee an active presence of women in contexts that would other-

wise be hegemonised by a patriarchal male culture. Studies on leadership referring to this perspective aim to identify the differences between female leaders and male leaders, tracing the different styles and approaches to managing power to personality traits: women are defined as more willing to help, more emotional, understanding, empathetic and sensitive to other people's needs; men tend to be independent, competitive, determined and dominant (Campus, 2010; 2011, Spence and Buckner, 2000). Generally the greater propensity of women towards the social dimension is underlined, while men are acknowledged as having a greater propensity to pragmatism (Eagly *et al*., 2003). In this sense women are defined as more "transactional" or "task-oriented" leaders and men as "transformative" (Antonakis *et al*., 2003) or "relations-oriented" leaders (Dello Russo, 2008; 2010). This type of orientation to the study of female leadership starts from a woman-focused approach in order to interpret the differences in male and female styles in working contexts and in positions of power. Although important, when taken as the only point of reference this approach risks replacing stereotypes with stereotypes, or creating new stereotypes for women leaders. While recognising the need to enhance male and female diversity in order to reflect on their differences, today it is important to underline the many elements of complexity in the construction of female and male identities in order to establish a viewpoint that can understand and promote the many pathways and choices taken by each of us to define own gender identity (Leonelli, 2010). The post-structuralist approach attempts to answer these critical elements of the approach defined by cultural feminism, by aiming to offer a more complex and dynamic analysis of female leadership. According to this approach (Court, 2005) we need to overcome a universalistic view of the differences between men and women to focus more on the complexity of the construction of male and female subjectivity, according to cultural and social categories that cannot be correctly analysed merely in terms of the patriarchal-matriarchal opposition. A vision of leadership centred on male-female opposition must be overcome in order to reach a perspective from which we can recognise the value and need for intersubjectivity, as a precondition for the construction of female and male identities and social contexts characterised by participation and cooperation, in a continuous, profitable and constructive dialogue between women and men. (Frazer, Lacey, 1993).

3. Hypothesis and research phases

This research aims to understand the perception of young girls and boys on leadership and gender in order to understand the variables affecting the views of female leadership, also compared to the image of male leadership. This can help us to formulate hypotheses concerning the possible paths used to train women of future generations to enter the labour market and increasingly cover positions of power.

The questions underlying this research are:

- What representations do young people (who are deciding on their professional careers and their role as active participants in political life) have of leadership and competence, and how do these representations differ between males and females?
- Which variables affect the different models of representation?
- How far does the awareness of women's condition in the labour market affect this?

- How far do prejudices and stereotypes on women in roles of power affect this?
- How far does one's socio-cultural context affect this?
- How far does social "prejudice" affect this? (are we born leaders or do we become leaders?)

To study the issue of leadership and gender, after the analysis of the literature a qualitative-explorative study was carried out; this involved a series of focus-groups held with university students in Bologna and Rimini to study the concept of female leadership and the various factors comprising this concept.

The second phase involved the production of a questionnaire on leadership and gender and the definition of the variables considered during the subsequent quantitative phase of the research. The independent variables (socio-cultural context, family education, the learning path,…) and dependent variables (attitudes towards female leadership) were defined and the hypotheses of the possible relations between these were formulated.

Subsequently the sample was defined (groups of final year secondary school students from at least two different types of schools), the questionnaire was delivered and the data was analysed.

3.1. Qualitative-explorative phase of the research and production of the questionnaire

The research involved a phase of explorative study carried out in three focus groups involving fifteen female students in the first year of the "Social and Cultural Educator" and "Preschool Educator" Degree Programmes at the Faculty of Education of the University of Bologna, run both in Bologna and Rimini. A female sample was chosen in order to study the opinions and attitudes of a group of young women concerning leadership and gender. We decided to involve only female students from the first year as they were younger and closer to the experience of the final year of secondary school, the context in which the quantitative tool, i.e. the questionnaire, was subsequently delivered. During the focus group, the following questions were tackled:

- What does female leadership mean? Is it different from male leadership?
- What is the link between leadership and competence?
- Is there a "competence" for leadership? Is there a "talent" for leadership?
- Is it a professional competence, a meta-competence, …?

We analysed the contents of the transcribed protocols specifically to identify the main categories of meanings for the concept of leadership (and leadership competence), and the main beliefs on female leadership.

The first stage of the research concluded with the construction of a series of statements (beliefs on female leadership) which were used to construct a scale of attitudes (according to the Likert methodology).

The results of the focus groups, together with the analysis of the literature, guided the development of the questionnaire items.

The first group of questions in the questionnaire focus on family, female and male styles and models, to identify types of maternal and paternal models, male and female reference figures and to understand if and to what extent these could affect the view of leadership. The questions concerning this area of interest regard the role of parents in decision making, the weight that each of the two has in important aspects of their son or daughter's life, the presence of adult reference models and future expectations over family models.

The second group of questions investigates the problems concerning the awareness of the female condition in the labour market and the support of relative stereotypes.

Some statements requesting the expression of agreement or disagreement concern sexist stereotypes on women's access to roles of power emerging from the literature and discussed with the female students involved in the focus groups. Other statements briefly describe some of the conditions that limit women's access to the labour market.

The male and female students were also asked about their own experiences as leaders in school contexts and extra-scholastic contexts, on their perception of their own ability as leaders and their desire to become leaders. Finally, they were asked to give their own opinion on the statement "We are born leaders".

To measure the opinions and attitudes towards leadership and gender, a set of questions was drawn up and subsequently validated with a scale.

The results emerging from the focus groups underlined the different styles of leadership traceable, in literature, to the dual polarity indicated by Bass and Avolio in the *Multifactor Leader Questionnaire* (Bass, Avolio, 1995) in which such styles are placed in a continuum that runs from effective to ineffective on one side and from active to passive on the other. Effective leadership, read according to this interpretation, is above all active, in terms of both the tasks to be carried out and communication and relationships, according to a model in which the leader builds a climate of trust, acts with integrity, encourages innovative thought and stimulates professional growth. In an intermediate point between active-passive and effective-ineffective leadership lies a leader with control functions, who monitors collaborators and measures their errors. A totally passive leadership on the other hand is represented by a passive, ineffective model in which the leader generates conflicts and at the same time avoids involvement. Other interesting contributions in literature are represented by the *transformative leadership* model (Bennis and Nanus, 1986 and Schein, 1985), characterised by an active and propositive attitude towards change and strong orientation towards innovation, as well as the *empowering leadership* model (Piccardo, Quaglino, 2006; Piccardo, 2000; Senge, 1990; Quinn, 1990) which sees the leader as the one who makes his collaborators grow through the construction of an organisation that learns.

4. Results

The sample was stratified by territorial area, identifying geographically different areas in Bologna and the province (in total four areas: city, Northern plain area, Southern mountain area and Eastern province) and Rimini (in total three areas: city, sea area of the province, hill area of the province). Within the territorial areas, the sample was then stratified by type of school.

The sample of 1897 students included a vast majority of Italians (91.6%), 53% females and 47% males (1115 in the province of Bologna and 782 in the province of Rimini). At the time of delivery the average age was 18.2 years (std. deviation 1.40). 47% of respondents attended a *liceo*, 37.5% a technical high school and 15.5% a vocational high school.

The interviewed student population represents approximately 20% of the total of 18-19 year olds resident in the two provinces. In this sense, although it does not offer a comparison at national level, it provides a fairly complete framework of the condition of young people in that age bracket in the chosen areas.

4.1. Models and family styles

The answers to the questions concerning maternal and paternal styles in terms of decision making and day-to-day management show some differences in maternal and paternal styles towards males and females. The question proposed four different types of approach to decision making: the parent leaves the child free to choose, the solution is identified together, through dialogue between the parent and child, the parent places conditions on the decision and the decision taken by the parent.

As can be seen in table 1, the prevailing decision-making style, as perceived by the students, by both father and mother is that of dialogue and seeking a solution together with the child. Mothers particularly are perceived as using this approach to decision making, and more so among females than males. Concerning the style in which the parent leaves the son or daughter free to decide, around one third of students indicate this as a paternal style, 29% of males and 25% of girls attribute this style to the mother. Between 11 and 12% of responding females and males recognise their own parents in the style that "sets conditions" while only very few state that their parents tend to take decisions in their place.

Table no. 1

	What attitude does your <u>father</u> usually have when an important decision has to be made that concerns you?		What attitude does your <u>mother</u> usually have when an important decision has to be made that concerns you?	
	male	female	male	female
They leave me to decide	33.3%	34.1%	28.9%	25.1%
We discuss it and find a solution together	51.8%	53.6%	56.6%	61.8%
They set conditions	12.9%	11.4%	12.4%	11.1%
They decide for me	1.9%	0.9%	2.0%	2.0%

The level of education seems to affect the decision-making style of both fathers and mothers, in the opinions of their sons and daughters. As is highlighted in table no. 2, parents with higher qualifications tend to take decisions in a participatory manner more often, while parents with low qualifications more frequently leave children freedom of choice, although it is important to underline that the prevailing model remains that of shared decision making.

Table no. 2

What attitude does your father usually have when an important decision has to be made that concerns you?	Father's level of education			Mother's level of education		
	up to middle school	high school or vocational diploma	degree	up to middle school	high school or vocational diploma	degree
They leave me to decide	37.9%	31.3%	29.3%	29.7%	26.6%	21.3%
We discuss it and find a solution together	47.7%	55.0%	59.3%	56.0%	60.0%	64.0%
They set conditions	13.0%	12.4%	9.3%	12.6%	11.7%	11.2%
They decide for me	1.3%	1.3%	2.0%	1.7%	1.7%	3.4%

The answers to the questions concerning maternal and paternal roles in the family show differences between the two parents and between males and females. As can be seen in table 3, the mother deals with the children's studies more than the father, both for boys (37.6%) and girls (39%). For 29% of the males

and 26% of females, both parents deal with their studies, while 27.7% of males and 30% of females state that neither parent gets involved with their studies.

Answering the question "Who gives you money when you need it?", the majority of both girls and boys stated both the mother and the father. There are some differences between males and females when it is the mother who manages the money: 27% of females compared to 18% of males state that they are in this situation.

Differences emerge in the students' views of the reference figure to consult in the event of an important decision: the females mainly consult their mothers (44.4%) while the males, in the majority of cases (52.5%) consult both parents.

A further element of diversity between males and females emerges in the answer to the question "Who do you confide in when you have personal problems" (sentimental or with friends): while the majority of girls (55.7%) confide in their mother, a similar percentage of boys (54%) state that they do not confide in either of their parents.

Table no. 3

	Who follows your progress in your studies?		Who gives you money when you need it?		Who do you consult if you have to make an important decision?		Who do you confide in when you have personal problems (sentimental or with friends)	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
Mainly my mother	37.6%	39.0%	18.4%	27.0%	21.0%	44.4%	25.7%	55.7%
Mainly my father	5.7%	4.7%	21.0%	18.9%	10.2%	6.9%	4.2%	3.6%
Both my mother and my father	29.0%	26.0%	55.6%	51.4%	52.5%	38.4%	16.0%	10.2%
Neither parent	27.7%	30.3%	5.0%	2.7%	16.3%	10.3%	54.1%	30.5%

Overall a scenario emerges in which the mother appears more involved in the children's life, above all for the girls. On the other hand, both parents represent a more frequent point of reference for boys than for girls. Questions concerning personal problems mark a clear boundary between female and male behaviour: the first oriented towards the maternal figure and the second generally without a parental reference figure.

In addition to the family roles, a question was asked to obtain information on adult reference figures. The students were asked to indicate, in order of importance, three people they consider a reference model, indicating their gender.

Table 4 presents the choices made by the students. The mother is the most commonly chosen adult reference figure, by both girls and boys (slightly more by girls). Then comes the father, without any significant differences between males and females, then other male and female family figures (females chosen slightly more by the girls and males by the boys) including brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents. Only a few indicated friends as adult reference figures and even less educational figures in school or extra-scholastic contexts. Overall we can state that the vast majority of adult reference figures are represented by relatives, the mother and father are particularly important, and the mother more so than the father.

Table no. 4

	Adult reference model		Adult reference model		Adult reference model	
	males	females	males	females	males	females
Mother	39.3%	42.3%	30.8%	29.6%	7.9%	8.3%
Father	31.5%	30.6%	32.0%	33.7%	12.5%	12.2%
Female relatives (sister, aunt, cousin, grandmother)	9.1%	9.1%	12.4%	12.8%	27.0%	28.1%
Male relatives (brother, uncle, cousin, grandfather)	10.0%	9.4%	12.1%	11.0%	25.3%	23.1%
Friends	6.4%	4.9%	7.8%	6.2%	14.3%	15.1%
Educational figures (school and extra-school)	3.7%	3.6%	4.9%	6.7%	11.5%	14.0%

Overall the differences between boys and girls emerge more so when identifying the prevailing gender in the composition of the choice of the three reference figures. As can be seen in Table 5, the males indicate male reference figures in 75.7% of cases while the females choose mainly women in 65% of cases, underlining choices that tend to be less oriented to gender compared to boys.

Table no. 5

	males	females
prevalence of male reference figures	75.7%	35.0%
prevalence of female reference figures	24.3%	65.0%

4.2. Awareness and adherence to prejudices and stereotypes

The results of the items concerning the extent of awareness are presented in Table 6. The statements proposed refer to some issues concerning the structural conditions which underlie inequality in the work environment. Overall higher percentages of agreement, and therefore of more awareness, emerge in girls than in boys. 54% of males compared to 70% of females agree with the statement *"In today's society women have more difficulty reaching roles of power"*. The viewpoint of girls appears even more clearly shifted towards awareness than that of the boys (82.3% compared to 53.5%) concerning the idea that "Women could hold positions of power more often if their rights as workers were protected more". The statement receiving the lowest percentages of agreement are those concerning family services as a condition for promoting female leadership (in males the disagreements are higher than the agreements).

Table no. 6

Awareness of the female condition in the labour market	Percentages of agreement	
	males	females
In today's society women have more difficulty reaching roles of power	54.7%	70.8%
Women could hold positions of power more often if their rights as workers were protected more	53.5%	82.6
Women could hold roles of power more often if there were more services for families	44%	66.9%

Table 7 on the other hand presents the results of males and females on the questions concerning the adhesion to stereotypes and prejudices on women in positions of power. The results show stereotyped views of female leadership that are diversified between males and females. Only 30% of males and 16% of females agree with the statement that "When women hold positions of power it is because they are well connected". Concerning the statement "Women who follow a career have to sacrifice their commitment to the family", there are more agreements than disagreements for both males (51.2%) and females (52.9%). Adhesion to stereotypes can also be seen concerning the opinion "Women in positions of power are stricter and more authoritarian than men" when the percentages of agreement among females are even higher than those of males (62.5% compared to 55.7%).

<div align="center">Table no. 7</div>

Adhesion to stereotypes and prejudices	Percentages of agreement	
	males	females
Women in positions of power are stricter and more authoritarian than men	55.7%	62.5%
Women who follow a career have to sacrifice their commitment to the family	51.2%	52.9%
When women hold positions of power it is because they are well connected	30.7%	16.1%

Overall the emerging views tend to be aware of the structural limitations that women meet in accessing positions of power, but are not free or not totally free of stereotyped or prejudiced views. The females show greater awareness than males, but their adhesion to stereotypes is far from low, in particular considering the image of a woman leader who appears worse than her male counterpart.

The answers to the questions concerning beliefs on relations of fortuitousness, modifiability or non-modifiability of one's own intelligence and condition (*I think that the ability of a person depends on their consistency and effort placed on studying*; *I think that a person is born a leader and cannot become one)* demonstrated low levels of significance and internal coherence, and for this reason are considered items to be removed from the instrument. The answers to the question *I think that a person is born a leader and cannot become one* are presented in the following paragraph.
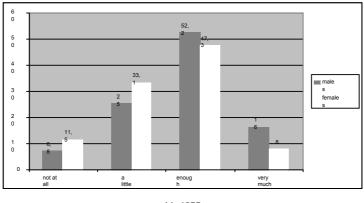
4.3. Being leaders

The students were also asked to respond to some questions on their personal experiences of leadership. The males had more opportunities to experiment roles as leaders in school and extra-scholastic contexts than females: 46% of boys cover leader roles compared to 26% of girls.

To understand to what extent, independently of any (lack of) experience of leadership, the students perceive themselves as being able to be or become leaders, the question was asked "Do you think you have the characteristics to cover a leadership role?"

As shown in graph 1, the majority of boys and girls think that they have the characteristics to cover a leadership role, however, the views of males deviate greatly from those of the females in the percentage of those who do not feel at

all suited or slightly suited to leadership. Overall 44.6% of girls do not feel that they have the characteristics to cover a leadership role, compared to only 31.8% of males. Vice versa, 16% of males and only 8% of females considered themselves to be very capable of becoming leaders.

Graph 1: Do you think you have the characteristics to cover a leadership role?

N=1855

Finally, the students were asked to indicate their agreement with the statement "I think that a person is born a leader and cannot become one" in order to understand to what extent the girls and boys interviewed adhered to a static idea of leadership, linked to the fixed nature of intelligence and personal possibilities. The majority of males (66.3%) and an even higher percentage of females (75.9%) do not agree with this determinist vision of leadership.

The answers to these questions show the need to work on the perception of competence for leadership and empowerment particularly in females, who not only are less frequently in a position to experiment leadership roles but also consider themselves to be far less capable than their male cohorts of becoming leaders. Another important element demanding pedagogical thought and intervention is education to leadership, understood as the set of competencies rather than a naturally acquired condition. From this point of view the girls seem less conditioned by this belief and therefore, probably, more willing to step forward in terms of learning. We must not however forget that they tend to hold an even more negatively stereotyped view of female leadership than their male companions, as can be seen in the answers to the previous questions.

4.4. Visions of female and male leadership[1]

The leadership evaluation scales were constructed according to the idea that it is possible to identify competencies and actions that define an effective model of leadership and which contrast characteristics that are traceable to an ineffective or

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1 For a more detailed analysis of the scales refer to Lodini E., Luppi E., *Misurare gli atteggiamenti verso la Leadership femminile e maschile in un'ottica di educazione al genere*, Journal of Educational, Cultural and Psychological Studies, no. 3, June 2011.

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authoritarian model. We decided to distinguish two different types effective leadership characteristics: a leadership style in which efficiency and task-orientation prevails and a style centred on relational skills and group management[2]. In terms of gender differences, an aspect which particularly interests us in this case, we chose to keep the styles we define as "task-oriented" and "relation-oriented" separate, as in conceptual terms these constitute representations which can be traced to respectively male and female models of leadership, as suggested in various theories on the difference of gender in roles of power (Tanton, 1994).

The three identified styles of leadership should allow us to reflect on the opinions that the young people interviewed have concerning men and women in positions of power, according to two lines of interpretation: on one hand we aim to understand their vision of leadership and gender in terms of the "effective leader-ineffective or authoritarian leader" polarity, based on the approach chosen here (Bass, Avolio, 1995); on the other hand we aim to investigate the adhesion or lack of adhesion to models used by men and women to exercise power, according to the two styles defined as "task-oriented leader" and "relation-oriented leader" which respectively characterise male and female leadership models.

The set of questions was therefore produced starting from the following three leader models.

The first model, which we have called the "relation-oriented leader" consists in an approach to leadership that focuses on interpersonal relations and group work, with values targeting cooperation, the enhancement of every collaborator and group loyalty. The attitude of a leader who adopts this model is described in the set of questions in six behaviours:

- motivates to commitment and cooperation;
- has a natural disposition for taking care of his/her team;
- delegates tasks and responsibilities to team members;
- goes beyond personal interest for the good of the team;
- takes decisions listening to the viewpoints of the team members;
- is coherent with his/her own ideals and cannot be corrupted.

The second style of leadership, referred to the model we have called "task-oriented leader", indicates an efficient, competent, pragmatic and charismatic leader. This is a leadership in which rationality serves success, and effectiveness and efficiency guide the organisation of activities. The actions that describe the behaviour of a leader who adopts this model have been exemplified through the following characteristics and actions:

- has a strong command of his/her professional competencies;
- pursues objectives with determination and courage;
- is able to organise work effectively and efficiently;
- tackles problems pragmatically and concretely;
- is charismatic and creative;
- acts rationally without being conditioned by emotions.

2   Within task-oriented and relation-oriented styles of leadership we find the effective traits of leadership of the models of *empowering leadership* and *transformative leadership*.

We have called the last leader style the "authoritarian leader". This is a model that, contrary to both the previous models which are traceable to effective leaders, describes a leader who makes an ineffective and authoritarian use of his/her power, is focused on personal success and does not promote either the team or its members. The characteristics and actions that describe this leader are:

• uses power to be obeyed;
• assesses by highlighting the errors and carelessness of the team members;
• tends to decide on his/her own;
• persistently controls the work of the team members;
• particularly emphasises his/her own successes within the team;
• is in competition with the other members of the team.

The first exploratory analysis of the scale of leadership concerning male leaders did not confirm the hypothesis that distinguished the three styles of leader: relation-oriented leader, task-oriented leader and authoritarian leader. However, two *subscales* emerged that the two-factor confirmatory analysis underlined, showing high levels of significance (0.0001) with a total explained variance of 38.1% (KMO equal to 0.834).

The first factor emerging is composed of task-oriented leadership and relation-oriented leadership characteristics together, while the second factor includes solely authoritarian leadership characteristics.

The items in the first factor offer a highly effective leadership profile, whose traits are characterised by a balanced blend of behaviour and competencies concerning communication and relationships and organisational efficiency.

Five of the items in the factor belong to the task-oriented leadership characteristics while the other five items concern the relation-oriented leadership characteristics. The factor includes elements linked to task-oriented leadership and relation-oriented leadership with no prevalence of one of the two dimensions over the other. The saturation coefficients of the single items do not underline a greater weight of one of the two styles over the other.

The second factor, on the contrary, includes solely authoritarian leadership characteristics:

Three items remain excluded from the two emerging factors:

• Delegates tasks and responsibilities to team members;
• Acts rationally without being conditioned by emotions;
• Assesses by highlighting the errors and carelessness of team members.

The first concerns relation-oriented leadership, the second task-oriented leadership and the third authoritarian leadership characteristics.

From a conceptual viewpoint, the two emerging factors are satisfied as the identified leader styles offer thought on certain characteristics and competencies of a leader which, also in literature, are considered separate only on a theoretical plane, while in fact we expect a leader to have mixed features, possibly with a lean towards one or other model. The adhesion to an idea of solely task-oriented male leadership is not confirmed, in fact on the contrary, the factorial analysis shows two fundamentally distinct types of leader in terms of effectiveness and level of authority. The first factor describes a leader who combines the effective elements of the task-oriented and relation-oriented leader styles while the second factor groups all the aspects of authoritarian leadership. According to these premises we will call the first factor "effective male leadership: task-orient-

ed and relation-oriented" and the second factor "authoritarian male leadership".

Also for the scale of female leadership the first exploratory analysis contradicted the hypothesis of the three different styles of leader and highlighted two subscales, also underlined in the confirmatory analysis with two factors with high levels of significance (0.0001) with a total explained variance of 38.4% (KMO equal to 0.857).

The first factor emerging is a mixture of task-oriented leader and relation-oriented leader characteristics, while the second factor includes solely authoritarian leader characteristics, in line with the factors of male leadership.

The items in the first factor are those of "effective male leadership" and describe an effective leader with a blend of communication and interpersonal skills and organisational management.

The factor includes five items which refer to task-oriented leaders and five items concerning the characteristics of relation-oriented leaders. Also in this scale, the saturation coefficients of the single items do not underline a greater weight of one of the two styles over the other.

As for male leadership, the second factor includes solely authoritarian leader characteristics but differs from "authoritarian male leadership" in that it contains one more item: *Assesses by highlighting the errors and carelessness of team members.*

Two items are excluded from the two emerging factors: one of the relation-oriented leader and one of the task-oriented leader, excluded also from the "Effective male task-oriented and relation-oriented leadership" factor.

- Delegates tasks and responsibilities to team members;
- Acts rationally without being conditioned by emotions.

We call the first factor "Effective female task-oriented and relation-oriented leadership" and the second factor "Authoritarian female leadership"**.** Also in this case the two factors emerging are conceptually satisfactory as they reprocess the proposed styles, with a clear distinction between effectiveness and authority, without showing a vision of female leadership based on a role of power that focuses solely on the relational dimension. The first factor includes the same items as the "effective male leadership" factor and describes a style of female leadership which positively combines elements of communication, relations and effectiveness. The second factor contains all the features of the negative leadership profile, adding, in addition to the "authoritarian male leadership" factor a further characteristic or attitude described by the item: *Assesses by highlighting to the errors and carelessness of team members.*

Overall, the four factors emerging underline two types of effective and authoritarian leadership that are coherent with the theoretical introduction and the literature available on the subject. It is interesting to underline that the two scales of effective male and female leadership include the same items, while the authoritarian leadership scales differ as the "Authoritarian female leadership" contains one more item than the equivalent male scale. While it is true that this highlights a difference in the two visions of leadership, it must be said that, among all the items in the "Authoritarian female leadership" factor, that which differentiates this scale from the male one (Assesses by highlighting the errors and carelessness of team members) has far lower levels of significance than all the others.

In any case, overall, for both men and women the four factors emerging show a clear distinction between the characteristics of an authoritarian leader and an

effective leader (which we define as such because it emerges as a factor in contrast to the characteristics of authoritarian leadership). Independently of the gender of the leader, the factors emerging underline the indivisibility of communication and relational skills and organisational-management skills in describing a male or female leader with positive characteristics.

4.5. Results of the scale application

In order to define a normative standard for the male and female students of the final year of secondary school, the average scores and relative standard deviations for each scale on the overall sample and for males and females are given. As seen above, there is a difference between the "Authoritarian male leadership" and the "Authoritarian female leadership" scales (the second has an additional item); to overcome these differences and make the averages and standard deviations of the four factors comparable, the scores were transformed into z points and t points[3].

Table no. 8

General results relating to the scales Factors	t points total		t points males		t points females	
	$\bar{x}$	σ	$\bar{x}$	σ	$\bar{x}$	σ
Effective male leadership task- and relation-oriented	30.48	4.26	30.11	4.50	30.83	4.01
Authoritarian male leadership	15.05	3.15	15.38	3.12	14.74	3.16
Effective female leadership task- and relation-oriented	31.56	4.53	32.87	5.00	30.41	3.70
Authoritarian female leadership	17.04	3.27	17.15	3.36	16.95	3.19

As shown in Table 8, some differences emerge in the comparison of the *subscales* and among male and female scores, however the values are often very close, with fairly low levels of dispersion. Looking at the most significant differences, it is interesting to see that the average "Effective male leadership" factor is slightly lower than the average "Effective female leadership" factor, and that, vice versa, the average score on the "Authoritarian female leadership" factor is higher than the average score of the "Authoritarian male leadership" factor. Overall the image of the authoritarian female leader exceeds the male equivalent and this difference is also noted when comparing the male and female averages on this *subscale*. The difference between males and females in the *subscale* "Effective female leader" is also worth noting, which shows a higher average for males than females, although the male data is more dispersed (with a standard deviation of 5, compared to 3.70 of the female data).

To summarise, the image of female leadership is more authoritarian when compared to male leadership, both for males and females, and the image of effective female leadership is higher for boys. Overall the emerging view of female leadership seems worse, if only slightly, than that of male leadership; this view also seems to be even more rooted in girls than in boys. This data makes us reflect

3   The maximum score for the male and female "Effective leadership" scales is 40, for the "Authoritarian male leadership" 20 and for the "Authoritarian female leadership" 24.

on the need to work on gender stereotypes in leadership, in order to contribute to the construction of new more positive, equal and participatory models.

To understand which variables most affect the image of female and male leadership, the results of the scales were analysed through the dichotomisation of the factorial scores. This allowed us to identify some elements that appear correlated to the adhesion or non-adhesion to a positive or negative female leadership model.

The scores related to the awareness of the female condition in the labour market were transformed into a single index used to distinguish between awareness and lack of awareness. As shown in Table 9, the awareness of the female condition in the labour market affects the adhesion to the positive female leadership model. This relationship is significant as the chi-square values are different (equal to 48.715 and significance 0.000).

Table no. 9

	Index of awareness of the female condition in the labour market	
	awareness	lack of awareness
Adhesion to the positive female leadership model	59.9%	42.3%
Lack of adhesion to the positive female leadership model	40.1%	57.7%

Similarly to the awareness on the female condition in the labour market, the scores related to the adhesion to stereotypes and prejudices were also transformed into indexes in order to distinguish the respondents between those with a basically prejudicial view and those who, on the other hand, showed no prejudice. As shown in Table 10 prejudice seems to affect, although not drastically, the adhesion to the negative female leadership model (chi-square equal to 10.439, correlation equal to 0.001).

Table no. 10

	Index of prejudiced view	
	Prejudiced view	No prejudice
Adhesion to the negative female leadership model	51.6%	43.8%
Lack of adhesion to the negative female leadership model	48.4%	56.2%

Moreover the answers to the questions concerning the adult reference figures were analysed to distinguish between those who stated female and those who stated male reference figures. Presented in Table 11, the emerging data leads us to hypothesise that the prevalence of female reference figures affects the adhesion to the positive female leadership model (chi-square 10.85, correlation 0.001).

Table no. 11

	Index of prejudiced view	
	Prevalence of male reference figures	Prevalence of female reference figures
Adhesion to the positive female leadership model	50.2%	60.1%
Lack of adhesion to the positive female leadership model	49.8%	39.9%

Overall it seems that the image of the woman leader is above all affected by awareness, adhesion to prejudices and by the adult reference figures. Girls and

boys who are aware of the dynamics of the female condition in the labour market adhere more easily to a positive male leadership image. The same occurs, although to a lesser extent, for those who have female reference figures, more so than those with male reference figures. A prejudicial view of women in the labour market, on the other hand, seems to have a certain influence on the adhesion to the negative female leadership model.

To further study this it is interesting to carry out a regression analysis of the factorial scores, in order to identify the most significant statistical models that explain male and female leadership styles.

5. Some final considerations

In what way can educational contexts and processes contribute to promoting greater female participation in roles of power and an approach to leadership that overcomes prejudice and sexist stereotypes? While in terms of school success girls have come a long way, the problem of limited access and unequal opportunities in the labour market remains. The competences acquired in learning paths do not seem sufficient to promote a significant change of orientation in the work place or in the corridors of power. Perhaps it is necessary to concentrate not only on equal opportunities in terms of skills but also on the actual conditions and the opportunities for access to working positions and spheres,which still remain a male prerogative.

As we have seen, we can identify some structural and super-structural social mechanisms that legitimise and perpetuate the low presence of women in management and leadership roles, a situation that is particularly serious in the Italian working environment (Sala, 2008).

We can attempt to trace these discriminatory mechanisms back to two causes: on one hand the lack or unsuitability of policies for active participation of women in the labour market and positions of power, on the other hand the existence of prejudice in the role of women at work and their suitability as leaders, combined with a perception of leadership linked to characteristics that are traceable to male stereotypes.

With a view to fostering the participation of future generations of women in roles of power, it seems important to raise the awareness of young women and young men, the stakeholders in tomorrow's labour market, towards these conditions which otherwise risk being taken for granted, as natural, constituent and unmodifiable elements of our society. Without an appropriate level of attention and awareness we risk falling into the famous trap of the goldfish who is unaware of the aquarium he lives in.

It therefore seems important to focus on the awareness that young men and women have of the discriminatory working conditions and the gender stereotypes of working contexts and roles of power, in order to help them to build new, more equal and participatory models in which the input of women and men can be blended profitably.

The scales presented here also act as a tool for the educational diagnosis of young male and female students' attitudes towards leadership and gender[4]. We ex-

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4   The data presented here offers normative values for a diagnostic-educational use of the scales: where the scores obtained are for example above average, in the case of Authoritarian leadership and below average, in the case of "Effective leadership", we can

pect they can be used to highlight the views of girls and boys on the characteristics of male and female leadership, based on the effective-authoritarian contrast.

From an educational point of view, it has been hypothesised that, in the girls' and boys' views, the leadership characteristics traceable to an authoritarian model were recognised as belonging to a style that is in contrast to the other two proposed, both for female and male leadership. It is also hoped that the views of young men and women on male and female leadership styles do not highlight such a clear distinction between competencies linked to tasks and to relations, above all if this distinction is attributed to gender differences. A convincing image of leadership should, in our opinion, be the result of a positive and constructive blend of characteristics and competencies, in a dialogical integration of the efficiency-oriented and relation-oriented approaches, according to a model in which gender differences are an opportunity for the enrichment of individual and collective views, as well as a condition for establishing authentically equal dialogue between women and men.

The emergence of factors linked not only to traditional views of male and female leaders, but also to the image of an effective leader (which mixes competencies linked to the task and interpersonal skills) in contrast to an authoritarian leader, highlights the importance of an educational intervention on leadership that concentrates first and foremost on competencies, with the aim of training towards positive and effective leadership. The results attained in the scales invite us to consider negative prejudicial attitudes towards female leadership, more than towards male leadership, as well as to consider the adhesion or non-adhesion to images of leadership conditioned by rigid models of the styles of women and men in positions of power. As stated above, differences in gender, understood as learned social differences, tend to be set as such persistent stereotypes that they become confused with objective data, like the differences determined by biology.

In our utopia, we would like to image a job market in which every woman who has the required competencies and abilities can cover roles of power, developing and exploiting her own skills and competencies. We imagine that these women dialogue on equal terms with their male colleagues, in a climate in which the characteristics of each person are enhanced, and that everyone collaborates to achieve visions that are all the more complete for having come from different perspectives and viewpoints. We think of workplaces in which a meeting point of male and female views is considered not *superfluous* but rather *necessary*.

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