

“I am not a typical woman. I don’t think I am a role model” – Blokishness, behavioural and leadership styles and role models

Martina Topić

Leeds Business School, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK

Abstract

Purpose – This paper presents a sociological analysis of the advertising industry’s leadership styles and role models in England using masculinities in behaviour (“blokishness”) as a concept. The paper particularly focusses on the experiences of the so-called tomboy women who were socialised with boys and embraced masculine behavioural styles and compares their views and styles with women who experienced a more common, feminine socialisation and spent time in girls’ peer groups during early socialisation. The paper explores why some women are seen as role models and others are not.

Design/methodology/approach – Qualitative interviews were conducted with 37 women working in a variety of roles within the advertising industry in England, and from a variety of backgrounds, and views on leadership and role models were analysed with a particular focus on “tomboy” women and their behavioural and leadership styles, which is linked with role models and compared against views of the so-called feminine women. Triple coding and a thematic analysis were used to analyse data and make sense of concepts derived from participants’ answers.

Findings – The findings suggest that tomboy women demonstrate masculine leadership and behavioural styles and are less likely to see themselves as role models along with facing disapproval from female employees they manage. On the other hand, feminine women demonstrate feminine leadership styles and are more likely to see themselves and become accepted as role models. Thus, the paper suggests that the perception and experience of role models depend on behavioural and leadership styles, which is different for the so-called tomboy and feminine women. Data suggest this is due to participation in early peer groups during childhood. The paper offers conceptualisation figures to inform future research.

Practical implications – The findings suggest it is not always formal structure that impedes the progress of women, but often informal ones linked to behavioural styles. Therefore, whilst many positive policies have been introduced to improve equality in organisations and society in general, this paper sheds light on how these policies could get undermined by informal issues such as behavioural and leadership styles. Human resource (HR) professionals should further internal policies to prevent situations in which only those “who are like us” can go ahead in their careers by diversifying the workforce and employment and promotions panels.

Originality/value – To the best of the author’s knowledge, this is the first paper analysing role models, and leadership styles linked to the position of women in the advertising industry, focussing on blokishness in behaviour and comparing styles of the so-called tomboy and feminine women.

Keywords Women, Leadership, Advertising, Blokishness, Socialization, Behaviour, Tomboy

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The advertising industry has been labelled as problematic regarding women’s rights since the 1990s when the first studies started to appear on this issue (Broyles and Grow, 2008; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, 2009; Windels, 2011; Grow and Broyles, 2011; Grow *et al.*, 2012; Gurrieri *et al.*, 2016; Mensa and Grow, 2019; Akestam *et al.*, 2021).

Whilst in the past, scholars criticised the stereotypical portrayal of women in adverts, the advertising industry has moved towards *femvertising* and promoting women’s empowerment since 2014 (Windels *et al.*, 2021). However, authors argue that the newly promoted *femvertising* is (1) centred on neoliberal projections of women as free individuals who can control their own destiny by showing more agency and fighting for themselves, thus



essentially ignoring structural barriers that women face, and (2) it often centres on the postfeminist discourse of all battles being won and things changing (Windels *et al.*, 2021). However, researchers and practitioners regularly report that women in advertising progress harder, and face discrimination and sexism, as well as discrimination in adverts where women are portrayed in stereotypical roles (Thompson-Whiteside *et al.*, 2020; Eisend, 2019; Crewe and Wang, 2018). In the UK, studies report that women face issues of “(homo)sociality and space” (Crewe and Wang, 2018, p. 12), and exclusion from business decisions (Mortimer, 2016), and this practice can happen spontaneously or deliberately (Gregory, 2009), which often leads to a conclusion that the advertising industry exists and functions as an old boys’ club due to masculinity in the way advertising organisations operate (Topić, 2020a, b). The majority of the workforce in the British advertising industry are women but they generally advance harder and advertising offices are seen as a man’s world (UK Digital and Creative Sector Talent Insight Report, 2017; Sleeman, 2019; Stein, 2017; Topić, 2020a, b).

Many authors argued that the organisational world remains a masculine domain, or a masculine habitus (Guillame and Pochic, 2007; Bourdieu, 2007; Saval, 2015; Gill *et al.*, 2017; Lewis *et al.*, 2017; Shook and Sweet, 2018; Momentum4, 2019; Spencer *et al.*, 2019; McKinsey, 2020; Topić, 2020c; Robertson *et al.*, 2021) and thus many women fail to progress and meet their full potential not necessarily because they are women but because they do not work in a way that fits within masculine meanings. In other words, since organisations remain a masculine world, only masculine individuals (regardless of their biological sex) progress because they demonstrate characteristics such as aggression, assertiveness, directness, lack of empathy and power-oriented managerial styles, which are characteristics commonly associated with masculinity and are socially constructed during early socialisation. For example, Topić (2020a, c), argued that women in advertising report having to be masculine or “blokish” to succeed, which she identified as shouting louder about their achievements, having to be aggressive, being bold and suppressing any emotion not to be seen as weak, all of which are characteristics commonly ascribed to men due to differences in early socialisation process (Bourdieu, 2007). Therefore, one question that can be asked is whether part of the structural barriers women face consists of not being “like us” or having different behavioural styles. According to studies conducted in journalism, public relations (PR) and advertising, women who prove to be ‘one of the boys’ or what is also known as ‘blokish’ in their behaviour, succeed and advance into leadership positions and generally stay in the profession longer (Mills, 2014; North, 2009a, b; Topić *et al.*, 2020; Topić, 2020a, b, c; Grow and Broyles, 2011).

Whilst studies have been done on lived experiences and the office culture in the advertising industry, including studying masculinities or “blokishness”, leadership remains a largely unexplored area. Most of the leadership literature argues that women often lead differently (Grove and Montgomery, 2000; Krishnan and Park, 2004; Christopher, 2008; Melero, 2011; Wright, 2011; Radu *et al.*, 2017; Billing and Alvesson, 2000) and that women communicate and behave differently as a result of the gendered socialisation process where girls learn, through their early upbringing, to behave differently than boys, and this later gets taken into the organisational world. Bourdieu (2007) argued that there is masculine domination that derives from early socialisation, which results in domination and possession and this also comes from the early socialisation which is experienced differently by boys and girls, and with boys, for example, early upbringing “favours more strongly in boys the various forms of the *libido dominandi* which may find sublimated expressions in the “purest” forms of the social libido, such as *libido sciendi*” (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 57, all emphases in the original). Grosswirth Kachtan (2019) argued that “organizations are an important site for the construction of masculinity and for the characterization of feminine and masculine identities” (p. 1491). In a study by Lee *et al.* (2019), masculinity is connected to Bourdieu’s theory of practice and masculinity is seen as a habitus, which is shared by a group of men; masculinity here constitutes a hegemonic practice (see also, McNay, 1999).

However, whilst there is plenty of research on differences in early childhood between boys and girls, and how these differences feed into leadership, behaviour and communication later in life, there is very little research exploring non-traditional socialisation such as girls who grow up playing with boys, or tomboy girls who then later develop masculine, or what is also known as “blokish” characteristics and how these feed into leadership styles and role models. Therefore, this paper continues from works on organisational masculinities and “blokishness” and analyses women’s leadership styles to explore to what extent women present role models for other women respective of their perceived masculinity and what is the perception of the so-called masculine women vs. feminine women regarding their leadership and behavioural styles and role models. The analysis focussed on comparing masculine vs. feminine women using the framework of behavioural style such as blokishness could provide an answer to why, for example, studies show that women do not always identify with senior women but with those who are closer to them and whom they know more intimately regardless of their position (Singh *et al.*, 2006; Hoyt and Simon, 2011) or why individuals, in general, do not always respond best to those who are of the same gender, race, class, etc. (Carrington *et al.*, 2006).

Women: masculinities and femininities in behaviour and role models

Role models

Researchers argue that women who have role models and mentors are more productive and have higher career satisfaction (Levinson *et al.*, 1991) and having women in senior positions can increase women’s employee retention (Drury *et al.*, 2011; Mensa Torres and Grow, 2015). In addition to that, researchers generally agree that having role models and mentoring generates a positive impact on motivation and career prospects (Lockwood *et al.*, 2002; Latu *et al.*, 2018). However, Singh *et al.* (2006) argued that women seek role models from different areas and for a variety of different purposes to guide their development and do not seek a single ideal who can match them. Nevertheless, women do not draw inspiration from either male role models or senior women and prefer role models from their circle who are closer to them regardless of their position (Singh *et al.*, 2006). Equally, some studies have shown that using highly successful female role models can have a detrimental impact on women if they do not perceive themselves as capable of achieving similar success (Hoyt and Simon, 2011). Having a role model who appears to be a “superwoman” excelling in having a family and a successful career can also reproduce harmful stereotypes and detract women from advancing either because they do not see the “superwoman” as a valid role model or because these roles reproduce stereotypes and put women in the position that they have to have some sort of femininity even if it means modifying their characters (Byrne *et al.*, 2018) to fit expected gendered norms of behaviour (West and Zimmerman, 1983). A similar finding has been found in studies on girls who failed to identify with women scientists due to a lack of personal connection with those women whilst women scientists felt pressured to portray themselves as perfect to become role models (Clark *et al.*, 2008).

Blokishness

Some studies have also shown that women are often facing dual expectations and issues because from one point they are not seen as leaders if they are not assertive, but from the other point if they are assertive people are not expected to see this from women, so they face issues in navigating their leadership styles and achieving staff support (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Nevertheless, when women try to be assertive to fit into a masculine world, they face the problem of being seen as trying to manage like a man, which can then result in being seen as too assertive and even “bitchy” with men sometimes being preferred as leaders

(Acker, 2012; Topić, 2020c; Denmark, 1993). Mills (2014) argued that women who progress to senior positions “become so bloke-ified by the macho water in which they swim that many younger women looking up don’t see them as role models for the kind of women they might want to become” (p. 19). This observation has been confirmed in recent empirical studies on the advertising industry where Topić (2020a, b) found that women who advance in advertising demonstrate “blokish” characteristics and the ability to fit into the masculine culture, thus calling advertising organisations masculine and entrenched into “blokishness”.

“Blokishness” is thus understood as behaviour that comes more naturally to men than women due to the early socialisation process and the fact organisations work under masculine patterns and meanings (Bourdieu, 2007; Mills, 2014; Topić, 2020a, b, c). Bourdieu (2007) argued that to “succeed completely in holding a position, a woman would need to possess not only what is explicitly demanded by the job description, but also a whole set of properties which the male occupants normally bring to the job – a physical stature, a voice, or dispositions such as aggressiveness, self-assurance, “role distance”, what is called natural authority, etc” (p. 62, emphasis in the original). In addition, “blokish” women would demonstrate characteristics such as aggression, directness, lack of empathy, being able to fit into the masculine culture and understand men’s language and also having a work-first attitude which has historically been associated with men due to the fact men did not traditionally care about families (Mills, 2014; North, 2009a, b; Topić, 2020a, b, c; Saval, 2015).

Other authors also argued that women are trying to be like men when they judge advertising awards (Jordan, 2009) and also, that women creatives are erasing their femaleness to succeed in creative departments (Grow and Broyles, 2011). Some women reported that they need to be both feminine and masculine, thus facing dual requirements and they also need to demonstrate that they are brave, a requirement not commonly expected of men (Mensa Torres and Grow, 2015). Masculinity, as a form of habitus marked in embodied dispositions, is constructed via engagement with practice, and thus presents a favoured norm or behavioural protocol of the dominant class at work, which means that “individuals who want to gain more power and ascent the organizational hierarchy, therefore, should be encouraged to embody the hegemonic masculinity as a habitus. In this sense, masculinity reinforces the power gap between social class” (Lee *et al.*, 2019, p. 1471). Masculinity is connected to power and Lee *et al.* (2019) argue that “the perpetuating imbalance between the power and social status is dependent on the possession of a habitus. In the same vein, masculinity as habitus is represented through gendered behaviours, which is shaped, learned, legitimized and encouraged by the various structured social fields” (p. 1471).

However, whilst “blokishness” has been explored in the context of lived experiences and the office culture across communications industries, including advertising, leadership in these industries remains an unexplored area, particularly in the context of masculine women who were socialised with boys (the so-called tomboys) and thus faced unconventional socialisation and the link between masculine behaviour, leadership styles and role models.

Socialisation

Socialisation is “a process by which individuals of a given society learn the skills, behavior patterns, standards, customs and values of the society” (Hoominfar, 2019, p. 1) and one of the main goals of socialisation is the “institutionalization of values, the beliefs, *and standards of the society for all members of a given group*. Socialization can help one to predict how people behave, think, and feel in a group or society” (Hoominfar, 2019, p. 2, my emphasis). Socialisation is a process that lasts all life; however, early socialisation is often seen as influential to behavioural patterns later in life and this is because, during early socialisation, we embrace values from parents, society, education, peer groups and also the media but early and middle socialisation process are often considered as main socialisation (Smetana *et al.*, 2014; Arnett, 2014).

When it comes to peer groups, communication and behavioural studies have argued for decades that participation in peer groups, as part of the early childhood socialisation process, has an impact on behaviour later in life, particularly in regard to communication and behavioural styles. During the early socialisation process, girls for example learn the so-called “rapport talk” marked with support and interaction whereas men learn the talk of domination and interruption (Maltz and Borker, 1982; Yule, 2006). Women are thus seen as having a conversational communication style founded on relationship-building and supportiveness whereas men are seen as having a communication style founded on dominance and interruptions (West and Zimmerman, 1983; Tannen, 1990; Merchant, 2012). These differences come as a result of early childhood socialisation because girls grow up spending time with other girls in smaller groups whereas boys spend time in larger groups where they often compete whilst girls build relationships and try to collaborate. This, later in life, results in a situation where women are more likely to build relationships and commit to teamwork whereas men are more likely to show independence and hierarchy (Maltz and Borker, 1982; Tannen, 1986, 1990, 1995; Yule, 2006). These communication differences are sometimes called “genderlect” and are seen as patriarchal because communication skills often derive from patriarchal early childhood socialisation which tends to be different for boys and girls. The socialisation process will continue throughout life but early childhood is seen as important because this is the period of institutionalisation of gendered beliefs and thus developing gender stereotypes and gendered discrimination (Leaper and Farkas, 2015; Cvencek *et al.*, 2011; Abbott *et al.*, 2005; Witt, 2000), however, research generally does not explore individuals with non-traditional socialisation such as tomboy women who grew up playing with boys for example and their leadership and behavioural styles and there is generally a lack of research on how behaviour in organisation links with role models, which are the focus of this paper.

Method

Qualitative interviews were conducted with women working in the advertising industry in England. As per Table 1 below, women come from a variety of backgrounds and thus work experience ranges from six months to 30 years. A total of 41 interviews were conducted. One interview, with only one month of experience, has been removed from the dataset due to a lack of experience in the industry. In addition, every effort was made to conduct a larger number of interviews with women based in all UK countries, however, this proved impossible and one woman from Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland has been interviewed. Since this is very low for a meaningful analysis, these data have been removed from the dataset, and thus the number of interviews for this study is 37 interviews with women working in the advertising industry in England. In terms of geographical distribution, and differently than most studies on the advertising industry often focussed on London as the main advertising hub in the UK (for, e.g. Crewe and Wang, 2018) and generally, studies tend to focus on women creatives only (for, e.g. Grow and Broyles, 2011), women from a wide range of areas in England have been interviewed, thus the data provide a good base for a meaningful analysis as women also come from diverse ages and work experiences (Table 1).

Women were contacted using LinkedIn where a connection request was firstly sent with a short message explaining that the connection request is linked to research, thus avoiding deception as per the ethics policy of the University. Once the connection was accepted, a longer email was sent asking for an interview explaining the aim of the research, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality. Women interviewees were identified using the website of the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) where the researcher first identified advertising organisations, then searched for staff members and contacted all women who had an email address on the company website. As most women did not have this form of contact, they were manually searched on LinkedIn and then contacted as described

Int. No.	Years of experience	Employee or manager	Place	Department	Comments
1	30	manager	north of England	Creative	A small place, anonymised as per ethics requirements
2	2.5	manager	London	Arts	
3	1 month	employee	Leeds	Accounts	Removed from the dataset
4	4	employee	Manchester	Accounts	
5	34	manager/ owner	Manchester	CEO	
6	4	employee	Leeds	Copyrighting	
7	1.5	employee	London	Design	
8	7	manager	London	Marketing	
9	5	employee	London	Arts	
10	12	manager	London	Business acquisition	
11	3	manager	Liverpool	Operations	
12	14	manager	Belfast	Board member	Removed from dataset
13	27	employee	Newcastle	Copy	
14	18	manager	London	Creative	
15	20	manager	Leeds	Sales	
16	19	manager	London	Creative	
17	25	employee	Leeds	Accounts	
18	6 months	employee	Manchester	Accounts	
19	17	manager	Leeds	Creative	
20	4	employee	London	Accounts	
21	30	employee	London	Production	
22	20	manager	Edinburgh	Partner	Removed from dataset
23	5	employee	Newcastle	Copyright	
24	3	manager	London	Media	
25	18	manager	London	Production	
26	15	manager	Newcastle	Director	
27	20	manager	London	Planning	
28	9 months	employee	Cardiff	Accounts	Removed from dataset
29	12	manager	London	Accounts	
30	12	employee	London	Accounts	
31	5	employee	London	Strategy	
32	7 months	employee	Leeds	Production	
33	4	employee	south of England	Business acquisition	A small place, anonymised as per ethics requirements
34	22	employee	south of England	Accounts	A small place, anonymised as per ethics requirements
35	5	manager	Leeds	Production	
36	22	manager	London	Branding	
37	8 months	employee	London	Sales	
38	5	employee	London	Accounts	
39	19	manager	Manchester	Director	
40	19	manager	London	Arts	
41	11	manager	Leeds	Accounts	

Table 1.
Interviewees

above. Women were thus identified randomly via the IPA website and interviewing continued until saturation has been reached. Four interviews were conducted face-to-face and the rest via phone. Of those face-to-face interviews, one is amongst four excluded interviews, thus in the total sample of 37 interviewees, three interviews were conducted face-to-face and 34 via phone. This is because of heavy workloads, particularly regarding frequent client meetings, and thus women could not dedicate time to meet in person. In addition to that,

the researcher noted that most interviews were conducted during lunch breaks or after work, which in many cases was from 7 p.m. and later (including one interview at 9.30 p.m.), thus showing heavy and demanding workloads of women, which already partially proves masculine work patterns in the advertising industry, as mentioned in the literature review.

Women were asked questions on whom they spent time with when they were growing up particularly regarding peer groups thus asking whether they played with boys or girls, to assess the leadership style of their bosses and whether they have any preferences regarding the gender of their manager. The latter question was asked to women employees without managerial duties. In addition to that, women were asked about role models, employees whether they see senior women as role models and managers whether they consider themselves to be role models. The approach to research was linear with the researcher conducting the literature review on blokishness and masculinities in organisations, which are mainly done in advertising, PR and journalism as per the literature review above, and then the interview questions were designed. All interviews were conducted at the same time, over a period of six months and there have been no changes to the questions during the interview process based on the interviewee's answers. The data have also not been analysed singularly and all transcripts have been analysed at the end of data collection. Saturation has been reached in the sample regarding age, geographical position, socialisation experiences and employment status.

The interviews were semi-structured, and all interviewees were asked exactly the same questions with no leading questions or references from the literature review on masculinities or blokishness that could lead the participants. For example, the first section of interview questions captured experiences of early peer groups by asking participants whom they spent time with when they were growing up and offering a "for example" option, outlining boys, girls and mixed groups, thus not leading participants to answer in a certain way. In the same way, women were asked how they would describe their leadership style (for women in managerial positions) without offering examples of what leadership might look like or how they would describe their manager's leadership style (for women employees). In the case of the latter, there was an additional question asking about the gender of the manager and thus there were two slightly different interview questions containing the same questions but applicable to women's employment status. Some women were asked to provide examples when they were not clear in their answers or they were too short, thus the interviews being semi-structured, however, no questions were added or removed during the interviewing process.

The interviews lasted between 30 and 40 min and all interviews were transcribed for analysis. A three-tier analysis was conducted, firstly on women employees, then women managers and then a whole analysis was done on all women together, the latter one particularly focussing on contrasting answers on leadership and role models against the data on early socialisation to explore also whether these data also suggest a possible link between early socialisation, leadership and behavioural styles and role models, as with literature cited earlier in this paper (Leaper and Farkas, 2015; Cvencek *et al.*, 2011; Abbott *et al.*, 2005; Witt, 2000). In other words, the aim was to compare the views and experiences of the so-called tomboy women who played with boys when growing up vs. women who experienced more traditional socialisation and played with girls (feminine women). This was then explored in the context of role models.

Responses from each group were copied to the Word document and these documents were first analysed separately, as described, and then one whole document was analysed looking specifically at socialisation vs. leadership styles and role models. The data were compared and contrasted throughout the process of coding as per the guidance of Morse and Richards (2002) and open coding was done first, which helped in identifying critical themes in the data. Axial coding was done next, and this process helped in analysing data against different sections of data (e.g. data on leadership and role models against data on early socialisation)

and selective coding then helped in identifying and capturing the most relevant themes from data, which were then compared and contrasted in the final analysis.

Thematic analysis was used to identify themes in the data. This method is a “systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning; coding and classifying data, usually textual, according to themes; and interpreting the resulting thematic structures by seeking commonalities, relationships, overarching patterns, theoretical constructs, or explanatory principles” (Lapadat, 2010, p. 926). The aim of the thematic analysis is to make sense of data and identify trends, however, without the intention to generalise findings or seek causalities. Since the thematic analysis is systematic in its approach to data and identifies codes, which are then grouped into themes, it is the closest to the quantitative analysis (and can be seen as a pragmatic approach) and findings can be used to design a larger quantitative survey to explore findings further and find causalities. Therefore, thematic analysis is a sense-making approach to identifying themes and concepts that derive from data and its main aim is to identify patterns in responses and suggest further research. In other words, these findings are indicative of the situation in the field, however, there is no generalisation from this sample.

The analysis was conducted according to guidance by Braun and Clarke (2006) who proposed that thematic analysis is accompanied by direct narratives of participants preceded by the thematic graph that illustrates the findings. The research questions for the study were set as follows,

- RQ1.* Are there differences in leadership styles of tomboy women vs feminine women? If differences exist, how do they, if in any way, feed into the views of role models?
- RQ2.* Are women managers demonstrating masculine traits in leadership? If so, are they seen as role models for women employees?
- RQ3.* Are there differences in the way tomboy vs feminine women describe their leadership styles?

The findings were analysed within a framework of early socialisation and blokishness one develops as a behavioural trait later in life, thus suggesting that interactions in social groups during early childhood have an impact on careers later in life, with which this study takes a sociological perspective to study organisations. This part of the analysis draws from Bourdieu's (2007) work on masculine domination and habitus where he argued that “to succeed completely in holding a position, a woman would need to possess not only what is explicitly demanded by the job description, but also a whole set of properties which the male occupants normally bring to the job – a physical stature, a voice, or dispositions such as aggressiveness, self-assurance, ‘role distance’, what is called natural authority, etc, for which men have been tacitly prepared and trained as men” (p. 62). What is more, Bourdieu (2007) also argued that to “access to power of any kind places women in a ‘double bind’; if they behave like men, they risk losing the obligatory attributes of ‘femininity’ and call into question the natural right of men to the positions of power; if they behave like women, they appear incapable and unfit for the job. These contradictory expectations simply take over from those to which they are structurally exposed as objects offered on the market in symbolic goods, simultaneously invited to use all means to please and charm and expected to repel the seductive manoeuvres that this kind of submission in advance to the verdict of the male gaze may seem to have provoked” (p. 68). In other words, Bourdieu (2007) argues that early socialisation in one's habitus affects behaviour later in life, particularly in the context of organisations, which are still a masculine world (Mills, 2014; Bourdieu, 2007; West and Zimmerman, 1983; Maltz and Borker, 1982; Merchant, 2012; Tannen, 1986, 1990, 1995; Topić, 2020a, b, c; Hoominfar, 2019; Smetana *et al.*, 2014; Arnett, 2014). The masculine domination and habitus are thus about social reproduction because people have deeply

engrained beliefs about the social world and embrace social behaviours linked to their growing up (Arnett, 2014). This does not mean that an individual cannot get out of their own habitus and change themselves. Studies in education have shown that this is possible, however, these studies also often show that people continue to struggle throughout their lives and feel, for example, an imposter syndrome (Lehman, 2013).

“Blokishness” is understood in line with existing literature or as a behavioural pattern in which women express what is commonly known as masculine behaviour and communication, e.g. aggression, a directness in communication, lack of empathy, a management style considered as tough, demanding and personal characteristics such as not showing emotion and thus rarely presenting a role model for many women, particularly to those showing what is commonly known as a feminine trait in communication and behaviour marked with considerate communication empathy and emotion (Mills, 2014; Bourdieu, 2007; West and Zimmerman, 1983; Maltz and Borker, 1982; Merchant, 2012; Tannen, 1986, 1990, 1995; Topić, 2020a, b, c; Hoominfar, 2019; Smetana *et al.*, 2014; Arnett, 2014). In a sense, this concept presents an extension of Bourdieu’s (2007) work on masculine domination as it empirically explores women’s experiences and conceptualises what behavioural characteristics masculine women have that take them ahead, and thus contributes to further explaining how masculine domination works in practice, which is somewhat lacking in Bourdieu’s work that provides a rich theoretical framework that has been used in hundreds of studies, but it does not provide empirical concepts that can be tested. Whilst this is a qualitative study that cannot be generalised, the findings, through the use of sense-making thematic analysis, provide enough concepts to inform future research that can further explore this framework.

Findings

Women employees

According to the analysis of responses from women employees with no managerial positions, behavioural styles are the main theme that runs through the responses of interviewees, and this is linked to early peer groups and leadership styles, as well as attitudes towards tomboy women and preferences of male vs female bosses respective of their behavioural styles and this, impacts views on role models (Figure 1).

The majority of women employees say they prefer having women bosses and reasons usually include women showing more understanding to mothers and also when employees need to leave earlier for a variety of reasons (e.g. doctor’s appointments, children, not feeling well, etc). Some women also said they prefer to work for a woman because they “listen to me more than men. Typically, I hate to generalise but from my experience men just don’t take us seriously or they think that their ideas are better” (interviewee 4). This suggests that women are inclined to prefer women bosses mainly if they demonstrate feminine behavioural characteristics such as empathy, which is often quoted as showing understanding, listening and being supportive (Mills, 2014; Bourdieu, 2007; West and Zimmerman, 1983; Maltz and Borker, 1982; Merchant, 2012; Tannen, 1986, 1990, 1995; Topić, 2020a, b, c; Hoominfar, 2019; Smetana *et al.*, 2014; Arnett, 2014).

However, some women said they prefer male bosses and the reasons for preferring men lie in differences in perceived styles of women’s leadership. Similarly to some organisational and communications literature (Denmark, 1993; Acker, 2012; Topić, 2020c), it seems as if women use prejudicial reasons for not liking women bosses by calling them “catty” or “bitchy” and what seems to be underlying these problems is that it is often harder to work for a woman because of higher expectations and toughness. This echoes observations from Mills (2014) who argued that women who succeed in leadership positions become so “become so bloke-ified by the macho water in which they swim that many younger women looking up don’t see them as role models for the kind of women they might want to become” (p. 19). Therefore, in line with



Figure 1.
Thematic analysis of employee responses

Bourdieu's (2007) arguments, women who behave like men and access the position of power, lose socially expected femininity in behaviour and get challenged. Women in this study tend to favour women who can build a relationship with their employees, thus signalling that "blokish" women who embrace masculine characteristics might not be seen as favourable bosses. This is visible in views on role models where women who had female bosses said in some cases that they see them as "what I didn't want to be like" citing reasons such as being protective of their work and not being helpful to other employees (interviewee 4).

However, some women make a distinction about what kind of women bosses they see as role models, citing also their behavioural styles and ability to manage careers and families, thus opening a question of "superwoman" (Byrne *et al.*, 2018) and suggesting a sense of internalisation of expected roles where women are expected to juggle both careers and family, for example,

Yes, definitely. She set this business up ten years ago and she's got two young children as well as running the business, so I really admire her, how she is set it up and continued to run it, set it up in the middle of the recession and run it for ten years and had two children through those ten years as well. So I do really admire . . . (interviewee 28).

What the data suggest is that women who experienced feminine socialisation tend to show a preference for women's bosses who can show more understanding and serve as an inspiration or a role model. When it comes to disliked women bosses, they see them as someone they would not want to become, outlining reasons such as hardness in the approach, which is commonly understood as a masculine or blokish characteristic (Mills, 2014; North, 2009a, b; Topić *et al.*, 2020; Topić, 2020a, b, c; Grow and Broyles, 2011). These views are further exacerbated in views on leadership preferences where women who were socialised with girls tend to embrace feminine leadership styles marked with a supportive and flexible approach. For example, interviewee 34 said that her leadership style is encouraging and empowering and this interviewee also said that she spent time mostly with girls. For example,

I try to encourage, show the juniors, the role going right the way through. If you do this, this is the outcome, try to think of it this way. I let them lead at meetings. I try to make sure that they have got all of the information, and I sit back and let them take it, run with it, but obviously jump in if they struggle. I try to be as collaborative as I can (interviewee 34 on her leadership style)

When it comes to assessing which characteristics are necessary for effective leadership, interviewed women tend to express a range of characteristics such as open-mindedness, friendliness, fairness, empathy and ability to listen, which are all traditionally seen as feminine behavioural characteristics (Mills, 2014; North, 2009a, b; Topić *et al.*, 2020; Topić, 2020a, b, c; Grow and Broyles, 2011), and it seems as if women with mixed socialisation experience, those who grew up with both boys and girls, tend to express mixed views combining both feminine and masculine characteristics but leaning more towards the masculine. On the other hand, women who grew up with boys tend to express traditionally masculine characteristics as desirable for leadership such as strictness and hard expectations. For example,

I would say attention. You need to be attentive. You need to know who you are dealing with. You need to be attentive of how they act, what they do, what they are good at, what they are not good at, and more details as well (. . .) Also, I would say, strict; in the way where you don't want to be too nice or too open, or too easy on people, so that they do not do what you expect them to do (interviewee 32, masculine socialisation).

I think leaders do not have to be liked, so I would say that the frankness is probably better because (. . .) if you are realistic and straight with everything. So that is probably what I would say is more effective. I think charisma is helpful and communication, but I do not think emotion needs to be too big a part of it as long as you are intelligent enough to get the best out of your workforce with whatever levers you have available to yourself (interviewee 33, mixed socialisation).

Women managers. According to the thematic analysis for data from women managers, *blokishness* runs as a central theme through the data, with sub-themes of masculine socialisation, more adaptability to masculine organisations, masculine managing styles and catch 22 (Figure 2).

The majority of managers described early socialisation which was marked by growing up playing with boys rather than girls. These women tend to describe their leadership style using a mixture of characteristics but there is a tendency to show trust in people and leave them to do the work until they do something wrong, thus showing empowering attitudes towards management. For example, interviewee 19 who described herself as a tomboy outlined what is commonly known as a masculine trait in leadership such as toughness and not showing emotion as well as accepting risks (Mills, 2014; North, 2009a, b; Topić *et al.*, 2020; Topić, 2020a, b, c; Grow and Broyles, 2011), for example,

Well, I am a bit of a tomboy (. . .) All my friends were mainly boys growing up (. . .) I get out there and fight (. . .) I think as girls in advertising, in a real male-dominated industry, I think you need to be a bit tougher (. . .) it is an industry where you really sometimes have to be a bit tough, because if you are emotionally not toughened to some of the comments and things that you get, you will not succeed as much, which is sad (interviewee 19 on socialisation)

. . . If people screw it up, that is fine, but definitely, in terms of my team, I like to think that they would go out there, take a risk. I definitely encourage people to take risks (. . .) Impatience was probably something that I need to work on a little bit (interviewee 19 on leadership).

These women also often mention being able to pull their weight and do work as well as lead by example. Therefore, they often say they will do lots of work to show employees how it is done, however, this matches the views of employees who expressed criticism of women managers being hard on them and having high expectations especially since some women admitted being impatient and hard, for example,

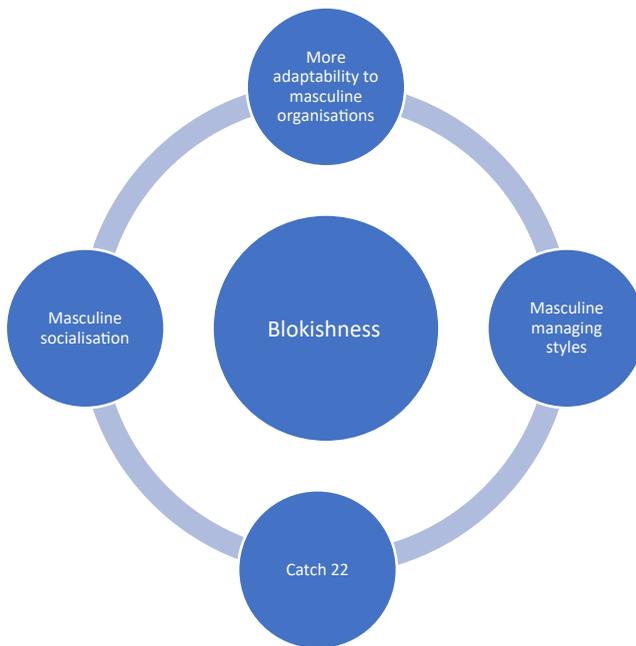


Figure 2. Thematic analysis of Manager's responses

... so everybody must pull their weight. Everybody must do what they are designed to do. I tend to be the one to pull the projects together. I tend to be the one to write the brief, so I tend to be the person that has the overall view of everything, and I tend to be the one that pulls the web bit, the copy, the artwork and the account ... (interviewee 1).

However, feminine women mention their leadership style using descriptions such as getting onto the same level as employees, being approachable, having an open-door policy and behaving like a friend, thus showing a tendency toward what is commonly known as feminine leadership (Mills, 2014; North, 2009a, b; Topić *et al.*, 2020; Topić, 2020a, b, c). For example,

I am not direct and I tend to be more like a friend (...) so if they have any problems, they can come to me for not work-related issues as well. And I think that is quite helpful. So communication and teamwork because of that is very strong, so if someone is struggling from my team I will jump on it straight away helping them. I would kind of describe it more as a team effort rather than leadership (interviewee 24, feminine socialisation).

Some women also commented on the struggle they face in being effective leaders and trying to manage how they lead, thus showing the catch-22 women face, i.e. if they are nice they can be perceived as too soft, but if they are too tough then they are perceived as bossy or a "bitch",

I am approachable. I have an open-door policy. People in every team in the agency would feel like they can speak to me and ask my advice (...) On the flip side of that, I have had to show my assertiveness because otherwise, I think they think I am a soft touch. I think it is a struggle because when I am direct and vocal, they can view me as aggressive and maybe a bit bolshy, bossy, a bit of a bitch, but I think that is what females face, whereas men, my colleagues if they are direct or semi-aggressive, they are just viewed as expressing their opinion. So, yes, I feel like I

have to adopt a softer approach, so I am not viewed as a bitch (interviewee 12, feminine socialisation).

Feminine women also say they see themselves as role models, however, women who experienced masculine socialisation and could be described as “blokish”, in many cases said they do not see themselves as role models for other women because they have different priorities and do not see themselves also as girly types of women. For example,

No. Well, my only female employee at the moment, she has a family and I am sure her family are her priority. Not having a family, work is my priority. [laughing] I am pretty certain that she does not want to swap places (interviewee 1, masculine socialisation).

No. I am not a typical woman. I do not think I am a role model (. . .) I do not think that I am very particularly a woman's kind of woman if you know what I mean. I am different in the way that I present myself. I am not particularly girly, I do not do things a lot of other women really care about, like typical girl talk (interviewee 40, masculine socialisation).

Women in advertising: who goes ahead and how? Based on this analysis, a conceptualisation for further research is offered. The data from this qualitative study suggested that women who demonstrate masculine characteristics report early socialisation experiences marked by spending time with boys and thus tend to have a direct communication style and prefer male managers, and when they become managers tend to embrace masculine leadership styles and show high expectations of employees. These women are also more likely to become managers as they can fit into masculine organisational culture and develop a better relationship with male employees and they do not see themselves as role models for other women (Figure 3).

On the other hand, the data suggest that women who experienced feminine early socialisation and were socialised with girls, tend to show feminine leadership styles such as open-mindedness, friendliness, the ability to listen and show empathy and being supportive of employees. These women also tend to show a considerate communication style and either have no preferences with employees or they prefer to work with female employees. However, these women face obstacles when it comes to progressing to managerial roles and when they do progress, they face difficulties in managing men and have different expectations from both men and women. These women see themselves as role models for other women (Figure 4).

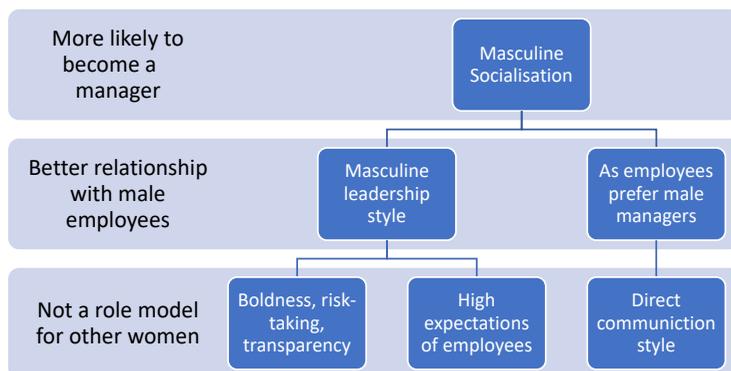


Figure 3.
Blokish women and leadership

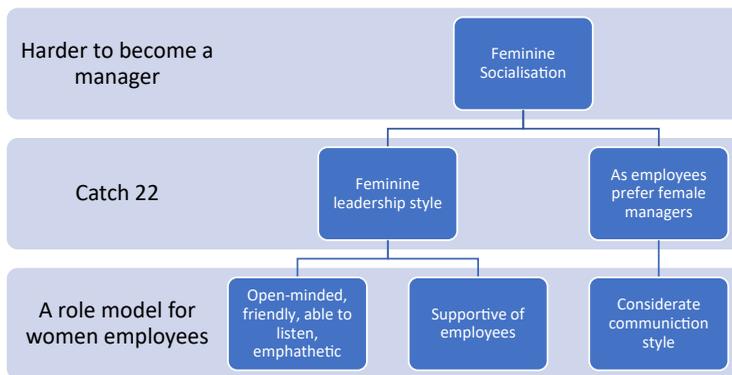


Figure 4. Feminine women and leadership

Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems that women describe their leadership styles and preferences in a way that fits existing literature on leadership arguing that women lead differently (Grove and Montgomery, 2000; Krishnan and Park, 2004; Christopher, 2008; Melero, 2011; Wright, 2011; Radu *et al.*, 2017; Billing and Alvesson, 2000), but also in a way that suggests the influence of early childhood socialisation and participation in peer groups (Bourdieu, 2007; West and Zimmerman, 1983; Maltz and Borker, 1982; Merchant, 2012; Tannen, 1986, 1990, 1995; Topić, 2020a, b, c; Hoominfar, 2019; Smetana *et al.*, 2014; Arnett, 2014) where the data suggest that women who socialised with boys tend to show a tendency to prefer and demonstrate what is commonly known as a masculine leadership style whereas women who grew up playing with girls tend to show a preference towards what is commonly known as a feminine leadership style. These differences are also visible in behavioural styles and work expectations as well as leadership styles as described in the findings section.

What these findings also tend to show is that there is a clear distinction between the so-called masculine women who face challenges from feminine women who do not see them as role models, but interestingly, they do not see themselves as role models either. These women describe themselves as tomboys and often use masculine behavioural characteristics to portray their leadership styles. As outlined in the literature review, studies argued that women benefit from having role models (Levinson *et al.*, 1991; Drury *et al.*, 2011; Mensa Torres and Grow, 2015; Lockwood *et al.*, 2002; Latu *et al.*, 2018; Singh *et al.*, 2006) but that also women sometimes suffer if they do not perceive themselves as capable of achieving the same success as senior women who are meant to be role models (Hoyt and Simon, 2011). What this study has indicated is that a role model needs to be someone women can identify with regarding behavioural characteristics such as leadership styles and if a senior woman is perceived as masculine or “blokish” this creates resistance from women who then often say they would rather work for men, particularly those who experienced feminine socialisation. One of the implications of these findings is that it appears the more senior women get, the less likely they are to be seen as role models or someone women would identify with, which also stems from the masculine culture of organisations in which women who succeed are often those who become bloke-ified (Mills, 2014).

Bourdieu’s work on masculine domination and habitus seems a powerful tool to understand the masculine culture of organisations, in this case advertising ones. The concepts identified in this study, as presented in Figures 3 and 4 outline behavioural characteristics of masculine vs. feminine women respective of their leadership styles and organisational behaviour signalling there are indeed differences in how they behave, communicate and lead, e.g. relationship with employees respective of gender, views and expectations of leadership and the ability to win

employee support, which signals the influence of habitus and upbringing in how we see organisational life (Bourdieu, 2007).

The limitation of this study is that it is a qualitative study, and its findings are based on 37 interviews with women working in the advertising industry. Further research could explore these issues using a large-scale quantitative study to further explore identified concepts. In addition, further research should also explore the role of social class in women's behavioural and leadership styles. This is particularly relevant in the context of Bourdieu's habitus, which does largely speak of class. In this study, the class did emerge in some responses from interviewees, however, it was not meaningful in numbers enough to be reported, but this might be due to class not being explored in these interview questions originally. Future research should look at behavioural differences between women of various class origins and explore what women are more likely to embrace blockish behaviour and whether there are behavioural differences in organisational behaviour based on class.

Future research could also explore to what extent behavioural styles in an organisation are image management and a conscious choice, such as for example using Goffman's framework of frontstage and backstage identities. As noted in the literature review, there are many different stages of socialisation and whilst early socialisation is seen as the most influential because it institutionalises beliefs and gender norms, further stages of socialisation can lead towards a conscious change of behaviour of women to succeed in career endeavours and thus a different interviewee sample could provide different answers respective of Goffman's stages. Goffman's analysis could thus provide a relationship between frontstage and backstage as well as the emotional impact this conscious change might have on women who chose to change their behaviour. What is more, an imposter syndrome might emerge from these findings, which is also an unexplored area in women's studies, particularly from a communications perspective.

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Further reading

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- Topić, M. (2018), "Not bloke-ified enough? Women journalists, supermarket industry and the debate on sugar in the British press (2010-2015)", *Newspaper Research Journal*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 433-442.

Corresponding author

Martina Topić can be contacted at: M.Topic@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

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