



## WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP IN THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD. A SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW

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### **Abstract:**

The aim of this paper is to detect and outline the effect of sex on the job expectations and professional identities of women, in order for them to apply for and be recruited to leadership positions in the educational field, through a review of the scientific literature. The study and analysis of the content of scientific studies relevant to the topic under investigation highlight the influence of gendered habitus on the career expectations and leadership style adopted by the women active in the educational field, in conjunction with their social and symbolic habitus. In particular, it emerged that gendered habitus places limitations on women's career paths, and as a result, the latter are concentrated in the lower echelons of the educational field. Even in the cases where women manage to advance in the administrative web of education, gendered habitus means they are faced with conflicting professional identities.

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## 1. Introduction

The woman's entrenched gendered social role, as expressed on a primary level through her position in the family, was extended when education was made compulsory, and it defined the suitability of the female sex for teaching work. Given its direct relationship with the socially defined concept of femininity, education constituted one of the first professional sectors that female workers were integrated into (Braun, 2015; Cortina & San Roman, 2006; Schmude & Jackisch, 2019; Warin & Gannerud, 2014). In particular, bestowing as it does the most powerful social status, the greatest job stability and the highest financial rewards compared with other "female" professions, the job of the teacher has always attracted a large number of working women (Carroll *et al.*, 2019; Tani, 2019).

However, despite its feminised character, especially in pre-school and primary education, women teachers continue to be the subjects of intense gender discrimination. More specifically, the inequalities that afflict the workforce in the educational field can be found on the one hand in the differentiated distribution of teachers according to gender, across the levels of education, the scientific fields and the cognitive subject areas (horizontal separation) and on the other in the underrepresentation of women in positions of administrative responsibility (vertical separation) (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013; Silander *et al.*, 2022).

In particular, the underrepresentation of women in the administrative network of education is evident across all levels of education and intensifies as we reach the top of the administration pyramid (Asimaki *et al.*, 2012; Frosi, 2016; Kreitz-Sanberg, 2013; Moreau *et al.*, 2007; Muradoglu *et al.*, 2022). At the same time, the presence of women in executive positions is more widespread in Primary Education and is more restricted moving up to the Secondary education level (McGrath, 2020; O.E.C.D., 2020). A characteristic example of this can be found in contemporary data from the 2018 TALIS research, according to which the average percentage ratio of female headteachers in school units at the early school, primary, lower secondary and higher secondary education levels in the countries that participated in the research are, respectively, 95.1%, 52.6%, 48.9%, and 40.3% (O.E.C.D., 2020).

With this in mind, a number of male and female researchers active in the field of the Sociology of Education have focused their research interest on the issues of gendered inequalities that are linked to the issue of educational leadership. More precisely, a significant number of studies have investigated the percentage ratios of female staff in Primary and Secondary Education (Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2011; Frosi, 2016; Melka *et al.*, 2022; Mitroussi & Mitroussi, 2009; Sismanidou & Poultidis, 2016). In addition, a plethora of research focuses on the gendered characteristics that make up the professional identities and leadership styles adopted by the women who hold positions in educational leadership (Carroll *et al.*, 2019; Daraki,

2007; Jones, 2016; Oplatks, 2006). Finally, at the centre of research trends in both the international and the Greek scientific field are the factors that influence the modest professional expectations and the limited administrative advancement of female teachers (Bodalina & Mestry, 2020; Brinia, 2012; Combat, 2012; Gutierrez, 2016; Kyriakoussis & Saiti, 2006; Markopoulos & Argyriou, 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Melka *et al.*, 2022; Mitroussi & Mitroussi, 2009; Niota, 2018; Oplatka, 2006; Robinson *et al.*, 2017; Üstün 2015).

This paper aims to trace the influence of gender on the job expectations and professional identities of female teachers and educational leaders through a review of contemporary scientific literature.

The paper comprises a chapter on theoretical points, which is followed by the classification of the scientific literature into four chapters based on the thematic content of the studies. For each thematic unit, the results of the most representative research, which orients the findings of the particular chapters, are briefly presented. Finally, a number of concluding remarks complete the paper.

## 2. Theoretical notes

The approach to the issue under investigation made use of Pierre Bourdieu's theory, which focuses on the way in which the structure of the world is prescribed by wider gender, racial and class relationships (Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Koustourakis *et al.*, 2016).

The world is conceived of by the sociologist as a unified entirety and as a complex of distinct 'fields', such as those of politics, the economy, culture, education, science and bureaucracy (Koustourakis *et al.*, 2020; Nairz-Wirth & Feldmann, 2019).

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 97), the field can be defined as a '*network or a configuration of objective relationships between positions*', which can take on the form of relationships of power, submission or homology. They are structured spaces of positions within which the actors are placed in positions based on their current or potential circumstance in the structure of the distribution of the types of power, in other words, based on the resources or capital they possess (Bourdieu, 1994; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Consequently, the actors are placed in a hierarchy in the framework of each field based on the volume and relative combinations of capital they possess (Kalfa & Taksa, 2013; Malsch *et al.*, 2011).

The way the field works is determined through a set of global and entrenched rules (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1991), which delimit and orient the action of the social subjects (Ferrare & Apple, 2015) in such a way that it is attuned to the interests of the dominant social groups within it (Bourdieu, 2006). However, when the rules of the field are questioned, the power games are transformed into arenas of competition and contest (Ferrare & Apple, 2015) in terms of the resources, the stakes and the imposition of domination (Dumais, 2002; Malsch *et al.*, 2011).

The educational field, like every field, is an arena of conflict and power struggles (Grinshtain & Addi-Racah, 2020) and has certain ideological interests and stakes

(Bourdieu, 1994). More specifically, concerning the decision-making sector of the educational field, the actors-teachers use all the resources available to them, in other words, all the kinds of capital they have in their possession, with the aim of increasing their power and influence (Grinshtain & Addi-Racah, 2020).

The educational field is related to a wide range of resources, the main ones being cultural, symbolic and social capital. As an example, both the official educational and professional qualifications and the networks of contacts have a direct influence on the subjects' chances of promotion to the dominant leadership positions in the educational field (Lingard & Cristie, 2003).

Bourdieu (1994) understands the concept of cultural capital as a system of long-term moods and habits, material cultural goods and formal educational qualifications and certifications. In particular, he identifies three distinct but interconnected forms of cultural capital, the 'objectified' or 'external', the 'institutionalised' and the 'embodied' or 'internalised' or 'innate' ('habitus').

More analytically, cultural capital in its objectified dimension consists of visible material possessions and cultural goods, such as books, works of art and broadly speaking, whatever material support is a product of activities of the intellect and fine arts (Bourdieu, 1994).

Institutionalized cultural capital is a form of objectification, which makes official the recognition of educational qualifications and is legitimized through the academic credentials that are granted by the educational institutions (Bourdieu, 1986; Milonas, n.d.).

Cultural capital, in its embodied form, is expressed through a collection of acquired knowledge in the form of long-term and continuous states of mind and body and is the product of an unconscious and subtle transmission (Bourdieu, 1994; Milonas, n.d.). It is acquired naturally, first in the context of the primary socialization of the individual, it doesn't follow a systematic line of teaching and doesn't have the quality of transmission (Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014; Bourdieu, 1986).

As Bourdieu defines them (2006, p. 88), the habitus are *"systems of lasting and transferable predispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, as generating and organizational principles in other words of the practices and representations, which can be adapted objectively to their purpose without needing to target consciously on those and to explicitly control the actions essential for achieving them"*. So, the concept of predispositions describes individuals' positions and tendencies regarding the way they think, act, feel, speak, comprehend and give meaning to various different situations, and also reflects the objective social conditions of the existence of the subjects and guides their practices (Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014; Reay, 2004).

According to Bourdieu, dealing with the "genders" as "gendered habits"-habitus is the product of a long-term process of *"socialization of the biological and biologization of the social"* (Bourdieu, 2007, p.33), which enters the bodies and the intellectual schema of thought that inscribe the biological and anatomical differentiations in a system of social divisions and contrasts (Bourdieu, 2007).

The self-apparent and apparently neutral character of the power of the male class legitimizes and is legitimized by male dominance in a symbolic way, through the gender-based division of labour in the public and private sphere. Bourdieu (2007, p. 30) ascribes male dominance to the symbolic violence practiced on women which he describes as *“mild violence, imperceptible, invisible, even to the victims of it themselves, which in essence is practiced through the purely symbolic channels of communication and knowledge..., the misrecognition, the recognition...of emotion”*.

According to Bourdieu (1986), the subjects are bearers of “symbolic capital”, which is depicted and conceived of symbolically in a relationship of misrecognition and recognition. It is a legal power, which is located in the markets where economic capital isn’t fully recognized. The symbolic element, which can be expressed through femininity, masculinity, skin colour or any other element that is a statement of “belonging” to a distinct group, legitimizes the “be” and “do” of the social subjects and determines the factors that define the stigmatized (for example, the women) on the one hand, and the socially dominant groups (for example, the men) on the other.

In this regard, perhaps even today, femininity in a number of instances, is associated with the attributes of shyness, modesty, malleability (Bourdieu, 2006), caregiving, sentimentalism, the development of interpersonal relationships and spending time on the external appearance (Miller, 2016). In addition, masculinity is traditionally linked to the characteristics of directness, ruggedness and frankness (Bourdieu, 2006), toughness, aggression, emotional control and dominance over women and same-sex opponents (Miller, 2016).

Finally, “social capital” concerns the network of relationships of mutual knowledge and recognition that shapes every social subject through – individual or collective – investment strategies (Bourdieu, 1986).

### **3. The vertical segregation of women in the educational field**

The action of the subjects takes place in gender-differentiated fields where the different kinds of capital function as an exchange rate (Bourdieu, 1986; Dumais, 2002) and male dominance exists in all the social spaces (Bourdieu, 2007; Silva, 2005).

Even in the case of traditionally feminized professions, such as, for example, the profession of the teacher, men are considered more suited to administrative work and are encouraged by their social environment to take on positions of administrative responsibility (Williams, 1992, 2013; Gutierrez, 2016). The phenomenon of the promotion of men who are active in female-dominated professional domains to the most highly paid sectors and administrative positions due to them being considered more competitive and more able leaders is described in the literature using the term *“glass escalator”* (Williams, 1992; 2013).

Hence, in the context of the educational field, while men occupy the dominant positions with status and administrative responsibility, the majority of the women are to be found in lower teaching positions, which results in the minimalization of their influence and power (Grinshtain & Addi-Racah, 2020).

As far as Primary and Secondary Education are concerned, a mass of empirical data from the Greek and foreign language literature reveals the strong presence of women in positions of administrative responsibility, as much at the level of school unit as at the level of local and regional government organization of education (Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2011; Frosi, 2016; Mitroussi & Mitroussi, 2009; Markopoulos & Argyriou, 2014; Sismanidou & Poultidis, 2016; Robinson *et al.*, 2017; Melka *et al.*, 2022).

In the case of Greece, more recent statistical studies reveal the gradual increase in the presence of women in educational leadership positions. More specifically, in the school year 2019-2020, the body of school head teachers was made up of 41.8% women (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2019). The increase in the number of women in school leadership positions in Greece is confirmed by the decisions of the Ministry of Education (2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d) regarding the recruitment of head teachers in school units in the four largest regions in terms of population.

Similar statistical data drawn from the international research field reveal that in the economically developed Western world, the percentage of female head teachers in Primary Education school units is higher than that of their male counterparts (McGrath, 2020; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023; O.E.C.D., 2020). More specifically, according to the most recent evidence from the TALIS research of 2018, the average percentage of female head teachers in Primary Education school units is 52.6%, with the highest percentages being in Argentina (90.1%), France (75.1%) and the United Kingdom (70.2%), and the lowest in Taiwan (31.5%), Japan (23.1%) and Turkey (8.2%) (O.E.C.D., 2020).

However, as we scale the educational administrative web, to higher administrative positions than those of head teacher, then the degree of female representation continues to remain small. Within the context of the Greek field of education, the percentage of female district heads of Primary Education, at 35.7% (Ministry of Education, 2022), is a characteristic example, and the corresponding percentage for female Regional Heads of Education is just 15.4% (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Similarly, in the field of Tertiary Education, the presence of women is significantly lacking in academic organization and especially in the highest grades of the professorial and administrative hierarchy in Higher Education Institutions (Aiston & Jung, 2015; Asimaki *et al.*, 2012; Asimaki *et al.*, 2016; Asimaki *et al.*, 2023; Hakiem, 2021; Koustourakis & Asimaki, 2012; Tang & Horta, 2021). Female academics are more likely to do teaching work or provide psychological support to students, with administrative work being a typically male practice (Aiston & Jung, 2015). In addition, it appears that drawing on resources to fund research is an almost exclusively male privilege (Asimaki *et al.*, 2016; Hakiem, 2021; Tang & Horta, 2021).

It is abundantly clear that the vertical separation is directly linked to the phenomenon of the “*glass ceiling*”, which is the “*invisible but invincible barrier that prevents minorities and women in general from reaching the highest levels in the hierarchy, irrespective of their qualifications and accomplishments*” (Cotter *et al.*, 2001, p. 656). More specifically, working women and, in this case, women in the field of education, who are

in a position below the 'glass ceiling', recognize the existence of potentially accessible positions in the administrative hierarchy of the structure they work in, but acquiring them is obstructed by factors that act in a silent and imperceptible manner (Gorman & Kmec, 2009).

According to Bourdieu (2007), the symbolic dominance and symbolic capital of men in the social field construct the female dispositions and place women in those positions in the field of work that align with their socially constructed gendered habitus. Hence, women, being symbolically destined to take on inferior or dependent work positions, appear even today to be restricted in their occupation of high-status administrative positions in the education sector and in that way, the ability of a large number of teachers to exercise power is significantly restricted. Consequently, the educational field of work, following – in a way – the patriarchal organizational model, grants to men the higher positions of responsibility and to women positions as inferior teaching staff, with the exception of the economically developed countries where to a large extent women occupy positions as head teachers of school units.

#### **4. Gendered habitus, symbolic capital and the professional expectations of female teachers regarding taking on positions of administrative responsibility**

Women who are active in the framework of the educational field are placed in the hierarchy based on the volume and relative combinations of capital that they possess (Kalfka & Taksa, 2013; Malsch *et al.*, 2011). Given that the main kinds of capital related to the educational field are cultural, social and symbolic capital (in the form of meaning transmitted with symbols, recognized as legal power and bestowing status-bearing commodities) (Bourdieu, 2007; Lingard & Cristie, 2003), the influence that the symbolic factor of femininity and the gendered habitus has on the professional ambitions of female teachers in terms of their participation in the organizational body of education becomes obvious.

Regarding the embodied cultural capital in the form of gendered habitus, the social stereotypes, the essentialist beliefs, gendered socialization in traditional social roles, the designation of typical 'male' and 'female' characteristics, as well as the associated gendered discriminations, all appear to constitute obstacles to women's professional advancement in the organizational body of education (Bodalina & Mestry, 2020; Combat, 2012; Gutierrez, 2016; Maranto *et al.*, 2018; Markopoulos & Argyriou, 2014; Melka *et al.*, 2022; Mitroussi & Mitroussi, 2009; Oplatka, 2006; Üstün, 2015).

In this regard, family obligations and motherhood appear to put the professional ambitions of women who work in the educational field on hold (Bodalina & Mestry, 2020; Brinia, 2012; Combat, 2012; Daraki, 2007; Gutierrez, 2016; Markopoulos & Argyriou, 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Melka *et al.*, 2022; Niota, 2018; Sarafidou, 2020; Taki, 2006; Üstün, 2015). Especially in the cultures of developing countries, family duties are the exclusive responsibility of the mother (Combat, 2012) and 'femininity' is associated with the concepts of marriage and motherhood (Oplatka, 2006). In fact, given that leadership tendencies are not included in the female field of action, any divergent

behaviours on the part of the women may lead to social sanctions, such as reduced chances of marriage (Oplatka, 2006).

A characteristic of this is research by Robinson *et al.* (2017), according to the findings of which, male supervisors, charged with a disproportionate share of family responsibilities, were more likely to be married with children in comparison with their female colleagues. Nevertheless, the new female leaders in the field of education appear to be less weighed down by family obligations compared with the past (Robinson *et al.*, 2017), while a number of studies have revealed the significance of family environment and, in particular, having a supportive partner, when it comes to female teachers reaching positions of administrative responsibility (Brinia, 2012; Gutierrez, 2016; Melka *et al.*, 2022; Taki, 2006).

Finally, elements of temperament that seem to follow the symbolic model determined by the factor of femininity, like the preference for teaching and interpersonal relationships in contrast to the exercise of administrative work and the associated official obligations (Daraki, 2007; Markopoulos & Argyriou, 2014; Sarafidou, 2020), low self-esteem (Markopoulos & Argyriou, 2014; Melka *et al.*, 2022; Oplatka, 2006) and the lack of ambition and motivation (Frosi, 2016; Williams, 2023) in turn contributed to the limited professional ambitions of female teachers and educational staff.

Consequently, from research which reveals the reduced ambitions of female teachers for professional advancement, it emerges that the latter continue to play the role of 'capital bearing objects' that serve the strategies for amassing capital (for example, cultural, economic, social or symbolic) for their families, rather than being acting subjects (Bourdieu, 2007; Lovell, 2000). Their value, in other words, the capital they bring, is amassed and determined, primarily, in the context of the family, and secondly through their personal action in the social fields (Lovell, 2000).

## **5. Institutionalised cultural capital, social capital and the professional ambitions of female teachers regarding taking on positions of administrative responsibility**

As Panagiotopoulos points out (1996), Bourdieu links institutionalised cultural capital to the concept of symbolic violence, which, coming from a group, a class or a nation, aims at the legitimization of a cultural tyranny by ensuring that both the conditions and the means of practising it are misrecognized overlooked. More specifically, the dominant culture that pervades the educational institutions, legitimizes the interests of the dominant groups, and as a result, the dominated cultures are seen as subordinate and are ignored.

The research findings revealed a growing equalization in the volume of institutionalised capital held by women on the one hand and men on the other. More specifically, a first series of studies, conducted at the beginning of the 21st century, blamed the lack of objective qualifications as the main factor limiting female teachers' professional ambitions (Daraki, 2007; Kantartzi & Anthopoulos, 2006; Kyriakoussis & Saiti, 2006). A second group of more recent research did not find differentiations



between the institutionalised capital of women and their male colleagues (Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2011; Grinshtain & Addi-Racah, 2020; Markopoulos & Argyriou, 2014; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023; Sarafidou, 2020).

According to UNESCO data (2021), women are better educated than ever, attaining undergraduate degrees at a higher rate than men across three-quarters of the countries where data is available. With the exception of the regions in the Arab States, East Asia and the Pacific, as well as Sub-Saharan Africa, the numerical superiority of women extends to the level of postgraduate studies, but drops, moving into the cycle of doctoral studies, where female students form a minority.

Therefore, regardless of their educational assets and professional training, women, chiefly in countries of the developing world, are faced with the phenomenon of the 'glass ceiling'.

Moreover, as far as the procedures for recruiting educational staff are concerned, in the framework of each organization, networks of relationships and connections develop that are founded on mutual recognition and support amongst workers. As the research shows, male networks of connections tend to be more powerful than those of women, and as a result, male workers are promoted more easily to positions of prestige and responsibility (Combat, 2012; Grinshtain & Addi-Racah, 2020).

The networks of connections between male colleagues and supervisors, the reduced presence of female representation in the union bodies and the bias and unreliability of the system for the selection of executive staff, appeared to influence the ambitions of the women regarding their advancement in the administrative pyramid of education (Bodalina & Mestry, 2020; Combat, 2012; Gutierrez, 2016; Kantartzi & Anthopoulos, 2006; Markopoulos & Argyriou, 2014; Melka *et al.*, 2022; Robinson *et al.*, 2017; Sarafidou, 2020; Üstün, 2015).

In addition, having prior service and administrative experience seemed to significantly motivate the women to claim positions of administrative responsibility in the educational field (Markopoulos & Argyriou, 2014; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Robinson *et al.*, 2017; Taki, 2006).

In contrast to this, the absence of role models at higher educational levels and in the organization of education (Combat, 2012; Gutierrez, 2016; Muradoglu *et al.*, 2022; Silander *et al.*, 2022; Williams, 2023) appeared to contribute to the restricted professional ambitions of female teachers. Nevertheless, as research by Robinson *et al.* (2017) revealed, younger female leaders in the educational field have started to receive greater guidance – mainly from same-sex mentors.

Finally, a plethora of institutional factors appeared to put on hold the ambitions of women for advancement in the organizational body of education. More precisely, the lack of state support and policy to facilitate the mother-career women (Combat, 2012; Niota, 2018), the 'breaks' in service, which jeopardize their reintegration into the administrative body (Brinia, 2012), the absence of state mobilization (Daraki, 2007; Markopoulos & Argyriou, 2014), the unfavourable organizational conditions (Mitroussi & Mitroussi, 2009; Taki, 2006), the increased leadership responsibilities (Daraki, 2007; Kyriakoussis & Saiti, 2006), as well as the centralised and bureaucratic way education

is organised, state intervention and the purely managerial and supervisory role of the administrative staff (Taki, 2006; Williams, 2023) are the central components in women's reduced professional ambitions.

According to Bourdieu (2006, 2007), the perennial issue of discouraging women from the amassing of institutionalised capital, which focuses to a larger extent on countries of the developing world, can be interpreted through their value as 'capital holding property', capital bearing objects' and 'repositories of their family's capital' rather than as voluntarily acting subjects. In this case, women appear mainly as socially destined to create a family, and are dealt with as 'repositories' and 'carriers' of cultural capital and use their capital to a large extent in the process of finding a husband, as well as in passing his inheritance on to their children (Dumais, 2002; Silva, 2005). In contrast, in the case of men, the prevailing tendency appears to be that the usefulness of cultural capital lies in the attempt to amass institutionalised capital and become integrated into the labour market (Dumais, 2002).

To conclude, the dimension of cultural capital that is legitimised through study titles, is directly related to social capital as it is institutionalised in the context of social systems and practices and is supported by the social networks of relationships that shape the acting subject in the field where he is active (Bourdieu, 1986). So, beyond the subjects' educational and professional choices, gender discrimination can be found in the division of labour for the maintenance of social capital, with men on the one hand monopolizing positions of official, public, active representation and women on the other taking on the transfer of family social capital in the context of the private sphere (Bourdieu, 2007).

## **6. Gendered habitus and the leadership style of women in positions of administrative responsibility**

A system of organization that perceives the traditional leadership style from a male perspective promoting centralization as opposed to collaboration, interpersonal relationships and democratization – characteristics that are traditionally linked to 'female' models of administration – discourages the female teachers with ambitions to pursue a career as an executive within the educational field (Combat, 2012; Daraki, 2007; Frosi, 2016; Gutierrez, 2016; Maranto *et al.*, 2018; Williams, 2023).

As Grinshtain & Addi-Racah (2020) note, teachers' contemporary professional habitus is acquired within an educational field that is a product of conflicts all the more extended due to the meta-field of power and educational policy. Consequently, teachers today come up against a fragmented professional identity in the context of an unstable professional field.

According to the findings of some research, female leaders in both the developed world and the developing world adopt an androgynous style for exercising power (Jones, 2016; Oplatka, 2006), combining 'female' characteristics of care and collaboration with 'male' elements of formality and bossiness (Oplatka, 2006). The leadership style in

question creates a number of often conflicting professional and personal identities, which are a significant challenge for women-education executives (Jones, 2016).

As study findings have revealed, when leadership is approached through essentialism and is correlated in male terms, female leaders experience sexist behaviours due to their female nature, and they are on the receiving end of stricter criticism regarding their leadership skills as compared with their male counterparts, for whom administrative talents are self-evident. As a consequence, these same women themselves are either overlooked or are forced to reject their femaleness and adopt a strict leadership style so as to be able to impose their will and win the esteem and respect of their colleagues. However, such practices have questionable outcomes (Daraki, 2007; Gutierrez, 2016).

Finally, in her research, Brinia (2012) found differentiations in terms of the temperament of male and female head teachers, who, not casting aside their gendered habitus, appeared to be equally effective in the exercise of power.

Lovell (2000) makes similar points when she claims that femininity as cultural capital is acquiring all the more prestige. Both the bridging of the gap in educational qualifications between the two sexes in Western societies, and the increased demand in the labour market for traditionally female skills are starting to overturn the way the labour market works.

Finally, entrenched in traditional leadership models too, are the contrived categories that are ascribed to the up-and-coming female leaders who are placed on the edge of a 'glass cliff'. More specifically, the term 'glass cliff' describes the phenomenon of the promotion of women "*in positions of leadership in circumstances of general financial downturn and downturn in company performance... such women can be seen to be placed on top of a 'glass cliff', in the sense that their leadership appointments are made in problematic organizational circumstances and hence are more precarious*" (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, p.87). Therefore, taking on the precarious work of representing regions with a marginalised student population and sensitive social background (Melka *et al.*, 2022; Robinson *et al.*, 2017), the female head teachers are exposed to intense criticism and are on the receiving end of severe accusations (Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

However, it is claimed that the typically female characteristics and leadership style tend to function favourably for women, making them stand out from their male counterparts based on their greater suitability particularly in facing organizational crises (Ryan *et al.*, 2016).

It becomes clear then that positions of prestige are charged with sexual connotations, and especially, male connotations. Hence, women who endeavour to enter the sphere of power are faced with a 'double bind': on the one hand, adapting their behaviour to male models brings with it the danger of them losing their 'femininity', and on the other, feminine behavior may be translated as a sign of incapability and inadaptability (Bourdieu, 2007).

## 7. Concluding remarks

Based on the above analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The analysis of the research findings reveals that despite their domination of the educational field as a whole, women, mainly in countries in the developing world, lag significantly behind in the administrative hierarchy as much at the level of school unit as at a district and regional level of organization. By extension, in the case of these countries, it appears that men monopolise the dominant prestigious positions of responsibility, which results in the majority of women being concentrated in inferior teaching positions where their influence and power are minimal.
- The majority of the research reveals that the actors in the educational field are ranked based on the volume and combinations of 'capital' they possess. More specifically, cultural, social and symbolic capital comprises the main kinds of capital linked to the educational field (Bourdieu, 1986). In particular, regarding cultural capital, numerous studies reveal the significance of both the institutionalised and the innate form in the contest for positions of administrative responsibility. With reference to the form of institutionalised capital that is legitimized through study titles, it appears that in recent years, significant differentiations between men and women have ceased to exist. What differentiates the genders in terms of the teachers' practices and professional ambitions, is their gendered habitus. Therefore, women, mainly in the case of the developing world, being symbolically destined to be submissive and obedient, are oriented towards and placed in inferior or dependent work positions and are excluded from the exercise of power (Bourdieu, 2007), something which contributes to their limited ambitions for professional advancement.
- Women are seen more as 'capital bearing objects', that serve the strategies for amassing their families' capital, rather than as acting subjects (Bourdieu, 2007; Lovell, 2000). In this regard, much research reveals the effect family obligations continue to have on the state of mind and professional career of female teachers. Nevertheless, a gradual mitigation of the phenomenon is observed in developed countries, particularly in cases where there is a supportive partner and family environment.
- The educational field, like every field, is an arena of contest and power struggles where the actor-teachers wield all their available resources so as to add to their power and influence. Given the importance of the networks of relationships that are constructed in the framework of each field, and the power of the male networks of connections, male workers secure a larger volume of social capital, creating 'alliances' and being promoted more easily to positions of administrative responsibility.
- Numerous pieces of research have revealed the conflicting dualities that identify 'manliness' with the concept of rationalism, and 'femininity' with emotionalism. In the framework of this dichotomous model, leadership and public representational

activities are interpreted in male terms. By extension, women who attempt to take on an administrative role in the educational field are faced with a 'double bind' issue: their adaptation to male models of behaviour brings with it the danger of losing their 'femininity', while demonstrating female behaviours runs the risk of being seen as a sign of a lack of leadership and adaptability skills (Bourdieu, 2007).

- Finally, a plethora of research makes reference to the phenomenon of the 'glass ceiling' that women teachers who have career ambitions encounter. In addition, in the research field, the now contemporary terms of the 'escalator' and the 'glass cliff' have also made an appearance.

Concluding this paper, we believe that an ongoing bibliographic review of scientific papers that investigate the factors that serve to mobilize women to lay claim to positions of administrative responsibility in the educational field would be especially interesting to the scientific community.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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