

# Gender Differences in the Leadership Styles of MPA Directors

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## ABSTRACT

A growing body of literature has documented leadership styles by gender. This study examines if directors of Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs accredited by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration exhibit gender differences in leadership styles. Such differences may affect the implementation of public administration and how effective MPA directors are in achieving positive outcomes. Using a mixed methods approach—specifically, exploratory sequential design utilizing qualitative data and analysis, followed by a quantitative survey—we find that there are some gendered differences among public administration directors. In particular, we find that women directors are significantly more likely than their male counterparts to exhibit traits that resemble transformational leaders. However, we also find that male and female directors converge in terms of other styles of leadership.

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## KEYWORDS

Leadership, leadership style, gender, transformational leadership

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In 2004, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) conducted a survey of 100 schools, asking, “What does it take to be a good MPA/MPP program director?” Leadership was cited among the top five responses.<sup>1</sup> Leadership is a heavily studied topic among social science researchers; a quick Google Scholar search for the term *leadership* returns 3.4 million results. Yet scholars have neither reached consensus regarding a clear definition of leadership, nor have they definitively determined whether leadership styles differ by gender.

Leadership style by gender is a contested topic in organizational studies (Butler & Geis, 1990; Butterfield & Grinnell, 1995; Eagly, 2005; Fox & Schuhmann, 1999; Juntrasook, 2013; Schein, 2001; Schein & Mueller, 1992). On one hand, several studies have shown that women have a more democratic, participative, and collaborative style of leading (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Juntrasook, 2013). On the other hand, Juntrasook (2013) suggests that men and women in equivalent positions of power behave similarly, suggesting no difference in leadership styles. Given these varied findings, this study

looks at a specific group: we examine if directors in Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs exhibit a gendered style of leadership. Since our study subjects are men and women in similar positions of power, we were interested to see if any leadership differences that emerged could be attributed to gender. We used a mixed methods study design, including in-depth interviews with MPA directors and a quantitative survey, to examine leadership styles.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1970s, a vast literature on gendered leadership spanning organizational type (Chliwniak, 1997; Trinidad & Normore, 2004), sector (Højgaard, 2002; Teasdale, McKay, Phillimore, & Teasdale, 2001), leadership style (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006), effectiveness (Bartol & Butterfield, 1976; Chapman & Luthans, 1975) and theoretical perspective (Eagly & Karau, 2002) has documented a complex and unsettled area in public administration scholarship. Research findings have been mixed. Whereas many scholars have argued that gender differences mark leadership styles, others have found no such gender influence. According to Butterfield and Grinnell (1999), "Overall, this area of inquiry has been hotly contested" (p. 225).

Aldoory and Toth (2004) attribute these mixed findings to either gender socialization or structuralism. Gender socialization refers to stereotypical traits and behaviors not subject to change (e.g., emotionality, nurturance and sensitivity to others). Incongruent behaviors, Aldoory and Toth say, such as women displaying autocratic behaviors or men being good listeners, are perceived as ineffective. Butler and Geis (1990) confirm the view that sex<sup>2</sup> differences have focused on perceptions of leadership (Butler & Geis, 1990) and as Lewis's (2000) study shows, followers feel uncomfortable and respect their male leaders less when these men cry in front of subordinates. In the same way, women are considered more nurturing than men and more sensitive to others' feelings (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Structuralism posits the opposing view, arguing that job status, job description, and position in a hierarchy displace gender stereotypes in leadership styles. Other evidence indicates

that both gender socialization and structuralism reciprocally influence leaders' behaviors (Lewis & Fagenson-Eland, 1998; Portello & Long, 1994). For example, Lewis and Fagenson-Eland (1998) find that leaders' self-reports are related to their gender, whereas supervisors' reports on leaders are related to the leaders' organizational level.

## Leadership Styles

In response to this lack of consensus, scholars have focused on transformational, situational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership types. First, transformational, or charismatic leadership (Bass, 1985, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1992), includes risk taking, goal articulation, high expectations, and emphasis on collective identity, self-assertion, and vision (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001; McWhinney, Webber, Smith, & Novokowsky, 1997). Cheung and Halpern (2010) align transformational leadership with the interpersonal characteristics associated with women leaders more than with the aggressive and hierarchical characteristics associated with male leaders. These leaders "transform" others by encouraging them to question prior assumptions and consider alternative points of view (Goethals, 2005). Druskat's (1994). Further, Cheung and Halpern (2010) illustrate that women line workers, for example, perceive women leaders as embracing more transformational characteristics than transactional ones, stressing the importance of communication and team building.

Eagly and Carli (2003) support the perception that women tend to use transformational leadership more than men and that women leaders tend to engage in more reward contingency behaviors. That is, women leaders tie employee rewards to behaviors, which enables employees to make connections between their efforts, outcomes, and the rewards they receive. Linking effective outcomes with transformational leadership, Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramaniam (1996) assume that women are more effective leaders because they are more likely to use the transformational style. Krishnan and Park (2005) find a significant and positive relationship between the number of women in top management and the financial performance of the company. The authors explain this important finding by

noting the differences between female and male leadership styles, especially women's greater willingness to share information, a transformational trait, which can drive better performance throughout the company.

Some have also argued that transformational leadership may be characterized as more feminine because the socialized characteristics of nurturing and supporting subordinates are integral to this leadership approach (Guy, Newman, & Mastracci, 2008; Newman, Guy, & Mastracci, 2009; Wang, 2011). Jin (2009) notes that, although emotions are an essential part of an organization, not until recently have researchers paid attention to their role. The reason is that emotions have "traditionally been thought to be something that women do naturally; and too often dismissed as either nurturing or supportive" (Jin 2009, p. 3). Maher (1997) writes that transformational leadership is positively associated with leadership effectiveness; therefore, if women typically exhibit transformational leadership behaviors, "this may contribute to breaking the glass ceiling as women are increasingly selected to occupy executive-level positions" (p. 212). Over the years, the concept of transformational leadership has evolved to include leaders who are inspiring, optimistic, moral, and equitable and who provide others with inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and a higher purpose in life (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Scholars view the second kind of leadership—situational leadership—in two ways: one approach sees leadership behavior as a dependent variable and focuses on identifying how contextual factors, such as position or type of organization, shape this behavior; the other approach focuses on elements that influence the relationship between leadership behavior and effectiveness (Ford, 2005; Juntrassook, 2013). This latter approach, Ford (2005) suggests, assumes that leadership style depends on contextual factors, including the nature and characteristics of environment, work, and subordinates, and that there is one effective style of leadership suitable for a given situation.

Third, transactional or authoritative leadership establishes positions held by the leader (Aldoory & Toth, 2004), focusing on exchanges between leaders and followers (McCleskey, 2014). These exchanges, McCleskey (2014) argues, allow leaders to accomplish performance objectives, complete required tasks, maintain the current organizational situation, motivate followers through contractual agreement, direct behavior of followers toward achievement of established goals, emphasize extrinsic rewards, avoid unnecessary risks, and improve organizational efficiency. Maher (1997), in turn, defines transactional leadership as behaviors that emphasizes exchanges or bargains between manager and follower, focusing on how current needs of subordinates can be fulfilled. Bass, Avolio, and Atwater (1996) classify transactional leadership as management-by-exception and contingent reward, where the former is either active, such as when the leader monitors and corrects follower performance, or passive, in which the leader intervenes to take remedial action only when something goes wrong. The latter is a more constructive, positive transaction that involves directed, consultative, or negotiated agreements between leaders and followers about objectives and/or task requirements. In the contingent reward aspect, the leader promises and/or provides suitable rewards and recognition if followers achieve objectives or execute tasks as required. In other words, the leader concentrates on identifying and correcting mistakes and taking disciplinary action.

Fourth, several researchers describe a *laissez-faire* or passive-avoidance style of leadership (e.g., Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1995; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). This leader type tends to react only after problems have become serious enough to take corrective action, and she or he often avoids making any decisions at all. Marked by a general failure to take responsibility for managing (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001), and exhibiting frequent absence and lack of involvement during critical junctures (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003), this leader type does not provide direction or guidance. The *laissez-faire* leader, according to Jones and

Rudd (2008), avoids accepting responsibilities, is absent when needed, fails to follow up on requests for assistance, resists expressing his or her views on important issues, and gives followers the majority of control in decision-making processes. Laissez-faire leadership assumes that followers are intrinsically motivated and should be left alone to accomplish tasks and goals.

### Alternative Approaches

Alternative leadership styles are replacing traditional ones, providing new (and possibly superior) ways to understand leadership (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Ford, 2005). Leadership throughout the organization (Peterson, 1997), team leadership (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears & Lawrence, 2002), transformative leadership (Burns, 1978), inclusive leadership (Helgesen, 1995), and the role of followership (Kelley, 1988) have replaced motifs of the “great man” or “hero” leader. There has been a shift from heroic leaders to a more participatory, encouraging type who works productively with all organizational members (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003). According to Davis (2003), leadership can “bubble up” in various places within institutions, no longer the domain of formal leadership roles. For example, Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) explore whether community college administrators use alternative or emerging language about leadership. They find that male leadership is perceived as more directive and autocratic (based on position, i.e., me-centered) and female leadership as more participatory and valuing meritocracy. The authors argue that gender does not always define how one chooses to lead but rather that institutional structures may act as barriers or impediments for the advancement of women.

In summary, Eagly and Johnson (1990) note ingrained sex differences in traits and behavioral tendencies, a spillover of gender roles into organizational roles, and subtle differences in the structural position of women and men, all of which could cause leadership behavior to be sex-differentiated. It is not surprising, then, that some organizational studies find evidence of

sex differences in leadership style. Nonetheless, we deem organizational roles more important than gender roles, which led us to predict that differences between men and women occupying the same leadership role in various organizations would be smaller than differences between men and women in other types of leadership research, namely laboratory experiments and assessment studies.

### DATA AND METHODOLOGY

We used a mixed methodology approach to study differences in leadership style among MPA directors, by gender. More specifically, we employed an exploratory sequential design, characterized by initial qualitative data collection and analysis followed by quantitative data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Clark, 2010). The first, qualitative phase consisted of in-depth interviews of 10 MPA directors stratified by location, faculty size, and gender. We contacted 30 MPA heads, of which 10 agreed to participate. A sample of 10–15 interviews is sufficient as a starting point in an exploratory sequential mixed methods study design (Creswell & Clark, 2010). The second, quantitative phase employed a survey of leadership styles using the well-tested Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) scale (Bass & Avolio, 1992).

In our first phase, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 MPA directors that lasted 1–2 hours. We recorded, transcribed, and analyzed the interviews. Two independent coders coded the data. Of the 10 participants, six were female and four male; four were in the Northeast, one in North Central (i.e., the Midwest), two in the South, and three in the West. There was an equal distribution of participants (four each) from small (less than 10 nucleus faculty) and midsize programs (10–20 nucleus faculty). One fifth of the program heads (two) belonged to large programs that had more than 20 nucleus faculty. We conducted interviews in early fall 2016. We categorized responses by concepts that allowed us to identify patterns. We employed a phenomenological approach to study what meaning the MPA directors ascribed

to their roles as leaders. We asked respondents 15 questions, divided into three key areas: motivations for becoming an MPA director, leadership style, and challenges and rewards. In this article, we focus on answers to these two questions: (1) What does leadership mean to you? (2) How would you describe your leadership style?

We used the in-depth interviews to develop an online survey to measure leadership styles of MPA directors. We used the MLQ, a popular tool in organizational science to measure transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles. The MLQ has changed since first introduced by Bass and Avolio (1992) and Avolio, Bass, and Jung (1995). The original questionnaire had 73 items, which was reduced to 45 items also referred to as the MLQ (Form 5X). Our study uses the MLQ-6S, an abbreviated version that has 21 questions and measures three leadership styles.

We assessed transformational leadership through four factors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. *Idealized influence* indicates if a leader is able to gain the trust, faith, and support of subordinates and keep their hopes and dreams alive; in short, the ability to act as a role model. *Inspirational motivation* measures the degree to which a leader can provide a vision and encourage others to see the significance of their work. *Intellectual stimulation* is the degree to which a leader can espouse new ways of problem solving and creativity and nurture people to question existing values and beliefs. *Individualized consideration* is the degree to which a leader is able to pay attention to the needs of every employee in an organization, even those who seem less involved. Two factors—contingent reward and management-by-exception—measure transactional leadership. Contingent reward and management-by-exception emphasize rewards contingent on performance and a belief in “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” We measured the hands-off laissez-faire leadership style using three questions. The appendix lists all questions used for all three leadership styles.

Respondents answered using a 5-point scale, where 0 = Not at all and 4 = Frequently, if not always. We used the MLQ to triangulate findings of our in-depth interviews by gender.

Our survey also used statements from the Guy-Newman-Mastracci emotional labor questionnaire (Guy et al., 2008). These statements measure emotional work and are as follows: My job requires that I display many different emotions when interacting with others. My work requires me to guide people through sensitive and/or emotional issues. My work involves dealing with emotionally charged issues as a critical dimension of the job. My job requires that I manage the emotions of others. In my work, I am good at dealing with emotional issues. My work requires me to provide comfort to people who are in crisis. The Cronbach alpha of these measures is 0.91. We ranked responses to these statements on a 7-point scale, from 1 = Never to 7 = Always. We specifically added these measures because female MPA directors in our interviews mentioned their emotional investment in their leadership roles.

Our survey also asked about overall job satisfaction, student enrollment, number of full-time faculty, and MPA directors’ age, gender, and years of experience. We conducted the survey in November 2016 using an online tool, Qualtrics. We sent 295 requests to MPA directors of NASPAA-accredited programs (two reminder requests followed the initial e-mail request); we received 84 responses, a 28.5% response rate.

Of our total survey respondents ( $N = 84$ ), 61% were male, 37.8% female, and 1.2% other. Close to 15% were aged 30 to 39, approximately one third (33%) were aged 50–59, about one third (33%) were aged 60 and over, and the remaining 22% were aged 40–49. The majority of the program directors were full professors, followed by associate and assistant professors. As expected, only a small percentage of MPA directors were assistant professors (6.1%). Respondents’ average years employed at their current institution was 12.8 years, and respondents averaged 5.4 years in their current leader-

ship role. The majority of programs offered MPA degrees (73%), 6% offered MPP degrees, 10.7% offered both, and close to 25% had other master's offerings (e.g., in government, nonprofit, health administration, or urban planning). On average, the programs included four full-time female faculty compared to six full-time male faculty (tenured and tenure track). Most programs had more female students than male students enrolled during spring 2016 through fall 2016. (See Table 1.)

**TABLE 1.**  
Descriptive Statistics of Survey Respondents

Description	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	61%
Female	38%
<b>Age group</b>	
31-39 years	12.7%
40-49 years	22.8%
50-59 years	31.6%
>60 years	32.9%
<b>Rank</b>	
Assistant professor	6.3%
Associate professor	41.8%
Professor	48.1%
Other	3.8%
<b>Average amount of time spent</b>	
At current institution	12.8
In leadership role	5.4

Note. N=84

**RESULTS**

**Interview Results**

Table 2 presents the results of our interviews with 10 MPA directors, six female and four male. Women directors were more likely to describe a leader as someone able to lead by example. Women directors indicated the importance of being a role model for their students and faculty members. They accomplished this by maintaining accountability, being a team player, and serving as a mentor to their students and junior faculty members. As one of the female directors said,

I see my leadership as a facilitator and a mentor and a role model. Because I think if I model for them [students and faculty] a good representation of the department, then it gives them a level of what they should expect of themselves as leaders. I try to model with them by being efficient and effective.

Most women directors also felt a responsibility to lead by example. As one summarized,

There's a responsibility to take whether you know it's assessment or curriculum, so I think it's being the kind of person that's in charge of making sure that you know you're moving in the right direction. And I try to do that by example.

Women directors further emphasized relationship building and bringing out the best in others:

I believe leaders should be empathetic, well-rounded, and able to find the best in others. Leaders should be able to mediate challenges and create excitement about possibilities. Leaders need to take responsibility for the bad as well as the good. Great leaders share success and recognize that we lift each other up by our partnerships rather than competitive relationships.

Male directors in our sample described leadership as setting a vision and agenda to move the program forward. Some of the key themes that

emerged are highlighted in Table 2. One of the male MPA directors said,

As a leader you are the advocate, the implementer, if you will. But more broadly, I mean, to me, a good leader is the person who keeps us on course and has a vision of where we're going and then implements, you know, kind of, "the how," how we get there. You're the captain of a ship in some ways. You're steering it, but you're also charting the course.

Male directors described leaders as strategic thinkers who set agendas, implement a vision, and communicate that vision to stakeholders. One male interviewee commented,

Leadership is more, to me, at least, it's about setting an agenda. And you know, looking at the mission of the program and saying, you know, who are we? What do we want to be? What's our vision? What's our strategic plan? And sort of implementing the vision, if you will.

Others saw their role as advocates, policy implementers, and administrators. One male director said, "I am basically responsible for implementing policy. If I were to make an analogy to a parliamentary type government, it might be that I'm the prime minister to... whoever is the president." Male directors also emphasized leading by example.

We asked interviewees to describe their leadership style, and we transcribed and analyzed responses by gender. Women directors described their leadership style as informal, collaborative, nurturing, facilitative, trusting, and laissez-faire (see Table 3). One female respondent noted,

You can't just say, "Well, we are just going to do X. Lead, follow, or get out of the way." That doesn't work in my experience in a public agency and it certainly doesn't work in an academic environment where nobody has control over anybody. It has to be collaborative and people have to feel that their opinions and their concerns matter.

**TABLE 2.**  
What Meaning MPA Directors Ascribe to Leadership

Male directors	Female directors
Setting vision, agenda	Maintaining accountability by taking responsibility
Role model	Setting an example/role model
Implementer	Initiator
Administrator	Representative/advocate of the program
Communicating vision to the stakeholders	Empathetic
Advocate	Facilitator
	Mentor
	Relationship building/connecting
	Others/collaboration/team building

**TABLE 3.**  
Preferred Leadership Style

Male directors	Female directors
Consultative	Informal
Administrator/policy implementer	Collaborative/facilitative
Laissez-faire	Nurturer
	Laissez-faire
	Empathetic and trusting

Women directors also described their style as facilitative, nurturing, and serving as counselors to students. One interviewee commented about counseling students, “You have to be a priest or a rabbi sometimes.” Another indicated, “My style is facilitative, nurturing, empathetic, and protective. I try to build teams that have complementary skill sets among collaboratively minded individuals.”

Male directors described their leadership styles as consultative, administrative, and laissez-faire (see Table 3). “I don’t know if I particularly see myself as a leader,” one male respondent said. “I’m an administrator and the dean is ultimately the leader of the school.” Another commented, “The first word that comes to mind is *consultative*. So I like to listen and consult with others on important decisions before just executing them.” Still another said, “I’m not very directive, telling people you have to do it this way or that way.”

**Survey Results**

Based on the themes that emerged from our qualitative interviews, we developed a survey to assess differences in leadership style, both employing the MLQ and examining emotional work. Table 4 presents factor-wise distribution of the MLQ for all respondents. The MPA directors scored high on intellectual stimulation

and individualized consideration, and most scored moderate on the remaining factors. The highest percentage among the low range was those who had a contingent reward style of leadership. The most expressed style of leadership was individualized consideration. To assess if there were significant differences in leadership styles by gender, we performed a *t*-test on the seven factors that comprise the MLQ (i.e., idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, contingent reward, management-by-exception, and laissez-faire).

The results in Table 5 show that women directors scored significantly higher on idealized influence and inspirational motivation factors of the MLQ. These two factors are part of the transformational style of leadership. But while women directors scored higher on individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation, there was no significant difference by gender in the remaining factors that comprise transformational leadership. Male directors scored higher on contingent reward and management-by-exception, which are both elements of the transactional leadership style. However, there is no significant difference between male and female MPA directors. Interestingly, both male and female directors scored identically in terms of the laissez-faire leadership style.

**TABLE 4.**  
Range of Leadership Scores for MPA Directors in the Sample

	High (score of 9–12) (percentage)	Moderate (score of 5–8) (percentage)	Low (score of 0–4) (percentage)
<b>Transformational leadership</b>			
Idealized influence	41.4	48.3	10.3
Inspirational motivation	48.3	44.8	6.9
Intellectual stimulation	56.2	36.2	6.9
Individualized consideration	61.4	31.6	7.0
<b>Transactional leadership</b>			
Contingent reward	30.3	53.6	16.1
Management-by-exception	39.3	58.9	1.8
Laissez-faire	44.6	53.6	1.8

**TABLE 5.**  
Mean Differences in Leadership Style by Gender (per the MLQ)

	Male ( <i>n</i> = 37)	Female ( <i>n</i> = 21)
<b>Transformational leadership</b>		
Idealized influence	7.3	8.5*
Inspirational motivation	7.7	8.6**
Intellectual stimulation	7.9	8.6
Individualized consideration	8.3	8.9
<b>Transactional leadership</b>		
Contingent reward	7.4	6.9
Management-by-exception	7.9	7.6
Laissez-faire	4.7	4.7

Note. The scale ranges from 0 = Not at all, 1 = Once in a while, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Fairly often, to 4 = Frequently, if not always; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .1$ .

**TABLE 6.**  
**Mean Differences in Emotional Work by Gender**

Emotional work indicators	Male (n = 33)	Female (n = 21)
My job requires that I display many different emotions when interacting with others.	4.73	4.81
My work requires me to guide people through sensitive and/or emotional issues.*	4.41	5.14*
My work involves dealing with emotionally charged issues as a critical dimension of the job.	4.3	4.9
My job requires that I manage the emotions of others.	4.3	4.8
In my work, I am good at dealing with emotional issues.	4.9	5.1
My work requires me to provide comfort to people who are in crisis.	3.9	4.4

Note. The scale ranges from 1 = Never to 7 = Always; \* $p < .05$ .

We also analyzed differences in emotional work by gender. We included a section on emotional work in the survey after female MPA directors noted how much time they spent attending to students' emotional wants and needs and similar faculty needs. Table 6 presents the results and indicates that while women scored higher on each of the emotional factors, they ranked significantly higher for the statement, "My work requires me to guide people through sensitive and/or emotional issues." Overall, women directors expressed a more transformational and nurturing style of leadership.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While there is no shortage of organizational leadership research, conflicting literature makes it difficult to distinguish what effect gender has on leadership styles. In this study we questioned whether gender difference exists among a sample of MPA directors of NASPAA-accredited programs. Consistent with Eagly and Carli's (2003) and Yoder's (2001) work on gendered leadership, we find that transformational leadership may be especially advantageous for women because it encompasses stereotypical female behaviors of support and consideration. We find that women directors lean toward the

transformational style of leadership because they integrate elements of collaboration, relationship building, and empathy. This supports Cheung and Halpern's (2010) definition of transformational leadership, which aligns more with the interpersonal characteristics associated with women leaders than with the aggressive and hierarchical characteristics associated with male leaders.

Also important, male directors scored higher on contingent reward and management-by-exception, both factors of a transactional leadership style. This supports Dvir's (2001) conclusion that as transactional leaders, men are more concerned with completing tasks efficiently and correctly, which becomes their most important duty. Yet, given that male and female MPA directors did not differ significantly in their leadership styles, we are reminded that Bennis and Nanus (1985) cautioned that despite more than 350 definitions of leadership, there is no clear understanding of what distinguishes leaders from nonleaders. In other words, blurred lines persist in terms of leadership generally and gendered leadership specifically. Stivers (2002) adds that leadership is partly a matter of personal qualities and

partly contingent on the situation; in sum, it is a myth used to make sense of organizational and political significance and to support and rationalize existing political, economic, racial, and gender arrangements. However, as Fox and Schuhmann noted in 1999, and still holds true today, “While it is important not to overstate gender differences, it is increasingly evident that men and women often bring different leadership qualities, agendas, priorities, and methods of conceptualizing policy issues to their professional roles” (p. 231).

Another interesting finding is that both male and female directors scored identically on laissez-faire leadership style. This is not surprising given that both males and females also reported laissez-faire as one of their leadership styles during the interview phase of our research. This finding may signal the need for a more in-depth questionnaire to better capture the nuance of what constitutes laissez-faire rather than simply identifying it as hands-off approach. This finding may also indicate convergence in male and female leadership styles. Perhaps, as Stivers (2002) noted, gender may not always be the defining variable of difference in how one chooses to lead. Instead, we should focus study on institutional structures that may act as barriers or impediments for the advancement of women (VanDerLinden, 2003).

Our findings probe us to think critically about leadership and gender and the necessity to unmask important aspects of social reality in relation to how participants—in this case, MPA directors—make sense of their leadership. Do women perceive themselves as transformational because that is what is expected? Are they acting according to perceived gender roles? The mainstream understanding of leadership derives from male professionals who have defined it to include decisive, visionary, bold, strategic, and inspirational behaviors (Stivers, 2002). Indeed, as Aldoory and Toth (2004) highlight, incongruent behaviors—such as women displaying autocratic behaviors or men being good listeners—can be perceived as ineffective.

In large part, a director’s leadership style influences the successful governance and performance of his or her organization (Seidle, Fernandez, & Perry, 2016). How MPA directors, regardless of gender, develop their leadership styles can positively affect their programs’ outcomes as well as future public administrators. Further research should focus on leadership development programs for both directors and students, in order to expand the repertoire of leadership styles (Dearborn, 2002). For example, the expansion and inclusion of emotional intelligence elements are key to developing leaders, to organizational outcomes, and to moving beyond mainstream perceptions of leadership (Sadri, 2012; Seidle et al., 2016).

One limitation of this study is the absence of survey questions regarding organizational hierarchy. Knowing the effect of MPA directors’ placement within a university’s and/or school’s structure is an important area for future study. In other words, whom the director reports to (e.g., dean, chairperson, director of graduate studies, etc.) may affect decision-making autonomy and thereby leadership style.

Several implications of this study are important for the direction of MPA programs. For example, gender and second-generation bias are not present in current MPA curricula (Schachter, 2017). MPA programs need to redefine the skills and knowledge taught to students so as to include these perspectives. Given the director’s role in curriculum development, if she or he is constrained by expected gender roles, curriculum changes of this sort may be challenging. Similarly, the increasing number of women in MPA leadership positions, including directorship, may present challenges if women do not adhere to gender expectations and perceived gender roles. Consequently, this may limit the possibility of structural and organizational change necessary to address fundamental limitations. Stivers (2002) explains that critically acknowledging the gendered nature of leadership and organizations is essential for institutional changes to take place and if more women are to assume leadership responsibility and ultimately successfully govern organizations. We are not

suggesting that MPA programs should be run by women only, but we urge program leaders to acknowledge gender differences in leadership styles and learn from each other.

Broader implications of this study touch on whether differences in leadership styles affect diversity policies and initiatives and the way that public administration is run. In other words, how effective are leaders in achieving positive outcomes in their roles? In light of the global push toward more women leaders and changing organizational practices (Eagly & Carli, 2003), studying the challenges and rewards of leadership are important next steps.

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## NOTES

- 1 See NASPAA's website for a summary: <http://www.naspaa.org/principals/resources/summary.asp>.
- 2 Earlier literature uses *sex* and *gender* interchangeably.

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## APPENDIX

### Elements of Leadership Styles

#### TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

##### *Idealized Influence*

- I make others feel good to be around me.
- Others have complete faith in me.
- Others are proud to be associated with me.

##### *Inspirational Motivation*

- I express with a few simple words what we could and should do.
- I provide appealing images about what we can do.
- I help others find meaning in their work.

##### *Intellectual Stimulation*

- I enable others to think about old problems in new ways.
- I provide others with new ways of looking at puzzling things.
- I get others to rethink ideas that they had never questioned before.

##### *Individualized Consideration*

- I help others develop themselves.
- I let others know how I think they are doing.
- I give personal attention to others who seem rejected.

#### TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP

##### *Contingent Reward*

- I tell others what to do if they want to be rewarded for their work.
- I provide recognition/rewards when others reach their goals.
- I call attention to what others can get for what they accomplish.

##### *Management-by-Exception*

- I am satisfied when others meet agreed-upon standards.
- As long as things are working, I do not try to change anything.
- I tell others the standards they have to know to carry out their work.

##### *Laissez-Faire*

- I am content to let others continue working in the same way as always.
- Whatever others want to do is OK with me.
- I ask no more of others than what is absolutely essential.