Nowadays, there is an increasing number of women who take up leadership roles in their workplaces. It is a general belief that women are supposed to use feminine ways of doing leadership. However, this is not always true. In some cases, women also use masculine ways in doing leadership. In this paper, Miranda Priestly in the movie ‘The Devil Wears Prada’ is used as an example to illustrate how a female leader breaks traditional gender stereotypes and uses masculine leadership style. This paper also explains why this phenomenon occurs and states the importance of balancing masculine and feminine styles of leadership.
1. Introduction

Researchers show that we are assessing people according to gender norms of, what women and men are supposed to be (Holmes, 2006: 5). And many scholars and linguists are still trying their best to distinguish masculine and feminine ways of doing things in the workplace, especially in the field of “doing” leadership. However, such kind of gender stereotyping is found not to be true in many cases in reality. There are always exceptions: not all women lead in a feminine way and not all men lead in a masculine way. As Stubbe et al. (2000: 231) argue “…females and males do vary systematically along the lines of the masculine and feminine feature?” Although there are researchers showing that many women leaders use both masculine and feminine ways of doing leadership in workplaces (Stubbe et al., 2002; Holmes, 2006), not much evidence is shown by which a female leader adopts a masculine style of leadership. This paper aims at breaking the gender stereotype of women tending to use feminine style of leadership. To achieve this, the ways in which a female leader uses an authoritarian style of leadership in a particular context are explored.

A specific example of the movie “The Devil Wears Prada” (2006) is used to illustrate my argument. In the movie, Miranda Priestly, the editor in chief of “Runway” fashion magazine, uses masculine and authoritarian ways to do leadership. She is rude, direct, task-oriented, picky and demanding. She is viewed as a devil boss. By analyzing the “masculine Miranda”, we can get a more thorough understanding of how gender relates to leadership in the workplace and how leadership is actually practiced by people in the real business world.

2. Literature review

This part aims to introduce the theories and frameworks that I am going to use in my analysis and define the key terms in this paper.

2.1 The Community of Practice approach

Community of Practice approach (CofP) is useful in examining workplace culture. It was introduced to linguistic researches by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992). According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, CofP is,
“an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short practices – emerge in the cause of this mutual endeavor.” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 95)

The CofP approach emphasizes “what members do – the practice or activities which indicate that they belong to the group, and the extent to which they belong. It also takes account of the attitudes, beliefs, values and social relations which underlay their practice.” (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003b: 34) According to Wenger (1998: 73), there are three crucial features of a CofP: (1) members interact with each other regularly (2) members negotiate a joint enterprise (3) members develop a shared repertoire of linguistic and behavioral norms. Members in the group have shared ways of engaging in doing things, shared linguistic features, common topics in social talk, small talk and humor which identify with them as belonging to the group. Individuals who do not conform to the norms of the group are therefore, excluded.

In the paper, staff working in the “Runway” magazine forms a CofP. They fulfill the three crucial criteria of CofP which are suggested by (Wenger, 1998: 73). First, the “Runway” staff interact with each other everyday in the office for daily routine tasks (in various kinds of meetings) as well as and for business talk, social talk and small talks. Secondly, “Runway” staff have a common goal which is to publish the “Runway” magazine regularly. Thirdly, “Runway” staff have their own shared repertoire of linguistic and behavioral norms. Their mouths are full of fashion brand names, names of famous designers, celebrities and technical terms of fabric, materials and style. In order to get things done efficiently to meet the deadline for each publication, directives and explicit forms are typically used. For behavioral norms, everyone wears trendy and fashionable clothes. Staff members are slim and usually on diet. Also they easily judge people by what they wear and their appearances.

2.2 Defining gender

Gender as defined by Peach (1998: 2) is defined as “ideas about the appropriate behaviors and roles of males and females”; it is a “social category imposed on sexed body.” Generally, women are related to nurturing, being less intelligent and more emotional compared to men. Men, on the contrary, are strong, powerful (physically), more intelligent and rational compared to women. In the linguistics field, there are
linguistics features of gendered speech styles that have been classified as feminine and masculine. As Holmes (2006: 6) points out that, “ways of talking are associated with particular roles, stances (e.g. authoritative, consultative, deferential, polite), activities, or behaviour, and to the extent that there are ‘culturally coded as gendered’”. These gendered speech styles are guidelines about how people expect how women and men to behave in talk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitative</td>
<td>Competitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive feedback</td>
<td>Aggressive interruptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conciliatory</td>
<td>Confrontational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>Direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Autonomous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Contribution (in public)</td>
<td>Dominates (public) talking time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person/ process- oriented</td>
<td>Task/ outcome- oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affectively oriented</td>
<td>Referentially oriented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 Widely cited features of feminine and masculine interactional styles (Holmes, 2000a)

Gender stereotyping is usually “a lens of ‘gender polarization’ – the ideology that women’s and men’s behaviour is dichotomous.” (Kendall and Tannen, 1997: 82) However, this is often far from the truth as much recent research has argued. In doing leadership, there also exist gender stereotypes about masculine and feminine ways of doing leadership, which I am going to explain in the next section.

### 2.3 Defining leadership

As many of the research studies point out, there are many definitions for leadership, but none of them seems perfectly capture the complexities of leadership. In this paper, Dwyer’s definition (1993) is used. Leadership is defined as the “ability to influence others (by both transactional and relational behavior) in order to achieve a commonly agreed goal which benefits the organization and its members” Transactional behavior means a focus on the purpose of meetings, achieving tasks, solving problems; while relational behavior means maintaining harmony within the group and creating a positive and productive work atmosphere (Dwyer, 1993).
The concepts of gender and leadership are highly linked together. In Holmes words, “leadership is a gendered concept” (Holmes, 2006: 34). It is commonly believed that a good leader leads in a masculine way (see Table 2.2). Many researchers claim that “leaders are typically characterized as authoritative, strong-minded, decisive, aggressive, competitive, confident, single-minded, goal-oriented, courage, hard-nosed, and adversarial.” (Holmes, 2006: 34) These features are closely linked with masculine ways of doing leadership. And this is the reason why, in many cases, when we talk about a leader, we think of men. (Holmes, 2006: 34) Women, on the other hand, are difficult to classify as a good leader because in order to be a leader, they often need to sacrifice their femininity (see Table 2.2). This “double bind” belief is actually blocking many women from becoming successful leaders. Therefore, even though there are increasing numbers of successful female leaders in the world, such as Hilary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice, female leaders are still a minority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Feminine</strong></th>
<th><strong>Masculine</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use relational behavior</td>
<td>Use transactional behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less directives</td>
<td>Use directives and instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship building</td>
<td>Task and goal oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use interrogatives and paralinguistic</td>
<td>Use imperatives and need statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>features like hesitation and pauses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 Commonly viewed features of feminine and masculine style of doing leadership (based on Holmes, 2006)

In the following section, I will illustrate how Miranda Priestly in *The devil wears Prada* uses an authoritarian or masculine style of leadership to lead her staff in “Runway” magazine. As Jones points out, “if she talks like a manger she is transgressing the boundaries of femininity” (Jones, 2000: 196) and vice versa. Miranda is a good example for illustrating the concept of this double bind. She has most of the features of an ideal leader, such as strong and goal oriented. However, she is viewed as a devil boss because, as a woman, she uses a lot of masculine ways of doing leadership.
3. Data

3.1 Background

The movie *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) is used in this paper to illustrate how a female leader puts down her feminine identities and adopts a masculine style of leadership. All the clips which are used in this paper are taken from this movie. The movie is based on a novel written by Lauren Weisberger, published in 2003. Weisberger wrote her book based on her summer internship experience in the renowned fashion magazine “Vogue”.

The story happens in a New York leading fashion magazine “Runway”. “Runway” is the fashion bible of New York. Miranda Priestly is the editor-in-chief of “Runway”. She is a very powerful woman and is leading the whole fashion industry. She is very authoritarian, aggressive, picky and harsh. Typical examples shown in her speech are, *your incompetence does not interest me* (6’34), *I couldn’t have been clearer* (15’58), *Please bore someone else with your question* (16’17) and *this is your responsibility, this is your job* (30’01).

Miranda often asks her subordinates to do what is impossible to do, like helping her to get a jet during a hurricane and finding the unpublished Harry Potter manuscript for her daughters. She also usually gives directives and uses explicit forms in commenting or complaining about others. Her words are caustic.

3.2 Example: Movie extract

Below is a conversation between Miranda and her magazine production team, the conversation takes place in a meeting chaired by Miranda. They are discussing issues for the coming publication. Staff A and Wallman are both members of the production team and also Nigel, the fashion director. Emily is Miranda’s personal assistant. They are all subordinates to Miranda.

*Clip 1: In the meeting room*

(57’16 –58’43)

1  Miranda:  No right February back to the issue did anybody speak with
4. Data analysis

The way Miranda speaks shows clearly that her leadership style is a masculine one. According to Holmes (2006), there are “very diverse range of activates in which leaders engage, including, meet objectives, running meetings, giving instructions, and evaluating the performance of others.” I will analyze Miranda’s style of leadership with reference to these four activities. First of all, let’s look at what Miranda does to
meet her objectives and to run the meeting. The objective of this meeting is to produce some useful ideas which are going to be included in the upcoming publication. In order to meet this objective, Miranda keeps asking questions to keep the meeting on track: Did anybody speak with Solman’s people yet? (lines 1 – 2), What about Justina where are we on that? (line 10) What about accessories for April? (lines 13 – 14) what else? (line 17) Does anybody else has anything that I can possibly use? (line 28) Miranda chairs the meeting in a relatively direct and fast way, instead of waiting for others to think of new ideas and discuss the issue, she keeps getting the information that she needs in a very fast pace. The meeting is very efficient in exchanging information between teammates (each of them reports on their projects) and making decisions (in determining what ideas are usable in the next publication.) After her subordinates (or herself) respond to the question, Miranda immediately asks another question. The meeting is like a question and answer section or a report section, rather than a discussion which is joined by every participant. No one is able to ask any question. In line 26, Wallman attempts to ask which, but Miranda ignores him. Also, the way in which the turn-taking is constructed shows that Miranda is in a dominant role. The one who is asking a question usually has more power than the one who is answering. And she has the total control of selecting the next speaker’s turn by asking question which the person in charge of that particular issue needs to respond to.

Apart from meeting objectives and running meetings, leaders also engage in giving instructions and evaluating others’ performance. “Instructions are speech act intended to get someone to do something” (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 31). Ways of giving instructions and directives are also gendered concepts. Male leaders tend to give instructions and directives by using more imperatives and need statement. Typical examples are I need these by ten and You need to get that to me soon (Holmes, 2006: 37). However, according to general perception, women leaders tend to give instructions and directives in a more indirect way. Moreover, paralinguistic features, such as hesitation and pauses are used in order to soften the directives. Typical examples would be can you just write that up a bit neater and I wonder if you could find that number for me (Holmes, 2006: 39) From the movie clip, we can see that Miranda is using a masculine way in giving directives and not many feminine features can be noticed. One of the best example is I need to see your new draft on the piece about shopping for plastic surgeons (lines 6 – 7).

Her responses and comments to her subordinates are very direct and she does not use any devices to soften or mitigate the negative effects. Here, let’s look at how she gives responses to her subordinates. Miranda often says one word No (lines 5, 17, 25) when
she thinks that a certain idea is not useable. Reasoning and explanations seldom appear. With an exception of saying *we did it two years ago* (line 17). However, detailed explanations like how we did it two years ago and why the way they did two years ago is not applicable to this publication are absent. In addition, Miranda seldom praises people. *Perfect* (line 13) is actually irony, and praise is rarely seen throughout the whole movie. Again, explanations are not given to why she thinks it is good.

Miranda always judges and evaluates her subordinates. Her harsh and direct form of criticizing, according to Brown and Levinson (1978), is a face threatening act (FTA) to her subordinates. Brown and Levinson suggest there are two types of face: positive face and negative face. Positive face as suggested by Brown and Levinson ‘includes individual needs to be approved of and liked by others, and to have their wishes and desires shared and respected’ (Daly et al., 2003: 947). Miranda’s comments about their ideas threaten their positive faces. *It’s dull* (line 7), *not wonderful yet* (line 8) and *spring? floral? groundbreaking* (line 20) are speech acts that disapprove and not respect others. The comments are very direct without any mitigation and she uses sarcasm to humiliate staff when she suggests using the idea of floral in spring. Using floral, as an idea for spring is not a new idea and many people have used it before. However, Miranda says *groundbreaking*. Another point is that, in Miranda’s point of view, this meeting is not successful since nearly none of her subordinates are producing useful ideas (except Nigel). She is criticizing her subordinates who are performing badly, using sarcasm. It makes all members in the meeting very embarrassed, for example, *I got somebody came to work today* (line 13). Obviously everyone came to work and is present in the meeting, what she means is she thinks most of them are not giving ideas she could approve.

To summarize, researchers are arguing that professionals in white collar workplaces downplay the power difference and emphasize politeness, especially women (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003). However, Miranda uses an opposite approach. She uses directives and judgmental speech acts to distance herself from her subordinates and she portrays herself as an authoritarian and masculine leader.

5. Discussion

Researchers argue that the traditional gender stereotyping in leadership is no longer applicable in many present workplace situations, like Holmes’ study about Queen
Clara (2006) and Holmes and Marra’s study about relational practice in the workplace (2004). Nowadays, there are increasing examples which show women using masculine ways and men using feminine ways of doing leadership. But why does Miranda prefer using a masculine way when doing leadership? Two reasons can be used to explain this phenomenon. The first one is based on the CoP approach. As I mentioned before, staff in the “Runway” magazine forms a CoP. They share a common way of doing things, that is, doing things in a very effective and efficient way. They have to be efficient because “Runway” is the bible of fashion. It provides the standard of what is trendy. Therefore, time is very crucial for them. If you are late, then you are outdated. And readers’ expectations are very high for this fashion bible. Miranda and her team need to produce top-quality work within a limited time. As “Runway” is a regularly published magazine, they need to meet deadlines continuously. As a result, there is a unique culture formed in “Runway” which requires precise and fast work. In order to be a leader in this particular workplace culture, Miranda needs to give directives and explicit forms of instructions to get things done precisely and efficiently. And her demanding and picky comments are actually helping the magazine to reach its top standard. So, as Nigel, the fashion director in the film, points out “she [Miranda] is just doing her job” (33’05).

The second reason for why Miranda adopts a masculine way of doing leadership is because she understands the concept of the double bind. In order to be a strong and tough leader, and a crucial person in the fashion industry, she has to sacrifice a more feminine way of doing things. As Holmes (2006: 34) says “think leader, think male.” Miranda chooses to be a successful leader, thus she needs to use a masculine style of doing leadership in order to succeed in this magazine environment. Miranda is a very successful leader for getting things done, in leading her team to produce the New York fashion bible; however, she is viewed as a “devil” boss by her subordinates because she is too masculine and not feminine enough. She is a devil because she disappoints her subordinates’ expectations of how a female leader should be. So, what if Miranda were a man? Would she also be considered as a devil boss?

6. Conclusion

Gender and leadership are complex issues in the reality. There are always exceptions and special cases in different workplace cultures. In this paper, a women’s authoritarian style of leadership was examined. Although Miranda is successful in
many ways, she is viewed as a devil boss by her subordinates. Her transactional focused leadership behavior cannot create a happy and harmonious atmosphere in “Runway”, and therefore, her assistants always quit and her subordinates are not happy working with her. In many situations, accepting subordinates’ ideas, praising them and establishing a good relationship with them are useful ways of creating a productive workplace atmosphere. So, in order not to be named as a devil boss, a leader should have a good balance between transactional and relational behavior when doing leadership.

Appendix

Transcription symbols

+ pause of about 1 second

(…) transcription omitted: can’t hear clearly

? indicating a question

[ ] overlapping

References and acknowledgements


