

THE GENDERED CONSTRUCTION OF LEADERSHIP AND FOLLOWERSHIP IN ARMENIA'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract: This article analyzes the gendered construction of leadership and followership within Armenia's educational system, drawing on theoretical frameworks from gender studies and qualitative fieldwork conducted in public schools. Despite the heavy feminization of the teaching profession, authority and leadership in Armenian society remain culturally coded as masculine, producing a structural paradox in which women educators hold formal instructional authority yet encounter symbolic devaluation. Empirical findings from interviews and classroom observations show that these gendered expectations shape how authority is interpreted and enacted, particularly in male students' varied acceptance or resistance to women as legitimate knowledge holders. The study demonstrates that gendered cultural norms continue to structure leader-follower relations in educational contexts and argues for a more critical engagement with how institutional practices reproduce or challenge patriarchal assumptions. The study contributes to scholarship on gender and educational leadership by demonstrating how cultural schemas and institutional norms continue to influence authority relations within Armenian schools.

Keywords: *archetypes, collective unconsciousness, critical frame, education, followership, gender, leadership, stereotypes.*

Introduction

This study examines the gendered construction of leadership and followership within Armenia's educational system through a combined theoretical and in-field analysis. Drawing on gender theory, sociology of education, and empirical classroom observations, the research explores how occupational segregation and socially constructed expectations shape authority relations between teachers and students. Although teaching in Armenia is a heavily feminized profession - dominated by women across primary and secondary levels - leadership, authority, and public decision-making remain culturally coded as masculine domains (Ishkanian, 2003). This disjuncture produces a structural paradox: women hold formal leadership roles as educators, yet their authority is symbolically devalued within a broader patriarchal context, where masculine leadership continues to be associated with legitimacy, strength, and public visibility (Connell, 1995; Bourdieu, 1991).



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Field data indicate that this contradiction generates tensions in the classroom, particularly in how male students perceive, negotiate, or resist female authority. Teaching is socially framed as “women’s work,” tied to caregiving and emotional labor, whereas authoritative leadership is linked to traditionally masculine traits such as decisiveness and control (Eagly & Carli, 2007). These conflicting cultural schemas shape the dynamics of leader–follower interactions, influencing student engagement, classroom behavior, and recognition of women teachers as legitimate knowledge holders. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how gendered norms continue to shape educational leadership in Armenia, highlighting the complex interplay between cultural expectations, institutional structures, and the everyday practices through which authority is enacted and negotiated within schools.

Conceptual Framework of Leadership and Followership

Leadership has been widely theorized across disciplines, yet foundational definitions consistently underscore its core functions: the exercise of influence, the coordination of people and processes, and the pursuit of shared goals. Hemphill (1949) described leadership as *“the accomplishment of a goal through the direction of human assistants,”* while Koontz (1955) similarly defined it as the ability to *“successfully marshal human collaborators to achieve a particular end.”* Contemporary scholarship expands these earlier formulations by conceptualizing leadership as a social process grounded in power, influence, and responsibility (Northouse, 2022; Yukl, 2013). Rather than being fixed traits possessed by individuals, leadership capacities are understood as relational and context-dependent, shaped by social norms, institutional expectations, and cultural frameworks.

Within institutional hierarchies, the meaning and practice of leadership can diverge substantially for men and women. Extensive research demonstrates that gender differences manifest in both leadership styles and followership behaviors. For instance, women frequently employ participative or democratic leadership approaches, which emphasize collaboration and empowerment (Rosener, 1990). Large-scale meta-analyses further show that women tend to exhibit transformational leadership behaviors - including individualized consideration and inspirational motivation - more effectively than men (Eagly et al., 2003; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Despite this, women’s leadership continues to be underrecognized or undervalued across many cultural contexts, especially in male-dominated institutions and professions.

In line with corresponding theoretical developments in leadership studies, scholars increasingly acknowledge that leadership and followership are interdependent and co-constructed. Social identity theory reframes leadership as emerging from shared group membership: effective leaders are perceived as *“one of us,”* acting in alignment with collective norms, values, and interests (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). From this perspective, followership is not passive but actively shapes who becomes a leader, how authority is interpreted, and which leadership styles are accepted or resisted. Relational leadership theories further highlight that leadership arises from ongoing interactions between leaders and followers, where each party mutually shapes expectations, behaviors, and outcomes (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

Taken together, this conceptual framework underscores the cultural, gendered, and relational dimensions of leadership and followership. These dynamics are crucial for

understanding the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within Armenia's scientific and educational sectors, where patriarchal norms and symbolic hierarchies continue to structure access to authority, legitimacy, and influence.

Historical Perspective: Leadership and Followership in Armenian History and Culture

Armenian history provides a distinct foundation for examining leadership and followership as culturally positioned practices shaped by centuries of political, religious, and social transformation. Traditional Armenian conceptions of leadership emphasize **collective resilience, moral responsibility, and service-oriented authority**, reflecting a cultural model in which leaders and followers jointly uphold community survival and national identity. These principles - deeply rooted in Armenian historical memory - continue to influence contemporary understandings of authority, gender roles, and educational leadership.

Throughout history, Armenian leadership has taken form in response to existential challenges, foreign domination, and the need for cultural preservation. Medieval military commanders (*sparapet*), royal figures, clergy, and intellectuals collectively shaped Armenian notions of authority. In these contexts, leadership was understood not merely as positional power but as **stewardship**, involving moral integrity, sacrifice, and communal responsibility.

Followership, correspondingly, was grounded in **loyalty, solidarity** (*miabanutyun*), and trust. Rather than a passive role, followership was conceived as active participation in a shared mission: defending the homeland, sustaining faith, or contributing to cultural continuity. Thus, leadership and followership historically operated as **relational practices**, defined by mutual obligation and collective purpose.

Despite the relational character of Armenian leadership traditions, authority has historically been embedded within **patriarchal structures**. Social, political, and religious leadership positions were predominantly allocated to men, reinforcing cultural narratives of male guardianship, rationality, and decision-making power. These norms were institutionalized through the family system (the patriarch as head of the household), political governance, and especially through the Church.

However, Armenian history also includes women who acted as significant political, spiritual, or cultural leaders, challenging the assumption of uninterrupted male dominance. Historical sources and contemporary analyses reveal several instances of women in formal leadership positions: *Queen Zabel of Cilician Armenia*, who ruled in the 13th century despite political turmoil and patriarchal pressures; *Diana Apcar*, appointed in 1920 as the diplomatic representative of the First Republic of Armenia in Japan, one of the first female diplomats globally. Women played crucial roles in Armenian resistance movements: *Sose Mayrig*, a fedayeen leader, is widely regarded as a national hero; in addition, numerous unnamed women participated in self-defense units during the late Ottoman era, the Artsakh wars, and various uprisings. Literature highlights that women's leadership in conflict contexts is often framed as exceptional rather than indicative of broader gender capabilities. Nevertheless, these figures illustrate an alternative leadership model rooted not in institutional authority but in communal protection and moral courage.

Numerous women educators of the 19th-century national revival period demonstrate that Armenian leadership traditions also contain *counter-narratives of feminine authority*, albeit less recognized in mainstream historiography.

Armenian diaspora studies reveal that women habitually become cultural leaders: preserving language, maintaining community ties, transmitting traditions, and sustaining diasporic identity (The Armenian Diaspora and Stateless Power: Collective Identity in the Transnational 20th Century, 2023). This leadership is informal yet pivotal.

Women structure community followership through care labor, educational practices, social organization, and the intergenerational transmission of memory.

A comprehensive understanding of gendered leadership and followership in Armenia requires an attention to the foundational role of Christianity in shaping cultural expectations of authority, duty, and communal life. Christianity, formally adopted in 301 CE, profoundly influenced Armenian social norms, moral frameworks, and institutional practices (Mathews, T. F., & Wieck, R. S., 1994). Its imprint remains visible in contemporary educational and gender dynamics.

Christian leadership ideals - centered on humility, sacrifice, and service - have historically reinforced moralized conceptions of authority in Armenian culture. Drawing on Christian ethics, leaders are expected to embody virtues such as compassion, justice, and selflessness, aligning closely with traditional Armenian understandings of stewardship, collective responsibility, and moral duty. These expectations continue to shape how leadership is interpreted within schools, families, and communities.

The Armenian Apostolic Church has operated for centuries not only as a religious institution but also as a cultural, political, and educational authority (Hovannessian, 2004). While its hierarchical structure has long mirrored patriarchal norms, many contemporary clergy and faith-based educators actively work to challenge gender bias, promote inclusion, and reinterpret Christian teachings in ways supportive of gender equity. Such initiatives reflect broader shifts within Armenian society toward more egalitarian interpretations of Christian principles.

Christian teachings on community, unity, and mutual care also play a central role in the process of formation of leadership and followership norms. Communal solidarity (*miabanutyun*), a key feature of Armenian identity, resonates strongly with Christian notions of collective belonging (Antonyan, 2011). As a result, leadership is often conceptualized not merely as positional authority but as the capacity to nurture collaboration, social cohesion, and shared purpose. These expectations tell the cultural role of teachers, who are frequently perceived as moral guides and community builders rather than solely transmitters of academic knowledge.

Despite limited access to formal ecclesiastical authority, Armenian women have long undertaken significant religious, social, and educational responsibilities. Through teaching, caregiving labor, community organization, and participation in mission work, women have exercised influential - though often informal or undervalued - forms of leadership that have sustained Armenian spirituality and cultural continuity (Abrahamian, 2006). These contributions highlight the dissonance between women's central societal roles and the structural exclusion often embedded within institutional religious hierarchies.

However, formal leadership pathways within Armenian church institutions remain constrained for women, revealing persistent tensions between patriarchal structures and the transformative ethical potential of Christian values. This tension shapes contemporary debates concerning gender, authority, and followership in Armenian educational and religious contexts. It also illuminates broader contradictions in how leadership is constructed: while Christian tradition valorizes moral authority and service - qualities widely embodied by women teachers - social norms continue to associate formal leadership with masculinity.

Modern Armenia still reflects patriarchal norms that limit women's public leadership. Studies show: underrepresentation of women in political decision-making; gender stereotypes that perceive leadership as masculine; cultural expectations that women prioritize family obligations. Even when formal barriers diminish, informal norms continue to restrict women's leadership trajectories (ADB, 2020).

Women's participation in environmental movements, human rights organizations, local governance, and grassroots mobilization demonstrates a shift toward more inclusive social leadership. However, followership remains gender-stratified; women are repeatedly positioned as supporters or mediators rather than recognized as primary change agents (Gevorgyan, 2014).

A gender-sensitive framework, therefore, recognizes that: women's leadership in Armenian history is not merely exceptional - it is systematically overlooked; followership structures reinforce, but also have the potential to challenge, patriarchal norms; leadership is culturally embedded and relational, shaped by communal values, identity, and moral expectations.

Armenian history and Christian cultural influences together create a complex tapestry of leadership and followership norms. While deeply rooted patriarchal structures have traditionally privileged male authority, alternative models emphasizing service, morality, community, and even feminine divine symbolism provide meaningful counter-narratives that validate women's leadership roles. These historical and cultural dynamics inform contemporary gendered interactions in Armenian educational spaces, shaping how authority is perceived, how followership is enacted, and how leadership is culturally legitimized or contested.

Research Design and Methodology

Given that the concepts of gender, leadership, and followership transcend national and institutional boundaries, this study began by examining how these notions are understood across different socio-cultural and historical contexts. The research employs an analytical approach to deconstruct the meanings ascribed to leadership and followership within educational and academic settings, applying a gender-focused lens to examine how these concepts are shaped, reinforced, and contested.

Central to this inquiry is uncovering how power relations, social inequalities, and dominant narratives shape expectations around who leads and who follows. The study further explores the role of archetypes in structuring gendered dispositions toward leadership and followership, emphasizing the interplay between cultural archetypes, the collective unconscious (Jung, 1969), and persistent stereotypes regarding women's authority.

A **qualitative interpretivist design** guides this research. Interpretivism assumes that social reality is constructed through interactions, shared meanings, and lived experiences (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Because concepts such as leadership, authority, masculinity, resistance, and followership are socially negotiated rather than fixed, this epistemological stance allows the study to capture the nuances of how gendered expectations are produced and enacted in everyday school life. Qualitative approaches are particularly suited for examining subjective experiences, cultural norms, and power relations in educational contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The methodology focuses on understanding how gendered norms shape leadership-followership dynamics in Armenian classrooms, specifically the interaction between predominantly female teachers and male students. To generate rich, multilayered insights, the study employed **semi-structured interviews** and **non-participant classroom observations**, enabling both discursive and behavioral data to be examined.

Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their own interpretations and provided the researcher with flexibility to explore emerging themes in depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Complementarily, non-participant classroom observations provided contextual insight into how authority, resistance, and gendered practices were enacted in everyday school interactions (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

The research was conducted in **six public schools in Armenia**, selected to represent a range of educational settings including urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. Public schools were chosen due to the pronounced feminization of the teaching workforce, making them a critical site for analyzing the gendered contradictions of leadership and followership. The study focused on classrooms in grades 8–11, as adolescence represents an acute developmental stage during which gender norms and identity performances are particularly pronounced.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants who could offer the most relevant and diverse insights into leadership and followership dynamics.

Purposive sampling prioritizes depth and contextual understanding over statistical generalizability (Patton, 2015). The participant pool included 12 **female teachers** across various subject areas to capture variation in leadership styles and disciplinary practices. Additionally, 36 **students** (boys and girls) participated in discussion groups to explore their perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of authority, gender, and classroom leadership.

Socially Constructed Expectations on Leadership and Followership: Evidence from Interviews with Armenian Students

The excerpts obtained from discussion groups with Armenian schoolchildren highlight the significant impact of socially constructed gender expectations on how young people perceive leadership, followership, and academic engagement. These statements exemplify how gendered norms are internalized and reproduced in educational settings, shaping students' behaviors, aspirations, and associations with knowledge.

The claim that "*learning is for girls*" reflects a pervasive cultural stereotype that associates intellectual effort, diligence, and academic success with femininity. Such discourses implicitly construct schooling as a feminized domain and position boys as outsiders to educational achievement. This framing is reinforced by peer policing mechanisms, as seen in statements such as "*I'm not a nerd*" and "*If I study well, the*

boys will make fun of me." These expressions reveal the extent to which boys feel pressure to distance themselves from academic commitment to conform to dominant constructions of masculinity characterized by nonchalance, resistance to authority, and disengagement from feminized domains.

Similarly, interview excerpts that distinguish between leadership and followership as gendered practices, "*followership is for women, leadership is for men,*" demonstrate how students conceptualize authority through a binary hierarchical lens. Leadership is commonly framed as a masculine domain associated with control, assertiveness, and dominance, whereas followership is culturally coded as feminine, linked to passivity, receptivity, and compliance.

The statement "*a man can't follow women*" makes explicit the gendered logic that delegitimizes women's authority, including that of female teachers, by presenting male followership as a violation of masculine identity norms. Such beliefs not only reproduce patriarchal structures but also constrain boys' willingness to recognize or accept women as legitimate leaders within educational institutions.

The final observation - "*carriers of knowledge are women*" - reflects students' awareness of the feminization of the teaching profession in Armenia. While this acknowledgment shows the central role women play in knowledge transmission, it simultaneously exposes a cultural paradox: even though women occupy positions of pedagogical authority, their leadership remains symbolically devalued due to ingrained gender hierarchies. As a result, male students may experience cognitive dissonance between the institutional reality of women's expertise and the cultural expectation that authority and knowledge ownership are masculine attributes.

Collectively, these narratives exhibit how gendered norms shape educational subjectivities and reinforce unequal power relations in the classroom. They demonstrate that boys' alienation from learning is not merely individual or behavioral but embedded in broader cultural scripts that define what it means to be a "proper" boy or girl. These excerpts illuminate the ways masculinities are constructed in Armenian educational contexts and how these constructions influence leadership and followership dynamics, student engagement, and the recognition of female authority.

Archetypes, Symbolic Power, and Gendered Leadership/Followership in Armenian Education

Carl Jung's analytical psychology offers a foundational psychological lens for understanding gendered patterns of leadership and followership, particularly the resistance male students may demonstrate toward women's authority. Jung posited that societies share a *collective unconscious* composed of archetypes - universal symbolic templates that shape how individuals perceive authority, knowledge, and gendered social roles (Jung, 1969). Although archetypes are universal in form, they manifest differently across cultural contexts. In the Armenian case - where leadership has been historically masculinized - archetypal imagery plays a central role in structuring expectations about who is entitled to lead and who is expected to follow.

Archetypes, Collective Unconscious, and Gendered Perceptions of Authority. Archetypes operate as symbolic models that influence how leaders are idealized and how followers position themselves (Kets de Vries, 2006). In Armenian cultural memory, shaped by centuries of militarization, national trauma, and patriarchal social

organization, certain archetypes have become particularly noticeable.

The **Patriarch/King archetype** - associated with protection, authority, and governance - aligns with historical images of male military leaders, clergy, and household heads. This archetype parallels Jung's "Father" and "Ruler" figures, which represent command, order, and epistemic authority (Jung, 1964). Conversely, the **Mother/Great Mother archetype**, symbolizing care, nurturing, and moral guidance, maps onto Armenian cultural expectations of women as caregivers and educators. Teaching, consequently, is symbolically feminized: valued for its moral dimension but not associated with authoritative leadership.

This *symbolic* distribution introduces what Jung (1969) describes as **archetypal contradiction**: women teachers are culturally aligned with nurturing roles, yet they are institutionally positioned as authoritative leaders responsible for evaluation, discipline, and the transmission of knowledge.

Archetypes and Masculinized Models of Leadership

The Armenian collective unconscious, shaped by historical narratives of survival, resistance, and national heroism, strongly aligns leadership with masculine archetypes:

- **The Hero** – courage, dominance, overcoming adversity; deeply intertwined with Armenian military history and nationalist mythology.
- **The Ruler** – governance, discipline, control; embodied historically by male kings, princes, patriarchs, and clergy.
- **The Magician** – mastery of knowledge and transformative power; culturally represented by male sages, priests, philosophers, and intellectuals.
- **The Outlaw** – rebellion, boundary-testing, rejection of authority; aligning with adolescent masculinity and oppositional behavior.

These archetypes create a symbolic template in which authority, discipline, and epistemic control are coded as masculine traits (Connell, 1995). Consequently, even when women are formally positioned as leaders - as in Armenian schools - the cultural unconscious may perceive their authority as misaligned with legitimate leadership.

Archetypes and Feminized Expectations of Followership

In contrast, archetypes aligned with followership - obedience, relationality, receptivity - are culturally feminized:

- **The Caregiver** – nurturance, support, emotional labor; aligned with female teachers' expected roles.
- **The Innocent** – compliance, moral purity, trust; traits often expected of girls in educational settings.
- **The Lover/Connector** – relationality, emotional sensitivity; qualities frequently devalued in leadership yet valorized in caregiving positions.

These archetypes shape expectations about who should follow and how. Following a woman leader thus becomes *symbolically feminized*, generating tension for male students whose identity is shaped by hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). In this framework, followership itself becomes a gendered performance, where compliance with female authority is perceived as a threat to masculine identity.

Archetypal Misalignment and Resistance to Women Teachers

Women teachers in Armenia occupy a structurally contradictory position. Institutionally, they embody aspects of the **Ruler** and **Magician** archetypes - they structure the classroom, control knowledge, and exercise evaluative authority.

Culturally, however, they are expected to embody the *Caregiver* archetype. This disjunction creates what leadership theorists describe as a *double bind* (Eagly & Karau, 2002): when women enact authority, they violate cultural expectations of femininity; when they enact caregiving, they risk losing professional legitimacy.

For male students - socialized into gender hierarchies reinforced by family structures, peer culture, and national narratives - following a woman leader requires adopting an archetypically feminized position. Jungian theorists suggest that such situations activate *projection*, whereby internal anxieties about masculinity are displaced onto women authority figures (Jacobi, 1973). This dynamic can manifest in resistance and boundary testing, mockery or public challenge, disengagement from academic tasks, and symbolic withdrawal from the learning process.

This pattern is not merely behavioral but deeply symbolic - what Bourdieu (1990) would describe as a clash between embodied habitus and institutional structure.

Archetypes, Symbolic Violence, and Social Reproduction

Bourdieu's theories help illuminate how archetypal expectations become mechanisms of *symbolic power* and *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu, 1991, 1992). Symbolic violence refers to the subtle, normalized ways through which cultural hierarchies are reproduced, rendering certain forms of authority legitimate and others illegitimate.

In Armenian classrooms, symbolic violence manifests through the naturalization of male authority as legitimate, the devaluation of women's leadership, the perception that knowledge delivered by women carries less symbolic weight, and gendered interpretations of assertive women teachers as "aggressive" or "inappropriate."

Archetypes, functioning as cultural symbols, reinforce these inequalities. Masculinized archetypes (Hero, Ruler, Magician) legitimize male leadership, while feminized archetypes (Caregiver, Innocent) naturalize women's subordinate positioning. Through habitus, male students internalize these symbolic hierarchies, producing resistance to female authority as a culturally sanctioned performance of masculinity.

Integrated Theoretical Lens

By integrating Jungian archetype theory with Bourdieu's symbolic violence, Connell's hegemonic masculinity, and Foucault's conceptualization of power/knowledge, this framework reveals how gendered authority in Armenian classrooms is produced at multiple levels: *psychological* (archetypes and projection), *cultural* (gendered national narratives), *institutional* (school structures), *symbolic* (legitimized forms of authority), *performative* (male students' resistance).

This integrated perspective explains why women's leadership in education - despite their numerical dominance in the teaching profession - remains symbolically devalued, and why followership among boys is fraught, contested, and often enacted as resistance or alienation from learning itself.

Women Teachers as "Uncomfortable Leaders" in a Patriarchal Society

In patriarchal social contexts, women's authority is often questioned, resisted, or rendered symbolically secondary, even when they occupy formal leadership positions (Connell, 1995; Bourdieu, 1991). In contemporary Armenia, teaching is a highly feminized profession; women teachers hold institutional authority within the

classroom, yet frequently encounter implicit cultural barriers that undermine their legitimacy as leaders. This contradiction positions women teachers as “**uncomfortable leaders**” - leaders whose authority is formally recognized but culturally contested (Kets de Vries, 2006).

When a woman assumes the teacher role - an authority figure who sets rules, evaluates performance, and holds epistemic power - students confront a leadership configuration that conflicts with the masculine leadership archetypes they encounter in society (Jung, 1968).

Feminine leadership styles - relationship-oriented approaches, collaboration, empathy, and supportive discipline - may be interpreted through patriarchal lenses as weakness, forcing women teachers into a contradictory position: they are expected to nurture while simultaneously exercising authority (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

This structural paradox positions women as legitimate “**owners of knowledge**” in the classroom, yet culturally devalues their authority. Male students socialized into patriarchal norms may resist female authority because leadership is culturally construed as masculine (Connell, 1995). The classroom thus becomes a site of **gendered power negotiation**, where women teachers’ leadership challenges the patriarchal order.

Gendered Authority, Knowledge Alienation, and Masculine Resistance

Although Armenian teaching is predominantly female, broader cultural systems remain strongly influenced by **hegemonic masculinity** (Connell, 1995), creating a contradiction: women hold institutional authority but are culturally devalued. Male students, socialized to expect male dominance, may experience tension when positioned as followers to a female teacher who is also the primary keeper and transmitter of knowledge.

Masculine Prerogative and Followership

Connell’s theory explains how male students internalize a gendered hierarchy before school (Connell, 1995). Following - listening, complying, accepting evaluation - is culturally coded as feminine, so following a woman violates internalized masculine norms.

Symbolic Power and Knowledge

Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power highlights that teacher authority is not only institutional but also **symbolically recognized** through cultural practices (Bourdieu, 1991, 1992). In patriarchal systems, intellectual authority is coded as masculine. Male students may reject knowledge from women teachers as a symbolic act to reassert masculine hierarchy, producing **alienation** from knowledge (Bourdieu, 1991).

Power/Knowledge and Resistance

Foucault (1980) suggests that resistance is embedded in micro-political practices. Male students’ classroom behaviors, such as refusal to participate, challenging authority, and devaluing tasks, function as strategies to restore gendered hierarchies, illustrating the intersection of **power/knowledge and identity**.

Symbolic Misalignment and Archetypal Contradictions

Jung’s (1969) concept of archetypes clarifies the psychological dimension introduced in Armenian culture: privileging the Hero, Ruler, and Outlaw archetypes as male. Female teachers embody the Caregiver or Mother archetype, which conflicts with the masculine-coded leadership archetypes. Male resistance thus represents

an **archetypal dissonance**, where following a woman threatens the collective unconscious expectation of male authority.

Discussion

Gendered Socialization and Leadership Norms

The interviews reveal that Armenian students internalize a **binary gender order** early in life: “*leadership is for men*” and “*men can’t follow women*”. Academic engagement is feminized, consistent with Connell’s (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity, which organizes social expectations by legitimizing male dominance and relegating women to supportive roles.

Statements such as “*I’m not a nerd*” and “*if I study well, boys will make fun of me*” illustrate that male students avoid intellectual engagement to preserve masculine identity, confirming that followership is culturally coded as feminine (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Archetypal Dissonance and Female Authority

Jung’s (1968) theory explains why boys resist female teachers. Male students have internalized masculine leadership archetypes (Hero, Ruler, King), while women teachers symbolically represent Caregiver or Mother archetypes. This **archetypal misalignment** produces psychological discomfort, manifesting as resistance, mockery, or disengagement.

Symbolic Violence and Knowledge Devaluation

Bourdieu’s (1991, 1992) concept of symbolic violence explains why and how women-teachers’ authority is devalued. Students’ implicit beliefs, such as “*a man can’t follow women*”, normalize gender hierarchy, reproducing structural inequality. Knowledge itself becomes gendered: male students distance themselves from academic engagement to resist subordination, creating a cycle of **resistance → disengagement → devaluation of authority and knowledge**.

Resistance as Power/Knowledge Negotiation

Foucault’s (1980) framework positions resistance as a negotiation of power. Male students’ refusal to follow female authority represents **micro-political acts** aimed at restoring masculine dominance. Disengagement is not a lack of ability, yet it is a **performative assertion of hegemonic masculinity**, reflecting broader cultural norms (Connell, 1995).

Knowledge Alienation

Male students’ avoidance of learning illustrates **gendered knowledge alienation**: knowledge is culturally coded as feminine when transmitted by women, creating an identity-based barrier to learning. Female teachers, in contrast, must navigate contradictory expectations - enforcing discipline while maintaining a culturally acceptable feminine persona – producing a double bind (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Schools as Sites of Gendered Power Negotiation

Classrooms function as microcosms of patriarchal society. The findings show:

- Leadership and followership are socially constructed and gendered
- Female authority is central yet contested
- Male students resist to protect their identity
- Knowledge becomes a symbolic resource embedded in the gender hierarchy.

This confirms that Armenian classrooms reproduce cultural norms while simultaneously offering a site for negotiation and contestation of gendered authority.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Armenia's educational system functions as a micro-arena where broader patriarchal norms are reproduced, negotiated, and occasionally challenged. Although women constitute the overwhelming majority of teachers and hold formal institutional authority, their leadership remains culturally contested. The findings highlight a persistent contradiction: women teachers are positioned as legitimate transmitters of knowledge, yet patriarchal norms devalue their authority and oblige the forms of leadership they can exercise.

Male students' resistance - expressed through disengagement, refusal to follow instructions, or devaluing academic tasks - emerges not as individual behavior but as a gendered performance rooted in hegemonic masculinity. Such resistance reflects the internalization of gendered hierarchies in which leadership is coded as masculine, followership as feminine, and intellectual engagement as incompatible with masculine identity. Drawing on Connell, Bourdieu, and Foucault, the study shows how symbolic power, hegemonic masculinity, and micro-political acts of resistance intersect to shape classroom dynamics. Jungian archetypal analysis further reveals the psychological tension created when female authority conflicts with culturally valorized masculine leadership archetypes.

The Armenian classroom thus becomes a site where gendered power relations are enacted and reproduced through everyday practices. Yet, it also holds transformative potential: by making these dynamics visible, educators and policymakers can begin to confront the structural and cultural barriers that position women as "uncomfortable leaders."

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.