LEADERSHIP: AN EXERCISE IN GENDERED BEHAVIOR?

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS EXPLORING HOW SWEDISH LEADERSHIP MEDIA CREATES AND REINFORCES GENDER STRUCTURES, AND ITS EFFECTS ON YOUNG ADULTS' PERCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP

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Bachelor Thesis

Stockholm School of Economics

2022

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Abstract:

With its high rate of female representation within positions of power, Sweden is frequently regarded as being at the forefront of gender equality. While the division of men and women in leadership roles is an integral prerequisite for achieving equality, societal appreciation for gender characteristics is an important and often overlooked factor. The authors seek to combine this idea with the perspective of critical theory, where discourses are believed to create and reinforce power structures, in examining the Swedish leadership discourse. Through analyzing various leadership media and conducting semi-structured interviews with young adults, conclusions indicate that male-coded traits permeate the leadership discourse, and that this results in young adults perceiving leadership as something inherently male. It is ultimately argued that while women are increasingly allowed into leadership positions, they are so mainly when embracing masculine characteristics. While men might no longer be considered intrinsically more suitable for leadership than women, masculinity is persistently regarded as superior to femininity in the context.

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Bachelor Thesis
Bachelor Program in Management
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Acknowledgements

There are many people to whom we would like to express our gratitude toward in the creation of this thesis.

Firstly, we would like to thank our supervisor Marijane Jonsson for her incredible devotion to helping us throughout the process. Without her expertise and willingness to exchange thoughts and ideas with us, we would not have been able to finish this thesis. Marijane's constant encouragement was also vital in helping us find the motivation to fulfill our ambitions with the work.

Secondly, we would like to thank our supervision group, who has been vital in noticing flaws in the thesis, while always contributing with constructive and helpful criticism.

Thirdly, we would like to thank all interviewees, for their passion and fearlessness in discussing an important contemporary issue.

Finally, we would like to thank our friends, families, and each other for supporting us throughout the past three years at the Stockholm School of Economics. Through ups and downs, thick and thin, you have been invaluable in helping us through the perhaps most challenging, yet rewarding, period of our lives.

Definitions and concepts

Leadership: The influence relationship between leaders and followers with the intention of creating changes reflecting the mutual purposes of both parties.

Media: All types of mass communication, including but not limited to: books, articles, podcasts, and newspapers.

Discourse: Refers to any spoken, written, or visual language. According to Norman Fairclough, the term can be used to make a connection between language and the wider society.

Leadership media discourse: All media within the subject of leadership composing the overall discourse.

Gender: The socially constructed behaviors and roles of women and men.

Gender trait: A characteristic more prevalent and/or socially desirable for a gender.

Young adults: Individuals between the ages of 18-25.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Sweden is regarded as one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, particularly in terms of representation (WEF 2021). With 38% of company boards (supervisory boards or board of directors) in the largest quoted companies being female, Sweden has the highest share of female board member representation of all European countries, excluding those with implemented gender quotas (EIGE 2021). In terms of political power, the 2018 election resulted in 46% of appointed parliament members being female (Riksdagen 2018). For much of history, however, a belief that women should be kept from positions of power has permeated the dominant discourse, as female characteristics in large have been regarded as incompatible with decision-making. (Smith et al. 2021). Today, the belief that women should not hold certain positions because of an inherent incapacity is relatively rare in Sweden. And while gender representation is still unequal in certain sectors, and there remains a large discrepancy in capital ownership (Heikensten et al. 2019), the social progression of Swedish society in a historical context is undeniable.

In Sweden today, representation within leadership positions is considered a key factor of gender equality, (Swedish Institute 2022), with governmental agencies and politicians regularly emphasizing this in international contexts (Lindhagen & Linde 2019). The emphasis on binary genders in a social context is also decreasing, through for instance the introduction of gender-neutral pronouns in the language (De Luce 2019). However, expectations of men and women still differ, perpetuating the social constructions of masculinity and femininity (Sendén et al. 2019). Individuals being socially assessed by either conforming to or dissenting from the societal expectations of their gender results in men and women being conditioned toward gender-specific behaviors (ibid).

There are various approaches to measuring gender equality, both in general and within leadership specifically. While the contemporary Swedish gender discourse increasingly emphasizes the distinction between sex and gender characteristics, masculinity or feminity, (De Luce 2019), it seems as though the dialogue within leadership is not. As women have become socially elevated to be accepted into positions of power previously reserved for men, the notion that both genders have similar foundations for becoming competent leaders is growing. What the dialogue frequently omits, however, is the social perception of femininity contra masculinity in a leadership context. While the leadership discourse is seemingly becoming more inclusive towards women, *what about femininity?*

1.2 Prior research and research gap

Organizational discourse, as well as gendered behavior, has been extensively studied by management scholars (Grant et al. 2005). However, the intersecting territories of gender traits within leadership discourses, and their effects on perceptions of leadership, remain largely unexplored. Within the area of gender and leadership discourse, the focus has rather been on the gendering of discourses within specific organizations and occupations (Hovden 2010), or the leadership discourse among women in certain contexts (Österlind & Haake 2010). Conversely, gender traits within the media have been detailed (Brooks & Hébert 2006). However, outlining how the discourse within specifically leadership media is gendered is largely not conducted, especially within a Swedish context. Further, young adults' perception of leadership in relation to gender traits has been investigated (Burley Shore et al. 2014), however, not in a Swedish context. Thus, there is a clear lack of research on the implications of the Swedish leadership discourse on young adults' perception of leadership. With a fundamental presumption of critical discourse analysis being that power structures are created and reinforced through language, we find it necessary to investigate the practical implications of the Swedish discourse on leadership.

1.3 Scope

This thesis is geographically delimited to examining discourse in *Sweden*, due to multiple factors. Firstly, Sweden is, as outlined, at the forefront of equality pursuits. Secondly, gendered language is frequently discussed in Swedish media (UR 2010), with gender neutrality in the language often advocated for (Prewitt-Freilino et al. 2011). Therefore, it is considered relevant to explore the actual extent of gendered language within Swedish discourses and its social implications.

The delimitation of the discursive effects on *young adults,* in particular, is much due to the broad and multiple discourses that younger generations are exposed to. As young adults consume media digitally to a higher extent (Ripollés 2012) and also through alternative channels, such as podcasts (Craig et al. 2021), the discourses they encounter are highly reflective of contemporary society. Additionally, because this thesis covers the area of leadership, young adults are a natural demographic selection, as they will shape the future of management and organizations.

1.4 Purpose and research question

This thesis aims to explore how the Swedish discourse on leadership is gendered and how the discursive practice affects the perception of leadership among young Swedish adults. Although the authors acknowledge the prior contributions toward assessing gender disparities in understanding

discursive effects on social structures and how these enforce power imbalances, they consider one perspective of studying gender equality relatively unexplored. While gender equality is frequently measured by quantifiable aspects such as income or representation (Swedish Institute 2022), these measurements cannot provide a total account of equality. This thesis is based on the belief that gender equality is not merely achieved by formal female access to certain spaces, but also by abolishing the devaluing of femininity in regard to masculinity.

Because of the identified research gap, the authors hope to not only fill a previously missing area of academic research but also encourage a critical perspective among readers. In the essence of critical discourse analysis, the authors hope to spark a discussion on how a gendered leadership discourse creates and reinforces power structures between the genders, specifically in relation to its implications on young adults. Ultimately, this optimistically contributes beyond answering the research question itself, as the thesis lays the groundwork for further research to build on in different directions. As critical discourse analysts, we ultimately aim to expose and challenge aspects of social inequality - in this instance in the context of Swedish leadership media. The research question is thus presented as follows:

How is the Swedish discourse on leadership gendered, and how does it affect young adults' perception of leadership?

2. Literature review

This thesis' literature review aims to outline the current research within the defined scope, and is therefore centered around previous works detailing leadership, gendered discourses, gendered portrayal within media, and young adults' perception of leadership in relation to gender.

2.1 History of leadership and leadership theory

Throughout history, different leadership styles have been premiered (Benmira & Agboola 2021). Current scholars identify four main historical leadership theories and discourses (ibid). The *trait era*, focuses on the inherent traits of a leader, the *behavioral era*, focuses on the behaviors of leaders, the *situational era*, focuses on leaders' adaptability to different situations, and the *new leadership era*, focuses on leadership being created in complex interactions between leaders, followers, the context, and the system as a whole. While theories in the earlier eras focused on the *"who"* and *"where"* of leadership, the *new leadership era* entails a shift in focus towards the *"what"* and the *"how"* of

leading. Examining these areas outlines how the influence process occurs between actors producing jointly desired outcomes. (ibid)

2.2 Gendered discourses in organizational studies

Prior to the 1970s, gender was a virtually non-existent parameter of Western organizational studies (Mills & Runté 2006). Once it became a point of analysis, however, women in organizations were often considered as the "other" gender, while men were regarded as the genderless norm (Ashcraft & Mumby 2004). Within management literature, the underlying assumption has been, and to an extent still is, that men lead other men, thus excluding women from the equation. (ibid)

A link between socio-political notions of gender and the exclusion of women and feminity from organizational studies has been argued (Mills & Runté 2006). Additionally, management theory and organizational studies have been considered to reflect current events in society. During war or times of crisis, a leader is frequently demanded to be of authoritative and decisive nature. As these are traits traditionally more linked with masculinity and men within Western contexts, such periods of time have been argued to further exclude women and femininity from discourses of organizational studies (ibid).

2.3 Academic findings of gender portrayal and gender in media

The gendered portrayal of leaders within academia primarily concentrates on specific contexts and events, such as children's books (Wilkins & Barry 2017) or news coverage of elections (Gidengil & Everitt 1999). A recurring theme within such studies is the finding that masculinity is portrayed as the contextual standard that the story or structure revolves around. Male characters or individuals are rarely evaluated in relation to their gender, and rarely regarded as representing their gender. In the case of femininity, however, gender expressions are seen as distinctive and stand out in many contexts (ibid).

Studies have outlined how the media discourse has a role in creating and reinforcing traditional gender roles, perpetuating the notion that women are the weaker sex (Wood 1994). It has also been found that news reports attribute different leadership qualities to men and women in a Western political context (Wagner et al. 2019). In general, female political leaders are subjected to more scrutiny and negative gendered assessments of their personal qualities. The knowledge of women is to

a higher extent downplayed if considerable and critiqued if lacking. Additionally, when female political candidates are not critiqued within the media, they are instead often not mentioned at all.

2.4 Young adults' perception of leadership

The attitude toward female leadership has been examined by scholars (Burley Shore et al. 2014), primarily in a North American context. In terms of leadership, young adults describe male leaders as "competitive" to a higher degree, while female leaders as "ambitious". It was simultaneously noted that "competitive" implicitly relates more to action-taking, while "ambitious" relates more to a desire. One study conducted in Europe asked students about notable individuals they perceived as leaders, with only one in five mentioned leaders being female (Borovac et al. 2012). When asked which characteristics a leader should possess, the following traits were most occurring, in falling order: self-confident, responsible, charismatic, and people-caring.

Although somewhat studied in cultures arguably similar to Sweden, young adults' perception of leadership in a Swedish context is largely unstudied, especially in terms of character traits in relation to gender. This has also not been conducted in examining the leadership discourse's effect on the matter.

3. Theory

3.1 Critical discourse analysis and Fairclough's three-dimensional model

Although Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) primarily acts as a method in this study, it also brings a crucial theoretical perspective to the work. Aiming to understand how practised discourse relates to societal power structures, language is regarded as an instrument to accomplish goals rather than a neutral device for conveying meaning (Janks 1997). The theory thus focuses on the linguistic manifestations of power, and language is therefore viewed as a form of social practice in which power is exercised (ibid).

While there is no universal method for conducting a CDA, Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse constitutes a common template (Fairclough 2022; Van Dijk 1993). The model consists of three interlaced processes of analysis which considers three dimensions of discourse: the *textual* dimension, the *discursive practice* dimension, and the *social practice* dimension (Fairclough 2022).

The textual dimension relates to the formal properties of the text and therefore operates on a *descriptive level*. It aims to describe and examine the discourse structure, content, and meaning, questioning how the choice of words and sentence structuring express attitudes (Fairclough 2022). The discursive practice dimension investigates the processes by which the discourse is produced and received, and is thus a level devoted to *interpretation*. Attention is paid to the speaker, channel, and participants of the discourse, as well as identifying *interdiscursivity* to other contexts (Fairclough 1992). *Access* to discourse should also be considered, as all language users have more or less freedom in their participation and influence in communicative events. The more access to influence the discourse an actor has, the greater their social power will be (Van Dijk 1993). In turn, the greater access to discourse, the greater the ability to influence *discourse understanding* will be. By controlling the context in which discourse is understood, the practiced discourse can be used to reinforce attitudes and ideologies toward the dominated group. Often, this is done through justification and legitimization of inequality, or through denial of any unequal structures (ibid.). Finally, the social practice dimension studies the relation between the discursive event and its social context. Here, the aim is to understand whether the discursive practice is contributing to maintaining the status quo in social practice or enabling social change. This level has an *explanatory* purpose, as it attempts to explain the discursive practice in relation to the social context (Jørgensen & Phillips 2000).

The aim of conducting a CDA is, however, not only to understand the practiced discourse's impact on power structures, but to contribute to social change. Therefore, conducting a CDA implies a sociopolitical aim of the researchers (Van Dijk 1993). The critical understanding of discourse is ultimately aimed to produce change, holding a socially emancipatory objective (Fairclough 2022). Because of this ideological aim, the theory of CDA has been subject to criticism, as it is claimed that the sociopolitical aim of the researcher collides with the criteria for scientific objectivity within research (Huy Nguyen 2014). While this argument is acknowledged, as critical scholars, the authors consider true objectivity impossible to achieve, as a social reality is always influenced by human interpretations (Bohman 2021). Instead, this thesis recognizes the need for a subjectivist approach in order to enable social change (Jørgensen & Phillips 2000).

3.2 Yvonne Hirdman's gender systems theory

According to Yvonne Hirdman's gender systems theory, there is a social dichotomy between the male and female, which has induced a view of men and women being direct opposites (Hirdman 1988). There are two rules of the gender system which ultimately result in a general subordination of female

traits. The first rule is based on the distinctive separation of the genders. Virtually all aspects of the life of the individual can be divided into male and female categories, creating preconceived notions of the behavior of men and women. The systematic division of individuals into genders and its social implications is what ultimately leads to the social, economic, and political disparity between the genders. The second rule states that within the gender dichotomy, masculine aspects are considered of higher value. Therefore, traditional male activities and traits will be considered superior to their female counterparts, having practical implications on the social status of men and women. Within professional settings, the result is that male-dominated professions generally are of higher status and pay more.

Constant reproduction of the gender systems occurs on three separate levels:

1. *Abstract cultural images:* The general conceptions of male and female traits, and how men and women implicitly should behave - both separately and in relation to the other gender.
2. *The institutional level:* Men and women are expected to conduct themselves differently within professional, relationship-, and conversational contexts.
3. *The interpersonal level:* On the exterior and physical level, women and men are socially conditioned to wear different clothing, have different hairstyles, and follow different trends.

3.3 Classifying gendered traits

3.3.1 Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI)

Initially developed in the 1970s, as a tool for assessing an individual's femininity and masculinity, the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) has since come to be one of the most established methods for analyzing gender roles (Davis 2017). The tool is designed as a test, where the respondent indicates how well a trait describes them on a scale from 1-7. The inventory of characteristics was subjected to Stanford students in 1974, who rated the traits in terms of social desirability for their respective sex (Bem 1974). The result was 20 traits judged as socially desirable for men, 20 for women, and 20 regarded as no more desirable for one sex than the other.

Although the BSRI is one of the most widely used tools for studying gender roles, its contemporary use has been criticized (Hoffman & Borders 2001). Because of the changeable nature of gender roles, the assessment of gender trait desirability needs continuous reproducing. The original study being conducted in an American setting has also created doubt about whether the theory can be replicated in

other cultures. Since its initial development, however, revised studies have been published with updated and statistically significant character traits (Arrindell 2013), including in Sweden (ibid). Another problematization of the BSRI is the assumption that masculinity and femininity are distinctively different (Hoffman & Borders 2001). Although both men and women can exercise both, the theory assumes sex-typed characteristics as not having the possibility of being integrated with one another. Instead, the individual is conceptualized as solely a passive recipient of social forces, instead of a consistent participant in the reproduction of gender as a social construction. However, in its sole purpose of determining the gendering of certain traits in this thesis, the model acts as a contextual reflection of the contemporary idea of gendered traits - and thus remains relevant (Arrindell 2013).

3.3.2 NEO-PI-R

The Big Five personality trait model is regularly used within organizational studies as an assessment of leadership traits (McAdams 1992). The model has been operationalized into NEO-PI-R, a personality inventory, from which gender traits can be differentiated (Furnham 2013). In accordance with the operationalization, replicable gender differences across cultures are found within the areas of *Neuroticism, Openness to Experience,* and *Interpersonal Traits*.

Neuroticism is a vast range of negative affects and the predisposition to experience depression, anxiety, shame, and anger. Studies are consistently confirming that women, on average and across ages and cultures, experience higher levels of neuroticism than men (Feingold 1994).

In the operationalization of the Big Five, there is no distinction in overall *Openness to Experience* between the genders. However, women and men are shown to prefer openness to different cognitive aspects: women have on average been shown more sensitive to emotions than men. It has therefore been hypothesized that women should generally score higher on openness to feelings, while men should score higher on openness to ideas (Paul et al. 2001).

Interpersonal Traits are composed of the Big Five-components *Agreeableness* and *Extraversion*. Within *Agreeableness*, women generally score above men, more often displaying submissiveness and love than their male counterparts (Budaev 1999). In terms of the NEO-PI-R, it is hypothesized women and men display different facets of Extraversion on a higher level; women scoring higher in warmth and men scoring higher in assertiveness (Paul et al. 2001).

Although the NEO-PI-R is considered one of the leading psychometric measures of the Big Five model (Furnham 2013), it has been criticized for not controlling for social desirability biases (Widiger 1995). The model makes a fundamental assumption of honesty amongst the test participants, something which has continuously been questioned by scholars. When measuring certain personality traits, it has been argued that participants will present themselves more positively than actually true (Ben-Porath & Waller 1992). The model hence takes for granted that social norms of desirable character traits do not affect the intrinsic personality traits of an individual. This critique indicates a requirement for a synthesization of theories and models that actively take the phenomenon of social desirability into account.

3.3.3 Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions

The *masculinity* dimension of Hofstede's *dimensions of culture* can explain the extent of gender differences in social contexts. This dimension is derived from contrasting work values between cultures, where some cultures are regarded as masculine and some feminine (Hofstede 1998). The masculine society holds a preference for achievement, assertiveness, heroism, and material rewards for success, and can generally be described as more competitive. The feminine societies in turn favor cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak, and quality of life. Within areas such as social norms, politics, and economy, concrete differences in masculine and feminine societies are outlined. (ibid)

The generalizing nature of Hofstede's cultural dimensions is a common critique, meaning the theory's applicability becomes restricted (Williamson 2002), as it is lacking any trait analysis on a deeper level. Therefore, it can not be assumed that the theory explains the personalities of individuals within a population. Instead, the theory is appropriately applied in determining what values and attitudes can be considered gendered within a society. An assumption which can not be taken for granted is that the theory describes individual personalities within a population. Thus, in a discursive setting, the theory is appropriately applied in determining what values and attitudes can be considered gendered within the discourse.'

3.4 Synthesized theoretical frameworks

3.4.1 Gender trait classification framework

The framework for classifying masculine and feminine traits are derived from the BSRI, NEO-PI-R, and Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions. Together, they create a synthesized structure for detecting gendered language in practised discourse (see Appendix A for gender trait classification framework).

3.4.2 Analytical framework

The framework for analyzing the examined discourse is derived from Fairclough's three dimensional model of discourse and Hirdman's gender systems theory. Together, they systematize the necessary assumptions when evaluating and interpreting the examined material, simultaneously explaining the societal implications of the findings.

From the Fairclough model, the textual, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice dimensions create a holistic tool for understanding discourse, while Hirdman's gender systems theory complements the sociocultural practice dimension. The theory of how men and women are socially conditioned differently from one another, thus creating a dichotomy in how society values masculinity and femininity, can help explain the disparities in how leadership is viewed in a social context. These theories are applied to the empirical material, consisting of the analyzed media and interviews.
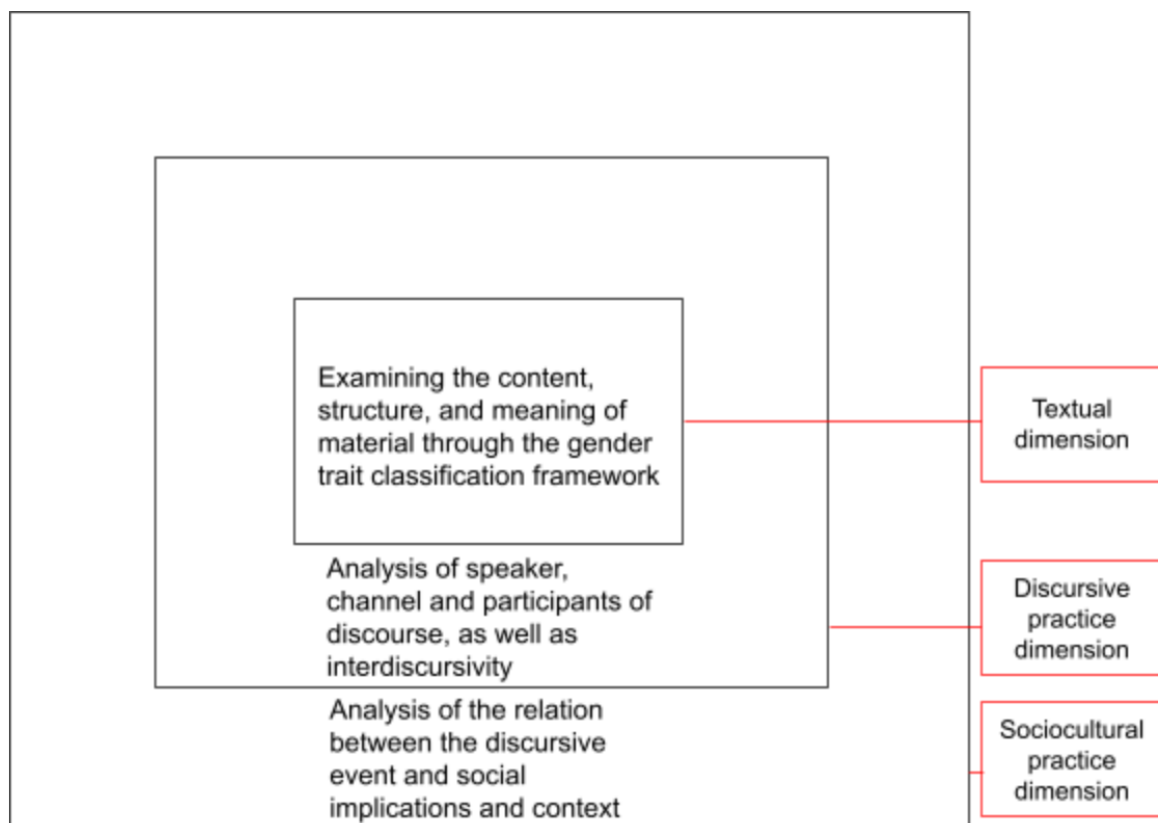
4. Methodology

4.1 Research stance

Considering the purpose of understanding power structures through critically challenging discursive practices, this thesis is based on a critical paradigm. Since the aim is to understand how leadership literature affects structural gender inequalities, the study takes a subjectivist interpretative research stance.

4.2 Research method

In order to answer the research question, the study will be carried out using a qualitative analytical approach. When conducting the CDA, Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse will be used to critically analyze the language of the pieces. At the first level: the text dimension, attention will be paid to the use of metaphors and allegories, pronouns and gender of depicted leaders, prescribed leadership skills, and the practical examples brought up.

At the second level: the discursive practice dimension, the creators and recipients of the discourse, as well as values and attitudes within the discourse will be analyzed. Attention will also be paid to the references used to detect interdiscursivity. Using the gendered traits derived from the framework it will then be identified to what extent these aspects could be considered masculine contra feminine.

To understand the societal effects of the discourse, corresponding to the third level of Fairgough's model, interviews with individuals from the chosen demographic will be held. The interview portion of the thesis will then complement the critical discourse analysis in understanding how the examined discourse affects power structures within society, and in which ways. This will be done through a critical gender perspective, applying Hirdman's theory of gender systems.

4.2.1 Interview method

In comprehending the effects of the examined discourse on young adults' perception of leadership, interviews will be held as a supplement to the theoretical applications. For this, a semi-structured approach has been chosen, as achieving a balance between flexibility and structure is essential for answering the second part of the research question. Because the interviews should aid in understanding societal implications of discourses, the aim was to ask open-ended questions, as these allow for the interviewee to detail their thoughts. While it is fundamental that the subjects are able to elaborate freely, having some fixed questions is crucial in perpetuating structure throughout the interviews, thus making a semi-structured approach more suitable than an unstructured one.

Due to a belief that the most valuable interviews occur in a context where the interviewee feels comfortable, the interviews will be conducted in a neutral environment where the interviewee feels at ease. As the topic of gender can be controversial, many interview subjects have expressed a fear of "saying something wrong". To avoid the subjects feeling questioned and ensure anonymity, none of the interviews, except the four out of six, were taped. To circumvent potential interview biases, both authors have been present during the majority of interviews.

4.3 Interview design

In order to understand the causal effects of the examined discourse, the interviewees must be familiarized with the discourse itself. Therefore, material within the defined discourse will be distributed to the interviewees prior to the interviews. These are extracts of the books, podcast episodes, and both articles. Consistent among the extracts has been a maximum reading or listening time of 30 minutes, as more would result in the risk of interviewees neglecting to consume the media beforehand, or choosing to decline to participate in the study. The book extracts consist of a few continuous pages which explicitly describe a leader without stating the gender of this individual. For articles, the entirety has been distributed to the interviewee. In the case of podcasts, a few minutes have been assigned to listen to (see Appendix B for interview questions) (see Appendix C for statistics of the interviews).

In total, 14 people were interviewed, with an equal number of men and women. The average age of the interviewed women was 22 and of men 23. Nine out of 14 were born and raised in Stockholm, with one born outside of Sweden. All interviewees were currently studying or recently completed their education (from either upper secondary school or university). The interviews were approximately 15-35 minutes, with an average of about 20 minutes (see Appendix D for list of interviewees)

4.4 Research material

4.4.1 Delimitation

A selection of contemporary Swedish leadership media has been chosen, in order to analyze the discourse on leadership. Through their significant reach and varying channels, they aim to accurately represent contemporary discourse. Although not exhaustive in representing the Swedish leadership

discourse, we find them sufficiently representative for drawing conclusions on the matter. For future researchers, analyzing more pieces of leadership media is encouraged, especially to mitigate the outlined hazards of biases associated with CDA.

4.4.2 Media

4.4.2.1 *Omgiven av dåliga chefer: varför bra ledarskap är så sällsynt*

"Omgiven av dåliga chefer: Varför bra ledarskap är så sällsynt" (Surrounded by bad managers: why good leadership is so rare) is a leadership book written by Thomas Erikson, published in 2018 by Forum. Despite frequent criticism for being unscientific, it has had a major influence on shaping the contemporary Swedish leadership discourse, remaining one of the top-selling leadership books in Sweden four years after its release (Alibris 2022).

4.4.2.2 *Dumhetsparadoxen: den funktionella dumhetens fördelar och fallgropar*

"Dumhetsparadoxen: den funktionella dumhetens fördelar och fallgropar" (The paradox of stupidity: the power and pitfalls of functional stupidity at work) is a book written by Mats Alvesson and André Spicer. Published by Fri Tanke Förlag in 2019, it was one of the most sold books within the field of leadership and organization at Sweden's largest online book retailer Adlibris (Alibris 2022). The authors tackle the concept of functional stupidity within organizations, describing how it is manifested, as well as how to defeat it.

4.4.2.3 Tidningen Chef - *9 punkter för ett gott ledarskap: Så är en bra chef*

"Tidningen Chef" is the Nordic region's largest leadership magazine, with a monthly reach of 300 thousand readers (Chef 2022). In 2021, their fourth most read article, and most read in describing leadership traits, was "9 punkter för ett gott ledarskap: Så är en bra chef" (9 points for good leadership: This is a good manager) (Chef 2021). The author of the article is not stated.

4.4.2.4 Tidningen Vision - *Samtalen du bör behärska som chef*

"Tidningen Vision" is a magazine focusing on topics such as work environment and leadership, with six issues per year and a circulation of 195 thousand readers (Tidningen Vision 2022). Among their three most-read articles on leadership in 2021 was "Samtalen du bör behärska som chef" (The conversations you should master as a manager) (Ekstedt 2021). The article is written by Lotta Ekstedt and features an interview with the rhetorician Serena Mon de Vienne, explaining the role of communication in leadership.

4.4.2.5 Framgångspodden - *Öka din självinsikt och få en nytänding* and *The Monk who sold his Ferrari*

"Framgångspodden" is the Nordic region's most listened to interview-based podcast, with 2.5 million monthly listeners. Among its five most listened to leadership-themed episodes are "Öka din självinsikt och få en nytändning" (Increase your self-awareness and get a reignition) (Malmberg 2021) from April 2021, and "The Monk who sold his Ferrari" (Sharma 2020) from May 2020.

5. Empirical material

The empirical findings of the leadership material have all been derived from a textual level, and thus collectively constitute the first level of Fairclough's analytical model of CDA.

5.1 The uses of metaphors and allegories

In both of the two books as well as the two podcast episodes, there were abundant uses of metaphors when referring to the practice of leadership. In large, four common themes were recognized in the use of metaphors, as they predominantly were based on: a) playing sports/games b) cars/vehicles c) machinery d) fighting/war.

Both Erikson, Sharma, as well as Alvesson and Spicer regularly used terminology relating to combatting when describing leadership, using words such as *dawn raids* (Alvesson and Spicer, 2018; Sharma, 2020; Erikson, 2018)*, minefield, war, battle*, and *marsh-order*. More elaborate allegories comparing leadership and managing organizations to war/combatting were also used. "Do you have some gaps in your arsenal?" (Erikson, 2018, p. 288) "Now you have more ammunition to handle the next meeting [...]" (Erikson, 2018, p. 326) "[...] anti-bullshit warriors could easily make dawn raids against the worst examples of corporate bogus" (Alvesson and Spicer, 2018, p. 238). Under Pärleros' interview, Sharma stated that business owners should see life as war, and implement a "military mindset" when doing business in times of the pandemic. He cited the war veteran Richard Marcinko, satting that "We sweat in training to bleed less in war" (Sharma 2020).

In terms of metaphors relating to games and sports, especially Erikson would compare the act of leadership to playing a game or sport, where positive leadership would be compared to winning. "It takes a while to win that confidence" (Erikson, 2018, p. 277), "you will win at it, believe me" (Erikson, 2018, p. 222), "the victory when you succeed is significant" (Erikson, 2018, p. 278). Both of the books also used metaphors comparing co-workers to a sports team ``"you are good at getting the

team together" (Erikson, 2018, p. 239) "The football team", "You are a team player" (Alvesson and Spicer, 2018, p. 148 and p. 104). When Sharma advocated waking up one hour earlier, he referred to it as the "victory hour" (Sharma 2020).

With words such as *highway*, *car,* and allegories such as "You are the accelerator, the [blue] employee is both the brake and the handbrake and the emergency screen" (Erikson, 2018, p.225), a theme of comparing leadership to driving a car was also apparent. Successfully managing the speed, navigation, and avoiding collisions while driving was the equivalent of successful leadership. Metaphors comparing managing machines were also common when describing leading organizations, with terms such as "

the machinery is oiled", "[engine] lubricant", "We risk a total stop in the machinery",

and "foundation bolt".

Alvesson and Spicer also used metaphors alluding to stereotypical female spheres when describing leadership, using terms such as "pink coloured ideals", "cosmetical effect", "beauty pageant", and "spring cleaning". These however were all used in order to describe negative aspects/examples of leadership, such as "Business leaders are as trend-sensitive as teenage girls choosing jeans" (Alvesson and Spicer, 2018, p. 162). Erikson compares inconsistency in leadership to going on a crash diet. (Eriksson, 2018, p. 270)

5.2 Pronouns and genders of depicted leaders

When Erikson refers to fictional leaders as examples in the book, there is a balance between referring to them as *he* or *she* (sometimes using both). In both of the magazine articles, as well as in Alvesson and Spicer's book, the Swedish gender-neutral pronoun *hen* was used when describing fictional leaders.

In the instance when Erikson used non-fictional leaders he had met in real life to exemplify leadership, they were exclusively referred to as *he*. When Alvesson and Spicer used examples of non-fictional leaders, they were referred to as *he* (or a male name) 34 times, and six times as *she* (or female name). The same pattern was found in Sharma's interview, where he used eight male leaders as examples and only two female leaders. In the interview with Malmberg, no actual leaders besides Pärleros and herself were brought up.

5.3 Emphasized skills

- Communication Skills

In the analyzed leadership material, one of the most commonly prescribed skills for successful leadership was good communication skills. Both the article *9 punkter för ett gott ledarskap: Så är en bra chef, Samtalen du bör behärska som chef,* as well as Malmberg, stressed the importance of a leader inviting to dialogue instead of holding monologues, and thus emphasized a need for listening skills in regards to their co-workers. Erikson consistently brought up the need to adjust your communication according to the co-worker's personality traits. The art of giving feedback to co-workers was also emphasized in the two magazine articles, in the interview with Malmberg, as well as in Erikson's book. The focus was on delivering critique in a constructive and factual way.

- Sensitivity to others' needs

All of the leadership material stressed the need for sensitivity to the co-worker's needs. In the article *samtalen du bör behärska som chef*, the author states that efficient communication is important, because "it is in the conversations with the employees that you take care of their feelings" (Ekstedt 2021). When interviewed, Malmberg explained the importance of kind words and compliments before critiquing in order to not lower the self-confidence of the co-workers (Malmberg 2021). Erikson also stresses the importance of catering to the co-workers' needs, especially in relation to the level of extroversion/introversion and task/relationship-orientation of the individual. Altering communication to the co-worker's needs, however, seemed to be a necessary means to a personal end, rather than an act out of affection or sympathy. "The victim role appears, and if you are not really careful, you will start to feel sorry for her" (Erikson, 2018, p. 315) "You should start a conversation like this with soft kind words" (Erikson, 2018, p. 315). In the article "9 punkter för ett gott ledarskap: Så är en bra chef", caring for co-workers' needs is also considered necessary, however, the goal being positive results for the organization: "[...] prosperous and motivated employees are crucial to achieving results" (Tidningen Vision 2021).

- Decision Making, Assertiveness, and Integrity

As an author, Erikson has a habit of personally taking a stand on questions in his book. He regularly states his own opinion on various matters relating to leadership. Often, his argument is strengthened by referring to himself as an expert: "As a specialist in communication [...]" (Erikson, 2018, p. 334). He thus legitimizes his statements by his authority on the topic. "I do not claim to know everything there is to know about leadership, but I do know a lot" (Erikson, 2018, p. 173). Stating his personal opinion, and substantiating the argument with his own expertise, signals high levels of assertiveness. By continuously stating his personal opinion, and thus taking a stand in questions, he also signals *willingness to take a stand*: "I consider it disrespectful" (Erikson, 2018, p. 122). "It is certainly controversial to claim that […]" (Erikson, 2018, p. 259)

The same tacit is apparent in the interview with Sharma. Sharma repeatedly strengthens arguments on various matters with statements such as "I have worked with the very best in the world", and "having done this for over 25 years [...]" (Sharma 2020). Furthermore, Sharma uses a plethora of scientific evidence to back up his advice, as well as examples of famous leaders who have lived by the same advice (ibid.). In large this signals high levels of *assertiveness*.

Malmberg uses a similar technique, as she uses her role as an expert/authority in the question in order to validate personal opinions "I, as a professional for over 30 years [...]" (Malmberg 2021). Furthermore, Malmberg states that "It is nice with people who can state "I am good at this" [...] it is annoying with people who think they are bad at everything" (ibid.). This signals a personal preference for high levels of assertiveness, as well as low levels of neuroticism. Additionally, Malmberg stresses the importance of not trying to be liked by everybody, stating that as a leader "you are not respected if you back down from decisions, turncoat, and do not state your own opinion in matters" (ibid.). This furthermore signals little need for high levels of *agreeableness.*

The article *9 punkter för ett gott ledarskap: Så är en bra chef* further empathizes the ability to make decisions, stating "A good manager has the courage to make decisions [...], but also the courage to tear up a wrong decision and quickly change", and "The boss also realizes when it's time to step in, and then acts quickly" (Tidningen Vision, 2021). Along the same lines, the article states "A good manager is a role model who sets an example for everyone in the organization. He/she is rooted in and is clear with his values and is an obvious culture carrier." (ibid.). The idea of leaders being role models also exists in Erikson's book. "[...] you need to act as a role model and [...] stand for what you have all agreed on" (Erikson, 2018, p. 269) Malmberg also mentions the importance of "standing up for your values" as a leader. Sharma declared being "strong in my own skin", and stressed the importance of doing "what feels right to me" (Sharma, 2020).

5.4 Voices of Authority

The recommendations in Erikson's book are based on a collection of leadership literature, which is all collected in a literature list. Of the listed authors, 11 of the 46 were females, the rest male. Alvesson and Spicer also used literature from scientists and authors to support their claims. When referring to these as authorities in the question of leadership and organizations, 55 of them were men, and seven of them were women. The article "9 punkter för ett gott ledarskap" does not state information regarding the author, nor the source of the claims made within the text. The article "Samtalen du bör behärska som chef" however, is based on an interview with the rhetorician Serena Mon de Vienne, in which she refers to her book written on the matter.

5.5 Connections to Readers' experiences

When describing what to avoid talking about as a leader in a work environment, Erikson brings up topics relating to family life and hobbies. In many instances, examples brought up were stereotypically drawn from the social context of a middle-aged heterosexual man. For example: "It is not enough to start the meeting with "did you see the game yesterday?" (Erikson, 2018, p. 81) "You met your blue boss who was on his way home to his wife and the new baby" (Erikson, 2018, p.107) "Nobody wants to hear about your wife's new job" (Erikson, 2018, p. 237) "You do not need to contact the communications department every time there is a stop in the men's toilet on the second floor"(Erikson, 2018, p. 277).

During his interview, Sharma is asked how to find time to implement his advice when managing family life with kids. Sharma responds that he too has children, but that "one needs to make time for what is important in life" (Sharma 2020). This signals social values of *living in order to work*, rather than *working in order to live*, as well as a disregard for the *quality of life and people*. These values are further strengthened by Sharma's regular comparison of life to battle and war, as well as his emphasis on routine and discipline for a successful life.

5.6 Interviews

The interview empirics are structured around the initially constructed questions, although the interviews themselves, through their semi-structured approach, gave details beyond the original questions.

5.6.1 *Forming the perception of leadership*

Many of the interviewees believed a multitude of factors influence young adults' interpretation of who a leader is. Individuals in the interviewees' vicinity, such as former teachers, classmates, and older relatives were mentioned as influential in forming their own perception of the character traits of leaders. In approximately two-thirds of the interviews, some type of discursive media was mentioned, such as podcasts, business news, and self-help books.

"I think I have formed my view of leadership through the interactions I have had with others. People who manage to make others listen to what they have to say, without being overly authoritarian, have shaped my view of who a leader is."

- *Interviewee 10*

5.6.2 *Character traits of a leader and leadership media*

During the interviews, a set of character traits associated with a leader was recurrently brought up. Among these were being charismatic, visionary, able to play political games, possessing interpersonal skills, and self-confidence. Out of the 14 interviewees, nine had listened to the podcast *Framgångspodden*. Yet, in regards to how leadership media had impacted their perception of leadership traits, about one third answered they did not believe it had at all. Instead, most of these interviewees solely attributed their image of a leader to individuals they had interacted with. Of those who regarded leadership media as having an influence, many pointed toward books on leadership and how leaders, mainly political, were portrayed in the news. Another finding was that of those who were or had been enrolled in a business university education, many considered management literature to have influenced them.

"I can't really recall how my view of character traits in a leader emerged, but I believe this view is constantly updated or reinforced through whom and what I interact with. (...) I think the management literature from my time at SSE has affected me because it details leadership in a conceptual way. Mostly I believe this has reinforced my view that a leader has to have certain traits to be effective."

- *Interviewee 9*

5.6.3 The extracts' effects on perception of leadership traits

Few interviewees felt the extracts given to them affected their perception of traits in a leader, declaring their view of leadership as being very robust. However, most interviewees considered the way leaders were described in the extracts as compatible with their previous views. A certain theme was especially apparent in this area. On average, male interviewees were more prone to regard the material as compatible with their view of leadership when the media was created by a man, and vice versa for female interviewees with a woman. This was especially apparent when contrasting the podcasts, as one had a male guest and the other a female guest.

5.6.4 Interpretation of the leader as male or female

Generally the interviewees imagined a male leader being described when consuming the media, both among male and female interviewees. The following shares of interviewees perceived the described leader as male, female, or neither:

Did you perceive the described leader as being male, female, or neither?		
Perceived gender	Male interviewees	Female interviewees
Male	57% (4)	43% (3)
Female	14% (1)	43% (3)
Neither	29% (2)	14% (1)

Contrary to the idea that men and women are socially conditioned to inhabit different traits, many interviewees believed that although men on average possess characteristics more compatible with leadership positions, today there is nothing hindering women developing these traits themselves.

"A leader has to have certain traits, of course. (...) A leader who isn't visionary and outgoing simply can not be a good leader in my eyes. I feel traits like these are possessed by men to a higher extent because men are more interested in leadership, generally. Being outgoing, being a leader-person isn't something static. At the end of the day, it's a choice, and nothing is stopping women from making this choice."

-   *Interviewee 13*

6. Analysis

The empirical findings at a textual level constituted the first dimension of Fairclough's analytical model. In the following chapter, the discursive practice dimension and social context dimension will be analyzed, thus entering the *interpretive* and *explanatory* stages of the CDA.

6.1 Discursive Practice Dimension - Interpretation

In the interpretive stage of the analysis, attention will be paid to the speaker, channel, and recipient of the discourse. The aim will thus be to examine who is *creating* the discourse, who is intended to *receive* the discourse, and what *values and attitudes* are being conveyed.

6.1.1 Creators of Discourse

With both the books as well as the podcast being created by men, a clear majority of the material comes from male creators. In terms of CDA theory, this implies that men on average have *greater access to discourse* since they as discourse creators have control of who and what is said regarding leadership. One of the podcast episodes did star a female leadership expert, however as the host of the show was male, he still controlled setting the agenda and location of the dialogue, thus having the ultimate *power of discourse*. Further, the host of the podcast has control over the *discourse understanding.* By hosting a podcast named "Framgångspodden" ("The success podcast"), which emphasizes self-development in fields such as leadership, the host sets the definition of what is considered success, and who is considered successful.

The same reasoning can be used for Erikson when he regularly states his own role as an expert in the subject of leadership. He further influences the discourse understanding through *denial of certain structures*. By for example referring to the fictional leaders as both he and she (often emphasizing the fact that the fictional leader *could* be female), he insinuates that there is equal access to leadership positions between genders. However, as he only referred to actual leaders as men, it is evident that within his own context, women and men have not had the same access to leadership. In terms of intertextuality, because the material has a heavy emphasis on referring to male researchers and authors, the intertextual messages are also masculine within the discourse.

6.1.2 Recipients of Discourse

The use of metaphors comparing the act of being a leader to "fighting a war" or "playing a game" signals a masculine view of leadership. It suggests an idea of leadership more *ego-oriented* than *relationship-oriented*, as the goal is to win against your rivals in order to succeed, rather than collaborating for success. It further signals underlying assumptions regarding conflicts being solved through *force*, rather than negotiation. The frequent use of allegories to war and fighting also resonates with readers inhibiting higher levels of the male-coded traits of *forcefulness*, *aggressiveness*, and *willingness to take risks.*

The use of metaphors relating to sports, cars, and machinery further assumes masculinity as a contextual standard for the reader. As stereotypical male interests, these metaphors will be more relatable to those who have an interest or knowledge in these fields. The use of male-coded practical examples has a similar significance to the use of masculine metaphors, as it too assumes a stereotypical masculine context. The use of female-coded metaphors is frequently used to portray negative examples of leadership. Using terms relating to beauty, homecare, and fashion, leadership marked by feminine connotations is frequently equated to poor leadership.

6.1.3 Values and Attitudes in Discourse

Because of the *discursive understanding* of successful leadership, Sharmas, Malmströms, and Eriksson's own attitudes and behaviors become relevant to analyze, since they as individuals are associated with successful leadership. In general, they all primarily express masculine traits. The regular habit of stating their own opinion on matters, suggests that a high willingness to take a stand is desirable in leaders. Confidently stating opinions and strengthening these with their own expertise further suggests the desirability of *assertiveness* in leaders. This aligns with both articles' emphasis on decision-making, insinuating a need for assertiveness as well as the *ability to make decisions easily*. Malmberg also legitimizes her statements through her expertise on the subject but does so more by advocating for a relationship-oriented approach in being sensitive to others' needs through for example focusing on employees' self-confidence. However, her opinion that likability is often negative suggests a favoring of defending one's own beliefs and having low levels of agreeableness.

The consistent theme of linking good communication skills to efficient leading might suggest a more feminine ideal of leadership, as women on average possess higher levels of *agreeableness* and *openness to feelings*, two essential components of communication. However, emphasizing conversational skills such as giving constructive feedback, suggests a more masculine idea of efficient communication. Stressing the concept of concise and direct criticism relates to more masculine notions of communication, such as *making decisions easily* and being *assertive*. Erikson's insistence on analytical skills when altering communication to the co-worker's personality traits and motivations can be interpreted as both masculine and feminine behavior. While such interactions demand a *relationship-oriented* and agreeable approach, traits like *high openness to ideas* and *independence* can also be regarded as essential.

By stressing the importance of sensitivity to co-workers' needs, Erikson initially seems to signal a more feminine approach to leadership. By prescribing *sensitivity to others' needs*, Erikson seems to manifest the need for high levels of *openness to feelings*, *warmth, affection* and a *relationship-*

oriented mindset. However, when explaining why this sensitivity is necessary, Erikson provides a highly masculine logic of leadership. As Erikson describes caring for co-workers' needs as tedious and boring, he suggests that this sensitivity is merely a necessary means to an end. This, therefore, implies an *ego-oriented* approach, as the motive behind the affection is purely personal. Thus, the motive does not stem from traditionally female-gendered traits such as *sympathy* or *tenderness*, but rather an ability to analyze the employee's individual needs in order to further one's own objectives.

6.2 Social Dimension - Explanation

Entering the explanatory stage of the analysis, the focus is to understand the relation between the discursive event and its social context. The aim is to explain how our findings from the textual and discursive practice dimensions contribute to either maintaining gender inequality within leadership, or enabling social change.

The idea of leadership discourse manifesting a preference for traditional male traits over female traits was supported by the interviews. The male-coded characteristics identified in the discourse were largely confirmed by the interviewees as desirable traits of a leader. However, most interviewees disagreed these traits were gendered, arguing anyone has the ability to develop them. This argues against leadership discourse influencing young adults' perception of leadership, as it implies that the interviewees do not find leadership as gendered, regardless of the textual gendering within the discourse.

This could be explained differently from another theoretical perspective, though. While men and women might have equal opportunities in developing desirable leadership traits, Hirdman's theory suggests such actions might result in social repercussions for women. Because there are preconceived notions of the behavior of men and women, individuals are socially punished when dissenting from their gender roles. Thus, although women have the same access to leadership traits as the interviewees stated, the social repercussions will result in fewer women actually developing those.

The fact that many interviewees regarded male traits as superior in a leadership context aligns with Hirdman's gender theory stating masculine features are continuously considered of higher value. This means the social dichotomy in a leadership context is constantly reproduced, especially on the *institutional level*, where men and women are expected to behave differently in a professional setting. Male interviewees finding male-written media more congruent with their view of leadership, and vice

versa for female interviewees, can be interpreted as a reproduction of gender systems in themselves; the male-dominated discourse reproduces leadership as something inherently male, making men more inclined to pursue leadership.

As the application of the *discursive practice* dimension and Hirdman's theory suggests, readers already have a general conception of how men and women should behave, and therefore it is more likely that the readers who inhibit stereotypical male interests and traits are men. The overrepresentation of male-coded metaphors makes the discourse more relatable to men, while the female-coded metaphors being used to exemplify negative leader behavior, further reinforces the subordination of female traits. Concludingly, it is apparent that the examined leadership discourse is contributing to perpetuating the status quo of leadership seen as a male phenomenon amongst young adults.

7. Discussion

7.1 Returning to the Research Question

With our research question consisting of two components, the following section will discuss the findings separately and integrated:

   a) *How is the Swedish leadership discourse gendered, and:*
   b) *How does it [the gendered leadership discourse] affect young adults' perception of leadership?*

   a)

The empirical and analytical sections detailed how the leadership discourse, from the established gender trait classification framework, is centered around male characteristics. Although feminine elements are prevalent, they are so to a vastly lower extent, and mostly so when alluding to poor leadership. This corresponds with findings from other discursive contexts (Wagner et al. 2019) and simultaneously contributes to an understanding of the Swedish leadership discourse as being more unequal than what might have been assumed. While textual descriptions of characteristics have proven to be male-coded, so have other parts of the discourse. Creators of the discourse, as authors, writers, and podcast hosts, are predominantly male. While female voices are occasionally heard, the

discursive setting is still generally controlled by men, as in the case of *Framgångspodden* interviewing women. In terms of interdiscursivity, the empirical material showed a clear majority of referred creators and authors were male. This also corresponds with the analytical conclusion that through male-coded language and metaphors, the recipients most likely to find the material relatable are men.

As outlined, there has been previous research on gendered portrayal within media, to which this thesis contributes. With a critical perspective on the gendered discourse of leadership media, this furthers the conversation of how gendered portrayal within discourses has practical implications on the social dichotomy between men and women, and constructs a more holistic groundwork for further dialogue on the subject.

b)

The interview section illuminated how young adults, to an extent, have been influenced by the leadership discourse in creating their view of leader traits. However, a frequently arising idea was that developing the characteristics of a leader was equally possible for women as men. This was incompatible with the critical theory assuming a social dichotomy between the genders resulting in contrasting gender roles. Examining this from an alternative perspective, though, it can be theorized that the social dichotomy described by Hirdman is disguised by social factors. As detailed in the background, the formal accessibility of leadership is the same for both genders and a substantial share of powerful positions are today held by women. This can be deemed to disguise other levels of gender equality, such as the favoring of male traits in a leadership context.

While women seemingly have equal opportunities to become successful leaders, the applied theories illustrate how doing so might come at a substantial cost for individual women. Because the idealized traits of a leader do not correspond to socially desirable traits of women, a woman striving to become a leader might succeed, but at the expense of social repercussions. The female leader hence faces a predicament: if displaying feminine traits like *affection* and *tenderness*, she runs the risk of not being perceived as leader-like. If instead displaying masculine traits more compatible with the societal view of a leader, she runs the risk of not being perceived as woman-like. This dilemma can be supposed to result in women having to choose between leadership and being socially accepted in their female identity.

These findings contribute to the discussion of how to properly assess gender equality in leadership. An overly quantifiable focus fails to include a crucial factor in truly achieving an impartial society: the appreciation of femininity and masculinity. This thesis, therefore, enables further dialogue on what constitutes true gender equality within leadership: the equal share of men and women, or the equal valuation of male and female character traits.

7.2 Limitations and suggestions for further research

A clear limitation in the analysis of the social dimension is the sample of interviewees. Because a vast majority were from Stockholm, currently pursuing higher academic studies, and from similar social backgrounds, the group is not completely representative of young Swedish adults. Although not ascertained, it can be hypothesized that the discourse affects other groups of young adults differently. In order to deepen the understanding of the effects of leadership discourse, replicating this study with a more representative sample of interviewees is needed.

Furthermore, one assumption made in the process of answering the research question, was the idea of discourse influencing its consumer and thus having an impact on social structures. The interviews held supported this idea since a correlation between gendered tendencies within the discourse and the interviewed partakers of the discourse was found. In reality, however, there is still a chicken and egg-type issue in the conceptual relation between discourse and social impact. While this thesis demonstrates how leadership discourse affects social structures, another perspective is that the discourse itself is simply a reflection of the socially gendered view of leadership. Simultaneously, it can be reasoned that the relationship between discourse and social impact is a continuously reproducing one; they do not exist without one another. To conclude the direct social effects of the discourse, it is suggested further research on the topic attempts to nullify and control the perspective of the discursive reflections of social reality.

In this thesis, a fundamental assumption is that society transmutes female and male into femininity and masculinity through social repercussions for those dissenting from their gender role. However, this does not take the perspective of individuals not conforming to binary ideas of gender into account. Having a queer and non-binary perspective of gender is paramount in drawing an exhaustive conclusion on the topic. While gender-binary individuals experience social repercussions when dissenting from their prescribed gender roles, this might not hold true for those outside the structure of gender binary. To comprehend this aspect of discursive impact on attitudes toward leadership, future studies should take this into account. The emergence of research on queer leadership would aid in filling an important gap in the literature.

The results from this thesis indicate that the leadership discourse aids in maintaining a masculine idea of leadership. Traditional male traits are consistently premiered over female traits in terms of leadership. Thus, gender equality within leadership is not yet reached, as men on average will have greater access to leadership roles as they to a greater extent will possess these traits. Considering the ultimate aim of a CDA, to challenge structural power inequalities, the discourse is then pivotal in allowing a more gender-inclusive ideal of leadership. One question that then arises, which is outside of the realm of this thesis, is how *leadership* will change if we were to embrace more feminine ideals. Will a more feminine notion of leadership have benefits outside of the power symmetry of genders?

8. Conclusion

Today, there exists a faulty notion of equality in leadership being solely reliant on positional representation between the genders. This thesis, however, provides an explanation for why other perspectives are essential in the equation. Through synthesizing a theoretical framework for detecting gendered discourses, this thesis concludes that Swedish leadership media is reproducing an idea of leadership being male in its essence. By conducting interviews, it was further established that the gendered leadership discourse has an effect on young adults' perception of leadership. The application of critical theories subsequently explained the social consequences of this: that in order for women to attain leadership roles, they have to possess male-coded traits in favor of female ones. Simultaneously, this was theorized to result in dire social repercussions for female leaders in other aspects of life, by dissenting from socially desirable gender characteristics. *Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that while we might no longer consider men superior to women, we certainly consider masculinity superior to femininity.*

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10. Appendix:

Feminine traits	Masculine traits
Revised BSRI	
Warm	Defend own beliefs
Gentle	Independent
Affectionate	Assertive
Sympathetic	Strong personality
Sensitive to other's needs	Forceful
Tender	Willing to take risks
	Willing to take a stand
	Make decisions easily
	Dominant
	Aggressive
NEO-PI-R	
High neuroticism	Low neuroticism
High agreeableness	Low agreeableness
High extraversion (warmth)	Low extraversion (warmth)
Low extraversion (assertiveness)	High extraversion (assertiveness)
High openness to experience (feelings)	Low openness to experience (feelings)
Low openness to experience (ideas)	High openness to experience (ideas)
Hofstede	

Social norms	
Relationship-oriented	Ego-oriented
Quality of life and people are important	Money and things are important
Work in order to live	Live in order to work
Politics and economy	
Environment protection high priority	Economic growth high priority
Conflict solved through negotiation	Conflict solved through force
Work	
Smaller gender wage gap	Larger gender wage gap
More women in management	Fewer women in management
Preference for fewer working hours	Preference for higher pay
Family and school	
Flexible family structure	Traditional family structure
Both boys and girls cry; neither fight	Girls cry, boys do not; boys fight; girls do not
Failing is a minor accident	Failing is a disaster

Appendix B

During the interview itself, the following questions have been asked as an initial starting point of discussion:

How do you believe your perception of a leader has been and is continuously formed?

What character traits do you associate with a leader? Do you feel this has been impacted by the leadership material you have consumed during your lifetime?

Was your perception of the character traits of a leader affected by the material you just read/listened to? If not, was it either confirmed or was it different from your perception of a leader?

When reading/listening to the material given to you, did you imagine it described a male or female leader?

Appendix C

The following table illustrates the statistics of the interviews:

Material	Extract	Number of interviewees	Female interviewees
Book *Omgiven av dåliga chefer: varför bra ledarskap är så sällsyn*	Extract page	2	1
Book *Dumhetsparadoxen: den funktionella dumhetens fördelar och fallgropar*	Extract page x-y	3	2
Article Tidningen Chef *"9 punkter för ett gott ledarskap: Så är en bra chef"*	Whole article	2	1
Article Tidningen Vision *"Samtalen du bör behärska som chef"*	Whole article	2	1
Podcast *Öka din självinsikt och få en nytändning*	Extract minute 53:00-01:03:25	2	1
Podcast *The Monk who sold his Ferrari*	Extract minute 1:40-6:40	3	1

Appendix D

List of interviewees:

Interviewee number	Gender	Date	Material extract	Approximate interview duration (minutes)
1	Male	22/4-2022	Book *Omgiven av dåliga chefer: varför bra ledarskap är så sällsyn*	17
2	Male	22/4-2022	Article Tidningen Chef *"9 punkter för ett gott ledarskap: Så är en bra chef"*	15
3	Female	22/4-2022	Book *Omgiven av dåliga chefer: varför bra ledarskap är så sällsyn*	18
4	Male	22/4-2022	Book *Dumhetsparadoxen: den funktionella dumhetens fördelar och fallgropar*	22
5	Female	23/4-2022	Book *Dumhetsparadoxen: den funktionella dumhetens fördelar och fallgropar*	20
6	Female	23/4-2022	Article Tidningen Chef *"9 punkter för ett gott ledarskap: Så är en bra chef"*	23
7	Female	23/4-2022	Book *Dumhetsparadoxen: den funktionella dumhetens fördelar och fallgropar*	18
8	Male	23/4-2022	Podcast *Öka din självinsikt och få en nytändning*	17
9	Male	26/4-2022	Podcast *The Monk who sold his Ferrari*	35
10	Female	26/4-2022	Podcast *Öka din självinsikt och få en nytändning*	21
11	Male	28/4-2022	Article Tidningen Vision *"Samtalen du bör behärska som chef"*	22
12	Female	28/4-2022	Article Tidningen Vision *"Samtalen du bör behärska som chef"*	20
13	Male	28/4-2022	Podcast *The Monk who sold his Ferrari*	15

14	Female	3/5-2022	Podcast *The Monk who sold his Ferrari*	18