

AN AUTHENTIC MILITARY IN GENERAL

**A qualitative study on gender, authenticity and
authentic leadership in the Swedish Armed Forces**

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Bachelor Thesis
Stockholm School of Economics
2022



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Abstract:

The Swedish Armed Forces was the last ever organization in the history of the Swedish labor market to terminate a male occupational monopoly. Even though women have had the same opportunity as men to join the organization since 2017, they still constitute a vast minority. Additionally, the stereotypical picture of a the male soldier is contributing to the picture of a masculine military leader. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate whether this masculine norm is affecting female leaders' authenticity in the Swedish Armed Forces. Nine qualitative interviews were conducted with female military leaders with different levels of experience and from different battalions. These interviews were analyzed with authentic leadership theory as well as gendered authentic leadership theory to investigate female military leaders' ability to perform authentic leadership as well as how this leadership conforms with the gendered military norm. The findings indicate a dilemma where deviations from authentic leadership, gender authentic leadership and/or the military norm appear disadvantageous but also inevitable.

Keywords:

Gender, Authentic Leadership, Military, Leadership, Norms

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Bachelor Thesis

Bachelor Program in Management

Stockholm School of Economics

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Acknowledgements

We would like to send the greatest possible thanks to everyone in the SAF and NOAK who helped us get this thesis together.

We are also tremendously grateful for the feedback we have received from our supervisory group, thank you! Furthermore, we would like to thank our supervisor for always trying to answer our many questions. And to everyone else contributing in keeping us sane during this autumn; thank you!

Abbreviations

FOI	Swedish Defense Research Agency
GSS	Group Commander, Soldiers and Sailors
NOAK	Network for Officers and Employed Women
SAF	Swedish Armed Forces

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In 2020, the European Institute For Gender Equality named Sweden the most gender equal country in Europe. Additionally, in 2019 the same institute concluded that Sweden had the second largest proportion of female board members in the largest listed companies (European Institute For Gender Equality, 2020; European Institute For Gender Equality, 2019). Sweden could thereby be seen as one of the countries where women face the best possibilities to develop into managerial positions. However, these positive numerics are not reflected in the Swedish Armed Forces. In this organization, only 9% of the military officers are women (Försvarsmakten, 2018, 2019, 2022). Furthermore, the SAF has historically been excluding women from large parts of the organization. Inger-Lena Hultberg was the first woman ever to enter the Swedish Armed Forces through conscription in the year of 1962. However, it was not until 1980 that women got the chance to apply for a certain selection of military services. The number of searching women however was still only a few dozen (Försvarsmakten, 2019).

In the year of 1989 the Swedish military profession monopoly was formally terminated. All military positions were now open for both genders (Sundevall. F, 2011). It was the last male occupational monopoly in the history of the Swedish labor market. (Sundevall. F, 2006). However, the requirements for women continued to differ for a number of years. For women to be accepted for any military training they still had to demonstrate an intention to do officer training up until 1994 (Försvarsmakten, 2019). It was not until 2017 the mandatory muster for military service was reintroduced in Sweden and both genders were summoned to complete mandatory military service. Studies have shown that in such organizations with gender exclusions, attributes and practices in line with a masculine gender norm, such as being disciplinary and authoritarian, have been seen to be rewarded and encouraged which in turn keeps a 'masculine' leadership norm persistent in the organization even when formal gender exclusions has been terminated (Bligh, M. C., & Kohles, J. C. 2008; Jeydel, A., & Taylor, A. J. 2003).

The leadership in the military thereby differs a bit from the typical leadership in most other organizations. It is for example explained as more authoritarian and hierarchical, where the leaders are characterized by assertiveness and being very disciplinary (Walterström, K. & Prytz, L. 2017). The historical exclusion of women has led to a perception that these attributes are typically connected to the male gender, and have been seen as ‘the right way’ of leading in this context. These masculine attributes and practices thereby define the current military norm. In contrast, feminine attributes were considered contradicting to this norm (Schröder, K. 2017; Acker, J. 1990). In the military division of the Swedish Armed Forces, most days are filled with different exercises to prepare for real war. This indicates a need for leaders who master and handle different tasks, but it also points toward the importance of authenticity since leaders must be followed with trust without being questioned in urgent decisions (Avolio, B, J. & Gardner, W. L. 2005). Therefore, authenticity is seen as a truly important attribute (Walterström, K. & Prytz, L. 2017). By being authentic, leaders have been seen to create trust through transparency which has in turn unified followers to fight for a shared vision (Celik, A., et al. 2016). The risky and turbulent environment that the SAF implies, therefore calls for authentic leaders independent of gender (Walterström, K. & Prytz, L. 2017).

In organizations where the leadership norm is defined strongly by ‘masculine’ attributes and where the women are at such a numerical inferiority, the women as a minority often adjusts to the dominant norm (Kanter, R. 1977). This possibly makes it harder for women in organizations with little gender diversification to be themselves and thereby authentic. Female leaders in the SAF have described that they find it hard to be themselves and those who have stayed in the organization and developed into leadership positions have adjusted to the organization's informal rules and norms (Schröder, K. 2017). Therefore, the authors wish to investigate how the ‘masculine’ military norm affects the authenticity for women in military leadership positions in the Swedish Armed Forces.

1.2 Academic context & Research Gap

1.2.1 Women in the SAF

Studies have previously been conducted on the different obstacles that women face in the Swedish Armed Forces. For example researchers, such as Alma Persson and Fia Sundevall, have investigated how gender has formed the organization and what outcomes this has had but neither of these have investigated the consequences this gendering of the organization has had on the leadership for women (Persson, A. 2010; Sundevall, F. 2011). Additionally, no previous gender research done on the SAF has been discussing how authenticity and authentic leadership is affected by the gender norms. This is thereby a research gap this study wishes to explore.

1.2.2 Authentic Leadership and Gender

Authentic leadership has previously been investigated with an added gender dimension. However, only to a small extent and a large proportion of these covered it in a quantitative manner where authentic leadership is measured through gender in different ways to see if the outcomes of authentic leadership differs (Caza, A. et al. 2010; Woolley, L., et al. 2011).

Further, there are studies of gendered authentic leadership conducted in qualitative manners as well. For example, Helena Liu et al (2015) examined the ‘doing’ of authenticity by comparing it between the two genders to see if it was ‘done’ in different ways for the different genders. However, this study was not conducted through interviews and the leaders’ own perception and experiences but instead through observing media coverage (Liu, H. et al. 2015). The authors wish to get female leaders’ own perspective on how gender affects their leadership and their authenticity.

1.2.3 Authentic Leadership in the Military

Authentic leadership has previously been examined in the context of the SAF, by for example Kristoffer Walterström and Louise Prytz (2017). However, this study’s purpose was to investigate how military leaders experience the application of authenticity in their leadership role. It was thereby mostly discussed how authentic leadership was perceived and, based on that, implicated in the SAF. The main take on the study was to see how

authentic leadership could be used in practice to motivate and facilitate learning (Walterström, K. & Prytz, L. 2017).

Walterström & Prytz's study has been conducted with the assumption that authentic leadership is carried out under gender neutral conditions. However, this study wishes to add to this research by also considering that gender might impact the ability to perform authentic leadership and gendered authentic leadership. Instead of investigating the implication of authentic leadership in the SAF, the authors want to examine how the gender norms of the organization can affect the ability to exercise authentic leadership.

1.2.4 Research Contribution

The academic intersection that we wish to investigate is between gender, authentic leadership and the SAF context which constitutes a numerical inferiority as well as a strongly gendered military norm. The numerical inferiority indicates adjustments for the minority group towards the dominant group's norm; the military norm. This thereby indicates different impacts on the genders' ability to perform authentic leadership in this context. These three aspects have not previously been studied jointly which creates a research gap that the authors wish to fill with this study.



1.3 Objectives, Purpose and Research Question

With this thesis, the authors want to investigate how women in leadership roles within the Swedish Armed Forces relate to authenticity and authentic leadership in practice. Authenticity has been seen as an important part of leadership in turbulent and risky environments such as the SAF (Walterström, K. & Prytz, L. 2017). The authors therefore wish to investigate whether the numerical dominance of men and the gendered military norm that the SAF imply, forces women to sacrifice this important part of their leadership or whether ways have been found to get around this. Through in-depth interviews with women about their leadership and their role within the organization, this study thus want to explore:

How are female leaders' authenticity affected by the military norm in the SAF?

1.4 Delimitations

Given the research purpose, this study will solely interview women in the SAF on leadership positions about their leadership and how they relate to authenticity. This study assumes that authenticity can be defined by female leaders themselves without directly regarding relational aspects and therefore we have limited our interviews to female leaders and not their subordinates. Since the authors are interested in investigating how a numerical inferiority affects authentic leadership in this study, only the inferior group; women, will be considered.

Furthermore, the thesis will only consider female leaders working in the military and not in the civilian part of the SAF. The civilian and military part of the SAF has shown clear differences in organizational structure, values, working conditions and culture (Persson, A, 2010). Additionally, the civilian part of the SAF is and has not been exposed to the numerical inferiority and historical gender exclusion that makes the military division of the SAF an interesting context for this thesis (Sundevall, F, 2011).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Numerical Inferiority and the Military Norm

Since Sweden reinforced the mandatory muster for all genders, the amount of women in the organization has increased steadily. However, the organization is still one of the least diverse numerically in Sweden, at least when comparing Swedish agency organizations (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2017), and men are still the majority, constituting the norm of the organization (Persson, A. 2010).

In *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977), Kanter first began to study how groups with little gender diversification affect the people in them, more specifically how women in numerically male dominant groups are affected. In her study which was to become the base of tokenism theory, she found that when women were found to constitute a vast minority, they were to experience a higher level of visibility resulting in increased performance pressure. Additionally, the differences between the women and the dominant male group were highlighted and the minority group was defined by the dominant group's stereotypes of them. In more contemporary studies of tokenism, it has been found that some participants of token female groups can "seek 'strategic invisibility' which helps to erase damaging markers of (embodied) femininity" by taking up 'masculine' values and practices (Lewis, P & Simpson, R. 2011). All together, tokenism works consciously and unconsciously to uphold a gendered norm in a numerically inferior organization. Therefore, with the numerical inferiority in the SAF, tokenism can be seen as one of the reasons for the persistent masculine military norm.

The stereotypical picture of the strong, protective, and masculine man still characterizes the ideal soldier in many regards (Carreiras, H. 2006; Williams, C.L, 1989). The explanation is originally based on the belief that the female body is deficient for the types of activities that the military occupation implies (Andersen, B & Persson, A. 2021) and despite the fact that these types of arguments have been disproved (Rones, N & Steder, F.B. 2017) and studies have instead suggested that new competences in the military is needed due to new combat strategies and ways in which wars are managed (Svendsen, S.H. 2018), these beliefs are still gendering the organization (Persson, A. 2010). These

beliefs can for example be seen in interviews conducted by FOI in 2017, where GSS defined a good manager as someone who is authoritarian and leads with discipline and assertiveness, pointing towards a military norm that, at least historically, has been defined as masculine (Acker, J. 1990). The attributes and practices that in the interview were described to be more feminine, such as sensitivity and supporting, were instead devalued and not part of the definition of a good leader or soldier (Schröder, K. 2017). This vision of the ideal leadership together with the increased visibility that a token position imply, serves as a possible explanation for why many of the female employees in the Swedish Armed Forces adapt to the current masculine military norms by adjusting their values and practices to seek the ‘strategic invisibility’ that Patricia Lewis and Ruth Simpson introduced in *Kanter revisited: Gender, Power and (In)Visibility* (2011). Consequently, this leads to women stepping away from their own beliefs and values, and thereby the authentic leadership that has been seen as truly important in the SAF (Walterström, K. & Prytz, L. 2017; Avolio, B. J. & Gardner, W. L. 2005).

2.2 Authentic Leadership

Authenticity is a term that has been discussed, defined and redefined ever since the French philosopher Descartes first touched upon the term. To “be true to oneself” became the baseline for how we were to define authenticity for the upcoming 400 years. (Harter, S. 2002). Ever since, the meaning behind authenticity and its practical implications have been a well discussed and researched topic in psychology studies as well as management research (Avolio, B. J., & Gardner, W. L. 2005). In more contemporary studies, authenticity has been frequently discussed more in relation to similar terms such as sincerity. What differentiates these terms is that authenticity is not described in the relation to others but exists explicitly “by the laws on its own” (Erickson, R. J. 1995). This implies that authenticity is something that is visioned and carried out by the individual alone. For this study this implies that authenticity is carried out by female leaders themselves and is not something that considers a leader-follower relationship.

In recent years, the concept of authenticity has been applied to leadership. The term authentic leadership became defined as “A process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in

both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development” (Luthans, F., & Avolio, B. J. 2003). The leaders committed to authentic leadership have been described to actively act on their own values and beliefs with a transparent approach towards their followers (Avolio, B. J. et al. 2004). The reason for this interest was an increased demand for leaders who could lead efficiently through crisis and turbulence with transparency and follower trust (Avolio, B, J. & Gardner, W. L. 2005). Since the military part of the SAF is characterized by such circumstances, authentic leadership has been seen as an important and suitable practice (Walterström, K. & Prytz, L. 2017). It is also noted that this aspect of authentic leadership includes a resistance towards any external influences by the desire to please others, which is theoretically aggravated for women due to possible tokenism effects following the numerical inferiority and masculine military norm in the SAF.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Authentic Leadership Theory

The breadth of the terms authenticity and authentic leadership has been criticized and discussed by Shamir and Eilam (2005) amongst others. Shamir and Eilam narrowed the definition of an authentic leader into 4 categoristics. They define leaders as 1) being real in the leader role and not faking the leadership due to the appointed formal power position, 2) not taking on leader roles for rewards or status, 3) not explicitly copying or imitating other leaders, 4) leading in accordance with their perceived and experienced version of what is true and right instead of giving in to norms and external influences (Shamir, B. & Eilam, G. 2005). Through these four categories, one can identify to what extent a leader can be defined as authentic in their leadership.

In this study Shamir and Eilam's definition of an authentic leader will be used to investigate the extent to which the interviewed female leaders in the SAF are performing authentic leadership in practice. For category 1 the authors will examine their description of their leadership and search for potential factors such as that they feel the need to mention their hierarchical level or rely on the hierarchical markings on their uniforms etc, that would suggest that their leadership is not authentic according to this model (Shamir, B. & Eilam, G. 2005). This category will in the thesis be covered as “Hiding behind the hierarchical rank”. We will further use category 3 and 4 to determine the female leader’s authenticity level from their descriptions on how they came to lead in their certain way and from their descriptions of what they perceive to be important and ideal practices for leaders in general and in this organization. Category 3 will throughout the thesis be addressed through “Mimicking and imitating the leadership” while category 4 will be addressed “Adjusting to the military norm”.

The reasons and motivation for why leaders take on leader roles does not contribute to our investigation of how female leaders’ authenticity is affected by the gendered military norm in the SAF. The degree of compliance to this category of authenticity is not at risk by factors such as the military norm or tokenism. Therefore, category 2 will not be considered

to the same extent as the other categories of Shamir and Eilam's definition of an authentic leader.

Most conducted studies have been done under the assumption that authentic leadership is gender neutral (Avolio et al., 2004; Caza et al., 2010). However, this study will complement Shamir and Eilam's gender neutral framework with a gender perspective. The gender neutrality of authentic leadership theory was challenged by Liu, H, Cutcher, L and Grant, D. in *Doing Authenticity: The Gendered Construction of Authentic Leadership* (2015). They started challenging authenticity as something you have and instead started considering it as something you do, in the same way you can do gender (Liu, H. et al. 2015). Further, authenticity can thereby be considered as something that can be performed or not performed.

In Doing Authenticity: The Gendered Construction of Authentic Leadership (2015) it was investigated what was considered to be authentic for women versus men. It was concluded that performing authenticity was closely connected to performing gender. (Liu, H. et al. 2015). For our research this adds an additional theoretical positioning for us to consider. In the Shamir and Eilam categories of an authentic leader, it is described that an authentic leader stands resistant against external influences that might affect one's leadership. In contrast to this, Liu et al means that 'doing' gender, in which a person or in this case a leader is acting in accordance with gender norms, has to be considered as a factor that is closely affecting the performance of authenticity. In this report this gender aware perspective will parallelly be considered to the Sharam and Eilam categories to get an even deeper view of how the military norm and numerical inferiority might affect women in their way of performing authenticity and thereby an effective leadership. This concept will be used by examining what 'performing gender' means in this masculine context when it comes to differences in expectations for leaders of different genders and then using that as a reference for measuring how well these women 'perform gender'. The authors will further use Liu et al's reasoning that performing gender contributes to the performance of authentic leadership.

4. Method

4.1 Research Design

4.1.1 Research Philosophy - Qualitative and Interpretivism

The research has been conducted in a qualitative manner. This enables a deeper insight in the different experiences that these women have towards their own leadership and their take on authenticity. Since the purpose with this study is to investigate and produce knowledge about real-world behaviors and structures, a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews is more suitable. This opens up for differentiations in the personal experiences and explanations and lets the respondents talk more freely during the collection of the empirical material, that would not be possible with a quantitative approach.

This study has adopted a constructivist ontological worldview. This takes on the assumption that all people are constructing their knowledge and their own experiences as a result of a social construction based on the world around them. In the case of this study, such a perspective was suitable since it for example in large parts regarded gender, and gender considers the characteristics of men and women that are socially constructed (Lorber, J. & Farrell, S. A. 1991).

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how the numerical inferiority for women and the military norm in the SAF affects women's ability to perform authentic leadership. To understand this, an interpretivist epistemology must be applied. The authors must try to make sense of what triggers these certain behaviors and to do that, some subjective interpretations of the authors have to be made. The interpretivist approach allows one to contemplate the participant's behaviors in certain contexts and make sense of them through the author's beliefs and experiences (Alharahsheh, H. H., & Pius, A. 2020).

4.1.2 Research Type - An Abductive Approach

This study was done through an abductive approach, where theory and empirical data has been reliant on each other throughout the research process. The broad theoretical ground on gendered leadership and the gendered occupational norm in the Swedish Armed forces was delimited with help of the empirical data collected, something that would not have been possible with an inductive or deductive approach. In this study, the empirical material specifically helped to narrow the framework from a gendered leadership one to a more delimited framework of authentic leadership theory and even gendered authentic leadership.

4.2 Data Collection Process

4.2.1 Investigation Context

Table 4.1 Proportion of women in the SAF

Year	Women in the SAF	Female officers and specialist officers	Female soldiers and sailors	Females in the civilian part of the SAF
2016	13%	5,5%	12%	38%
2019	18%	7%	11%	40%
2021	22%	9%	15%	39%

(Försvarsmakten, 2018, 2019, 2022)

4.2.2 Interview Sample

The sampling process resulted in a mono method qualitative study with nine interviews with different women in leadership positions in the SAF. To get in contact with the interviewees, three different methods were used. Firstly, the authors contacted a person who had previously written her bachelor thesis about the SAF to see whether she had any contacts that could be utilized for this study as well. Thereby, a contact was found who in turn helped to reach out to different people in the organization to find participants. Secondly, the authors reached out to the SAF official email and asked them for people suitable for our project that might be interested in participating. Thirdly, the authors got in contact with a network called NOAK consisting of women in the SAF. This network sent

out an email with a brief introduction of this project and thereafter the authors got contacted by women in different leadership positions who wanted to participate.

In order to get a view of how the gendered culture might affect the leadership of women and more explicitly their authentic leadership throughout the whole organization, we chose to not interview leaders from the same battalions. To further the breadth and enable for diversity of experiences from the interviewed female leaders, the authors chose to interview women with a large span of years spent in the organization. (See table 4.2).

As mentioned in chapter 1.4 the authors exclusively interviewed military female leaders and chose to exclude civilian female leaders in the SAF. The image of civilians is closely connected to femininity in contrast to the military part of the organization that is characterized as masculine. This has contributed to differences between the civilian and military part regarding certain organizational structure, set of values, working conditions, and culture (Persson. A, 2010). Since the civilian part of the organization lacks the gendered military norms that makes this context extraordinary, the authors have chosen to delimit the thesis to the military part. The distinctive turbulent and risky settings of the military part in the organization is another factor that makes this setting stand out from regular organizations, making it a particularly interesting study object for authentic leadership, unlike the civilian division. Furthermore, the civilian part has not been subject to the female exclusion in the same way historically as the military part has and is not subject to the numerical inferiority to the same extent as the military division (Sundevall. F, 2011; See table 4.1).

Table 4.2 Table of participants

Participant	Age	Years in the SAF
P1	22	2 years
P2	45	22 years
P3	25	5 years
P4	52	9,5 years
P5	28	7 years
P6	29	9 years
P7	56	33 years
P8	57	35 years
P9	28	9 years

4.2.3 Interview Design

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner and were based on the same questions and key topics (see Appendix 1) while allowing the respondents to develop their answers in questions they were interested in. The flexibility of the interview design gave the respondents the possibility of speaking more freely and thereby giving a more deepened view of both their perception of their own leadership as well as the environment and norm that the SAF implies in practice. It also made it possible for the authors to dig deeper into some of the respondent's statements through probing follow-up questions. Due to this study's theory usage being open for modifications, the authors chose to keep the questions and key topics very open and loose to let the participants put emphasis on what they themselves found to be important aspects of the topics.

The conducted interviews averaged to 41 minutes and varied between 30 and 60 min. Due to the nature of the abductive approach, some patterns and recurrent topics angled and narrowed our focus during the project. The authors therefore had to get back to the earliest interviewed participants in order for them to answer some follow up questions regarding authenticity more specifically.

4.2.4 Interview Setting

The interviews were conducted in a one-to-one setting, both digitally and physically depending on where the respondents were located (See table 4.3). Three interviews were conducted via Google Meet due to an extensive physical distance in which the digital alternative was found crucial for the interview to take place. The opportunity of digital interviews thereby provided essential accessibility to respondents from different battalions around Sweden and made it possible to access the whole organization to a larger extent, which was the aim.

However, the aim was also to conduct most interviews physically. The reason for this is that the authors found that physical interviews facilitated not only the capturing of the verbal responses to the questions but also the body language and emotional reactions to them to a larger extent than through digital interviews. Since the topic of one's own leadership in a gender setting can be a bit sensitive, the authors felt that a feeling of safety could be important for the respondents in order for them to really open up and answer the questions truthfully. Physical meetings often imply a greater sense of safety than digital ones, which is why the authors strived to hold the interviews in person.

During the interviews, one of the authors held the interview and focused on asking all the questions, asking relevant follow-up questions and on really showing a dedicated attention to the respondent, while the other one took written notes about important points, the author's own thoughts about the responses and discussions, as well as about body languages and non-verbal cues.

An ethical aspect had to be considered when it came to the choice of location of the interviews. While it can be preferable to keep the interviews in a setting that the respondent is familiar with, such as their workplace, this can have some impact on the results given (Saunders, M., et al., 2019). Since the respondents were touching on sensitive subjects regarding their working environment, conducting the interviews in this environment could make the respondents hesitant to answer the questions truthfully. The same thing was considered with the recordings. Therefore, the authors suggested that the interviews should be held in a place where there at least was a possibility to keep closed

doors and chose not to record the interview if the respondent showed any slight concern about it. The authors argued that receiving honest and truthful answers were more valuable for this study than having everything recorded.

Table 4.3 Table of interview setting

Participant	Physical / Digital	Location of Respondent
P1	Physical	Author's kitchen
P2	Digital	Respondent's home
P3	Physical	Respondent's working place
P4	Physical	Respondent's working place
P5	Physical	Booked room at SSE
P6	Digital	Respondent's working place
P7	Physical	Booked room at SSE
P8	Digital	Respondent's working place
P9	Physical	Respondent's working place

4.2.5 Recording And Transcription

The interviews were audio-recorded, to the largest extent possible, in order to recall all information mentioned during the sessions. However, there were four exceptions to this due to the respondents not wanting to get recorded. For these interviews the notes were more extensive to capture the information that would otherwise be captured in the recordings. However, few direct quotations were used from these interviews due to the increased risk of misquoting from our notes. The recorded audio was transcribed in the spoken language (Swedish) and the quoted phrases were translated to fit for this report in English. To ensure that the narratives were not lost in translation, the phrases were translated word by word.

4.3 Analysis

After the interviews were done and transcribed, a thematic analysis was initiated. During this process, the authors color coded recurring words and formulations to a start. Thereafter, the authors individually started to put colors in the same categories together to create more aggravating themes. The two different categorizations were then compared and after internal discussions and some consulting from externals, the authors defined a combined thematically sorted ground for the empirical material.

4.4 Discussion of Method

4.4.1 Ethicality

When it comes to the ethical aspects of the data collection it should be noted that the information gathered can be considered as sensitive. The interview consisted of questions partly about the female leaders' leadership and gender performance but also about how they perceived the organization from a diversity perspective. Since many personal examples were mentioned in this context, it is important that this data is collected and stored in a way that ensures that this information can not be used in a harmful way. The authors therefore made sure that the participant's were aware of the purpose of the thesis and how the interviews and their experiences would be used for it. After this the respondents got to sign a form where they confirmed their consent for us to collect this information and it was made explicit that the respondents could take back their consent at any time. Additionally, all respondents were kept anonymous directly from when the data was collected to ensure the safety of the respondents.

4.4.2 Research Quality

The nature of the qualitative interpretivist research generates a degree of subjectivity both from the respondents as well as from the authors as they make sense of the empirical material collected which comprises the trustworthiness somewhat (Saunders, M., et al. 2019). For the purpose of this study, it is desired to investigate the "socially constructed interpretations of the respondents" which justifies the somewhat lacking validity and reliability that the interpretivist approach implies (Saunders, M., et al. 2019). To ensure

research quality, the authors have relied on Lincoln et al's quality criteria (Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G., 1985). Interpretivist research is often at risk for researcher biases and deviations from the respondent's factual experiences. In order to increase *confirmability*, the two authors started to do individual analyses and interpretations of the empirical material before the analyses were combined. Additionally, during the interpretations of the respondents narratives, the data was also discussed with externals in order to widen the reflections (Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G., 1985). This also helped increase the *credibility* of the research due to the external perspective on the interpretations and analysis. Additionally, at requests of the respondents, the usage of their answers were sent out as well as the analysis conducted from it to see if it fit their narrative (Padgett, D. K. 2016). Since the study is using cross-sectional interviews and is covering a specific context, the *dependability* can be questioned. However, by providing detailed information about the methods used during the data collection and research process, the authors provide transparency into their research and thereby increase dependability. (Tong, A. et al. 2007). The nature of qualitative research also provides some drawbacks when it comes to *transferability* due to the small sample size. However, in these contexts it is important to note that the findings should not be seen as holistic proof of the findings or phenomena, but instead as an introduction to a problem which may be supported by the norms in certain contexts.

5. Empirical Material

5.1 Results From the Qualitative Interviews

5.1.1 Expectations on Female and Male Leaders

The unifying answers from the interviewees are that the expectations on leaders differ depending on the gender of the leader. All respondents witnessed that there are more and tougher expectations on women than there are on men since women are assessed and examined more closely as a minority.

“Women have to perform and make more effort to be rewarded the same as men”.

Furthermore, one of the respondents explained that it was important and expected in the organization to simultaneously be humble and distinct in who makes the decision to gain trust. Trust was often mentioned and all respondents agreed that it was truly important. However, some of the more experienced leaders (over nine years in the organization) explained that it was difficult to attain trust as a young woman in the organization but that they have grown and developed their leadership throughout the years. Most women talked about the importance of leading in line with their own beliefs and values but that these values sometimes could contradict with what was expected from them in their leadership. Performing authentic leadership was also explicitly described as important and several interviewees appointed authenticity as a way of gaining trust, something of utmost importance in this kind of risky and turbulent organization.

The majority of the interviewees noted that women are expected to be the ones who you can come and talk to, just because they are women, but that at the same time, the expectations of a military leader in general does not include such behaviors. The described general expectation of a leader is for them to be authoritarian and disciplinary. One of the interviewees reckoned that there are expectations on women to be caring and supporting and if not, they are seen as moody rather than disciplined and assertive which the general military norm suggests is how a military should be perceived when acting in this way. Furthermore, another of the respondents added to the argument about the conflicting

expectations and said that you could be as feminine as you want to outside of the organization but that you need to conform to a disciplined and authoritarian leadership role when at work.

Two of the interviewed women described themselves as the sort of people who have never been very talkative or good at supporting colleagues. They described that they had never really been or acted feminine in or outside the SAF. Thereby, they acted in accordance with the persistent military norm but not in line with the prevailing expectations of female leaders in the SAF.

To conclude, the interviews revealed that the leadership expectations seemed to be contradicting for females making it difficult for women to live up to the expectations. A majority of those interviewed expressed the expectation of being caring and showing empathy while simultaneously having to adjust to the military norm.

“There is an expectation on women to be more caring” but also “One expects the leader to match the image of a military man; pointing with his whole hand”.

5.1.2 Category 1 - Hiding Behind the Hierarchical Rank

In general, the respondents with less experience (up to nine years) considered leadership in the SAF to be easier for women than in other organizations. One described that the reason for this is that she found that the military rank markings on the uniform directly showed the subordinates that they were the subordinate’s leaders. This was explained further by another respondent and was even described as comfortable; there is an expectation that the leader, defined by the military rank marking on the uniform, takes command. Because of the visible hierarchical rank, the leader makes the decisions unquestionable.

However, this reasoning was contradicted by some of the more experienced leaders. They argued that trust from subordinates, which is crucial in this organization, cannot be created strictly by hiding behind a hierarchical position. Instead, a satisfactory leadership demands work and a transparency of one’s own values and beliefs. One of the respondents argued

that in the beginning of her career she thought she had to make her managerial role explicit to gain authority. However, nowadays she notes that authority and trust is not gained by pointing out the leadership; you just have to lead.

5.1.3 Category 3 - Mimicking and Imitating the Leadership

The majority of the women explained that it was generally common that women in the organization at leadership positions were a product of the disciplinary, masculine leadership they had once been exposed to. More specifically, the women who had worked for the organization for nine plus years described that in the beginning of their leadership careers they typically mimicked the masculine leadership and the military norm by putting aside openness and their supportive sides in order to fit in. One of these interviewees described these leadership practices as characterized by ignorance and uncertainty, wanting to appear authoritarian. Further, this behavior was described as “trying to mask their insecurities” and it was not perceived as authentic or trustworthy. Two of the respondents who had worked for the organization for a shorter time confirmed this picture as well by describing that they conducted more of an authoritarian and strict leadership in the beginning of their career, but that this approach still is something that you are expected to convey to, to some degree. In contrast, the more experienced officer distanced themselves more from this type of leadership and mimicking.

"[I was] very strictly schooled in the beginning to be a tough second lieutenant, you have to distance yourself in a different way, but today I am who I am."

Another of the more experienced respondents (over nine years in the organization) noted that she previously was tightly controlled by the task as a result of mimicking other managers. However, she continues by adding that she more recently has realized that she has to perform a leadership more in line with what she believes is important instead of just following her previous leaders.

"After all, I was trained quite hard by the first managers I had and it was very focused on the task to be solved. That was my main focus. Then, over the years, I have become more mature and realized that I have to involve the staff in it. So I've

probably shifted from being very strictly controlled by just the task to now going much more to the point that I have to bring my staff with me because they need to last, they need to feel good, have a good work environment, otherwise they won't solve the tasks."

One of the respondents who had worked for the organization for over 20 years described that she had developed into a really good listener, who sees all her employees and is really good at motivating and supporting the subordinates. She did not once mention that she nowadays has to be someone or something else than herself in this leadership role, suggesting she commits to authentic leadership (Shamir, B. & Eilam, G. 2005). However, she mentioned that this had been met with some critique. One subordinate of hers had a hard time dealing with some personal issues and opened up to her about this. A posteriori this was something he regretted. He blamed the boss' leadership and said that if she had not been the way she is he would not have shared all that personal information.

"He had a rough time with his personal life and then he explained that he thinks I know too much about him right now which he considered that I use against him. I explained that I had never done that, but that I instead had increased my patience for him since I know how his personal life is looking right now. Otherwise I would not have accepted this [behavior] at all".

Even though this female leader had tried to explain that this would never be the case and that she would just use this information to support the subordinate, according to her it was clear that this leadership approach had resulted in a lack of trust.

5.1.4 Category 4 - Adjusting to the Military Norm

The interviews reveal that the majority of the respondents acknowledge that the clear military norm can be the reason why many women in the organization adopt more of a 'masculine' approach. Moreover, the dominant result also described that there is a template for what is considered a good military leader, which included performing a disciplinary, direct and authoritarian leadership in a more masculine manner. Furthermore, the respondents that had worked for the organization for up to nine years did in general describe that if the leadership was not managed in accordance with this military leader norm, it was hard for women to gain authority in their leader role.

These interviewees agreed that they are adjusting or have had to adjust to the military norm to be accepted by their male managers and the organization. Some have had to work harder than the men, and some explained that they felt the need to adjust their leadership by being more strict and authoritarian in their leadership than they felt comfortable with. One of the interviewees mentioned that since those who examined her were men, she had to "act a certain way to get good grades, fulfilling certain criteria set by men".

Furthermore, another of the less experienced respondents confirmed this by adding that it was easy to get blinded by your own leadership and thereby adapt to a leadership that you personally are not comfortable with, especially in this organization when you are dependent on your superior, who most often is male.

In contrast to this, two of the more experienced interview objects (worked for more than nine years) conveyed a picture of themselves as being authentic and genuine in their leadership role. One of these women described that it took her 15 years of working in the organization until she managed to step away from any adjustments to any norms and finally be 100% herself. Today, she argues that her personal values and beliefs are valued and shines through to the point where the whole organization calls her by her nickname. She reasoned that the reason why she finally can be herself is partly due to the long experience in the organization but also due to the fact that the number of women in the organization has increased, making women more accepted in the organization overall.

6. Analysis

6.1 Authentic Leadership in the SAF

6.1.1 Ability to Perform Authentic Leadership

From the empirics, it can be noted that most female leaders in the SAF struggle with authentic leadership. While most of the respondents described authenticity as something truly important in this organization, there were parts in their description of their own leadership that did not add up with the categories of authentic leadership by Shamir & Eilam (2005). Although the importance of incorporating one's own values and beliefs in the leadership is highlighted, it is mentioned that the strict and disciplinary leadership the respondents has been subject to during their way up in the organization has been influential and has strongly impacted their own leadership. Mimicking and imitating previous leaders in this way is contradictory to authentic leadership (Shamir, B. & Eilam, G. 2005). Additionally, the fact that many female leaders themselves are examined by male leaders, they find it important to adjust their leadership in a way that is in line with the military norm since this is what their leaders consider 'the right way'. The adjustments to the military norm and mimicking of other leaders was seen to be occurring to a larger extent for the less experienced leaders (up to nine years in the organization). The more experienced leaders described that they had been exposed to such behaviors before as well, however, the increased safety that years of experience have implied, have helped them to overcome this.

Conclusively, the empirical material additionally tells us about three occasions of authentic leadership with the more experienced leaders where the respondent led naturally without relying on a hierarchical role, without adjusting to the military norm and without having to mimic someone else's leadership. From these interviews it was not mentioned anything that implied any level of stepping away from their own values or beliefs in their leadership. All these factors together indicate an authentic leadership (Shamir, B. & Eilam, G. 2005).

6.1.2 Ability to Perform Gendered Authentic Leadership

Gendered authentic leadership theory argues that performing authenticity is closely linked to performing gender (Liu, H. et al. 2015). The empirical data collection suggests that female gender performance in the SAF is mostly focused around being caring and supportive and that the expectations on women specifically regard them as the ones you turn to with sensitive topics and subjects.

The empirical material was contradictory to whether the gender was performed or not. Some mentioned that they were caring in their leadership, however they also described femininity as something that can be done outside of the organization but that there is little room for it internally. The reason for this was that the general military norm was found contradictory to what was perceived as feminine. The empirical material thereby suggests that gendered authentic leadership is difficult to uphold in the leadership within the SAF (Liu, H. et al. 2015).

From the three respondents that were conducting authentic leadership according to the Shamir and Eilam categories, one of them could be described to perform authenticity according to Liu et al's gendered authentic leadership perspective as well. It was described that this leader put little attention to her gender but that she led in correspondence with how females were expected to be. This included being supportive and caring as two main parts of her leadership. In contrast to this, the other authentic female leaders described themselves as the sort of people who have never been very talkative or good at supporting colleagues. These respondents described that they had never really been or acted feminine in or outside the SAF, which fits more in line with the military norm and could thereby have facilitated their ability to perform authentic leadership according to Shamir and Eilam. However, since this is not in accordance with the described expectations of the gender, it implies a lack of gendered authentic leadership (Liu, H. et al. 2015).

6.2 The Effects of the Norms

6.2.1 Effects of Gender Norms

Furthermore, the empirical material mentions that women performing disciplinary leadership were met with some resistance. The women performing this leadership can be argued to be authentic according to the categories of Shamir and Eilam but not in accordance with the gendered authentic leadership theory since the disciplinary leadership is perceived as masculine (Bligh, M. C., & Kohles, J. C. 2008; Jeydel, A., & Taylor, A. J. 2003). Even though this is described to be in line with the military norm, the empirics show that the expectations on women still remained consistent.

For example, there were three women that can be analyzed to be authentic according to the categories of Shamir and Eilam. Two of these women practiced more of what was perceived as a masculine leadership, since this was in line with their personality and this was how they remained true to themselves. One of these authentic women, however, was not fully accepted in this role as she was still viewed as a woman more than an authoritarian leader. Her subordinates' would still seek her for emotional support and sensitive subjects despite her expression of inconvenience and her directing them to other leaders more suitable for the task. This implies that even though you are fitting into the military norm and can be considered as authentic, the gender dimension will still contribute with specific expectations that can complicate the leadership. This further indicates that the gendered authentic leadership dimension is important to consider in this context as well. More explicitly this confirms the difficulties for women of conforming to both dimensions of authenticity, the categories of Shamir and Eilam and performing gender, while still acting in accordance with the military norm in the SAF.

6.2.2 Effects of the Military Norm

The qualitative empirical material reveals that a vast majority are adjusting or have felt the need to adjust their leadership in order to be accepted in the organization. Based on the deposition from the interviews and the previously done research in the SAF, these adaptations are likely from how this organization is gendered. The empirics revealed that the way the SAF is structured, has had an effect on how the leaders have adapted their leadership.

One of the interviewed leaders can be seen as completely authentic both according to the categories of Shamir and Eilam and the gendered authentic leadership theory since she had more of a feminine and caring way of leading. However, she found herself in situations where subordinates criticized her supportiveness, meaning that her ability to make people open up to her caused obstacles for them and decreased their trust for her. This could thereby conclude that a feminine authentic leadership still can be met with resistance because of the expectations to adapt to the military norm which is contradictory to the feminine leadership. A dilemma is thereby found in which the extent of authentic leadership has to be weighed against the extent of being in line with the military norm. What further has to be considered in this dilemma is that deviations from either of these has been seen to cause various complications in the leadership. As mentioned, female leaders are expected to, in addition to acting in accordance with their own beliefs and values (Shamir, B. & Eilam, G. 2005) and in accordance with the military norm, also being caring and supporting and thereby perform gendered authentic leadership. The importance of authentic leadership has been stated both in research (Walterström, K. & Prytz, L. 2017) and in the empirical material, however this dilemma questions whether striving to become an authentic leader bears the same importance as striving to become an “authentic military” and thus act in accordance with the military norm. The empirical material shows that complications connected to deviations from the military expectations were worse rather than connected to deviations from authenticity or gendered authenticity. While the deviations from gendered authentic leadership simply led to inconvenience for the leaders personally, the deviations from the military norm had greater effects on the leadership since this was found to result in a lack of trust. This suggests that the military role becomes more important than authenticity in this practical context.

6.2.3 The Impact of the Numerical Inferiority

A pattern can be found in when the women felt that their adjustments toward the more masculine military norm were most extensive. It was described that most found themselves adjusting more to the norm in the early part of their career. Women who started their career in the SAF many years ago described how women then were vast minorities. However, with the increased number of women entering the organization, they have become more and more safe to be themselves and thereby become more and more authentic throughout the years. The pattern thereby describes that norm adjustments are occurring to a larger extent when the women are at low proportions which is in line with the concept of 'strategic invisibility' (Lewis, P & Simpson, R. 2011).

7. Discussion

7.1 Summary and Connection to Research Question

To summarize this project the research question is revisited:

How are female leaders' authenticity affected by the gendered norm in the SAF?

From the analysis it can be concluded that the gendered norm in the SAF have had major implications on the female leader's authenticity and authentic leadership. What was found was a conflict between the female gender norm and the masculine organizational norm. This led to the women having to abstain between either acting in accordance to the female norm which implies a gendered authentic leadership, or to keep authenticity but then risk to not perform in accordance to the organization's expectation of a military leader. The dominant result was an adaptation to the masculine gendered organizational norm, which can be seen as a strategy to decrease the increased visibility that the female gender implies in this male dominated environment. This in turn results in female leaders finding it hard to act in accordance with their own beliefs and values without adapting to any norms, which constitutes authentic leadership. Additionally, women who stood against adaptations to the organizational norm and kept authentic were still met with some resistance by some subordinates. The reason for this was the strong expectations and preconceptions of what a military leader implies, which is strongly connected to the historical male exclusivity.

Secondly, the authors can conclude that the effects of the gendered organizational norms are most extensive in parts of the organization where the proportion of women was small. This implies that the gendered norm is reinforced in situations where the dominant group is at a large numerical advantage, which supports the concept of tokenism.

7.2 Contributions To Literature

In line with previously conducted reports about gender in the SAF, it was found that gender imply certain direct effects on everyday work. Our findings suggest that expectations on women and men differ still to this day which FOI also reported in 2017 (Schröder, K. 2017). What was further mentioned in this report, was the negative implications of the increased visibility that the numerical disadvantage caused (Schröder, K. 2017). This study continues on the argument of strategic invisibility covered by Lewis and Simpson (2011) which gave a reason to why women seem to adjust to the dominant norm in an organization such as the SAF. To further this, the authors used this aspect as a possible explanation to why authentic leadership can be difficult for women to conduct in male dominated organizations.

Previous studies suggest that authentic leadership has been seen as truly important in the SAF (Walterström, K. & Prytz, L. 2017), something that the respondents suggested as well. Our findings also propose that authentic leadership is something that is strived for in the same way that is mentioned by Walterström and Prytz (2017). However, the report nuances the picture by investigating not only if the factual leadership is authentic but also by explaining that aspects such as the gendering of the organization opposes complications to the application of authentic leadership in practice.

Thirdly, this research provides a feminist perspective on how gender and norms impacts the performance of authenticity that previous studies have introduced (Lui, H. et al. 2015). This study's findings confirm the conclusion of Liu et al that gender has a big impact on authentic leadership. However, the interpretivist perspective provides a broader explanation of how it affects the performance of authenticity as well as how this is met by others. The findings of this study show that gender can complicate the performance of authenticity, at least in male dominated environments by pushing women to adapt to the dominant norm to avoid the added visibility. In addition, the finding shows that differences in expectations for the different genders will still imprint on the reception to the leadership regardless if the leader can be found authentic according to gender neutral authenticity theories. Leaders that are not describing themselves as typically feminine are still expected by others to act in accordance with typically feminine attributes.

7.3 Implications

Authentic leadership has been seen as important in the SAF due to the turbulence and riskiness that the military part of the SAF constitutes (Walterström, K. & Prytz, L. 2017). However, with the strong current masculine norm that has gendered the organization, this authentic leadership has been counteracted for women in leadership positions. This observation provides practical insights in how the gendering of an organization practically has major direct effects on the leadership that can be implemented. In an organization that is still highly numerically inferior, these insights are important since they suggest systematic disadvantages for women that might work against this diversity objective. In order to increase the gender diversity in the organization the authors suggest that the SAF should consider to further make efforts to reduce the numerical gender differences as tokenism is seen as a huge role in why the minority, women, are subject to a disadvantage. However, it cannot be said with certainty that the complications will resolve explicitly by implementing numerical measures since the gendering of the military role is so deeply rooted in the organization. Instead, or perhaps in addition to this, the authors suggest that practitioners' focus should be kept on providing knowledge about the importance of diversity in the organization as a way to degender the organization and provide a more nuanced picture of what a 'military leader' implies.

7.4 Limitations

To reach further reliable results, the sample size should have been larger. It should be considered that nine women might not reflect a holistic view of how the military norm affects the authentic leadership of women. A bigger sample size would contribute with more and perhaps different insights in how the norm impacts the leadership. Also, the study is conducted around one context exclusively which limits the possibility to draw conclusions on similar organizations and contexts in general. Furthermore, since the interpretivist approach is used, the analysis and presentation of the empirics can be affected by the authors' own perceptions and interpretations.

7.5 Further Research

Future research could develop the findings by investigating whether male military leaders in general find it easier or even possible to be authentic as a military leader. This study's findings suggest that the military norm is defined and gendered masculine. However, it should also be said that this military norm has been consistent in the organization for many years and might not be applicable to what is considered masculine but more of just 'military' for younger generations. This could thereby be investigated further. Furthermore, it could also be investigated how this relationship between a numerical inferiority, a strong leadership norm and authenticity can be applicable in other contexts. The SAF is an extreme context due to the historical exclusion of women and the environment connected to such turbulence and risk. It would therefore be interesting to see how authentic leadership can be affected for women in other contexts less extreme but still underlined by little gender diversification.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Question Guide

About the role:

- What is your role in the military and what does the role imply?
- Explain a 'normal' day at work?

About the environment and equality:

- Why did you become a part of the military?
- How would you describe the organizational environment?
- How many men versus women are there in your part of the organization?

Leadership expectations:

- What were your expectations for the leadership role before you entered it?
- What expectations do you think people have on you?
- Do you presume the expectation to differ between men and women?
- How do you deal with these expectations in your role?

Authenticity and authentic leadership:

- Would you consider authenticity as an important part of being a leader?
- What is 'good leadership' to you?
- Are you the same person in the leadership role as you are privately?
- How have your leadership developed since you first started?