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The Leadership Discourse Amongst

Female Police Leaders in Sweden

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Abstract

Female leaders within the police force in Sweden are in a minority. Although their numbers are increasing, little is known about their experiences. By using interviews and discourse analysis, this article aims to analyse and construct the leadership discourse articulated by female leaders within the Swedish Police. It is argued here, as in previous research, that female leaders experience a range of different aspects in their roles as leaders. The female leadership discourse within the police is constructed around five themes of discussion: (a) the leadership style of good leaders is generally a transformational one; (b) a transactional approach to leadership is visible in relation to crisis situations; (c) extensive experience as a police officer is of importance; (d) leaders need support in different ways, and (e) experiences of being a 'token' female in a male-dominated organisation is common. Above all, this article challenges the notion that a 'feminine leadership style' exists. It is also argued that an intersectional perspective on police leadership is preferable, and that co-workers have an impact on leadership processes.

Keywords: female police leaders, police leadership, leadership discourse, women

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Introduction

Within the police organization as well as in many other occupations, women are under-represented at leadership level. Even though women in the police are increasing in number, they still face difficulties in reaching managerial positions and are also a target for harassment and discrimination (Somvadee & Morash, 2008). According to Silvestri (2003), the lack of research on police leaders reflects a general problem in reaching elite groups. In contrast to this, lack of research on female police leaders can be explained by way of their low numbers in the organization. However, Silvestri (2003) stated that “women in police leadership positions may offer a significant contribution to the project of organizational change within policing” (p. 2), and Moses Schultz (2003) underscored the importance of learning more about police leaders. There are few studies in general devoted to discovering the complex construction of gendered police leadership discourses, particularly from a Swedish perspective, which is why this study should offer additional information to the field of gender, leadership and police research. For this reason, the present article aims to analyze and construct the leadership discourse articulated by female leaders within the Swedish Police.

The majority of employees within the police are men and the police culture is looked upon as being imbued with masculinity, male values and norms (e.g. Åberg, 2001; Andersson, 2003; Åse, 2000; Dahlgren, 2007; Metcalf & Dick, 2002; Silvestri, 2003). In the Swedish Police, equality in general is seen to be an important factor in order to attract more female leaders, which is why various activities are put in place in order to increase the number of women in the organization (The National Police Board, 2008). About 40% of all employees in the Swedish Police are women and among police officers specifically, they form 25%. The number of female leaders has increased over the years and at present approximately 22% of police officers are women who are leaders at different levels. The majority of all employed men are sworn employees and the majority of all employed women are non-sworn employees. Being a sworn police leader means that you have formal police academy training. Being a non-sworn leader means that you are a civilian employee without formal police academy training. In January 2009, for the first time ever, the number of men and women accepted in the Police Academy for police officer training was entirely equal (The National Police Board, 2008). Various training programs for leadership development exist for leaders at different levels and some police authorities also have specific programs for women. A gender perspective is supposed to be integrated in most programs in the organization (The National Police Board, 2008), a trend that is also pertinent to the UK police force (Metcalf & Dick, 2002).

According to Van der Lippe, Graumans and Sevenhuijsen (2004), the Swedish Police is shown to be a front-runner in gender equality and Sweden is said to have a long history of political will and policy for attaining gender equality. In comparison, the Swedish Police has the highest number of women in managerial positions. However, the authors state that employees in the Swedish police force experience organizational culture as being the main disincentive to maintaining women in the force. They argued that:

However, even in Sweden, the only country where gender mainstreaming has been incorporated in policies, it has not been successful yet. The percentage of women in managerial positions is low, and a male-dominated culture is still present (Van der Lippe, Graumans and Sevenhuijsen, 2004, p. 403).

Earlier research on women in the police varies in terms of aim, methodology and theoretical perspective and when viewed from a Swedish perspective, it is apparent that limited research is to be found. Overall, as has already been noted, little is known about police leaders in general and even less is known about the gendered aspects of police leadership. The first part of this article outlines earlier research within the field of women in the police as well as the theoretical stand and methodological considerations of its authors. The second part draws on the statements made by female leaders on the subject of leadership, which make clear their acknowledgment that a good leader uses a transformational leadership style in carrying out the regular work of a leader and a more transactional approach in managing crisis situations. Also shown is the importance of being an experienced police leader with a long history of service. Different kinds of supporting activities are also discussed, as is the significance of being a 'token' female in a male dominated organization. The discussion considers the merits of taking an intersectional perspective to shed light on minority groups, by directing criticism at the notion that there exists a feminine leadership style, and by emphasizing the importance of recognizing the impact of co-workers on leadership processes.

Earlier Research on Women in the Police

Even though there is no consensus among leadership scholars of what constitutes good and efficient leadership, the majority argue that the leader plays a significant role in organizational success. However, leadership is no longer viewed as a set of individual characteristics; rather, it is looked upon as a holistic feature, a complex dynamic process affected by numerous factors within an organization (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). There is, however, a growing interest in adopting 'transformational' leadership styles within the police organization (Silvestri, 2007), since the traditionally autocratic or transactional leadership style is, according to Villiers (2003) and Silvestri (2007), outdated and looked upon as counter-productive for the development of the police organization. This traditional leadership style is, nevertheless, still a part of the organizational culture of the police force and the authors stress the need for change. Transformational leaders are defined as being participatory, relational and interactive, as being those who put organizational goals and vision before self-interest and who motivate personnel by increasing their self-esteem and autonomy (Villiers, 2003). Power and information are shared between the leader and the employees, as well as there being adopted an open communication approach (Silvestri, 2007). Transformational behaviors have been shown to have a positive effect on subordinates' attitudes, job satisfaction and commitment to the organization (Silvestri, 2007) as well as having a positive influence on leadership effectiveness and organizational outcomes (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009). Transformational learning for women can take place and be supported in formal leadership development training (Debebe, 2009).

The more common transactional leader, on the other hand, sees personnel as being instrumental functions (Villiers, 2003), and he or she uses a top-down approach, power and authority to exchange rewards for services (Rosener, 1990). Rosener's (1990) study is cited as being influential in showing the gendered aspects of transactional and transformational leadership styles (Silvestri, 2007), and it is argued in Rosener's (1990) study that women are more likely to adopt a transformational leadership style while men adopt the more transactional one. Silvestri's (2007) study on the descriptions provided by senior policewomen of their leadership styles is in line with Rosener's (1990) results, showing that the female leaders emphasize good relations, the sharing of power and information with subordinates, the use of open communication to create loyalty, and working through processes and promoting cooperation as well as working to reduce conflict, competition and hierarchy. The concept of transformational leadership stresses the need for organizations to become less hierarchical and more flexible, team-oriented and participative (Kark, 2004).

Even though such issues are not directly related to the police, Mano-Negrin and Shaeffer (2004) examined whether crisis awareness and preparedness are affected by gender. By using questionnaires sent out to leaders of Israeli companies, they show that transformational leadership styles associated with a feminine orientation are better suited when it comes to managing crisis situations. Female managers are, in their opinion, more likely to have a holistic, democratic and participative approach to leadership than are their male counterparts. Moving beyond the bureaucratic, paramilitary structure of police organizations, Pagon (2003) suggested that new forms of organizational design and leadership style need to be adopted. This change includes extensive organizational transformation and the training of police leaders. Pagon (2003) concluded that police leaders should focus on increasing their communication skills, being sensitive to cultural diversity, and working on interaction, participation, networking, problem solving, and motivating employees.

Not only are leadership styles of interest in the literature available on women in the police force but so are aspects of pursuing a career within it (e.g. Burke & Mikkelsen 2005; Dick & Cassell, 2004; Gaston & Alexander, 1997; Metcalf & Dick 2002; Silvestri, 2006). By way of interviews with female leaders in the police, Silvestri (2006) described carrier paths within the police organization as well as the way in which female leaders construct their leadership. By making and managing time and by working full time and pursuing a long and clearly established period of service, policewomen can maintain their police identity and prove their commitment and trustworthiness as well as secure a career within the organization. The difficulties women experience in attaining the top jobs in the police are created by a traditionally male career model that hinders the opportunity they might have to reach managerial positions (Dick & Cassell, 2004; Silvestri, 2006). By way of questionnaires sent out to police officers in Norway, Burke and Mikkelsen (2005) showed that female police officers experience greater difficulties in pursuing a career, they rank their leadership qualities as being lower than those of their male colleagues, and they experience more sexual harassment and less equality than do their male colleagues.

In another study, the traditional view of women being less committed to pursuing a career in the police is challenged, and shows instead that men and women display more or less the same levels of commitment (Metcalf & Dick, 2002). However, they stated that this fact "may not capture the totality of the female working experience in a male-dominated organization [...]"

women in male-dominated professions tend to develop the same attitudes and values as men in the profession” (Metcalf & Dick, 2002, p. 400). This adaptation on the part of women, prompted by the desire to fit in, and this acceptance of the existing culture is also identified in other studies (Dick & Cassell, 2004; Silvestri, 2003). This is given expression in the Swedish context by Cedermark Hedberg (1985), who concluded that female officers have limited opportunities to change the typically male police role, and that they adapt to the prevailing system of norms by identifying with stereotyped male characteristics synonymous with the role of a police officer. By the use of surveys, Somvadee and Morash (2008) showed that US policewomen experience sexual harassment in terms of suggestive jokes, offensive stories and behavioral and verbal sexism. Jokes and remarks were shown to be seen as part of the male-dominated culture, and, by accepting these, women could become part of the group - the price for fitting into the organization.

Other studies on the experiences, attitudes and behaviors of men and women at the beginning of their police careers describe the under-representation of women in positions of leadership (e.g. Gaston & Alexanders, 1997). After a couple of years within the police force, women are three times less likely to be interested in pursuing a career and engaging in the promotion process within the police compared with their male colleagues. This is seen as due to there being a smaller amount of perceived support and encouragement from senior management as well as a lack of female role models at leadership level. Senior managers are said to constitute significant role models and it is recommended that managers become mentors for their subordinates (Gaston & Alexander, 1997). Metcalf and Dick (2002) also stated that support from management is influential in shaping organizational commitment among both men and women. In contrast, Archbold and Moses Schultz (2008) found that female police officers who had been strongly encouraged by their male supervisors feel dissuaded from engaging in the promotion process. This was due to the women feeling that they were being promoted only because they were women and not because they were looked upon as effective leaders. Archbold and Hassel’s (2009) results revealed that family related issues as well as lack of confidence affect the decision women take to become leaders, even though it is shown that the majority of the women in the study perceive themselves to have the characteristics of leadership needed for the job.

Being a woman in a male dominated organization can be lonely and Kanter’s (1977) study showed that “those women who were few in number among male peers and often had ‘the only woman’ status became tokens: symbols of how-women-can-do, stand-ins for all women.” (p. 207). Tokenism has been said to affect those who are few in number in a way that makes them more visible than the dominant group, as well as overstating their differences and bending their qualities to fit with the stereotyped image of them (Kanter, 1977). Perceptions of tokenism are shown to have an impact on the decision taken by women to participate in the promotion process in order to become a leader within the police (Archbold & Moses Schulz, 2008; Wertsch, 1998). Wertsch’s (1998) interview study of female police officers demonstrated that tokenism combined with family responsibilities and organizational structures affect women’s opportunities of engaging in the promotion process to become leaders within the police. One explanation for this is the reference to feelings of being trapped in gender-appropriate roles.

Being a woman is not the only incentive for becoming a leader within the police; there are also seen to be difficulties in being a non-sworn leader, as these are generally regarded as having a weaker position within the organization (Rowe, 2006; Stenmark, 2005). Non-sworn staff, seen from a Swedish perspective, is looked upon as a collectively heterogeneous group with limited opportunity for acting in relation to other sworn groups of employees. About 70 percent of the non-sworn staff in the Swedish Police is women (The National Police Board, 2008). This gap between non-sworn and sworn employees is said to impact negatively on the organization's ability to act as a comprehensive unit (Stenmark, 2005). Rowe (2006) stated that non-sworn leaders "have to overcome considerable internal resistance" (p. 765) if they are to gain legitimacy in the police organization, as they lack the long experience of policing that is so important and that police leaders normally have. According to Stenmark (2005), research on the police organization, its culture and leadership has so far left the experiences and conditions of non-sworn employees out of analysis.

Other studies from a Swedish perspective that are of interest include Andersson's (2003) research on the age-specific constructions of masculinity that affect the way male police officers describe and pursue their daily work. Åberg (2001) and Dahlgren (2007) stated that there exists an internal segregation according to sex of the division of tasks and that a stereotyping of male and female practices creates barriers that prevent female patrol officers from being regarded as 'real' police officers. Dahlgren (2007) as well as Cedermarck Hedberg (1985) show that female police officers are looked upon as invaluable for their social skills and gentle way of dealing with women, children and the elderly. Åse's (2000) study focused on the way in which the female body is used for subordinating women in the police force and shows that women experience difficulties in being looked upon as "real" police officers.

As can be seen in this review of earlier research, little has been explored regarding female police leaders from a Swedish perspective, a discourse analytical point of view or a qualitative interview approach, which is why this study can be seen as an effort to fill in part of that gap. Also of interest to bear in mind is the study made by Van der Lippe, Graumans and Sevenhuijsens (2004), which illustrated the Swedish Police as being a model for the good work done on equality, a factor which implies that women's narratives from a Swedish perspective might differ from those of other nationalities. Moving on from this review of past research, the next section provides a description of the theoretical frame of reference and methodological considerations running through the whole research process.

A Gender Perspective on Leadership and Organization

In taking a gender perspective on leadership, it proves interesting to study the conditions that exist for male and female leaders as well as the way in which male domination in leadership positions affects our ideas about leadership, masculinity and femininity. The critique, as set out by gender scholars on leadership research, is directed at the gender neutral view on leadership that has unthinkingly characterized a good leader as one based on male features (Freeman, Bourque & Shelton, 2001). Even though there is a large amount of literature on leadership, there is no consensus about what effective leadership looks like or in what way gender affects leadership. However, Rhode (2003) stated that good leadership is affected more by context and other circumstances than by individual characteristics and qualities. There are different models

for explaining the low number of women in managerial positions, but it is common for the under-representation of women to be connected to individual characteristics rather than to the features of the organization (Connell, 2006; Silvestri, 2006).

This article draws on the notion that organizations are not gender-neutral, a perspective that has its background in Kanter's (1977) and Acker's (1990) influential work on gender and organizations. These authors are said to be the most important originators of the development of a systematic theory on the gendered processes that infuse organizations at both institutional and individual level (e.g. Silvestri 2003 & 2006; Connell, 2005 & 2006; Ford, 2006). A definition of gender that focuses on processes and social relations rather than on personal traits and characteristics is the one used in this research (Connell, 2003; Haake, 2009). Social and cultural ideas about gender and leadership are both constructed and reproduced by way of societal and organizational structures and practices (Acker, 1990). The ways in which we act in different situations are thus dependent on normative ideas and broad structures in society. This study adopts Due Billing and Alvesson's (2000) ideas on taking a critical approach to the term of feminine leadership. Their critique is directed at a rather general and stereotypical view of men, women and leadership that has a tendency to essentialize gender and reinforce stereotypical views of women. They stress that variations are as great within the categories of men and women as between them:

The social construction processes of gender are complex, multifaceted and heterogeneous. Masculinity and femininity are not static traits but change over time and over the lifetime of the individuals, and vary with class, race, occupation, organization, age, and individual conditions (Due Billing & Alvesson, 2000, p. 152).

While research in the areas of leadership and organization has been criticized for being centered on masculinity, gender research has been criticized for failing to consider the differences in the lives and experiences of men and women and for over-generalizing the subordination of women to men (Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, 2004). It is therefore important to consider which women are being studied as well as which women have become leaders within the police. In doing so, Hesse-Biber and Yasier (2004) indicated that the researcher can shed light on social structures that otherwise would be hard to see.

Social Constructionism and Discourse Analysis

Social constructionism can be looked upon as an umbrella term for many approaches within the social sciences, whereas discourse analysis, by way of example, is but one approach (Burr, 1995). When discourse analysis is applied, a basic social constructionist starting point is necessary for the research to be undertaken. A number of key issues are stated by Burr (1995) and Winther Jørgensen and Phillips (2000) as being central to a social constructionist point of view: taking a critical approach and questioning knowledge taken for granted, as well as seeing that our way of understanding the world is the product of our history and culture. Other key features mentioned are the fact that knowledge is constructed through social interaction between people and that knowledge in turn affects our social actions. The social constructionist standpoint, according to Burr (1995), takes a non-essentialist view, which means that human

nature is not a given, determined condition but that our manner of being is a product of social processes, with language being a pre-condition central to our understanding. Human dialogue constructs the meaning of one's surroundings and can thus be seen as a kind of social action. By being conducted in conjunction with other people, this interactive process sustains as well as develops our knowledge and understanding. Knowledge is thus something that requires action on our part, not something that we have inside us; the focus within the field of social constructionism is therefore on processes. Doing leadership and doing gender is thus the focus (Haake, 2009; Pesonen, Tienari & Vanhala, 2009).

Our work draws on the discourse theory set out by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), which is also described and quoted by such authors as Howarth (2000) and Winther Jørgensen and Phillips (2000). This perspective embraces not just language but also all social practices and relations as being discursive. Central to discourse theory is the notion of a discursive structure; that is, a social and cultural construction of relations between objects and subjects, which gives social agents a variety of available subject positions. Discourses are not closed units; rather, they are discourses that constantly change in relation to others, a variation termed a discursive struggle. Discursive structures are articulatory practices which constitute and systematize social relations. Articulatory practices "consist of the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p.113). Nodal points are described here as privileged discursive points that try to fix the discourse around a centre of meanings and to bridge the differences that are articulated in the discursive field. Nodal points tie elements - ambiguous signs that are constantly struggling for meaning - to a chain of significance. A sign (for example, a word) acquires its meaning from a system of distinctions called chains of equivalence. This means that elements have both positive and negative functions in the discourse. From this perspective, one might say that discourses form symbolic systems and social orders which eventually become natural and 'true' to us (Howarth, 2000; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). Discourse analysis then becomes a method for analyzing how these practices, systems and orders are constructed and which consequences result from this for forming our view on reality. Trying to be objective and establishing empirical generalizations are thus not in the interest of discourse theorists (Howarth, 2000).

Methodological Considerations

In order to construct the leadership discourse among female leaders in the Swedish Police, material from interviews has been used. The choice of interviews as a method is based on the notion that discussion about leadership is an articulatory practice. The leadership discourse forms what is said by the leaders and also in what way, and interviews then constitute a method of capturing the articulated in its spoken form. In this case, in-depth interviews that followed a semi-structured interview format were conducted with four female sworn police leaders (police academy trained officers) and one female non-sworn police leader (with academic background). The participants were leaders at middle management level from two county police departments. Four of those were in leadership training at the time. The leadership program dealt with a range of topics within the fields of organizational theory, leadership theory and communication. With geographical concern, the five women (of totally nine) that worked in the capital were contacted to participate in the study. Four of those accepted to participate. Two more female leaders in another district were contacted after the human resource department had been approached. One

of those accepted to participate. The intention has not been to look upon women as a homogenous group who share common characteristics, experiences and opinions; however, a purpose can be served in shedding light on a group that finds itself in a minority in a male-dominated organization (Due Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Hesse-Biber & Yasier, 2004).

The leaders interviewed were women in the age of 32, 45, 48, 49 and 54. One aim of this study has been to focus on a small group in order to in-depth analyze the discourse on leadership (Howarth, 2000; Kvale, 1997). Our focus was on what was said (articulated); hence the interview questions were open ones to leave space for the interviewees to speak freely about their thoughts of leadership. An interview guide was constructed in a semi-structured format around the areas covered by the questions, which allowed for follow up questions as well as for changing the order of the questions. The main areas covered by the questions focused on issues such as what it felt like to be a leader within the police, what constituted a good leader, and what organizational factors and support functions were important in order to be a good leader. The interviewees were also asked about their thoughts on recruitment and pursuing a career. The interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word to supplement the notes taken during the interviews. By way of introduction, the informants were asked about their background within the police force. The interviews lasted about one and a half hours.

As the theoretical point of reference is based on the notion that the informants articulate the discourse (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), the analysis was directed at an understanding of the way in which different meanings were articulated. Once the interviews had been conducted and transcribed, the work of analysis began. Interview transcripts were analyzed by means of close reading and rereading in order to capture what leadership aspects the informants expressed in the interviews - this constructing the leadership discourse. The analysis resulted in the emergence of a number of related themes repeatedly touched on by the leaders. The emergence of a theme did not have to follow the structure of the interview questions but could be constructed by other general discussion. However, this could also constitute an element of a discussion not necessarily voiced by many of those taking part but showing the ambiguity of the discursive theme. This type of work implies a categorization of nodal points (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985); namely, a significant subject of discussion raised by at least three leaders on different issues of leadership that construct the themes within the leadership discourse. For example, the theme of 'support' was developed by way of the leaders discussing what kind of support they needed in order to be good leaders. All discussion about support was written down, and nodal points emerged as it became apparent that support could take many forms such as that coming from management, from mentors and networks, and from shared leadership and leadership training. The nodal points (e.g. support from management) in each theme (e.g. support) construct the leadership discourse. By drawing on the female leaders' discussion on leadership, the following section will address the various ways that leadership is approached in the studied discourse.

Findings from the Study

The aim of this study was to analyze and construct the leadership discourse as articulated by female leaders within the Swedish Police. In common with previous research, the findings from this study show that female leaders articulate a range of different aspects in their role of leader. The following sections provide details on the way in which the leaders interviewed talked about leadership and show that the leadership discourse was constructed around five themes. The nodal points within each theme are marked in *italics*.

A Transformational Leadership Style

In the discussion on how to be a good leader, different individual characteristics were mentioned that were similar to the approach regarding adopting a transformational leadership style (Kark, 2004; Rosener, 1990; Silvestri, 2007). The theme of the transformational leadership style emerged from the leaders' discussion on the important characteristics for what constitutes a good leader. Good leaders are said to be successful in the work they do by their use of *communication, involvement and participation* and *creating and maintaining good relations*. It is also stated that there are *differences between men and women* and the way they lead, implying that women are more transformational in their leadership style than men are.

A good leader is said to use *communication* as a tool in order to be successful. This involves listening, inviting people to talk, conducting dialogue and discussion with co-workers, and communicating through cross-groups composed of both employees and civilians that have a range of competences, as well as passing on relevant information to co-workers. Communication is closely linked to the notion of realizing that the leader does not possess all types of competence or the answers him or herself. Instead, he or she has to be able to pinpoint where such competence can be found within the working group.

Involvement and participation is another significant nodal point, one articulated as an important feature for being a good leader. This means showing one's co-workers and others respect for their opinions when making decisions, a strategy that serves to increase feelings of motivation and involvement in the day-to-day work and strategic planning of the organization. If employees take part in the decision-making, they will also feel more motivated to participate in the implementation of new strategies:

[...] when you are about to take a decision on a number of matters, you gather people from different backgrounds in order for them to feel involved and to have an influence on those decisions. We try to get a lot of input from under, because if you involve people in the decision-making process you will then have the staff behind you in another way [...] because if you have participated in the discussion it will be easier to implement [...].

This way of working aims both to effectively reach decisions and move the organization forward and also to increase feelings of involvement and motivation. The top-down perspective is perceived as negative and a majority of the leaders interviewed stated that it is actually the police officers on the front-line and carrying out the work who know best and who come up with many of the good ideas that are eventually implemented.

An additional nodal point that arose from the interviews, one helping to construct the leadership discourse, is the notion that *creating and maintaining good relations* is something positive. This can be done by way of communication and involving people, and also by way of taking a sympathetic approach; for example, by being thoughtful, sensitive and prestige-free towards co-workers, as well as being natural, daring to be oneself and staying true to one's personality without being autocratic or authoritarian. Having an optimistic attitude, a sense of humor and the ability to appear humble are other features mentioned, as are proving your credibility and showing a genuine interest in the development of others. The interviewees reported that in order to maintain good relations, a leader should not distinguish between his or her co-workers, butt in too much, steamroller one's way through, or pass over one's subordinate leaders regarding information that is supposed to go through them. Rather, leaders should let their subordinates take their own decisions and responsibility.

All the leaders stated that there are *differences between men and women* in the way they lead; men and women have different ways of expressing themselves, and their approach and ability to tackle problems differ. This is, however, a complex view:

I guess this is a generalization, because I know a lot of men who are really good at this [...] but I still believe that we women have that little bit extra in this regard [...] well, now I am contradicting myself. I know that there are men who are really social and really [...] but I think that we provide a more social type of leadership, where we work more with the group dynamics in another way.

It is perceived that women are more social and more socially oriented in their leadership than are men, which means that they focus more on relations, communication, dialogue and the group dynamics. Critical consideration of these statements about the existence of feminine and masculine leadership styles, in line with the approach taken by Due Billing and Alvesson (2000), means challenging stereotypical notions about the differences between men and women, emphasizing the fact that femininity and masculinity are social and cultural constructions, and thus emphasizing the use of other expressions in order to promote gender equality.

A Transactional Approach

However, talk about leadership in relation to making tough decisions or leading a crisis situation brings to mind a more transactional view on leadership. The theme of 'a transactional approach' emerged from the leaders' discussion on the subject of being a good leader in situations tougher than that offered by the leader's everyday work. Significant nodal points in this theme that construct this leadership discourse are being able *to make tough and uncomfortable decisions* and to *give orders*. This contradiction between taking a transformational

approach to leadership in general (in calm situations) and the feeling of having to switch to a more transactional approach (in urgent situations) is mentioned as being a difficult factor and one that also affects at times one's actions in a negative sense:

You have to be able to make tough decisions, and that might then - unfortunately sometimes - result in you having to be cooler. Well, I haven't changed my own personality but I have changed who I am in the organization; in some decisions and situations and at meetings I might have to take on a leadership and managerial role [...] to be a good leader, I have to do that, but I can feel that sometimes it isn't me.

Discussion about the "leadership and managerial role" shows that this is not that of the usual transformational leader but more that of the traditional transactional leader. *Making tough and uncomfortable decisions* and standing up for them is mentioned in general as an important trait for a police leader when managing difficult situations. The leader has to be firm and straightforward and be brave enough to communicate difficult issues and also to take controversial decisions because he or she believes in them. Making tough decisions often means *giving orders* and being more authoritarian. This means having to be an active leader, being able to make fast decisions and make people do what they are told. This was said to be even more important in a crisis situation while dialogue, something looked upon as a female trait, was reported as being "good at times and less good at other times - for example, in a crisis - than the straight communication is needed". It was perceived by the leaders interviewed that giving orders without there being a consensus was accepted within the police, and also that subordinates do not expect to be as involved in decisions as they normally would be. There exists a culture of no argument:

The advantage in the police force is that when you have acute situations out in the field and you are the task force commander, it is legitimate to be more authoritative.

In line with Silvestri's (2007) argument that "the culture of police management demands quick decision making and decision makers; the transformational approach takes too long and is therefore perceived to be ineffective when adopted by women" (p.48), these women perceive a transactional leadership style as being more appropriate in managing crisis situations, and that such a style of leadership is easier because of not having to consider other people's points of view. Even though these leaders talk in terms of a more transactional approach when referring to various crisis situations, they still believe that good relations with employees are crucial and state the benefits of having a large network of good relations with others to turn to when necessary. Working in teams during a crisis situation means that you are able to use the right competences in the working group. Having a transformational approach to leadership in one's everyday work means that when crisis situations occur, one is well prepared for taking fast, difficult decisions and giving orders to subordinates.

The Experienced Police Leader

A good police leader is, however, characterized not only in terms of leadership style but also as someone who has had long experience in the police. The theme of ‘the experienced police leader’ emerged from the leaders’ discussion about *having long experience* as a police officer, the significance of *being a sworn police leader*, and the importance of *being encouraged and recruited* to leadership positions.

A significant characteristic needed for being a good leader within the police force was to have *long experience* as a police officer before becoming a leader, according to these four leaders who had themselves been sworn police officers for between twenty and thirty years. It is also shown by Silvestri (2006) and Rowe (2006) that experience gained from a long and clearly established police career is perceived as being important by both leaders and subordinates in order to gain legitimacy and trust in the role of leader within the police. One finding in this study is that having long experience of the core activities of police work, e.g. patrolling, is said to bring about an understanding of the responsibility that police officers face in their daily work; become connected to the ‘reality’; bring about an understanding of what can be implemented practically; and to provide the competence to translate strategic thinking into practical work. A leader with policing experience and the ability to manage crisis situations is said to gain greater respect, credibility and trust in the organization. By being experienced, one also acquires competences that are needed in critical situations:

Then you have to have this knowledge and broad experience to lean on, and you rely in part on your experience as well [...] it doesn’t mean that just because you go to the Police Academy for a couple of years, it takes quite a long time to become a good police officer; simply because you face so many critical situations, and as an individual you just have to learn to deal with it [...].

Connected to the notion of having long experience, when assuming a position of leadership within the police, is the nodal point that expresses the importance of *being a sworn police leader*. Non-sworn police leaders, also discussed by Stenmark (2005), are looked upon by the sworn police leaders in this study as being not particularly suited as operational leaders or those who lead other police officers: “There are some functions that non-sworn employees can’t have, due to their lack of formal competence as police officers.” This is shown to be a common view within the police force (Rowe, 2006; Silvestri, 2006), a view which in turn must affect non-sworn leaders, since they have to overcome internal resistance in the organization due to their lack of legitimacy in comparison with sworn leaders (Rowe, 2006). The non-sworn police leader who participated in this study had an academic background, and, while acknowledging the importance of having experience, she felt that the argument for always putting the most experienced police officers in leadership positions was an overstated one. Arguments for employing non-sworn leaders from sectors outside the police force is, according to Rowe (2006), an effect of the current debate that suggests that non-sworn employees with valuable experience from outside the force would open up and modernize the police service. This is, however, perceived as a practice now loosening up for those who are non-sworn; non-sworn investigators are, for example, a recent feature of the police organization:

To gain authority I think you should have some knowledge of your craft, and whether you are a non-sworn or sworn officer doesn't matter [...] in the same way that it is loosening up for non-sworn investigators, it will loosen up for leaders as well. We are not there yet, however; police officers are of the conservative kind.

The majority of the leaders interviewed had no specific strategy for pursuing a career. Their identities lay more in being experienced police officers than in having a focus on pursuing a career as a leader. Even though individual choices to apply for posts in the job are made, it is apparent that being *encouraged and recruited* was an essential factor for helping them on their way up to a position of leadership. Being asked by senior managers to take on leadership responsibility affects self-esteem in a positive way as well, since it sends out signals to others that you have earned their feeling of trust.

Encouragement and support from partners, colleagues and supervisors are shown by Gaston and Alexander (1997) to affect one's decision to engage in the promotion process. As can be seen - in contrast to Archbold and Moses Schultz' (2008) results - these women have presumably not felt dissuaded from participating in the promotion process because they were encouraged. Even though these women had worked hard within the police organization, it was recognized that not having one's career plans set in stone was something positive:

If I had focused on goals, then maybe I would have turned down opportunities that weren't part of the plan.

I could never have dreamed that I would end up being the head of this unit. I don't have a career plan. If I had, I would probably not be here.

Getting Support in Order to be a Good Leader

The female police leaders interviewed all expressed the need for support in order to cope with being a leader - this was a significant theme in the leadership discourse. Four nodal points within the theme on support arose: support must come from *senior management, mentors and networks, shared leadership* and *leadership training*.

When asked about what kind of support women need in order to be good leaders, all the leaders reported that the need of support from *senior management* was important in order for them to feel secure and trustworthy in their role as leaders. Metcalf and Dick (2002) also stated that managerial support is important for creating a feeling of organizational commitment. This study shows the importance of being able to go to senior managers on an everyday and informal basis to talk, reason and brainstorm about different issues as well as to be shown respect for knowledge and performance. Informal discrimination does occur, although rarely, and it was stressed that support from management was crucial in such situations. One example mentioned, and one in line with Archbold and Moses Schultz' (2008) study, was their having to face comments about being taken on as a leader only on the basis of their being a woman. Having a manager who defended and described women leaders as competent and suited to the post

regardless of gender was looked upon as being a significant support, as was their being backed up in other situations involving discrimination:

If you don't have managers, senior managers, that are observant and see this, and have the ability to stop it, then you have to deal with it yourself [...] I have always been in work places where I have had senior managers who are observant and who don't fall into the trap, so to speak [...] you have to be backed up by the senior management, otherwise it doesn't work.

Managerial role models in general and female managerial role models in particular are mentioned as constituting a good support (see also Gaston & Alexander, 1997). Due to the masculine nature of the police culture, it is perceived as particularly important that female managers are visible to female police officers and that the women in the police force support each other in order to pursue their careers. It has been shown in earlier research that male officers tend to get more support than female officers and that a lack of female role models affects the confidence of women in their considering becoming a leader (Gaston & Alexander, 1997).

Discussion about the need to have *mentors and networks* arose from the interviews as another nodal point in the theme of support. Having a mentor, network or someone else to reason with creates an environment where problems and different situations can be discussed, as well as creating a feeling of belonging among women in the same situation. It is recognized in this study that it is lonely to be a leader high up in the hierarchy:

Well, I think all leaders need mentors for certain, but I think we (women) need mentors and networks that bit more, to feel that support, you could say. Because it is kind of lonely to be a leader, and to be a female leader is probably even lonelier, because there are so few of us. Because men have got their men talk and women have got their women talk. I mean, you need women talk even at leadership level.

It is perceived by all the women interviewed that being a leader means having a work overload, which is why the benefits of *shared leadership* are acknowledged. Recruiting someone to share the role of leadership means that the other person can make up for any weaknesses, share responsibilities and convert ideas and analysis into reports and strategic plans:

I am not asking at all to have an assistant head of section but I can see, especially now when I am undergoing (leadership) training, that it is grueling because there is no one to share my responsibilities, my thoughts or my long-term plans [...] everything that should be written and done is lying there, waiting for me when I come back. If I could have had someone who was more informed about what I want and about the way we work - what we in this section want - then that person could offload me and do those things when I am not around [...] you share some of the responsibilities.

Adopting a shared leadership approach is consistent with having a transformational leadership style and favoring an organizational structure with less hierarchical levels; working on relationships, participation, dialogue and communication as well as putting the organizational goals before personal interest (Murphy & Drodge, 2004). This means that leadership is seen as a social process engaging many members of the team (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009).

Four of the leaders interviewed were at the time undergoing a program in *leadership training* and all of them were positive to this, believing that it would help in their development and support them in their roles as leaders. They believed it would help the development of the leaders within the police to take the role of employer more seriously, to fill in the gaps in their knowledge, to create a better foundation and understanding, and also to spread the new knowledge to employees. Murphy and Drodge (2004) said that training for transformational leadership is possible, and in their review of training and development research, Auginis and Kraiger (2009) summarized that training in work organizations reaps benefits for individuals and teams as well as organizations and society. It was also shown by Dvir et al (2002) that follower development and performance are enhanced in the training of leaders to adopt a transformational leadership style. Even though the leaders in this study were positive to the idea of training, there was some ambiguity in what they said: they noticed, for example, that while they were away on their training those who were left behind had to work harder to manage the work load and also, there was a lot of catching up to do on their return. They also reported that it was hard to fit in time for studying and a further problem mentioned was the demand for making savings and therefore the limited opportunity available to undergo leadership training in general. As concluded by Auginis and Kraiger (2009), training alone is not beneficial if it is not implemented together with other human resources functions or if other organizational structures do not ease the work load of the leader.

Tokenism in a Male-dominated Organization

In the discussion about being a female leader in a male-dominated organization, a number of nodal points similar to the notion of being a token emerged (Wertsch, 1998; Archbold & Moses Schultz, 2008). This means that being in a minority renders the person more visible, which leads her to *adapt to the culture*, creates feelings of *being treated differently* and generates feelings of having to *work harder* than her male colleagues.

The female leaders in our study said that they had learned to *adapt to the culture*, which is in line with research showing that women in the police tend to adapt to the prevailing culture and thus reinforce dominant masculine values (e.g. Dick & Cassell, 2004; Metcalf & Dick, 2002), as a result of their not being fully accepted into the dominant police culture (Gaston & Alexander, 1997). This aspect of being in a minority in a police culture based upon male values contributes to the women within it considering their way of behaving, talking and thinking in a variety of situations. The following quote represents a common view:

I am a leader in a world that is very male and with a male way of looking at leadership [...] through the years I have understood how it works. I sort of understand more and more [...] you adapt, yes. You have to, for good and for bad. [...] I wouldn't have got this far as a female leader if I hadn't understood the rules of the game.

None of the leaders interviewed said that they had been directly discriminated against or that there had been any problems relating to them as female leaders. This can be interpreted as one effect of succeeding in adapting to the police culture:

I can't say that I have had any problems. But I have what are most likely important attributes within the police [...] some people talk about how many years you have worked, and I have worked here quite a long time; I have been tested, shown that I can manage. I have landed at this level when you sort of get the OK. And then you have quite a lot of trust invested in you.

However, some of the leaders interviewed felt that they were sometimes *treated differently*, and one leader said that "some men have a hard time only seeing that this is the leader of this unit; they also see that it's a woman." Another leader said that "there is a category of men with low self-esteem who, when they feel threatened, react in a non-healthy way [...] so that I am sort of overridden". It is also perceived that if a woman acts in a male way, that of being sharp and sure of what she wants, that is not looked upon as something positive compared to when a man behaves in the same way. Although these women did not experience direct discrimination in terms of sexism, as shown in Somvadee and Morash's (2008) study, it could be interpreted that they accepted being treated differently or subjected to harmful comments about being a woman in order to fit into the organizational culture.

The fact that women must prove their competence by *working harder* than their male colleagues and the fact that there is more focus on their gender if something goes wrong, constitutes another nodal point within the theme of 'tokenism':

As a woman you have to do everything twice as well as a man [...] you really have to show your competence when you apply for a job. And girls do that in the police; they don't apply if their CV isn't packed full. You don't stand a chance.

These kinds of statements are in line with Silvestri's (2003) results that "women must work harder and longer than men to justify their place" (p. 120), and also shows that other female police leaders experience the fact that "every man is good until he proves he's not, and every woman is not good until she proves otherwise" (p. 120). As was also demonstrated by Archbold and Hassel (2009), we found that female officers, in general, lack confidence about the amount of police experience they have, a reason for them not applying for higher positions.

Discussion

In summary, the results in Figure 1 show the arrangement of the themes and nodal points that construct the leadership discourse articulated by female leaders in the Swedish Police:

Theme	A transformational leadership style	A transactional approach	The experienced police leader	Support in order to be a good leader	Tokenism in a male-dominated organization
Nodal point 1	Communication	Making tough and uncomfortable decisions	Having long experience	Senior management	Adapting to the culture
2	Involvement and participation	Giving orders	Being a sworn police leader	Mentors and networks	Being treated differently
3	Creating and maintaining good relations		Being encouraged and recruited	Shared leadership	Working harder
4	Differences between women and men			Leadership training	

Figure 1: The leadership discourse.

As can be seen, the female police leaders in our study talked about leadership from a range of perspectives, similar to findings in other studies. The leadership discourse should be interpreted from a social constructionist point of view. With this in mind, the leadership discourse constructed is suggested to show that knowledge and attitudes to leadership are products of history, culture and social interactions, and that this in turn has an effect on social actions e.g. leadership practices. According to discourse theory, social and cultural constructions of relations between subjects and objects provide social agents with a variety of available subject positions.

It can, for example, be understood that the police culture traditionally demands a more transactional leadership style, and it can be seen that the female leaders in this study reproduced these ideas when talking about leadership in crisis situations. However, they also talked about having a more transformational leadership style in their everyday work as leader, which is in line with more modern thought about leadership and therefore says something about the ambiguity of the discourse. Recruiting more women to leadership positions can have positive effects, such as potentially increasing the number of female role models and also influencing tokenism. However, it cannot in itself change the existing organizational culture within the police, which is why a broader perspective needs to be taken. Tokenism is still an important concept, principally because it describes all individuals who find themselves in an under-represented, marginal subgroup within any organization (Kanter, 1977). With this in mind, further research within the police could focus on analyzing from an intersectional perspective how other minority groups - e.g. persons with different sexualities, ethnic minorities or even non-sworn employees - perceive their situation.

The advantage of investigations from an intersectional perspective is, according to Acker (2006) and Due Billing and Alvesson (2002), that the researcher can focus on more than one factor, such as gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality which are complex and contradictory factors that reinforce each other. This is based on the notion that gender in itself cannot be studied without considering the impact of other variables that affect one's sense of being, say, a woman. This is also why one starting point, which draws on Hesse-Biber and Yaiser's (2004) thoughts, has been to recognize that gender research has been criticized for failing to consider the variety of women's experiences or identities. The women leaders in this study might reflect a homogenous picture of what kind of women are actually recruited to leadership positions within the police. Even though it is interesting to study those who have become leaders "such an approach reveals little about the attitudes and experiences of the majority of officers who do not make it to the top" (Gaston & Alexander, 1997, p. 47). One point made here is to recognize the fact that there may be a certain kind of female officer (or non-sworn employee) who is recruited to take on a position of leadership. Encouragement and recruitment are shown, both in this study as well as in others (e.g. Archbold & Moses Schultz, 2008; Gaston & Alexander, 1997; Metcalf & Dick, 2002), to be an influential factor for women in their becoming leaders. It is therefore reasonable to ask which women are being encouraged and recruited within the Swedish Police.

By way of example, it has been discussed in many studies that women in the police tend to adopt stereotypical male behaviors in order to fit into their organization (Cedermark Hedberg, 1985; Dick & Cassell, 2004; Metcalf & Dick, 2002; Silvestri, 2003). Female leaders who are recruited to become leaders within the police might thus use for their frame of reference the person traditionally looked upon as a good leader as being someone with male leader characteristics. However, it can be interpreted in this study that the female leaders interviewed expressed their preference for a more transformational leadership style, which breaks with the tradition of authoritarian (male) police leaders. It is not implied here, however, that male leaders within the Swedish Police would adopt another leadership style essentially male by nature. This study proposes that gender stereotypes are often visible and highlighted in leadership discourses, and that these stereotypes can act as a restraint on both men and women and the way they (are supposed to) lead (Due Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Haake, 2009). Within the leadership discourse it is acknowledged that the female leaders do not have a specific strategy for pursuing a career. With the above reasoning in mind this can be understood as if the gender stereotypes within the police organization generally and within the leadership discourse specifically act, as restraint on what is acceptable for women to express in relation to career ambitions.

In taking into critical consideration the notion that there exists a feminine leadership style, it becomes questionable to suggest that the transformational leadership style is a feminine one. Doing so lays open the risk that such views then reinforce stereotypical ideas about women and men leading in opposite ways. Even if there are some differences of leadership style, there can be greater variation within the group of women as well as within the group of men. It is also noticeable that leadership style does not come about without the influence of the organizational context (Rohde, 2003).

Murphy and Drodge (2004) suggested that the transformational leadership style is dependent on the organization embracing collectivist goals and a strong group identity. Increasing the number of women in the police, and especially those in leadership positions, may have a positive effect on making them less visible and thus reducing instances of tokenism, but this cannot be looked upon as a single factor in transforming attitudes and behaviors within the organization.

Other researchers have noted the impact that followership has on the leadership process (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009; Rowe, 2006), something which is of interest for future research. If the Swedish Police wishes to develop its leadership, one challenge would be to understand the complex relationship between police leaders and police officers. Exploring the construction of follower identity, Collinson (2006) argues that followers are an integral part of the leadership process and that researchers must consider the complex ways in which leaders and followers interact with one another. Followership also has an impact on the employing of non-sworn leaders, and, as is suggested by Rowe (2006), if non-sworn leaders are supposed to gain legitimacy within the police force, the assumed benefits of employing non-sworn leaders must be clearly outlined among the subordinate officers. Connected to the notion of accepting non-sworn police leaders is the demand for police leaders to have had a long and clearly established sworn police career (see, for example, Silvestri, 2006), an obstacle which needs to be overcome.

Limitations of the Study

Having a social constructionist perspective on research means having the understanding that knowledge and perceptions of the reality are products of history and culture (Burr, 1995). Therefore, when reflecting on the limitations of this study, it is stressed that the leadership discourse must be put in a broader societal and organizational context as well as being seen as an interactive process between the interviewer and the interviewee. According to Dick and Cassell (2004), the research interview is conceptualized by the existing power relations between the researcher and the participant, meaning that what is said during the interview is a reflection of these complex power relations and one also affected by broader social and cultural beliefs about gender, leadership and policing. According to this line of reasoning, the researcher interprets what is said on the basis of prior knowledge, and can motivate the interviewee to express herself in a certain way or only to follow up answers perceived as being the most interesting. Another limitation is the small number of informants who participated in the study. With more informants, a richer and maybe somewhat different leadership discourse expressed by female police leaders might then be able to construct. Also, by including more leaders as well as co-workers in the study it might be possible to say something about the effectiveness of the leaders, which has not been the case with this study. However, in-depth interviews and discourse analysis of a small number of narratives can also give a rich and detailed insight in the discourse by analyzing the discussion of only a few women leader (Howarth, 2000; Kvale, 1996), and it is not suggested here that generalizations or transferability have been an aim of the authors.

Conclusions

This study contributes to the current field of gender, leadership and police research as seen from a Swedish perspective. At a time when the National Police Board (2008) are working on diversity and equality issues and when a gender perspective is supposedly running through the organization, the narratives of the female leaders interviewed add knowledge to this important work. Also, this study contributes to research in the area from a broader, international perspective, by offering a different perspective and methodology compared to most other studies on the gendered aspects of police leadership. In conclusion, we would argue that the challenge for the police organization goes beyond the question of recruiting more female leaders and creating women-friendly policies because organizational and societal culture plays a significant role in shaping leaders. It is important to keep in mind that, although the Swedish Police is struggling with implementing a gender perspective in the organization (The National Police Board, 2008), the police culture, which is shown to be based on male values and masculinity, may hinder the work to increase the number of women in the organization generally and that of women in leadership positions particularly. However, as stated by Van der Lippe, Graumans and Sevenhuijsen (2004), the Swedish Police is a model for the good work done on equality when compared to other countries, which is why more research on police leaders as well as co-workers could provide more knowledge in order to develop the organization, and to change the police culture by making it more inclusive of both women and other minority groups, in Sweden as well as in other countries.

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