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Constructing Yourself as a Female Manager

A qualitative analysis of how women construct their identities as managers

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Acknowledgements

The process of creating this study has been a transforming one, full of challenges and valuable insights. After ten weeks of hard work, we have now written a paper on a topic that we find both fascinating and thought-provoking. Throughout this process, we have dug deeper into understanding how female managers construct their identities, uncovering the subtle interplay between gender roles, identity, and managerial position.

Thank you so much to our supervisor, Anna Stevenson. Thank you for your intelligent feedback, interesting insights, and for inspiring us to keep evaluating and analyzing our findings in order to take our research to the next level.

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We hope you enjoy reading this and that you find the study as interesting as we do!

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Abstract

Titel: Constructing Yourself as a Female Manager: A qualitative analysis of how women construct their identities as Managers.

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Research Question: How do female managers construct their identities?

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to create a deeper understanding of how female managers construct their identities. Furthermore, we aim to examine the experiences of female managers from an individual perspective.

Methodology: To fulfill the purpose of the study and answer the research question, a qualitative research method was used together with an abductive approach and a discourse analysis. The empirical material consists of ten semi-structured interviews with female managers.

Theoretical perspectives: The theoretical background first presents literature regarding male and female management. Thereafter, research regarding identity construction where theories such as Role Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Role Congruity Theory are presented. Additionally, to understand how female managers can construct their identity, research regarding manager identity construction, female manager identity, and female manager identity construction is provided.

Empirical foundation: The empirical findings consist of ten female managers' experiences and thoughts. The analysis consists of the authors' interpretations of how the female managers construct their identities through the conducted interviews.

Conclusions: The interviewed women construct their identity by not conforming to the socially constructed role they could be placed in. Instead, they construct an identity with the group 'managers', neutralized from male and female, and do so by conforming to that role.

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1. Introduction

This study aims to create a deeper understanding of how female managers construct their identities. The following chapter provides information about identity construction and the complexity that may occur for female managers when constructing their identities. Thereafter, we present the problematization and how we aim to contribute to existing literature. Additionally, the purpose of the study and the research question are presented. The study uses a discourse analysis, meaning that the findings are based on how the women construct their identities in the interviews. Therefore, the study does not aim to provide a general view of how all women construct their identities.

1.1 Background

Identities are crucial because they suggest what we do, think, and feel (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). The term work identity refers to a person's work-based self-concept, which is made up of organizational, occupational, and other identities that shape the roles a person adopts, and the corresponding ways he or she behaves when performing his or her work (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). This means that people may construct specific identities that correspond to their work, and the position they occupy.

Research shows that people often re-construct their work identities after high-position role models similar to themselves in order to advance in their careers (Singh, Vinnicombe & James, 2006; Sealy & Singh, 2010). However, women may find it more challenging to construct their work identities, due to the lack of senior female representation at the highest levels of organizations (Singh, Vinnicombe & James, 2006; Sealy & Singh, 2010). When women, and others, do not see femininity represented in high leadership roles, the managerial role is reinforced as typically masculine (Singh, Vinnicombe & James, 2006). The attributes that are associated with the managerial role are frequently associated with being hard, competitive, and objective, traits often considered masculine (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014). Attributes such as empathy, sensitivity, or being emotional are traditionally associated with femininity and viewed as potentially lowering the competitiveness of the company (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014). According to Gromkowska-Melosik (2014), it is only possible

for individuals to succeed in their professional careers if they embrace traditionally masculine attributes. Female managers could thus be seen to be forced to choose between maintaining their typical feminine traits or adopting a more masculine persona to succeed professionally (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014). Women who are willing to compete with men could be seen to adopt a masculine identity and actively reject traditional feminine qualities which leads to them distancing themselves from other women (Gromkowski-Melosik, 2014). This tactic, on the other hand, may backfire when high-status women who adopt a masculine persona at work are criticized for not being womanly enough (Hopkins, 1996 cited in Haslam, Van Knippenberg, Platow & Ellemers, 2003). Another aspect that further argues for the complexity of female managers to construct their identities is that women may need to balance the relationship between the gender role and the managerial role. This is due to the perception that women are less effective leaders than men, as their leadership positions require them to play roles that do not align with societal expectations of their gender (Fernandez, Burnett & Gomez, 2019; Ritter & Yoder, 2004; Eagly & Karau, 2002). The construction of a female manager identity can thus be seen as problematic. Given the complexity, we believe that there is a need to investigate further how female managers construct their identities.

In our study, we investigate how female managers from the media industry construct their identities. The percentage of female CEOs increased from 15% to 28% in daily Swedish newspaper companies between the years 2012-2020 (Nordicom, 2022). During the same time frame, the proportion of female board members increased from 24% to 36% in the same sector (Nordicom, 2022). With the increased representation of women in higher positions in media, we chose to use the media industry as our medium for this study. We found it interesting to further understand how women in the media industry construct their identities due to the increased representation of women and the complexity of identity construction for female managers.

1.2 Problematization

Previous research investigates how identities can be constructed in the managerial role, for instance, leadership identity is proposed to be socially constructed by adopting leader and follower identities through social interaction (Derue & Ashford, 2010; Marchiondo, Myers & Kopelman, 2015). Additionally, a person's work identity, meaning the identity someone takes on

as their corporate persona, can be inspired by the social environment surrounding the role (Singh, Vinnicombe & James, 2006; Walsh & Gordon, 2008).

Studies exist regarding the construction of the female manager identity, but the research primarily focuses on its complexity and dilemma between the male and female identity (Singh, Vinnicombe & James, 2006; Sealy & Singh, 2010; Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014; Haslam et al, 2003). As the management job is extensively associated with male attributes, a struggle can be seen to exist for female managers as they need to balance being viewed as both skilled managers and feminine at the same time (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Eagly and Karau (2002) developed the role congruity theory which asserts that discrimination against female leaders may exist because the management role is associated with masculine characteristics and due to the discrepancy between the leader role and the gender role. Many women in higher corporate positions are confined to a more masculine identity and obtain attributes in order to reach their desired position at the highest levels of the organization (Schein, 1973 cited in Blom, 1998). Some women actively reject traditional female features in favor of male identity traits, devaluing femininity (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014). This leads the female manager to see herself as different from other women and instead identify in ways that correspond to the high-level position, which are typically associated with masculine characteristics, while still viewing other women in the organization through the lens of gender stereotypes (Ellmers, van den Heuvel, de Gilder, Mass, & Bonvini, 2001 cited in Haslam et al, 2003). Based on previous research, we found that the literature often focuses on the fact that female managers may face a struggle with constructing their identity due to its complexity and dilemma between the male and female identity, as well as women often needing to adopt a masculine identity at work in order to succeed professionally. We believe that it is crucial to further investigate *how* female managers can construct their identities. This information can be useful for both female managers and managers overall in order to have a more inclusive organization. Thus, with our study, we hope to contribute to the phenomenon of how female managers construct their identities.

1.3 Purpose, Scope, and Research Question

This study aims to create further understanding regarding how female managers construct their identities. The scope will be limited to women that have an association with being a manager in the Swedish media industry. We chose the media industry as our medium for the study due to its increased female representation, but the industry itself will not significantly impact the findings of our study. The focus of our study will be on the phenomenon of female manager identity construction. To fulfill the purpose the following research question has been formulated:

How do female managers construct their identities?

1.4 Disposition

The paper consists of the following chapters: introduction, theoretical background, method, empirical findings & analysis, discussion, and conclusion. An overview of the study's topic is given in the first chapter and the background and problematization aim to give the reader an overview of the study's purpose. Thereafter, the theoretical background presents previous studies and literature that aid the reader in understanding the subject of the study. Role theory, role congruity theory, and social identity theory are the main theories used in the discussion. The method and methodological choices for the study are described in the method chapter. This is a qualitative study based on ten women's interviews, and a discourse analysis is used to analyze how the women construct their identities by analyzing how they speak about and express themselves. The empirical findings are presented and discussed in the fourth chapter and divided into different themes, with various ways in which we perceive that the interviewed women are constructing their identities. *The themes are: Moving towards the ideal image of a manager, Distancing herself from male managers, Distancing herself from other women, Distancing herself from the female body, and Being an overachiever.* Every section of the analysis includes several quotes with interpretations of how the quotes can be perceived and understood. The analysis is followed by a discussion in which the empirical findings are discussed in connection to existing literature to demonstrate where our study can contribute. In the final chapter, a conclusion is presented that explains what the study led to, as well as suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Background

In the following chapter literature regarding male and female management is presented to introduce the social construction of the managerial role, and how roles can be associated with gender. We introduce our view of identity construction and present theories like role theory, social identity theory, and role congruity theory. Furthermore, previous studies of female identity construction are presented to understand existing literature, and further, where our research aims to contribute.

2.1 Male and Female Management

A leader and a manager can be regarded as two separate things, where one is appointed by their subordinates as the unofficial leader, and the other is appointed by an authority making them the official leader (Gradinarova, 2021). However, both leaders and managers can be viewed as a *leader* since they both obtain authority to influence followers or subordinates (Gradinarova, 2021). Jackson and Parry (2018) share a similar view and explain that a manager can also be considered a leader from a position-based perspective. For the purpose of our study, the two terms will not be separated as doing so is not beneficial for answering the study's research question. Hence, when the words *leader* or *manager* are mentioned it refers to a person in a high position within the organization with both power and ability to influence. To further grasp the purpose of our research, we believe it is important to understand that the managerial role can be associated with certain traits and stereotypical features. The stereotyping of the roles could have effects on how the people who take on a role perceive it.

Stead and Elliott (2009) explain that there is a historical tendency to divide leadership as female or masculine in literature. Alvesson and Billing (1997) advocate for the idea that various forms of education, industries, and work positions are gendered, meaning jobs can be perceived as feminine or masculine, and thus more fitting for a man or a woman. Research often shows that management can be seen as 'male-coded' and that certain traits could be viewed to be linked to the managerial role (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Blom, 1998; Eagly & Karau, 2002). The literature also suggests that masculinity is viewed as the norm within leadership and managerial

roles (Calas and Smircich, 1996; Lamsa and Sintonen, 2001; Stead & Elliott, 2009). Both Blom (1998) and Eagly and Karau (2002) build on the argument that masculinity could be viewed as equal with management by explaining that positions in an organization follow a gender role. The traits associated with masculinity are described as hard, impersonal, objective, aggressive, leadership-oriented, dominant, and ambitious (Hines, 1992; Grant, 1988; Willemsen, 2002). According to Sabharwal (2013), since men and masculine attributes are frequently connected with leadership, descriptions of excellent leaders frequently overlap with descriptions of male characteristics.

On the contrary, Stead and Elliott (2009) emphasize that women's leadership expertise often takes place outside the work and corporate world, meaning that the stereotypical traits fit in better elsewhere. Femininity is described as the opposite of masculinity, with descriptions such as "caring [...] and the prioritizing of feelings" (Hines, 1992, p.314). Further descriptions of feminine traits speak of nurturance, compassion, sensitivity, cooperativeness, affection, gentleness, empathy, interpersonal sensitivity, and interdependence (Grant, 1988; Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Hines (1992) reimagines femininity and masculinity as the Chinese symbol Yin and Yang, symbolizing opposite forces, further depicting the idea that the two are the opposites of each other. The research above indicates that socially constructed expectations of gender roles exist because these typical traits have been assigned by the surroundings. The social construction of gender means that the identification of that gender is learned through the environment and social cues (Winter, 2015). The past research helps us to fulfill the purpose of our study by creating an awareness of how management can be viewed as a man's job, which might affect the general view of women in management positions. The social construction of management being a job for a man generates a predicament for women who by some means still reach high positions (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Which can give room for the construction of an identity suited for the work position.

2.2 Identity Construction

The definition of identity could vary depending on its scientific context and individuals' view, but key characteristics of identity can be defined as "sameness and difference" (Coulmas, 2019, p.2). Charon (1992) explains that identities generally refer to who a person thinks they are and who the surroundings perceive them to be. Identities can be seen as important since they give a template for how to act, think and feel (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). A person's identity can also show what role the person corresponds to (Katz & Kahn, 1966). According to a social constructionist perspective on identity, identity can be constructed within one's image of oneself as derived through reflections on communicative exchanges between oneself and people from one's social context (Jackson & Hogg, 2010). Similarly, the social constructionist perspective describes that roles and identities are neither static nor fixed, but constantly changing and shifting (McConnel-Ginet, 2000 & Stubbe et al, 2000 cited in Olsson & Walker, 2004). In our study, we will examine identity as a socially constructed function and the following chapter will present different ways identity can be constructed in a social context by presenting relevant theories.

2.2.1 Role Theory

We will present role theory to help understand why the distinction between male and female management is important in this study. This theory helps us understand what a role is and the consequences that follow depending on the expectations connected to the role. Biddle (1979) defines a role as a person's behavioral characteristics in a context, hence the characteristics that are expected of that role. A role can have an impact on how a person views themselves and how they behave, but also how other people perceive them (Anglin, Kincaid, Short & Allen, 2022). Biddle (1979) explains the reasoning behind this is due to expectations that may exist to fulfill the socially constructed idea that comes with the role that an individual occupies.

The fundamental tenet of role theory is that people perform a variety of roles in daily life (Biddle, 1979). Role theories investigate how existing social roles influence an individual's behavior and offer insights into how others interpret that behavior in the context of those roles (Anglin et al, 2022). An individual can have more than one role, and when an individual has several roles where the expectations on the person's behaviors are inconsistent with each other, a

role conflict can occur (Biddle, 1979; Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017 cited in Anglin et al, 2022). A common role conflict that may arise is when the expectations between work and personal expectations differ (Anglin et al, 2022).

Biddle (1979) further claims that a role can be considered an identity, as a role might exist with a set of expectations or a set of behavioral characteristics. He explains that when you know a person's identity and the situation they are in, you can then assume that the person is somewhat alike in the behaviors they display, thus the behaviors they show are more or less predictable. Anglin et al. (2022) share a similar view and explain that an individual's behavior can be understood and anticipated if one is aware of the role they occupy as well as the associated behavioral expectations. Therefore, we believe it is essential to understand what a role entails and understand the expectations that might follow with a role since the role can have effects on a person's identity.

2.2.2 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a theory that tries to explain intergroup conflicts as a result of group-based self-definitions (Islam, 2014). SIT is explained by individuals' definition of themselves by taking social groups and identification work into consideration to protect and support self-identity (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Haslam et al. (2003) define SIT as the extent to which an individual's identification with a group reflects how he or she perceives themselves in terms of a group membership. According to the authors, identification blurs the distinction between the self and the group, making the group a part of the self (Smith & Henry, 1996 cited in Haslam et al, 2003). Thus, the more one identifies as a member of a group, the more likely one is to act in accordance with the group's social identity and preconceptions, as well as adopt the group norms and attitudes (Haslam et al, 2003).

Tajfel and Turner (1979) explain that group identities are based on groups that people form, which in turn are based on certain categories, such as being part of an 'in-group' versus an 'out-group'. 'In-group' is a group a person identifies with or sees themselves to belong to, meanwhile an 'out group' is a group where a person feels they do not belong to and view as something different from themselves (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Therefore, people tend to have an increasingly positive view of their own group compared to the other group (Tajfel & Turner,

1979). In line with this, Haslam et al. (2003) suggest that people, specifically at work, feel more comfortable expressing their behavioral preferences, which highlights the impact group dynamics have on individual behavior. Expanding on this, Haslam et. al (2003) elaborate on two factors that can influence behavior within a group: individual group identification and social acceptability. When individuals strongly identify with a group, they tend to be more likely to adopt the behavioral norms that are associated with the group, meanwhile, social acceptability entails what a person believes is socially acceptable (Haslam et al, 2003).

That individuals strongly identify with a group is related to the idea presented by Hogg, Terry, and White (1995, cited in Raskovic & Takacs-Haynes, 2020), who say that SIT operates by categorizing people into groups, which helps to break down barriers between various groups. Hogg, Terry, and White (1995 cited in Raskovic & Takacs-Haynes, 2020) further explain that the theory involves boosting a person's self-esteem by having a positive view of oneself through stereotypes and norms that are associated with the group the person belongs to, in comparison to the people outside the group. Walsh and Gordon (2008) present social identities in a similar way, saying that social identities represent one's sense of belonging to, and distinction from, one's group and culture. This way of creating an identity by comparing oneself to others could be seen as a continuous self-defining process (Charon, 1992 & Wharton, 1992 cited in Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Furthermore, Haslam et al. (2003) state that individual group members can overcome identity threats, which occur when one does not feel that their own identity aligns with the group identity, by separating themselves from the group in question and subsequently transfer into another group. As previously mentioned, social identity theory explains that individuals create their self-identity based on their membership in social groups. We will therefore use social identity theory as a theoretical framework to understand the social processes and group dynamics that may affect how female managers construct their identities.

2.2.3 Role Congruity Theory

Role congruity theory provides a perspective on the relationship between gender roles and managerial roles and is useful for our study due to the complex relationship between the two. Eagly and Karau (2002) explain that the theory asserts that discrimination against female leaders may exist because the management role is associated with masculine characteristics. Thus,

discrimination occurs due to the discrepancy between the leader role and the gender role (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Fernandez, Burnett, and Gomez (2019) further explain that according to the role congruity theory, the discrepancy between roles leads to a perception that women are less effective leaders than men, as their leadership positions require them to play roles that do not align with societal expectations on their gender. According to gender role norms, women should be more nurturing, considerate, and warm (Eagly, Wood & Diekmann, 2000 quoted in Karelaia & Guillén, 2014). Meanwhile, men are expected to display agentic traits, such as independence and self-assertion, which could be viewed to legitimize their role as leaders (Fernandez, Burnett & Gomez, 2019). Ritter and Yoder (2004) provide additional insights on gender roles, stating that gender roles include expectations on what is considered desirable for each gender, both in terms of ideal standards and actual behaviors associated with each gender. Ritter and Yoder (2004) further explain that role congruity theory predicts that women may be less likely to become leaders compared to men due to gender-biased perceptions about leadership. Additionally, Fernandez, Burnett, and Gomez (2019) explain that gender-biased perceptions can lead to female managers struggling with which role they should prioritize in their work. Eagly and Karau (2002) also highlight that people tend to view women negatively when they exercise leadership because they act in a non-stereotypical manner.

The traits and behaviors that are commonly expected from women and leaders diverge greatly (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014). Therefore, the reasoning above is important to highlight in our study as it can be viewed that women need to balance the complexity of the relationship between the gender role and the managerial role. Additionally, their unfavorable position can be viewed to have effects on how they construct their identities as managers. Another aspect Eagly and Karau (2002) highlight is that the perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership role can be seen to increase, particularly the higher people climb within the organization. In summary, role congruity theory is based on the belief that biological differences and environmental factors underpin gender roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Therefore, we will use role congruity theory in order to understand how women in their gender roles, and managerial positions, construct their own identities.

2.3 Manager Identity Construction

An individual's work identity refers to a work-based self-concept, constituted of a combination of organizational, occupational, and other identities that shape the roles a person adopts, and the corresponding ways he or she behaves when performing his or her work (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Individual work identity is only one aspect of an individual's many personal identities, yet a central one when performing a job (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). There are several ideas on how identities may be constructed in managerial positions. Derue and Ashford's (2010) leadership identity construction theory proposes that people actively co-create their leader and follower identities through social interaction. This involves adopting mutual roles and receiving collective endorsement within a corporate setting which results in individuals internalizing their identity as a leader or a follower, and these identities are recognized and acknowledged in relation to others (Derue & Ashford, 2010). Similarly, Marchiondo, Myers, and Kopelman (2015) have empirically tested Derue and Ashford's (2010) leadership identity construction theory, emphasizing that leadership is a negotiated process and that leadership can be understood as a positive identity that is socially constructed. Individuals can claim a leader identity through their words or actions and these claims are either supported by others, who grant them the identity as a leader, or countered by others who claim the leadership identity for themselves (Marchiondo, Myers & Kopelman, 2015). Alvesson and Billing (1997) further highlight how leadership, as with all social phenomena, is constructed culturally and through discourse. Understanding that managers can create their work identity through collective endorsement and social acceptance is crucial for the study's purpose as it may lay a foundation for how female managers construct their identities.

2.4 Female Manager Identity

According to Afshar (2012), women are often described and associated in the literature with identities developed for them by others, which has led women to combine their traditional domestic duties with more modern income-generating and political activities. The fluidity of women's identities allows them to overcome rigid classifications and connect public and moral obligations, even when these two identities conflict with each other (Afshar, 2012). The fluidity of female identity becomes relevant to our study as it explains the challenge of aligning with different roles that they are expected to have.

Singh, Vinnicombe, and James (2006) explain that people seek role models with comparable backgrounds to themselves in order to advance in their professional careers, which is challenging for women due to the lack of female role models at the highest levels of organizations. Similarly, Sealy and Singh (2010) claim that one of the current career barriers for women to reach the highest positions is the lack of female role models in senior positions in organizations. Thus, women do not see themselves represented in leadership, nor do others, which can be considered as reinforcing the leadership role as masculine (Singh, Vinnicombe & James, 2006). According to Gromkowska-Melosik (2014), female managers, therefore, choose between maintaining their traditional feminine identity or adopting a more masculine identity in order to succeed professionally. A woman aspiring to achieve professional success, especially in positions of power and decision-making, finds herself in a trap (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014). If she displays traditional feminine characteristics, she risks being challenged by male subordinates or competitors (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014). On the other hand, if she assumes stereotypical masculine traits, she may be accused of “losing her femininity” (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014, p.28). On the same note, Haslam et al. (2003) explain the complexity of female manager identities as they may conform to organizational norms and display masculine behavior to avoid performance expectations as females. However, this strategy may backfire if high-status women who adapt to masculine roles, such as managerial roles, are criticized for not being womanly enough (Hopkins, 1996 cited in Haslam et al, 2003).

Alvesson and Billing (1997) also highlight the struggle for women with finding a balance between being viewed as skilled managers and also being viewed as feminine enough to avoid violating gender expectations. Moreover, women who adopt a more masculine way of being can be penalized for betraying the gender expectations that are placed on them (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). By conforming to male traits, women can become successful managers but then be judged unfeminine, however, if they are more feminine in their management role, they will most likely be labeled as an ineffective manager or a good female manager. (Evettes, 1997 quoted in Kyriakidou, 2011). Hence, by being the feminine version of oneself you are either insufficient or a good female manager, but not just a good manager.

It is evident that the female manager identity is multifaceted, and previous research focuses on clarifying its challenges and complexity. However, there is surprisingly little research available on how female managers perceive themselves and how they experience their leadership roles (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014). We mean that previous research only partially answers the question with whom the female managers identify themselves, and rather focuses on the dominance of male attributes in management. We argue that the literature on how female managers construct *their* identity can be further developed, and our study thus aims to contribute to the phenomenon of female manager identity construction.

2.4.1 Female Manager Identity Construction

Some women are willing to compete with men by adopting a male logic and masculine identity. To safeguard their chances of professional success, they eliminate traditional feminine characteristics and willingly assume a masculine corporate persona (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014). These women shorten their hair, avoid blonde hair color and skirts, and wear suits (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014). Women at the managerial level tend to perceive themselves as different from so-called ‘ordinary’ female workers because they have accepted a more masculine persona (Haslam et al, 2003). Instead, they see themselves and act in ways that are consistent with their high-status employment role, usually dominant, ambitious, and competitive, but continue referring to other women in gender stereotypical terms (Ellmers, van den Heuvel, de Gilder, Mass, & Bonvini, 2001 cited in Haslam et al, 2003).

Karelaia and Guillén (2014) found that a positive social identity might help to reduce the tension between women’s gender and leadership identities. The author’s definition of positive social identity implies that a woman’s gender leader identity will be more positive if the social category of women as leaders are viewed more favorably. By having a positive social identity, self-worth can be maintained and women can cope with identity-threatening situations (Hogg et al, 2004 cited in Karelaia & Guillénl, 2014). Furthermore, according to Olsson and Walker (2004), a woman’s identity in the corporate culture can be constructed by identifying with the traits needed for a leadership position and denying their gender in order to succeed in their career. Their study revealed that women engage in processes similar to men, involving, affirming, and celebrating female differences.

2.5 Summary and Lack in Existing Literature

In our theoretical background, we present literature and studies that are important for understanding how female managers construct their identities. This includes research that investigates that managerial roles often are associated with being a man's job (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Blom, 1998; Eagly & Karau, 2002), and that masculinity could be viewed as the norm within leadership and managerial roles (Calas & Smircich, 1996; Lamsa & Sintonen, 2001 cited in Stead & Elliott, 2009). This literature serves as a foundation for theories that are applied later in this study, such as role theory, social identity theory, and role congruity theory.

Many studies provide insights into how an identity as a manager can be constructed, both through an individual's work identity (Walsh & Gordon, 2008) and through leadership identity (Derue & Ashford, 2010; Marchiondo, Myers & Kopelman, 2015). Olsson and Walker (2004) suggest that a woman's identity in the corporate culture can be constructed by her identifying with the traits needed for a leadership position, and denying her gender in order to succeed in her career. Moreover, numerous studies emphasize the notion that women often need to adopt a masculine identity at work if they want to succeed professionally, and sometimes even eliminate their female characteristics (Afshar, 2012; Haslam et al, 2003; Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014). Hogg et al. (2004 cited in Kareal & Guillén, 2014) propose that a positive social identity can help to reduce female leaders' identity conflict as self-worth can be maintained and women can cope with identity-threatening situations (Hogg et al, 2004 cited in Karelaia & Guillénl, 2014). While the literature offers some explanations on how female managers construct their identities, we believe that the phenomenon is not investigated enough. We believe that further research is needed to more extensively cover female managers who do not conform to either the stereotypical male attributes of a manager or the stereotypical female norm, but struggle to construct their work identity. Increased knowledge of female manager identity construction contributes to a more conscious and understanding work environment and culture. We believe that this further contributes to a more welcoming organizational development for women striving to reach higher positions within their organizations, which we believe is an increasingly relevant topic in today's society.

3. Method

This study uses a qualitative research strategy where interviews have been conducted with female managers as the study object. This chapter outlines the study's methodology, methodological decisions taken, and the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen methods based on the study's purpose. Finally, the chapter presents an evaluation of the effects these choices have had on the quality of our study.

3.1 Qualitative Research Strategy

This study aims to investigate how female managers construct their identities. We will do this by investigating the identity construction that occurs through the conducted interviews, in other words, how the women speak and express themselves in the context of their role. We will therefore not comment on cause and effect that might have affected the women's identities previous to the interviews unless the women speak about it themselves. In qualitative research, the focus lies on understanding how the social world is described and constructed, rather than explained by numbers and quantification (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The authors further explain that a qualitative research strategy is about interpreting the material. We have therefore chosen this approach to address the research question in order to learn more about how the women construct their identities in the interviews. The approach enabled us to develop a deeper comprehension of our research question by focusing on how the women express their experiences and thoughts through their use of language and how they speak.

The study covers our specific sample selection, and cannot be applied to all female managers outside our selection. We interpret the interview talk as subjective experiences and do not interpret what the women say as facts, instead, we are focusing on how the way they express themselves can be understood as how they construct their identities. Therefore, we present our socially constructed interpretations of the interviewees' individual interpretations of their social environment (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

3.2 Discourse Analysis

We have chosen discourse analysis as the analytical method. According to Svensson (2019), the word discourse can be explained as a discussion, speech, or conversation that describes how to talk about a certain phenomenon. Furthermore, the author explains that discourse analysis is both a theory about the language's function and a method to investigate the language itself. Svensson (2019) explains that discourse analysis is especially useful if you are interested in the language's meaning for how people can view themselves. As we wanted to understand how the women construct their identities in the interviews, discourse analysis was a suitable method since we could analyze their expressions and ways of describing themselves as who they are as managers. Therefore, we have not considered words from a grammatical perspective in the analysis, but instead the meaning of the words and sentences as symbols of how the women describe and talk about themselves. According to Boréus (2015), a discourse analysis could further be used if one wants access to things that might be unsaid, taken for granted, or implied. Discourse analysis was suitable for our study as it enabled us to understand more in-depth how the women construct their identities.

3.3 Abductive Approach

The foundation for an abductive approach is a problem or surprise uncovered in the empirical material that must be explained. (Bryman & Bell, 2017). In our study, one surprise was how the women described themselves compared to others, both women and men. Bryman and Bell (2017) further explain that with an abductive approach, you often revisit and switch between theory and the empirical data. When we started our work, we discovered that there was limited information about female leaders in industries that could be viewed as having increased female representation and that the literature often focused on female managers adopting male characteristics. This motivated us to investigate how female managers felt about gender equality in the media industry since statistics showed progress in female representation. While investigating this, we found another dimension in the empirical material, where the female managers gave many explanations that could be seen as ways how they construct their identities which led us to investigate theories regarding identity construction.

Bryman and Bell (2017) explain that an abductive approach can be used to draw logical conclusions and develop theories about reality. We wanted to understand the interviewed women's explanations and experiences more in-depth. Therefore, we tried to draw conclusions from the empirical material by applying theories such as role theory, role congruity theory, and social identity theories. Furthermore, an abductive theory was useful as it allowed the interviewee's responses to influence the study's focus (Bryman & Bell, 2017). As described in the paragraph above, we changed the direction of the study based on the empirical data and saw that these findings could be useful as a contribution to existing literature. To summarize, the abductive approach enabled us to redirect our theoretical gaze and gain new knowledge and understanding when examining our empirical data.

3.4 Empirical Collection

3.4.1 Selection

Our research has taken a new direction as we now concentrate on the phenomenon of how female managers construct their identities. However, when we originally started our research, we felt it would be interesting to look into an industry where women's presence had increased and wanted to focus on how women experienced gender equality. One industry that came up during our discussions was the media industry, as we knew the representation of women had increased and we also had connections to people within the industry. Thereafter, we formulated our first research question and purpose, which focused on how female managers experienced gender equality within the media industry and examined the effects gender equality had on the managers.

A criteria-driven selection was made in order to answer the research question and purpose of the study. A criteria-driven selection means that the chosen individuals for the study fulfill one or several criteria (Bryman & Bell, 2017). We selected 11 female managers and took four factors into account: they had to be women, managers in higher positions, managers in roles that are often held by men such as CEO or CTO, and managers with extensive managerial experience. These criteria were crucial because we wanted to get the women's perspectives on gender equality, especially from women in high positions as these positions are generally harder to

reach. When we say extensive managerial experience, we are referring to women that had been in the industry or held their position for several years, as their industry-specific knowledge could impact their answers. We ended up removing one interviewee from our selection because her interview primarily focused on the media industry and its gender development, which was relevant to our initial research question, but not the question we ended up with. Since we shifted our focus to studying how female managers construct their identities, we decided to exclude this interviewee as her responses were not about her identity construction as a manager.

Furthermore, each respondent was contacted via email and given information about the study and the topics that would be covered during the interview. They were given the following topics to reflect on before the interview: gender equality in the media industry, the development of the industry, and the numbers regarding gender division within the industry. We had access to the interviewees through our own network, thus the choice might be considered a convenience choice (Bryman & Bell, 2017). However, the personal links made it simpler for us to access the women, which could be an advantage for the study, seen from the study's purpose and research question as well as the limited time frame. Moreover, the size of the selection could be viewed as a limitation but could also be motivated by the given time frame for the study (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

3.4.2 Description of the Study Object

The study objects are women that have been or are active within the media industry and in prominent roles. In our study, we focus more on how female managers construct their identities. This means that the media industry is not in focus and instead used as a medium due to its increased representation of female managers, which is relevant for our study as we investigate how female managers construct their identities.

Below follows a summary of the people that participated in this study, as well as more information regarding the interview time and pages of transcription. It further states whether the women currently hold a position or if they used to be a manager since some of the interviewed women proceeded to other roles, such as board members.

Name (alias)	Current/held position	Interview time	Pages of transcripts
Manager A	CTO	45 minutes	7 pages
Manager B	Editor in Chief	45 minutes	6 pages
Manager C	CEO	50 minutes	11 pages
Manager D	CFO	40 minutes	8 pages
Manager E	Previous Editor in Chief	50 minutes	8 pages
Manager F	CEO	45 minutes	8 pages
Manager G	Program Director	45 minutes	8 pages
Manager H	Previous CEO	50 minutes	8 pages
Manager J	Program Director	55 minutes	7 pages
Manager I	President	50 minutes	7 pages

Table 1: Summary of interviewees

3.4.3 Interview Process

The empirical material was collected through qualitative interviews with ten women. Since we sought to understand how the women construct their identities in the interviews and wanted to search for a deeper understanding of the answers, interviews were selected as our method for data collection (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The interviews were conducted in Swedish and then translated into English. We decided to translate the interviews because we wanted a wider audience to be able to have access to our study as the study can be relevant for both Swedish and international audiences. Also, the English language is used to a greater extent than Swedish in the corporate and scientific world, meaning that our findings will be easier to understand for non-Swedish future researchers. We are aware that a translation could affect the meaning of what

is said, but we are comfortable with our translation as we carefully compared the translated quotes with the original ones, ensuring rightful translation was achieved.

Before the first interview, we performed a pilot interview with a woman that had previously been a manager in the media industry. The pilot interview was conducted in order to test the interview guide and allow potential improvements to the questions (Bryman & Bell, 2017). After the pilot interview, the interview questions were altered to create a guide that was applied to the subsequent interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that they were built around several themes that guided the interview's course while still allowing the interviewees freedom to formulate their answers in their own way (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Additionally, the approach allowed spontaneity from the interviewee which resulted in unexpected discoveries regarding how they construct their identities, giving us rich material (Bryman & Bell, 2017). After the initial five interviews, two additional questions were added to further clarify two already existing questions. This was done because we often had to ask follow-up questions on two specific questions in order to clarify the meaning of these.

All interviews were held digitally due to the women being located in different cities and countries, and we wanted these specific women as a part of our study as they fulfilled our criteria. Two interviews were conducted using only audio through Zoom due to technical difficulties that did not allow video. The rest of the interviews were conducted using a microphone and a video camera through Zoom, Teams, or Google Meet. Every interview was recorded with the interviewee's consent and then transcribed, which raises the study's quality as it enables a thorough analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2017). In almost every interview, all of us were present as we wanted everyone to take part in the empirical findings, but also because we may interpret some answers differently. Bryman and Bell (2017) argue that having everyone present could be an advantage since we were then allowed to take on different roles when we interviewed. Each group member was in charge of a particular section of the interview, such as asking questions or recording, which was then rotated between the interviews. The other team members were then able to actively listen to the responses and ask pertinent follow-up questions. Moreover, the interviewed women were given the assurance of anonymity to enable them to

respond honestly and openly and therefore they are referred to as Manager and a following letter, such as Manager A, B, C, etc.

3.5 Analysis Process

Rennstam and Wästerfors (2011) describe that there are three fundamental approaches that can be utilized to assess empirical data and produce a social sciences analysis. By following these steps, we obtained the best outcome for our study without sacrificing the quality, depth, or richness of the empirical data when we created the analysis (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2011). Furthermore, these steps gave us a good overview of our empirical data and a clear structure that helped us to identify several themes. We have overall spent a great amount of time getting to know the material, reading through it, reviewing it, and discussing it between us. This has been a time-consuming but necessary process in order to present the material in the best possible way.

3.5.1 Sorting

According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2011), sorting the empirical material will avoid chaos as a study often involves plenty of material, and this step can be viewed as crucial to create a good foundation for the analysis. After conducting and transcribing each interview, we began sorting our empirical material. Each transcript was printed, and each interview question with the following answer was cut out. The questions and answers were then divided into one pile for each question. As we chose semi-structured interviews, we had a number of general questions regarding several themes but adapted the in-depth questions accordingly. The answers to these questions were categorized into various themes we noticed in the answers, such as *women versus men, challenges regarding gender equality, the most important factors in the change towards a more gender-equal industry, adaptation as a woman, and so-called 'woman traps'*. Moreover, we went through the piles by discussing, and through that process, we identified additional themes, such as *characteristics specific for a woman, women more suitable for the media industry, consequences of too many women in the industry, the managerial role as not designed for women and quotas for women.*

During the whole sorting process, we simultaneously wrote down our interpretations both as a group and individually as our interpretations sometimes differed. We tried to ask ourselves when sorting the quotes what they could be interpreted as to find the best interpretations and read between the lines. We continued sorting the material after the initial sorting by creating new themes within the pre-existing theme or question. This made it easier for us to notice similarities in the answers which could be seen as an advantage before reducing the material. Furthermore, we focused on the interviewee's words and the patterns we saw in the answers as we wanted to use a discourse analysis (Svensson, 2019; Boréus, 2015). Moreover, during the whole sorting process, we made sure to follow Rennstam and Wästerfors' (2011) recommendation to come close to the empirical data by reading the material several times and really searching for the meaning and reading between the lines. We did this with a great amount of respect to be as transparent as possible and assure good quality in the analysis.

3.5.2 Reduction

After sorting, we began the second step in the process by reducing our material. In the previous step, several interesting categories were found in both the initial and the subsequent sorting. Due to the size of this study, we had to reduce the number of themes since we could not delve deeper into each one individually and had to make sure that the purpose of the study was fulfilled and the research question answered (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2011). The reduction of the material took place over numerous steps, but the overall picture of the material persisted throughout. We reduced the material by seeing which themes could be seen as the most interesting and where we had several quotes from different women to increase the credibility of the theme. We then used our first research question, which focused on how gender-equal female managers felt the media industry was, in order to identify overarching themes that might serve as an answer to our research question. The quotes and themes from the previous phase were divided into the new themes, *improvement of gender equality in the media industry*, *male dominance at the highest positions*, *adapting to the management role and constructing an identity*, *being a manager and a mother*, and *distancing herself from other women* and *distancing herself from the female body*. After discussing each quote, we decided to highlight the quotes in green or yellow according to how well they fit the broader themes. Green quotes were relevant, yellow quotes were somewhat relevant, and quotes without color were no longer relevant to our chosen themes. We then went

through the quotes that did not receive a color and decided if they could be removed or not. The omitted quotes were transferred to another document so we could save them in case we decided to use some of them in a later stage of the study.

The new themes were still quite broad and we had plenty of quotes. Therefore, we focused on how to make the material as relevant as possible and discussed what we thought were the most interesting themes. We had discussions with our supervisor and our classmates regarding this and discussed what could be viewed as the most interesting findings. The discussions resulted in a new research question that focused on how the female managers constructed their identities in the interviews. This meant that we moved away from the gender equality question and focused on a phenomenon instead. When we had the new research question, we went back to our themes and empirical material and reviewed both with a new perspective. Thereafter, we reduced the material to the final themes and used them as subheadings, *moving towards the ideal image of a manager, distancing herself from male managers, distancing herself from other women, distancing herself from the female body, and being an overachiever*. These subheadings could be viewed as answers to our research question and are in line with the purpose of this study, as we aim to create further understanding regarding how female managers construct their identities.

The reduction of material solved the representational difficulty, which is described as a way to handle that not everything from the interviews could be reproduced in the study (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2011). We handled the representational issue by emphasizing the parts that exemplify the material and therefore identified and reproduced the material in a fair way that created a good representation.

3.5.3 Argumentation

According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2011), the third step in the analysis process is argumentation, and it is essential to argue for the empirical findings. The authority issue, or ‘auktoritetsproblemet’ in Swedish, can be resolved by defending the empirical findings, which emphasizes the significance of being heard among other studies and formulating an interdependent contribution (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2011). The authors further elaborate that a

study should also be compared to other studies and the empirical findings can be used in dialogue with other studies in order to explain where the study aims to contribute.

We presented arguments for the potential value of our study and the applicability of our data. We aimed to answer the study's research question throughout the analysis, and we used the empirical data as a framework to build our reasoning around the answer. On the other hand, according to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2011), theorizing is a process that begins even before categories are created. In our study, we created an empirical foundation by first sorting and then condensing the gathered data and carefully selected quotes that could be used to describe how the interviewees construct their identities. As we characterized the empirical work with the help of theory, we were able to develop categories and subcategories that can be considered part of our theorizing (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2011). We used the chosen information to respond to our research question and thereby contributed to the overall understanding of our subject. The argumentation's goal has been to convince the reader of the empirical findings, as well as to build and contribute to various ways female managers construct their identities.

3.6 Quality Assessment

To demonstrate the trustworthiness of our study, we have made a quality assessment. Lincoln and Guba (1985 cited in Bryman & Bell, 2017) argue for the necessity of evaluating the quality of a qualitative study with alternative concepts to reliability and validity that are commonly used in quantitative research. These criteria assume that there is an absolute truth about social reality, and that research can find this picture of social reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Bryman & Bell, 2017). It is hard to find an absolute picture of the social reality as we have a qualitative study where we do not interpret what the study objects say as facts, instead by using discourse analysis, the emphasis is placed on how their words and way of expressing themselves can be interpreted or perceived. Therefore, we will use the following criteria regarding trustworthiness as it is a criteria for how good qualitative research is (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Bryman & Bell, 2017). We will address four criteria regarding trustworthiness more in-depth: credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Bryman & Bell, 2017).

3.6.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the study's findings are believable and trustworthy to others, including participants of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2017). We believe we have built credibility because the outcome was generated with the purpose of providing a transparent depiction of the empirical facts while not disregarding crucial factors. Furthermore, we are aware of the risk of bias in an interview-based qualitative study (Bryman & Bell, 2017). We thoroughly examined and addressed any expectations, assumptions, or ideas that might have affected our study before conducting the interviews, such as any preconceived notions about how gender expectations may affect women and how female managers construct their identities. To remain objective about each interviewee's experiences and thoughts and avoid steering them in a certain direction, we also utilized open-ended questions and asked identical questions to all of them. Additionally, we made sure to carefully evaluate each step of the research process to increase the study's credibility. This included properly selecting the study object, conducting the transcription, and clearly describing how we conducted the analysis.

3.6.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to whether a result can be applied in a context other than the one under consideration (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The purpose of our research is not to present an objective description, instead, we present our socially constructed interpretations of the interviewees' individual interpretations of their social environment (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Our starting point has been that there exist several social realities that continuously interpret and reproduce by social actors. This implies that transferability may be a question of how the reader understands the study. By conducting in-depth interviews, gathering empirical data, carefully interpreting the social phenomena that have emerged, and describing the social phenomenon, the study attempted to establish transferability.

3.6.3 Dependability

The concept of dependability means that the researchers should adopt an auditing approach to ensure that a complete and accessible account of all phases of the research process is created (Bryman & Bell, 2017). To ensure this, classmates have acted as reviewers through peer reviews and seminars in order to ensure the quality of the procedures of the research and the extent to

which the theoretical conclusions are justified. On these occasions, our classmates had access to information on all the steps and stages we had been through, which may be considered as improving their base of knowledge for reviewing and evaluating our work. We are aware that our classmates' time has been limited as they are writing their own thesis and that this could be seen as a weakness. However, our study has been examined by our supervisor on several occasions, which would lead to our study having to some degree fulfilled the criteria of dependability.

3.6.4 Confirmability

Being able to confirm implies that the researcher, aware that total neutrality is unachievable in social research, attempts to verify that they operated in good faith (Bryman & Bell, 2017). In other words, it should be evident that the researchers have not intentionally allowed their personal values or theoretical orientation to influence the performance of conclusions from the study. We have done this through all of the above quality assessments such as being reviewed by two other essay groups through seminars and peer reviews. Furthermore, we have before supervision been examined by our supervisor and overall transparency in reporting and acknowledging any potential biases that might influence the study's conclusions.

4. Empirical Findings & Analysis

The following chapter showcases our empirical data which serves to support our findings and build the arguments for our study. The empirical data will be used to explain how the interviewed women construct their identities, and we are examining the construction of identity that occurs in the interview dialogue, thus only looking at what happens within our interviews. This chapter consists of five sections that could be viewed as ways the interviewed women construct their identities: Moving toward the ideal image of a manager, Distancing herself from male managers, Distancing herself from other women, Distancing herself from the female body, and Being an overachiever.

4.1 Moving Towards the Ideal Image of a Manager

In the interviews, a recurring theme that could be identified was how the women created an ‘ideal’ image of a manager that was based on their previous male leaders and the socially constructed view of what a manager should be. We view that this image of a so-called ‘ideal’ manager, and traits they appreciated in other managers, was found to inspire how the women construct their own identity.

“I had a certain image of how a manager should be, and at Company X where I worked, I had a manager who was incredible, wonderful, expansive, entrepreneurial and a very dominant person.” (Manager H).

In this quote, Manager H describes her former male manager with a range of positive adjectives. She describes the male manager as “incredible”, “wonderful”, and “expansive” which indicates that this is a manager she likes and values. Manager H continues by describing the manager as “a very dominant person”, after specifically indicating that she had a certain image of how a manager should be. Thus, we view that she thinks a manager should be a dominant person because her “incredible” manager was just that. According to the literature, a dominant attribute is usually associated with the male identity, and we interpret that Manager H sees this attribute as favorable for the managerial role. As she is a manager herself, we perceive that she has most likely adopted the attributes she finds favorable for the position while constructing her own

identity as a manager. With this, together with the fact that she chose to tell us about this manager, she constructs an identity similar to the one she is describing to us. Manager H continues to highlight how managers often are connected to masculine attributes and refer to a previous manager as a father figure.

“He really was the ‘boss boss’, but also good, he was like a big dad.” (Manager H)

The quote from Manager H describes the same male manager that she previously found to be incredible. We view her idea of a good manager as one that also inhabits father-like attributes. By saying that her boss was good and also a “*big dad*”, we view that she links the attributes with each other, meaning a person that is a father figure is also a good boss. We view the connected use of father and a good manager, “*boss boss*”, “*big dad*”, which could be seen to influence the way she views a good manager. Hence, by specifically saying that a “*father-like*” manager is good instead of for example using the word “parent”, we interpret that she appreciates a manager with father-like attributes since she associates a father with something positive. We, therefore, interpret that by indicating her idea of the ‘ideal’ manager being someone who is like a father, her self-perception as a female manager is affected by implicating that this image influenced her. Furthermore, Managers B and C express toughness, which we view as a male attribute.

“I have a toughness somewhere inside me that I use [...] which can be associated with the stereotype of a male boss”. (Manager B)

“I was probably much tougher than most men, at least more so in that I said what I thought.”
(Manager C)

Manager B views herself as a tough person which is a trait she utilizes in her role. She explains that this attribute could be associated with a stereotypical male manager, which suggests that there is a common perception of male managers being tough and an attribute Manager B saw as favorable for herself. By indicating that she uses her toughness, “*that I use*”, together with acknowledging the fact that toughness can be seen as a trait for male managers, she admits to actively inspiring her own managerial style after stereotypical male attributes and therefore

moves towards the male identity as a manager. Manager C also speaks about toughness and we interpret that as her agreeing with the stereotype that men are supposed to be tough, “*tougher than most men*”. By describing herself as tougher than most men, we perceive that she views other men as tough. She is super tough, just like the men, which can be viewed as a way of keeping up with the men. Manager C recognizes that her own toughness aligns itself with this male stereotype, and by doing so she constructs a persona through her quote that is closer to what stereotypically a man would inhabit. Manager B further confirms our interpretations by saying that “*you have to become tougher*” which we view as a desire to be accepted into the group of people who identify as managers, hence why she stresses that you have to become tougher to be a manager. As previously said, toughness is often associated with masculinity in literature, hence why we interpret this quote as a movement towards the ‘ideal’ manager which in turn is often considered to be masculine. We recognize a similar toughness in Manager F.

“I am not as affected by what other people think, there are many out there who want to tell me how I should do my job.” (Manager F)

Manager F displays arrogance when she states that she is unbothered by other people's opinions of her, which we see could be linked to the toughness previously mentioned. By saying that she is “*not as affected by what other people think*” she indicates that she can stand up for herself and her actions, indicating that she is indeed tough. Furthermore, Manager F gives the impression that she has experienced other people telling her what to do, “*there are many out there who want to tell me how I should do my job*” and we interpret that she may feel exposed in her role as manager, needing to stand up for herself and be tough. The arrogance that Manager F exhibits in this quote can be considered a stereotypically male attribute, hence we view it as her taking on more masculine attributes in her managerial role. Manager B exhibits a similar arrogance when she speaks about a time when she demanded to her manager that “*I want to sit on the board, and Company X needs me to do that*”. By letting us know she could demand authority above her, she displays an arrogance that can be viewed to help construct her identity. Toughness and arrogance are attributes that can be labeled more masculine and therefore by inhabiting them, we interpret that the women construct an identity in the interviews by speaking of and adopting, traits they

find favorable for their role. Some women openly admit that these attributes are male-inspired, while others display behavior that connects to male attributes.

Manager B further states that *“I have the ability to become very ice-cold, I rarely get angry but people usually say that when I lower my voice then you know that ‘now it’s on’”*. We interpret that Manager B has allowed typical masculine traits to influence her leadership when she explains that a low voice signifies seriousness. Low-pitched voices are biological, and normally associated with masculinity. Hence, we view that in order for Manager B to signal that the situation is serious, she lowers her voice in order to mimic a more masculine, and thus according to her, serious appearance. Manager B’s adaptation of more masculine traits in her role as a leader can also be seen as a way to distance herself from her femininity, which will be discussed later on in the analysis, as female voices are often lighter than male voices. Moreover, Managers A and E show further movement toward male-like identities by the way they express themselves.

“I am ambitious, overly ambitious.” (Manager A)

“I was very undemocratic, I was a well-liked boss but very undemocratic.” (Manager E).

The managers describe themselves as ambitious and undemocratic, which are traits not typically associated with femininity. When Manager A describes herself as *“overly ambitious”*, we interpret that she takes a step away from femininity, as this is not commonly described as feminine in the literature. Similarly, Manager E describes herself as *“very undemocratic”* which is mentioned in the literature specifically as a masculine trait. Hence, by describing themselves as ambitious and undemocratic we interpret that the managers distance themselves from typically female characteristics, which can be seen as constructing an identity that can be considered more masculine, and in this quote more like the women’s image of an ‘ideal’ manager.

To conclude, it is evident from the interviews that a majority of the women speak of adopting features they seem to believe are appropriate for the managerial role, a role that often corresponds to traditional male attributes. We can see that they often express a need to adapt male traits in order to be taken seriously in their roles as managers. Furthermore, we interpret

that the women experience an ‘ideal’ image of a manager and we therefore interpret that, through their talk in the interviews, they aim to construct an identity more like that image in their role as manager.

4.2 Distancing Herself from Male Managers

As previously mentioned in the literature, management is often associated with men, since stereotypically masculine traits are connected to the managerial role. A pattern noticed by some of the women in the interviews was that they struggled to identify with the role of manager. Some indicated that they did not see themselves fit for the role because they were women, and some did not want to accept traditional ways of being as a manager. Due to the managerial position often being associated with men, a struggle of identification as a manager prevails in the interviews because the women inhabit alternative traits. We view the struggle as a result of the women having an already established idea of what a manager should be, and that this image does not align itself with how they view themselves. Indicating that they distance themselves from male managers because they experience that they are outside of that group.

“I never saw myself as a boss, I felt I wasn't cut out for it because there weren't many female bosses around me.” (Manager H)

“I didn't have this dignity at all that these guys, who represented the old leadership, possessed. I could see that I was not a boss, it was obvious.” (Manager H)

“I haven't really seen myself that way. I have to live up to it. I have to fill out this suit.” (Manager I).

Manager H says that she “*never saw [herself] as a boss*” which we view as her making comparisons between herself and the male managers. She indicates that there “*weren't many female bosses around [her]*”, which makes us understand that she experienced differences between herself in the manager position compared to what she saw around her. We interpret the quote as Manager H questioning her suitability for the managerial position, and that she could not see herself as a manager because of how she viewed herself, thus her work identity did not

align with what she considered a manager to be. We interpret that she distances herself from the male managers in her talk and identifies herself with something different. The second quote by Manager H further proves how she distances herself from the male managers by explaining how she does not have the same attributes as the men, *“I didn’t have this dignity at all that these guys [...] possessed”*. We understand the word “dignity” as a person’s self-worth and inherited rights, and when Manager H explains that she did not have the same dignity as the guys, we interpret that she means she did not feel that she fit into the role or have the same right as a manager the same way the older men did. She reinforces this claim by saying that she did not see herself as a boss, *“it was obvious”*, meaning that it was clear that she did not possess the attributes one should have when being a boss according to her. With this we understand that Manager H does not see herself as possessing the male-manager-attributes other managers have, thus distancing herself from the male managers. Manager I further explains that she did not see herself as a manager. From the quote, we see that she is also struggling to identify as a manager because she inherently does not feel as fit for the role and rather has to prove herself and *“live up to it”*. This connects to what Manager H mentioned above about not feeling the same “dignity” for the role, which we understand as her taking a step away from seeing herself as a traditional male manager and instead seeing herself as something different.

On the other hand, Manager I further states that in order to live up to the role and its expectations she has to *“fill out this suit”*, meaning that she is associating the word “suit” to the managerial position. Given that a suit has historically and stereotypically been associated with men, we infer that she expresses a need to *“fill out this suit”* which we interpret as an attempt to construct an identity that could be considered more masculine. However, she still indicates a struggle with identifying with the masculine identity and manager, *“I haven’t really seen myself that way”* which we interpret as her not fully identifying with masculine attributes and distancing herself from the male managers. Manager B continues the theme of distancing herself from the male leaders.

“I think that it is important that a manager has - you have to have a warmth.” (Manager B)

"I am very relationship-driven and very sensitive to what happens in a room, which may not traditionally coincide with male characteristics." (Manager G)

The stereotypically masculine traits that are prominent in literature are described with words such as hard, impersonal, and objective, which we interpret as not aligning with the term "warmth" which Manager B claims that managers must have. We interpret "warmth" in this situation and context, as being linked to being personal and caring with the staff. This is because the opposite of warm would be cold, which is normally a word associated with someone who is unemotional and uncaring. When Manager B states that a manager has to have warmth, we believe that she is not embracing the traditionally masculine traits but rather views "warmth" as a trait favorable in a managerial position, thus distancing herself from the masculine association that the managerial role stereotypically has. Further, Manager G strengthens the distancing from typically male attributes when she says that she is relationship-driven, which is a typically more feminine attribute. Hence, by admitting her feminine characteristics, we interpret that she distances herself from the masculine ones. Managers A and G further add to the theme of not embracing masculine traits.

"I have also made the choice not to tone down my femininity, but rather highlight it. I wear a lot of dresses." (Manager A).

"I have always been pretty keen on having my own personal style that is based on me and I have never felt comfortable to walk around in a classic, you know, suit." (Manager F)

Manager A claims that she actively chooses not to tone down her femininity at work, but rather highlights it by wearing dresses. We understand that Manager A views a dress as a typically female garment, which can be compared to what has been said earlier in the analysis where a suit was seen as a typically male piece of clothing. By telling us that she wears dresses at work, we interpret that Manager A actively takes a step away from the masculine expectations that often inhabit a workplace, such as wearing a suit. She rather creates her own self as a manager by letting us know that she highlights her femininity, she wants to be identified with femininity. Similarly, Manager F explains that in her work she insisted on having "her own style". By

indicating that there was a need for her to have her own style, we interpret that she experienced some kind of expectation on how to look as a manager. This is proven when she states that she does not feel comfortable in a suit, but rather wears something that “*is based on her*”. We understand that Manager F wears something else than a suit to work because she feels that this does not represent her. With the suit already being established as a male garment, we interpret that she wants us to know that she distances herself from the traditional ways of dressing as a male manager, and further constructs her own identity by making it a point that she distances herself.

We interpret from the quotes above that some women are distancing themselves from the stereotypical male managers. They do this by either actively taking a stance against the stereotypical male garments or by expressing a feeling of having to fill out the position because they inherently do not fit into it.

4.3 Distancing Herself from Other Women

During the interviews, we interpreted the way some of the women spoke about themselves as a way to distance themselves from the traditional woman, as they often spoke of other women in the third person or as a group they did not seem to be a part of. They referred to their gender as “women” instead of using the word “we”, which could be expected from someone belonging to that gender group. Hence, the women's vocabulary can be analyzed in order to show how the female managers construct another identity, which is not typical of a woman.

"I think that women are perhaps a little wiser than men and see that those high positions mean sacrifices that you may not feel like making." (Manager E)

Manager E explains that a reason why women may not be as represented in the highest positions at a company might be because they are “wiser” and more aware of the responsibilities the role entails. Furthermore, Manager E reasons that women may not feel the necessity to work as much as the role requires because they have other interests. When analyzing Manager E’s choice of words we interpret this quote as her distancing herself from other women by not using the term “we” and instead opting for “women”. We interpret her way of talking as her separating herself

from other women as she has chosen to pursue a high position whereas the other women stray away because they are “*wiser than men*”. Hence, by referring to other women as wiser than men, we interpret that she distances herself from the group of women in general because she has chosen to pursue a career, just like the men. Manager A further distances herself from women in her way of talking.

“Men brush it off with 'ahh, it wasn't that bad, it wasn't really my fault, while women tend to take on the blame even for things they didn't do themselves.” (Manager A)

“The aspect of self-blame that I experience many women have to a greater extent than men.” (Manager A).

She reflects on how women often take the blame for mistakes that they themselves have not made and again refers to her own gender group as ‘women’ instead of including herself, which could indicate that she identifies differently from these women. The second quote could further be viewed as her talking about women in the third person and not including herself. Instead, she talks about something she sees happening and we view her as considering herself to be in the audience that observes women, rather than seeing herself as a woman that participates in the group. The self-blame and holding oneself back is something Manager E speaks about as well.

“Women themselves have been very good at holding back.” (Manager E)

Manager E can be seen to distinguish herself from other women by again referring to her own gender group as ‘women’ and not personally identifying with them at work. We interpret this as her seeing herself as someone different from the other women. We do not claim that she does not view herself as a woman, but rather that she does not identify herself with the women she speaks of, hence not belonging to the group. We interpret, based on her claim, that “*women themselves*” are holding back which results in them not reaching as high in their career as they actually can. With Manager E having succeeded in reaching a high position within her company, she distances herself from the group of women that hold themselves back, because she has not held back. Hence, she creates a distinction between herself and other women at work by explaining what

other women do, and because she has risen to a managerial position, she can be seen to have done differently. Managers C and A reinforce this interpretation.

"Sales are measurable, so all the time you are evaluated in some way how successful you are, I think many women find that pressure annoying." (Manager C)

"It is partly due to structures in society which make women tend not to apply for those types of more strenuous roles (management)." (Manager A)

Manager C further exemplifies the distancing by using the term "women" when explaining that sales are always evaluated and that women cannot handle the pressure that the sales role entails, and therefore shy away from managerial roles. Since Manager C reached the role of CEO at the company she worked at, she had to be evaluated in the very way she describes "*many women*" do not enjoy. She indicates that she does not identify with those women because she could handle the pressure of the managerial position. Manager A is also referring to her own gender group in the third person which distances her from the rest of the women. We interpret the choice of vocabulary as a detachment from "women" as a group because Manager A has taken on one of the more "*strenuous roles*" which sets her apart from the group. Hence, she defines women's tendencies, but by doing so she constructs an alternative persona for herself as a woman because she has not stayed away from the positions in question. We interpret this as both Manager C and A seeing themselves, thus identifying, as something different from what they seem to describe as other women in general, for example when they say "*many women*" or "*women tend to*". We see this as them distancing themselves from other women which is further reinforced by Managers A and E who spoke of the 'woman-trap'.

"I don't fall into a classic 'woman-trap' where I blame myself too much for failures or hold myself back." (Manager A)

"I learned not to get caught in these 'women's traps'. One trap for women is caring too much about the staff." (Manager E).

Both Managers A and E explain that they have actively learned to watch out for the so-called ‘woman traps’ in the context of being a female manager. The trap is described as either holding oneself back or “*caring too much*” about others, which we have seen previously explained in the analysis as typically female traits. A trap is something you might get stuck in, and struggle to get out of, which means that when the women indicate that they do not get stuck in the woman trap, they mean that they avoid exhibiting traits that are typically associated with women. By indicating that the use of female traits is a trap, we interpret that the women view typically female attributes as dangerous for their managerial role, and something that they do not do, nor want to do. In other words, we interpret that they are actively distancing themselves from these female traits. Further, Manager C states that “*I have had a low score on eager-to-please, which has helped me reach my goals*”, which we see as her indicating that other women have a higher score on the eager-to-please scale than her. Hence by making it a point that she disregards the desire to please others, we interpret that she differentiates herself from other women.

The managers’ frequent use of third-person vocabulary to describe other women is something we interpret as a sign that they identify themselves as outside of that category, and are distancing themselves from other women. Their description of female characteristics and women overall could be categorized as less power-hungry and unobtrusive, which is what we interpret as them not identifying themselves with as they have managed to reach a management role where they may regard those characteristics as ill-fitting.

4.4 Distancing Herself from the Female Body

Throughout the interviews it became evident that along with distancing themselves from other men and women, some of the interviewed women distanced themselves from their female bodies in order to master their managerial roles. We interpret this talk as a mechanism to construct a version of themselves that is more suited for the managerial role.

"This friendly female boss who knows how it feels to have a period is something you should stay away from." (Manager E)

Manager E warns us about being a friendly female manager and she suggests that this will inhibit successful managerial work. She has made an active decision not to relate to the women around her by not speaking about her period, being friendly, and relating to them. She appears to distance herself from being relatable as a woman, which could be perceived as a way of appearing less like a woman when considering the stereotypical female traits and female biology. From previous statements in the analysis, we have come to understand that the managerial role is usually associated and accepted as a male role. Thus, by not appearing as relatable to other women through biology we interpret that Manager E wants to be seen more as how she perceives a manager should be, in other words, not connected to female attributes. We interpret that she actively chooses to suppress her natural feminine side in an attempt to be what she considers a successful manager. Manager H adds to this interpretation by stating that one should not try to be sexy at work.

"Trying to be sexy in a workplace when you're going to be a manager or having a cleavage, then it's over - that's when you're not taken seriously." (Manager H)

The quote from Manager H derives from a discussion about how to be taken seriously, where she begins by stating that *"women - they are meant to be so sexy"* which is what she perceives that society expects from the female gender group. However, to be a manager with visible breasts will, according to Manager H, result in her not being *"taken seriously"*, indicating that breasts are something not associated with being a manager because it will make you appear less serious and respectable. Moreover, breasts are a part of the female body and cannot be dismissed fully. We perceive that Manager H is covering her cleavage in order to be taken seriously as a manager which would suggest that she suppresses a part of her female body in order to better fit into her role. She distances herself from the female body by believing that breasts signal less seriousness and should be covered to be or become a manager. Another way to stray away from female biology involves distancing yourself from biological female obligations such as taking care of your children.

"I was never home. No, I was fixing so that my parents could help me, it was like a big puzzle."
(Manager C)

Manager C strays away from the biological aspect of having a family, by explaining that women tend to feel a bigger responsibility to stay home with the children, but she organized her time so that she could work even though she had children at home. Furthermore, there are generalizations about gender roles made by Manager E “[...] *women prioritizing leaving work a little earlier or not taking a managerial position because it entails things that are not as good for the family*”. Further points were made by Manager A “*It's still the case that women take on more responsibility for children and family*”. Moreover, Manager C chose not to prioritize staying home with the kids as she deemed it negative for her image because when a woman stayed home with a sick child she would be labeled as “*not somebody to count on*” (Manager C). Hence, we interpreted that Manager C is distancing herself from women and female biology by not prioritizing what is considered the female instinct, to care for the children. Thus, we interpret that she strays away from what is considered typical of her gender and her natural instinct in order to be a successful manager. Similarly, Manager F highlights the distancing of the female body by taking a different path than what was expected of her as a woman.

“In Sweden, ideally you should have reached the peak of your career when you're 50 or a maximum of 55, and as a woman, at the same time you should have established a functional family and have a lot of children, and that's an impossible combination.” (Manager F).

Manager F refers to the socially constructed expectations that hover over women regarding their balance of career and family life, and that it is impossible to master all of those things before you are considered past the peak of your career. When Manager F mentions that having a career and children is an impossible combination in Sweden we interpret that she distances herself from these women. By mentioning it she sets herself apart, she becomes the audience that is showing compassion for the women in Sweden. Seeing as she has established a career and had children, and has what can be considered a career peak now at an older age than what she describes in her quote we see a distinction between her and the other women who peak in their careers by 50 or 55. Hence, by merely mentioning that she views Swedish society this way, therefore showing compassion for these women, we argue that she does not consider herself in need of that compassion.

The features of the female body and female instincts are something we interpret that some of the women are distancing themselves from in the interviews as an attempt to construct their own identity. A Manager should not, in the interviewees' opinion, relate to the other female workers about the struggles of having a period, nor should they stay home to care for the children because this is, according to them, not favorable for a manager. Additionally, women should cover their female body parts in order to be taken seriously. We interpret these quotes as an attempt to distance themselves from the female body and construct an alternative identity.

4.5 Being an Overachiever

Some of the interviewed women seemed to agree that the expectations for male and female managers are different and that women often have to prove themselves more than men have to. From the interview talk, it appeared that the women too often feel the need to work a little bit more, and do the job a little bit better, in order to gain the same acceptance as the male managers. Because of this, we interpret that the women construct their own identity as managers by indicating in the interviews that they are always working hard, putting in extra effort, and are willing to do the work. We label this as being an *overachiever*, meaning that the women go above and beyond what the work entails.

“You have to work a little harder to be listened to and taken seriously [...] Men reach my position by working at 90% of their capacity and I might have to work at 150% to be accepted and achieve the same thing.” (Manager F).

Manager F argues that women may need to work harder and perform better than men in the equivalent position to be taken seriously and gain the same degree of success in their careers. We perceive that Manager F admits that a man in her position would have it easier, thus encouraging the idea that the managerial role is better suited for a man. By indicating that *“you have to”*, we interpret that she refers to herself as a manager which means that she has felt the need to overperform in her own career, further setting the stage for what is necessary in order to succeed as a female manager. By stressing that *“you have to”*, she indicates that *she* needs to work harder as a manager, which makes us view her as an overachiever due to her self-perception of working

“at 150%”. Similarly, Manager E states that “*the unfortunate thing about equality is that women always have to prove that they are as good and perhaps even better*”. Manager E builds on our interpretation that the women often have to overperform from what is required because they experience that they must prove themselves to a greater extent than men, which could also indicate that she is an overachiever. Furthermore, Manager I states that “*It somehow got better to just bite the bullet and try to do the job twice as well*”, further proving that she felt the need to do double the work, “*twice as well*”, compared to her coworkers in similar positions. We understand that by constantly striving to prove oneself and achieve success, being an overachiever, it can contribute to the construction of women's identities and self-perception. By constantly indicating the need to overachieve they may come to see themselves as driven and ambitious individuals, which adds to the construction of their identity. Managers I and D further build on this interpretation.

“*That's how it was in a way, having to tough it out and try to show that I was capable. So, I kept pushing myself, working around the clock.*” (Manager I).

“*I have probably placed more time, resources, and energy on proving that I also am capable.*” (Manager D)

“*More is required of a woman, I think, and you sometimes need to prove yourself to go the same way.*” (Manager D)

Manager I speaks of the expectations she places upon herself to work “*around the clock*” to prove that she was capable too, which we interpret as a sign of overachieving since a job would not normally demand that much time. She indicates that it was not always easy to work as much as she did “*having to tough it out*”, “*pushing myself*”, and by explaining “*that's how it was*” we interpret that she really wanted to do this kind of work despite its time consumption. Manager D continues by saying that “*more is required of a woman*” in the context of proving herself as a manager. Manager D further supports the idea that women actually have to be overachievers to “*go the same way*” as men, thus why they become overachievers. Manager D and J further prove their personal will of succeeding in their career which explains our interpretation of being an

overachiever, *“I am where I am today because I wanted to pursue a career”* (Manager D), *“I was always striving to deliver, giving it my best shot. I really wanted to”* (Manager I). We interpret that managers D and J put in the hard work because they really wanted to pursue a career as managers, which explains their ambition. Manager A confirms this claim when she states, *“I am ambitious, overly ambitious”*, which highlights a sense of extra ambition because she uses the word “overly” which can be associated with being an overachiever. Again, in this instance, we see that they are overachievers, which we see can steer how they construct their identities.

To conclude, the analysis helps us understand how the interviewed women construct their identities as managers through the way they express themselves in the interviews. We found that the women had a view of what a manager was supposed to look like, an ‘ideal’ manager, often inspired by a socially constructed idea of what that was. We view that this inspired the women in their identity construction, leading them to distance themselves from other women and the female body. On the other hand, the analysis also showed that the women distanced themselves from male managers by recognizing traditionally female attributes in themselves, meaning that they distanced themselves from both males and females in a work setting. Furthermore, we found that the women were overachievers in their work as they often stood out by the amount of time and effort they put in. We, therefore, interpret that women construct an identity, through their talk, different from the one society perceives they have, because we conclude that they neither identify with other women nor men. Through the way the women express themselves we see that they move towards an ‘ideal’ manager. We also see that the women often indicate a desire to work more than they have to, making us label them as overachievers. These interpretations are ways we find that the women construct their identities through their interview talk.

5. Discussion

In the following chapter, the empirical results will be compared to previous research. We will discuss the female managers' identity construction. Additionally, we will discuss how our study can contribute and the issues it raises.

As our study developed, we asked ourselves how the female managers construct their identities. The analysis shows that the women construct their identities through the following ways: *Moving towards the ideal image of a manager, Distancing herself from the male managers, Distancing herself from other women, Distancing herself from the female body, and Being an overachiever.* We have shown how we interpret that the women construct their identities by analyzing their interviews using discourse analysis. We argue that the women construct a different identity from both male managers and other women in the interviews. They distance themselves from male managers, who are labeled the stereotypes of managers in literature. We also see that they separate themselves from other women, which we interpret as a method to be regarded as more suitable for their managerial role, and therefore do not conform to the stereotypical and socially constructed roles that would be expected from a woman. The interesting aspect here is that the women do not seem to want to be connected with traditional female traits because these are not seen as managerial traits, nor do they want to be connected to the stereotypical male manager. Even so, the women were seen to have an 'ideal' picture of what a manager should be like which was often inspired by male attributes. Furthermore, we see that women are motivated, driven, and willing to go above and beyond in order to gain the acceptance they believe they deserve in their roles as managers, which we interpret as them being overachievers. We investigate how the women construct their identities in the conducted interviews and what the construction can be interpreted as. We want to clarify that our research does not aim to give an answer to how all women construct their identity, rather we show how we interpret the interviewed women construct an identity through the conducted interviews.

5.1 Management as a Man's Job

There is extensive research that shows that management could be associated with certain characteristics that can be linked to masculinity and the idea that being a manager is a man's job (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Blom, 1998; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Furthermore, the literature suggests that masculinity is viewed as the norm within leadership and the managerial role (Calas & Smircich, 1996 & Lamsa & Sintonen, 2001 cited in Stead & Elliott, 2009). Our findings partially align with previous research in this area. In the analysis, through our interpretations, we argue that the managerial role is socially constructed as more acceptable for male attributes. We see this through the women seemingly having an 'ideal' image of the role of a manager; "*I had a certain image of how a manager should be [...] a very dominant person*" (Manager H). We argue that the women's 'ideal' manager was often inspired by male attributes, which aligns with previous studies of management being a man's job (Calas & Smircich, 1996 & Lamsa & Sintonen, 2001 cited in Stead & Elliott, 2009).

Furthermore, in the analysis, we found tendencies that the women felt that they had to overperform and work harder than men to be taken seriously and gain similar success in their careers. We argue that the women become overachievers because they express that their role is reserved for someone else, thus they need to prove themselves capable of mastering the role by working increasingly harder. Similar to Alvesson and Billing (1997), we mean that the social construction of management as a man's job creates a more challenging situation for the women who by some means reach higher positions. However, our research differs from Alvesson and Billing (1997) since the women do not speak of any significant barriers or discrimination due to their gender role. Rather, the interviews highlight that the women themselves felt a need to overperform, an internalized feeling, "*I have probably placed more time, resources, and energy on proving that I also am capable.*" We see that the women feel the need to overperform and become overachievers because *they* view men as more socially acceptable for the managerial role, thus needing to prove themselves to a greater extent. This does not mean that we claim that the women do not view themselves as not suitable for their roles as managers, but that they view men as generally *more* accepted. Hence, we interpret that they become overachievers as a result of the social construction of what the managerial role entails, which affects their self-perception and identity. Another view is that the women construct their identities as overachievers simply

because they enjoy the work, “*I wanted to pursue a career*” (Manager D) and succeed in their professional career. Their self-perception of being driven, hard-working, and reaching the managerial position thus shapes how they construct their work identity. Either way, our interpretations, and findings align with the managerial role being viewed as more suitable for a man. Our findings do not however state that the women felt held back due to their gender, as stated in previous literature (Alvesson & Billing, 1997).

5.2 Role Theory and Role Congruity Theory

Previous research has highlighted the significance of expectations linked to a role, and also how a role conflict can occur when there are inconsistencies between roles and expectations (Biddle, 1979; Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017 cited in Anglin et al, 2022). When analyzing how the women construct their identities in the interviews, we discovered that the women displayed evidence that aligned with previous research on role conflict when they discussed how they achieved success in their careers. Some of the women indicated that more is required from them, both at work and in their role as a woman. We see that these expectations create a role conflict due to the inconsistency between societal expectations and the actual experience of being a female manager. Some women exemplify their role conflict by indicating that they believe there is an expectation to downplay their femininity in their managerial role. Some of the managers made active choices, like Manager A, to not tone down their femininity and instead embrace and highlight it by dressing more feminine. Hence, by mentioning that she actively makes a choice, she indicates that she believes there is another choice that she should have made.

Furthermore, our findings indicate that the women construct their identities based on what they perceive as the rightful identity of a manager, which aligns with role theory. Some of the interviewed women for example said “*I never saw myself as a boss*” (Manager H) and “*I haven't really seen myself that way*” (Manager I). We argue that by not feeling like the role is suited for them, a role conflict occurs because they are expected to act as managers, but struggle with not feeling fit for it. As described before, the women can be seen to have multiple roles, both being women and managers and when these expectations do not align with each other, we witness a role conflict. We view that the role conflict can strengthen the idea that the women have pre-decided expectations of how a person in the managerial role was meant to act. Moreover,

when the women explained what someone *had* to do in order to be a manager, “*You have to become tougher*” (Manager B), we interpret that they have a pre-decided expectation that managers are tough. Thus in order to be one you have to become tougher, confirming role theory since certain expectations can be seen to be connected with the role. This can be understood as the women distancing themselves from other women and the ordinary female attributes in order to succeed in the role of manager. According to past literature and through role theory, the managerial role is stereotypically associated with men and typically masculine characteristics (Calas & Smircich, 1996; Lamsa & Sintonen, 2001; Stead & Elliott, 2009). Hence, women distance themselves from the typical female role and move more towards what they consider the ‘ideal’ image of a managerial role. We see this movement as a role conflict because it shows how they deem the role they see themselves inhabiting, not match the managerial role thus why they had to “*become tougher*” or not get caught in the so-called ‘women-traps’. Here our study can be seen to align with Gromkowska-Melosik’s (2014) study where she describes that women who want to excel in their professional careers can find themselves in a trap if they display traditional feminine characteristics since they risk seeming less congruent with the managerial role.

The role congruity theory helps us make sense of the underlying dilemma for female managers seeing as the managerial role is more associated with male attributes. The theory shows how women stray away from leadership roles, not necessarily because of discrimination, but due to the gender-biased expectations society has on the role of a manager (Ritter & Yoder, 2004; Fernandez, Burnett & Gomez, 2019; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Similarly, we found that the interviewed women seem to believe they need to adapt to more masculine attributes and thus construct a more masculine identity at times in order to maintain their role as a manager because their feminine self would be perceived as less competent in the role according to the role congruity theory. Even though there was no mention of established ways of being a manager, the women felt a need to act ‘less feminine’ and distance themselves from other women, which indicates that society has constructed an image of what a manager is. Hence, the women construct a new identity to take on the managerial role.

We argue that the interviewed women felt the need to demonstrate their worth and ability more in comparison to men in order to prevail as managers because society has a perception of who the

manager role should be held by, based on both role theory and role congruity theory. Of course, there are expectations on men as well that are not covered in our study, but it is clear from the interviews that the women are operating under distinct circumstances that may have a significant impact on how they create their identities because they actively alter them.

5.3 Social Identity Theory

Our findings align with previous research regarding social identity theory seeing as we interpreted their talk as them defining themselves by taking social work- and group identifications into account (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In accordance with Walsh and Gordon (2008), our findings show how the interview subjects interpreted themselves at work, by creating a work identity that suits their managerial role. However, our research partly differs from previous studies since past research often highlights that managerial women tend to take on more manly identities and conform to more masculine attributes to succeed in their careers (Ellemers van den Heuvel, de Gilder, Mass & Bonvini, 2001 cited in Haslam et al, 2003; Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014). We argue that the women express a need to adapt their personas after certain male attributes, but differ from previous studies because they do not seem to identify with the male managers either: *“I didn't have this dignity at all that these guys who represented the old leadership possessed” (Manager H)*, *“I have also made the choice not to tone down my femininity, but rather highlight it” (Manager A)*. Further, we see that they do not identify themselves with other women either as they often are distancing themselves from them, and detaching themselves from the female body. Hence, the women distance themselves from both male managers and other women and rather identify with their perceived image of how a manager should be, which through our analysis proved to include masculine attributes. We argue that the women construct their identity through feeling like members of the group ‘managers’, which can be linked to social identity theory because they positively identify with the group and therefore adopt traits typical of that group (Islam, 2014; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Haslam et al, 2003). This can be seen as an attempt by the women to gender-neutralize the managerial role. They simply want to be managers, and not be seen as female managers or male managers. The literature mentions that women are rarely seen as just ‘good managers’ but are either insufficient or good female managers (Evettes, 1997 quoted in Kyriakidou, 2011). By distancing themselves from male managers and females through the interviews, we argue that it

can be seen as the women striving to neutralize the social constructions and prejudices associated with both roles. On the other hand, we observed that the interviewees made a distinction between men and women, similar to what Olsson and Walker (2004) discovered in their study. The researchers discovered that women identified with some particular males who displayed characteristics they perceived as either gender-neutral or supportive of women and that these men frequently possessed or valued stereotypically feminine traits. Our study builds on women being a part of an industry where the representation of women has increased in recent years, which could be seen as an explanation for why our interviewees distance themselves differently, by distancing from male managers, other women, and from the female body.

According to Afshar (2012), women are frequently linked with roles that have been created for them by society. Haslam et al. (2003) expand on the argument by asserting that there is a significant gender disparity in the workplace generally. We believe this could contribute to why women feel the desire to construct new identities, as the ones they are given by society are not associated with the managerial role. Moreover, society can deem their gender incongruent with the managerial role thus to take on that role they construct a different identity. This is evident in our analysis when they distance themselves from other women and male managers and rather move towards their perception of the 'ideal' identity in order to be *just managers*. Hence, they see an incongruity between themselves and the role and view the manager group as favorable, thus adapting in accordance with that group, which exemplifies the social identity theory.

6. Conclusion

The following chapter will compile the studies' reasoning and come to a conclusion regarding the research question.

The study has aimed to investigate how female managers construct their identities. We have done so by studying how the women express themselves in an attempt to see how they form their identities. With support in the analysis we have shown that women distance their identity from other women, hence do not place themselves in the same group. Moreover, they do not either place themselves in the male manager category, rather they construct an identity in accordance with their idea of what the 'ideal' manager is. From the analysis and discussion, together with the discussed theories, we can see that the interviewed women tend to stand out from both male managers and other women. This creates an interesting discussion on "*what are these women identifying themselves as at work*", and we mean that these women construct their own identities as managers. They neither identify themselves with the stereotypical female characteristics, nor the stereotypical male attributes. This can be seen as an attempt by the women to gender-neutralize the managerial role. They simply want to be managers, and not be seen as female managers or male managers.

To answer the research question, *how do female managers construct their identities*, we argue that they do so through not conforming to the socially constructed role they could be placed in. Instead, they construct an identity with the group 'managers' and construct their identity by conforming to that role.

6.1 Practical and Theoretical Implications

Our research practically contributes to the knowledge of female identities and how women can construct their identity by further developing the understanding of how societal expectations, stereotypes, and self-perceptions influence women in their managerial role. Also, by shedding light on female identity construction, and shared experiences within this, we contribute to women feeling recognized to a greater extent. This understanding can help women reflect on their self-image and how they view themselves, and that the identity you construct as a woman must not be the one socially constructed for you. We also believe that by raising an

understanding of what it means to be a female manager at work, it can support organizational development as these experiences are important for organizations to take into account. With increased knowledge of female manager identity construction, our study contributes to an elevated awareness of the struggles female managers may face with work and identity. This further contributes to an increased understanding of colleagues, organizations, and management which promotes a more equal and understanding work environment. The theoretical implication of the study is a contribution to theories regarding identity construction, giving an additional perspective on the female manager identity construction.

6.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The study has focused on qualitative interviews with female managers. Therefore it is their first-hand experiences that make up the empirical data. With personal accounts, the empirical data becomes subjective and can thus have been influenced by other factors not considered in our study, like background, age, or even level of education. These external factors can be seen to affect how the women experience and how they see the social constructions around them. However, due to the study's limitations, these factors have not been taken into account in the result.

In our study, we focus on female managers that in many cases could be seen to be leading in their positions. We have analyzed how they construct their identities by expressing a nonconformity to their socially constructed role and thereby constructing a new identity for themselves. As further research, we suggest studying why these women feel the desire to construct new identities because we believe there are personal accounts to be collected there too. Another interesting topic could be to research if this phenomenon of constructing new identities applies to female managers lower down in the organizational hierarchy as well, as our study covers women in leading positions. Perhaps there is a difference in how women lower down in the industry construct their identity.

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Appendix 1 - Interview Guide / Intervjuguide*

Hur jämställd skulle du säga att mediebranschen är?

Varför finns det fortfarande en så stark dominans av män i vissa roller, som ägare, investerare, vd och styrelseordförande/styrelseledamöter?

Hur har du kommit dit du är idag?

Vad är en bra chef enligt dig, och vilka är dina styrkor?

Under din tid i branschen, vad har du utvecklat i ditt chefskap?

Vad är en bra ledare enligt dig, och vad gör dig till en stark ledare?

Varför tror du dessa egenskaper är viktiga?

Har du någonsin upplevt att du behövt anpassa dig för din roll?

Har du någonsin upplevt att du inte blivit tagen seriös i ett specifikt sammanhang? Vidtog du i så fall några åtgärder i denna situation?

Upplever du att det finns några särskilda förväntningar på dig som kvinnlig chef?

Under din tid i yrket, hur har branschen förändrats gällande jämställdhet och vad har varit de viktigaste faktorerna?

Ur ett kvinnligt perspektiv, vad tror du att de kommande utmaningarna kommer att vara för unga chefer? *(Fråga som lades till efter hälften av intervjuerna hade genomförts)*

Hur tror du att framtidens jämställdhetsutmaningar ser ut? *(Fråga som lades till efter hälften av intervjuerna hade genomförts)*

Vad krävs för att få in fler kvinnor på de högre positionerna?

*The interviews were conducted in Swedish. Thus we chose not to translate the interview questions into English.