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Leading the Progressive Agenda: Analysing the Swedish Discourse about Female Political Leadership

*"How has the Swedish discourse surrounding female political leadership
developed from 1998 to 2018?"*

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Abstract

This research investigates the research question "How has the discourse surrounding female political leadership developed in Sweden between 1998-2018?". By applying a critical discourse analysis onto a set of 64 articles about seven political leaders from the years 1998 and 2018, this study aims to investigate developments and differences in the discourse longitudinally. Using a theoretical framework based in feminist media theory, mainly constructed on the basis of Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross's (1996) concept of gendered mediation, different discursive, semiotic and linguistic aspects of the material was analysed in order to unveil the power structures behind the discourse. The analysis found a shift towards more neutral coverage, with less charged wording and more proactive use of verbs in relation to the female leaders. Despite this, traditional gender roles and underlying biases persist, depicting women as inferior within a masculine context. Negative coverage decreased between 1998 and 2018, yet ongoing negative comparisons and war metaphors highlight enduring patriarchal values that continually cast women as unnatural political actors and shape public perceptions. In summary, the discourse around female political leadership seems to be shifting towards a more neutral one in expression, but the underlying power structures remain stubborn.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, feminist media theory, gendered mediation, female leadership, Sweden, discourse

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
1.1 Background	5
1.2 Research question and purpose	7
1.3 Previous research	8
2. Theoretical Framework	10
2.1 Critical theory, power and constructivism	10
2.2 Feminism and female political leadership	11
2.3 Feminist Media Theory: Women, Leadership and Media	13
3. Methodology	16
3.1 Methodological framework: Fairclough's three dimensional model	16
3.2 Methodological discussion	18
3.3 Analytical framework	19
3.4 Material	20
4. Results	22
4.1. Gender	22
4.2. Relationships	23
4.3. Appearance	24
4.4 Attributes	25
4.5. Use of Language	26
4.5.1 Tone of Text, emphasis and wording	26
4.5.2 Verbs and transitivity	28
4.5.3 Metaphors, gendered comparisons and references	29
4.6 The discursive dimension and the socio-cultural dimension	30
5. Conclusion	33
5.1. Limitations, recommendations for further research, applications	33
5.2 Conclusion	34
Bibliography	35
Appendix 1	40
Appendix 2	41
Appendix 3	43

1. Introduction

Women's political engagement has historically been limited and shaped by institutional structures and societal norms while formal political positions have typically been reserved for men. Despite this, women have influenced public affairs from behind the scenes, mostly exerting their power outside of the public eye. This exclusion persisted into the early modern period, and was not challenged until the beginning of the 1900's. During this time, women and women's movements fought for suffrage and political representation, eventually leading to landmark achievements in women's rights. Finland became the first country in the world to allow women to run for office in 1906, and the following year 19 Finnish women became the world's first female parliamentarians (Paxton, Hughes & Green, 2006, p. 898). 50 years later, Sri Lanka elected the world's first woman Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, and following her election an increasing number of women attained executive power globally. In England, Margaret Thatcher became the first European head of government in 1979. Since these achievements, female political participation has continued to increase. By the 1970's women's right to vote had been implemented in 94% of all sovereign nations, and in 2003 over four out of five countries had elected their first female parliamentarian (ibid, p. 909-910). Today, 27% of all parliamentarians in the world are female, and in Europe women constitute 31,6% of the parliamentarians (IPU, 2024).

There are still social and institutional obstacles that hinder women from reaching the political top (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Brescoll, 2016). Beckwith (2015) and O'Brien (2015) suggest that the path to party leadership is gendered as women often become party leaders after a crisis which removes the established, often male, leader and that it is easier for women to become leaders of smaller parties. UN Women predict that gender equality in national legislative bodies will be reached by 2063, while gender parity among executive positions will not be reached for another 130 years. As of January 2024, only 26 countries have a female Head of State or Head of Government (UN Women, 2024). The obstacles that women face in politics surpass the legal frameworks of participation as there are various cultural differences in the perception of the legitimacy of female political leadership, which in itself constitute an obstacle to women's political ambitions. Considering the social layers of gender disparities in politics, it is especially valuable to take a deeper look into the contexts of countries which have progressed far in gender equality.

Sweden consistently ranks high in international indices and rankings assessing social welfare and gender equality (EIGE, 2023; UNDP, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2023, p. 5). Its success in these areas have given Sweden an international reputation as an egalitarian and progressive country that has made significant strides toward achieving gender equality (World Economic Forum, 2017; Jezierska & Towns, 2018). For example, Sweden's generous parental leave policy promotes gender equality by encouraging a more equal distribution of childcare labour (Ma et al., 2020). Additionally, the staunch anti-discrimination legislation ensures equal treatment and opportunities for individuals regardless of gender, ethnicity, or other characteristics (Carlson, 2013). These policies exemplify Sweden's commitment to gender equality. With the implementation of a feminist foreign policy in 2014, Sweden took these ideals onto the international arena with the intention to challenge patriarchal norms globally and promote a feminist understanding of foreign affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). Given the status as a leader within gender equality, Sweden is an interesting context for an investigation into domestic power structures as it relates to gender. In one of the most equal countries in the world, how is female authority and power conceptualised? Has female leadership become legitimate in the public view? Has the discourse surrounding female politicians undergone a transformation parallel with the advancements in gender equality and societal discussions?

1.1 Background

The political arena has historically been male-dominated not only in terms of the gender of the majority of individual actors, but also in terms of culture and language (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003a; Starck & Sauer, 2014; Reeser, 2023). Politics is often portrayed as conflict between ideologies and political actors, using metaphors that draw on violence and battle (Otieno, Owino & Attyang, 2016). The conventional image of a politician is imbued with masculine traits such as toughness, ambition, and assertiveness (Schneider & Bos, 2014). Over time, these conceptualisations have become natural in the public consciousness, and the view of political leadership as masculine has not been challenged in a real way, even though the contemporary political landscape includes women across all levels. Women have been, and remain, unnatural actors within politics (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003b), as will be discussed further in chapter 2.2.

In Sweden, women were excluded from the political domain up until the early 1900's. During the end of the 1800's, the national debate about suffrage was central with many groups advocating for the right to vote. The question of women's suffrage, however, was sidelined and justified by the argument that women were not knowledgeable or interested enough in politics to partake. In 1913, the National Association for Women's Suffrage collected more than 350,000 signatures in favour of women's voting rights (Sveriges Riksdag, 2024a). A proposal of universal and equal suffrage was put before the Parliament in 1918, and it was fully implemented by 1921. The new law, however, still excluded 45% of the population from voting in the election for the second chamber. People who for example had a criminal past, had refused military service or were bankrupt were not given the right to vote (Sundevall, Berg & Sandin, 2024). In 1921, Sweden elected its first female parliamentarians in both the first and second chamber (IPU, 2024). While this historic occasion broke the metaphorical glass ceiling, men continued to dominate party leadership and the political arena.

In 1994 the Swedish parliament implemented a gender quota measure called "varannan damernas" (translated to either "every other ladies" or "every other seat"), which entailed alternating the gender of the candidates on the party lists (Törnqvist, 2007). The strategy resulted in an increase from 33% to 40,2% female parliamentarians in the 1994 election and was hailed as a victory for Swedish women and the progress towards gender equality (SCB, 2024a). Since the enactment of the quota, the percentage of female parliamentarians have fluctuated between 40% and 60% (Sveriges Riksdag, 2024a). Sweden, therefore, has come far in the process to reach gender parity in the parliamentary setting, but what about political leadership?

Sweden's first female minister was Karin Kock who in 1947 was appointed minister without portfolio, and in 1948 she became Minister of Supply (Jonung & Jonung, 2013; Sveriges Riksdag, 2024b). Her historic appointment was not followed by an immediate increase in female ministers. Instead the percentage of women in executive positions remained low up until the end of the 1990's when Sweden reached an approximate gender equal distribution of ministerial positions. Since then, the percentage of women in executive positions have remained between 45-55% (SCB, 2024b). 40 years after Kock was appointed minister, Sweden elected its first female party leader. Karin Söder of the Center Party was appointed in 1985 after serving as parliamentarian, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Social Affairs (Sveriges Riksdag, 2024b; Sveriges Riksdag, 2024c). Between the start of the 1990's

and the 2010's, Sweden had on average two or three female party leaders, with seven established parties in the parliament (Manell, 2021). These numbers are bolstered by the Swedish Green Party's split leadership which consists of one male and one female representative. In 2021, female leadership representation historically peaked with six party leaders being women (ibid.). Sweden has, looking at the political progress, come far in terms of equal political representation on essentially all levels of government. Paradoxically however, it was not until 2021 that Sweden appointed its first female prime minister in Magdalena Andersson (Sveriges Riksdag, 2024b). Andersson was suggested as the new prime minister after Stefan Löfven, approved by the Parliament after two rounds of voting (Fors, 2021). With Andersson's installation, Sweden became the last of the Nordic countries to elect a female head of government, 100 years after Swedish women first gained the right to vote.

A constant throughout the last decades is the media with its different forms of coverage and opinion-making regarding Swedish politics. Today, media has become one of the main ways in which people engage with politics. Very few individuals have access to face-to-face interactions with politicians, and most of our perception of individual leaders stem from media portrayal (Hammarlin & Jarlbro, 2014, p. 7). In Sweden and elsewhere, female politicians have often been subjected to different standards compared to their male counterparts, with excessive attention paid to their appearance and relationships rather than their policy positions and leadership skills (ibid.; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996; Jarlbro, 2013; Heldman, Carroll & Olson, 2006).

1.2 Research question and purpose

The aim of this study is to investigate how women in positions of political power are portrayed in Swedish media, and if and how this has changed over time. In order to disclose longitudinal differences and developments, the study compares two moments in time against one another. By utilising a critical discourse analysis informed by feminist media theory, this study aims to unveil underlying power structures found in the discourse and possible changes to these longitudinally. The theoretical framework and method are grounded on constructivist epistemological assumptions and a critical approach to knowledge and power. The media representation is seen as a mirror of the larger public discourse around female political leadership. The investigation will be guided by the following research question:

"How has the discourse surrounding female political leadership developed in Sweden between 1998-2018?".

This study has primarily intrascientific relevance as it contributes to the existing research in the field of media studies, gender studies and political science. More specifically, the study aims to expand the knowledge about the perception of female political leadership, offering an investigation into the power structures behind the discourse within the Swedish context. By combining feminist media theory, critical discourse analysis and critical theory, the study uses an interdisciplinary approach, building on the previous research and theory presented below.

1.3 Previous research

Previous research conducted on the Swedish discourse on female political leadership is relatively sparse to date. While there is a rich field of research within political communication, political discourse analysis and feminist media studies, the intersection of these fields in the Swedish context remains relatively unexplored. There is, moreover, plenty of research on the construction of political leadership, gendered stereotypes about politicians and the effects of those on for example voter behaviour, mostly being conducted outside of Sweden (Haraldsson & Wägnerud, 2019; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Van der Pas & Loes Aaldering, 2020; Schneider & Bos, 2014; Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Gidengil & Everitt, 2003a; Ross & Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1997; Sjöberg, 2016).

Johansson has conducted several studies about gendered media portrayal of female politicians in Sweden. In Johansson (2021), he investigated media reflections of Swedish female politicians in 2010, highlighting the increased questioning and criticism that they face compared to their male counterparts. Here, the lens of the intersection of ethnicity and age were applied and considered as well. In Johansson and Asplund Bergström (2015), the focus was on a male versus female comparison within specific areas such as the media coverage of politicians as parental figures, mentioning how women face a higher level of pressure and expectations regarding their parenthood as a politician. In a study from 2019, Berkqvist and Johansson studied the gendered aspects of the specific media coverage of Swedish politician Annie Lööf using a critical discourse analysis (Berkqvist & Johansson, 2019). The investigation found that the press portrays Lööf using a combination of traditional femininity and hybrid-femininity, indicating that female politicians gain from balancing feminine and

masculine traits. Lööf's popularity rose when she embraced normative motherhood, suggesting that female leaders can increase their appeal by emphasising their roles as mothers. In a large-scale qualitative content analysis of media content, Bromander (2012) compared how the Swedish press have rendered political scandals depending on the gender of the person involved. The study found that the media portrayal was gender neutral in many ways, but that female political scandals tend to be reported on more extensively than male scandals. Moreover, female political scandals elicit a higher demand for political accountability, making the coverage of male political scandals more forgiving (ibid.).

This study aims to contribute to the currently limited research on the discourse on female leadership in the Swedish context. By applying feminist media theory onto historic media content portraying Swedish female politicians, this study intends to longitudinally compare the conceptualisation and attributed legitimacy of female political leadership. By adding a timely comparison, not only the apparent differences in reporting about female political leaders in Sweden are revealed, but the potential lack of differences as well.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Critical theory, power and constructivism

The concept of theory has as many definitions as there are researchers, and different conceptualisations highlight different aspects and draw on various assumptions. Teorell and Svensson (2007, p. 44) offer a broad definition, explaining theory as one or several concepts, a claim about the nature of said concept or a claim about the relationship between the concepts. This understanding is based on King et al's (1994, p. 19) understanding of theory as a collection of contingent hypotheses. These definitions lend themselves well to a positivist understanding of science which is based on the epistemological assumptions of objectivity. Objectivity, in this sense, can be understood as the assumption that there is an external reality independent of us which we can study and find objective truths about (Badersten & Gustavsson, 2015, p. 38-39).

The tradition of critical theory questions the ability to produce objective knowledge on the basis that all knowledge production is influenced by researchers' previous ideas and experiences, cultural norms and history. Critical theory is thereby constructed upon ontological subjectivism, which claims knowledge is always influenced by the individual creating it, the culture in which it is formed and the time it is constructed (Badersten & Gustavsson, 2015, p. 38-40). Moreover, critical theory argues that because knowledge is time- and placebound it is constituted in a series of power dynamics which it reinforces (Thompson, 2017, p. 5-6). Robert Cox, one of the most prominent scholars in critical theory, explains the relationship between knowledge and power as follows: "theory is always for someone and for some purpose" (1981, p. 128).

Critical theory analyses power structures that underpin society, offering a comprehensive approach to understanding social reality and identifying its dysfunctions (Thompson, 2017). Central to critical theory is Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony, where the dominant class moulds societal perceptions, values, and ideologies to maintain its supremacy, stifle dissent and perpetuate inequality. This notion of power aligns with the concept of discursive power, which encompasses the creation, expression, distribution, and reproduction of power through discursive practices (ibid.; Bergström & Ekström, 2018, p. 262). Discursive power, as described by Bergström & Ekström (2018, p. 255), shapes our social reality, but does so

covertly. When unchallenged, discourses become hegemonic, consolidating the dominance of one class over another, as articulated in Gramsci's hegemony (ibid., p. 262).

In this case, the methodological approach of critical discourse analysis is intertwined with the chosen theory because discourse analytical frameworks assume that language constitutes reality and that power dynamics can be made visible through textual analysis. As such, critical discourse analysis is based on an understanding of constructivism, stating that knowledge formation hinges on language, acting as a lens shaping individuals' perceptions of reality (Bergström & Boréus, 2018, p. 27; Badersten & Gustavsson, 2015, p. 118-119). Language and its symbolic systems are seen as actively shaping reality, with statements offering subjective interpretations while simultaneously contributing to the construction of reality (Bergström & Ekström, 2018, p. 255). Therefore, this study utilises the critical discourse analysis framework to analyse how language use in the media affect and legitimise the discourse about female political leadership and how the discourse has developed over time.

2.2 Feminism and female political leadership

Researching the discourse on female political leadership is in and of itself a feminist matter as it aims to critically investigate gendered power structures behind the discourse. The feminist movement calling for equality became increasingly visible across Western countries around the 1970s, where the calls and demands were adjusted to each of the countries' current cultural, historical and political contexts. Historically, the term feminism stood for the fight for equal rights for both genders. Over the decades, feminism has not only developed a wide range of understandings of the term itself, but also evolved into different branches of the initial feminist idea such as liberal, black, postmodern, or radical feminism. To this day, the term is constantly being redefined and evaluated, as “there are no simple ways to represent these diverse struggles and histories” (Mohanty, 1981, p. 4). For the sake of this study, Hammarlin & Jarlbros (2014, p. 14) definition of feminist research as “the study of how and to what extent the current gender power order is negative [...] and how it could change” will serve as the core conceptualisation of feminism.

At the centre of feminist theory is the understanding of the separation between the biological concept of sex and the socially constructed gender. Sjoberg (2016, p. 154-155) explains sex as different biological characteristics, and gender as “the social perceptions born of those

perceived biological differences”. Jarlbro (2006, p. 12) explains gender as the socially constructed gender categories which are often discussed using ideas of characteristics that are masculine or feminine. The gender power order then, or the patriarchy, can be understood as the power structure encompassing the values and power assigned to different individuals under the culturally specific conceptualisation of gender (ibid.). The patriarchy impacts the social distribution of power depending on gender, gender expression and sexuality, and has throughout history justified the limited agency women have been awarded.

Historically, the political arena has been dominated by male individuals and masculine ideals of power and authority. As described in chapter 1.1, women’s active contributions to politics started off by having to fight for the right of political participation. In her works about feminist political theory, Bryson (2000, p. 1) explains how women have actively been excluded from politics by men, by saying “When they deigned to notice us, it was usually to justify our exclusion from public affairs and our confinement to the home; only a few saw us as political beings worthy of serious consideration”.

While the issue of exclusion is less prominent today, many obstacles remain - some visible, some not. The picture of a political leader, and leadership in general, is characterised still by masculine traits (Schneider & Bos, 2014; Gidengil & Everitt, 2003b; Hammarlin & Jarlbro, 2014, p.63-65, Koenig et al, 2011). Aalberg and Jenssen (2007) found that after delivering the same speech verbatim, the male politician was perceived as more convincing, trustworthy, and capable compared to his female counterpart. Schneider and Bos (2014) compared stereotypes between male and female politicians and found that the perception of *male politician* and *man* largely align, depicting both groups as ambitious, competitive, and assertive (ibid., p. 255). Conversely, *female politicians* diverge from the broader stereotype of *women*, and are characterised as educated, self-assured, and industrious, while *women* are often portrayed as nurturing, attractive, and emotional (ibid., p. 253-254). When comparing the groups of *female politicians* and *women*, *female politicians* had double the amount of negative characteristics. Moreover, when comparing both groups of politicians, they found that *female politicians* scored lower in all tested traits. In this sense, the stereotype of *female politicians* are constructed as less than their male counterparts in all aspects, and are therefore viewed as less able to be successful political leaders. Similarly, successful female politicians are often portrayed as extraordinary or exemplary, and this representation creates a distance between the politician and the general demographic of women (Bashevkin, 2018; Williams, 2021).

Through this framing, the politicians' positions of power in the masculine field of politics is justified. She is no longer portrayed as a regular woman, as regular women cannot easily be conceptualised as legitimate actors in politics. Sjoberg (2016) explains that the continuous subordination of femininities to masculinities can be understood as the state of “hegemonic masculinity”, which is attained when masculine qualities are consistently preferred and allowed to dominate other traits.

When in power, women are stereotypically believed to care more about matters related to welfare and peace whereas men are believed to own domains such as economy and foreign policy. This follows a disproportionate division of ministerial positions, where women tend to become ministers for softer policy areas, such as education or social affairs (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007; Ross 2004; Baitinger 2015; Bashevkin, 2018, p. 12). Moreover, as women reach executive positions, they are pressured to conform to the masculine culture and embrace stereotypically masculine perspectives. Koch and Fulton (2011) found that while more women in legislative roles correlate with lower defence spending and conflict, this trend reverses in executive roles. These findings suggest that women, once in power, modify their politics to align with the masculine culture in executive government.

2.3 Feminist Media Theory: Women, Leadership and Media

Media is an important and influential tool regarding opinion-making of politics, parties, and the people within it (Asp, 2007; Hammarlin & Jarlbro, 2014, p. 7-8). Feminist media theory holds a critical lens over channels, outlets, and media as a whole in order to investigate how these contribute towards the opinion-making of women, in this case in leadership positions within politics. Moreover, the media has an important democratic responsibility as it serves as society's watchdog of state power and main communicator of objective information (Asp, 2007; Bromander, 2012). As mentioned in chapter 2.1, critical theory questions the very notion of an ‘objective truth’ and claims that media through its reporting reproduces discourses and power structures. Media co-constructs people's perception of reality through the choice of what to report on, the framing of events and subjects and the emphasis placed on specific details and aspects of stories.

The relationship between media and the representation of women is well-studied. In a meta-analysis of the findings of 90 studies, Van der Pas and Aaldering (2020) found that

women politicians were covered less than their male equivalents. In addition, the study found that the existing coverage highlights women's looks, dress and personal life more than for male politicians, and that women receive more negative stereotypes and trait coverage. Similarly, Heldman, Carroll and Olson (2005) compared media coverage of Elizabeth Dole and the other contenders for the 1999 Republican presidential nomination in the US, revealing a gendered bias against Dole. Despite her strong poll performance she received less coverage than expected. Journalists emphasised her gender and looks, framing her candidacy as a novelty diminishing her role as a serious contender for the nomination. Similar findings are reported by Thomas et al (2021) in a large-scale content analysis of coverage of female heads of government, where female leaders were on average written about less than their male equivalents, their clothing was covered to a larger extent, and the stories featured more gendered identifiers.

Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross (1996) refer to the differing media portrayals as gendered mediation. Their understanding introduces a gender perspective on the construction, distribution and consumption of media. Gendered mediation affects not only society's view of specific political actors, but it also reproduces power structures such as the one relating to gender. Women for example are three times as likely to be described by their respective family status as a wife or mother compared to their male counterparts (Ross & Carter, 2011). Through the utilisation of a feminist understanding of media theory, gendered use of language, choice of subjects, production and distribution, gendered nuances of media reporting can be investigated and the underlying power structures can be revealed.

Framing within media has been and is influencing politics by placing developments or events into a certain frame or perspective and thereby influencing its reception. According to Entman's famous definition, framing is described as "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" and hence entails a strong impact on public opinion-shaping (Entman, 2007, p. 164). This can influence perceptions, for example, the language used can evoke different emotions, and focusing on certain aspects of an event can highlight particular implications. Framing can also introduce biases by emphasising specific actors or perspectives. Similar to gendered mediation, a consistently gendered framing of female politicians can impact society's view on their ability to successfully execute political assignments. Haraldsson and Wägnerud (2018) investigated the impact of sexism on women's

political ambition, finding a strong correlation between the level of sexism in a culture and lower shares of female candidates running for office. Schlehofer et al (2011) similarly investigated the impact of media coverage on the stereotype of “competent but cold” as it relates to female politicians. They found that positive coverage of the candidate counteracts the negative stereotype and resulted in a higher rating of perceived warmth and competence. Negative coverage of the candidate did not counteract the negative stereotype and resulted in more unfavourable ratings of the politicians. Framing, as exemplified here, impacts the perception of specific actors and shapes the way society relates to them. Framing can therefore influence elections, and limit women’s chances at a political career while legitimising the patriarchal power structures.

3. Methodology

3.1 Methodological framework: Fairclough's three dimensional model

This investigation will apply Norman Fairclough's version of critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to investigate gendered tendencies in Swedish media portrayal of female political leaders. Discourse can in its simplest form be understood as a "way of signifying experience from a particular perspective" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 96). This explains discourse like a conceptual lens or viewpoint through which individuals interpret reality and gain the means of expressing themselves. Fairclough (*ibid.*, p. 17, 230) also offers an inclusive definition of the term that extends beyond verbal exchanges or text-based semiotics. Instead, discourse is described as a multifaceted construct encompassing not only interpersonal aspects of communication but also the portrayal of societal constructs through an array of channels including writing, speech, or non-verbal cues. Utilising this definition allows to highlight the complex connections and relations embedded within discourse, both on the tangible end such as conversations themselves as well as the intangible assets such as visuals and non-verbal interactions.

Additionally, Fairclough (2010) highlights how discourses are connected to broader social phenomena, arguing that discourse is in its nature linked to power dynamics, institutions, and socio-cultural practices (*ibid.*, p. 35; Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 63). To exemplify, Fairclough illustrates the relationship by stating that discourses both shape and are shaped by power dynamics, thereby influencing social norms and practices. By both representing and interpreting facets of societies, discourses serve as a driver for the perpetuation and dissemination of social beliefs, norms and ideologies (Fairclough, 2003, p. 123-126). This dialectic relationship accentuates the power of discourse by showing how discourse impacts the individual experience as well as societal conditions. Through the means of language, we are enabled to create narratives that shape perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours, thereby crafting a direct influence on societal structures and power dynamics (Fairclough, 2010, p. 230-231). The beliefs, perceptions and values within hegemonic discourses then become conscientiously ingrained in society through text and other discursive practices. It is because of this dialectic relationship that text can be utilised when analysing power, as power both constructs and is constructed in text.

Fairclough's model examines three dimensions: textual, discursive, and sociocultural, each offering unique insights into the construction and interpretation of discourse (Winter-Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p. 68). The textual dimension of analysis can in some ways be likened to a qualitative textual analysis as it focuses on the structural and semiotic practices within texts. This dimension highlights aspects like tone and emphasis, identifies key themes, and accentuates the text's transitivity. Transitivity can be understood as a version of syntax analysis focusing on the construction of action, e.g. who is doing what, and to whom (ibid., p. 83-84; Boreus & Seiler Brylla, 2018, p. 328). The textual dimension is somewhat descriptive in nature and relies on textual features like formatting, emphasis, and visual elements to elucidate underlying dynamics and meaning.

Embracing a different focus, the discursive dimension elaborates on the discursive practices of various actors and how each produces, reproduces, and interprets discourse. A discursive practice is any action related to the "the production, distribution and consumption of a text" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 95). The discursive dimension criticises how central concepts and themes are utilised, who uses them, when they are used, when they are excluded, how they can be interpreted and what they come to represent in different discourses and contexts. Additionally, this dimension clarifies the intertextual relations between the analysed discourse and previously established discourses, displaying the complex interconnected nature of discursive influences or references (ibid., p. 132-133).

Thirdly, the sociocultural dimension analyses how societal factors shape discourse and the use of language. Looking into the contextual conditions that impact discourse emergence, development and dissemination, this dimension illuminates how powerful societal structures impact discursive practices such as text production. It dissects power structures embedded within discourse itself by highlighting how discourse legitimises and reproduces existing social hierarchies and inequalities (Fairclough, 2010, p. 131-132). It is of note that Fairclough, while explaining the three dimensions in a pedagogical and chronological way, argues that the practical analysis does not need to be carried out along this sequence, but may benefit from reasoning that goes back and forth between the three dimensions (ibid., p. 234).

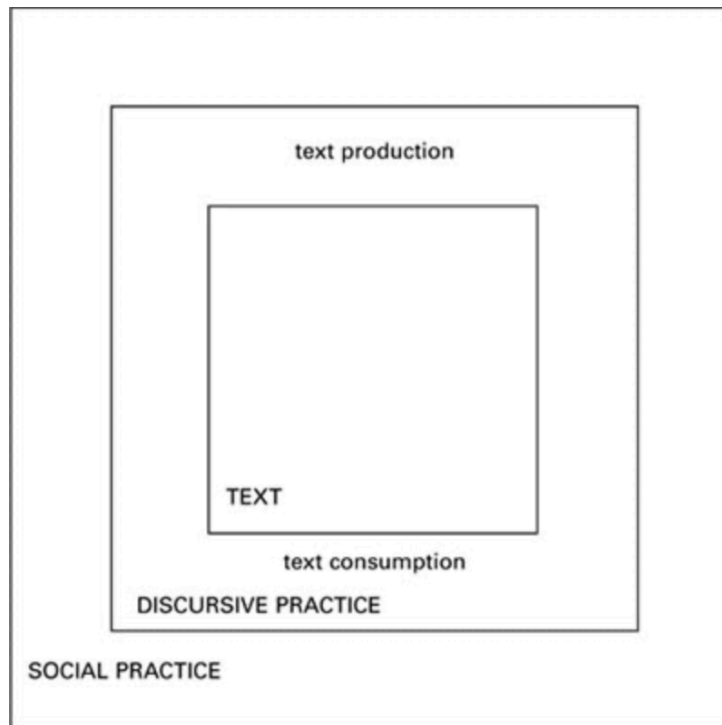


Figure 1. Fairclough's three-dimensional model (Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 68)

Summarising, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay between language, discourse, society and power. The critical focus of CDA and its constructivist underpinnings makes the approach appropriate when analysing power structures as they appear in textual form. Moreover, the three dimensions of Fairclough's CDA allow for an analysis that encompasses more than strictly semiotic expressions as larger discursive practices, possibly diverging interpretations and intertextual references are included.

3.2 Methodological discussion

Selecting CDA as a methodological approach merges well with the study's goals and critical theoretical framework as it is particularly useful for uncovering power dynamics and underlying ideologies embedded within discourse. By examining how language, power, and society interact, CDA allows researchers to explore how discursive practices shape and are shaped by broader social structures. The framework offers a comprehensive set of tools, including textual, discursive, and sociocultural dimensions, enabling researchers to conduct a nuanced analysis of discourse in its various forms. In contrast to Laclau and Mouffe's more poststructuralist approach, which focuses on linguistic aspects, and concepts like floating

signifiers, Fairclough's method is more holistic and inclusive by also considering how different interpretations of texts can emerge and how textual perspectives are connected to larger social dynamics (Winter-Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p. 6-7).

It is important to discuss the implications of the investigation's epistemological assumptions in relation to scientific ideals and research quality. Unlike positivist methods which highlight criteria such as objectivity, reliability, and generalizability, CDA operates within a critical and constructivist paradigm (see 2.1). This entails an understanding of knowledge as situated within specific socio-cultural contexts, necessarily influenced by the researcher constructing said knowledge. Since no person, according to this view, can operate outside of their mental, social and historical context, knowledge cannot be objective. Hence, this study does not claim absolute objectivity, and is instead based on systematically structured interpretation. To generate credible research given these assumptions, investigations must be conducted applying a slightly adjusted understanding of intersubjectivity (Badersten & Gustavsson, 2015, p. 48-49). In broad terms, intersubjectivity consists of the criteria of criticizability and reproducibility, but for constructivist research the former of the two is highlighted (ibid.). In order to fulfil these criteria, research must consist of transparent accounts of methodological choices and researcher reflexivity. This includes a critical reflection of underlying biases, assumptions and positionalities and how these influence the course of the research.

Moreover, it is not this study's objective to generate generalisable findings, but rather deeply analyse and interpret the selected material via the three dimensions in order to illustrate the power(im)balances in Swedish media and how these are reproduced. The entirety of a societal discourse cannot be fully interpreted on the basis of a few articles. Discourse, as described in chapter 3.1, is much more layered and complex, and includes everyday reproductions and discursive practices that simply cannot be fully analysed within the scope of this, or any, research.

3.3 Analytical framework

In the first reading of the material, the following analytical framework is applied in order to structure the primary analysis. The framework, relating to the first level of Fairclough's analysis, facilitates a classification of materials and allows for patterns and themes to be

uncovered. The second and third dimensions will partially draw upon the patterns found in the first dimension.

Based on the insights presented in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), the following variables as visible in Figure 2 are construed; *Gender*, being identified through the means of naming or otherwise alluding to the politicians’ gender. *Family and private relations*, measured through the mentions of their familial associations or other private relationships. *Appearance*, deduced from comments about the politicians’ physical appearances, including the way they dress, physical expressions, or their body language. Fourth, the variable *Attributes* is made up of comments on personal characteristics and implied or indirect characterisations of the politicians. Lastly, the variable *Use of Language* consists of interpreting tone of text, emphasis, the wording, verbs used in relation to the subject, and the usage of metaphors and similes in regards to gendered comparisons. An example of this primary analysis can be found in Appendix 2.

1. Gender	<i>naming of gender</i>
2. Family and private relations	<i>familial associations, relationships</i>
3. Appearance	<i>physical appearance, dress, physical expression</i>
4. Attributes	<i>personal characteristics</i>
5. Use of language	<i>a) tone of text</i>
	<i>b) emphasis</i>
	<i>c) wording</i>
	<i>d) verbs used in relation to subject</i>
	<i>e) metaphors and similes: gendered comparisons</i>

Figure 2. Analytical framework

3.4 Material

The analysed material consists of texts by Sweden’s four biggest national media companies: Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Expressen and Aftonbladet. Dagens Nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet represent traditional Swedish newspaper agencies, Expressen and Aftonbladet typify Swedish evening newspapers with sensationalistic traits. This mix provides a comprehensive analysis of discourse on female political leadership, covering the

political spectrum to balance editorial biases. Dagens Nyheter and Expressen are independent liberal, Svenska Dagbladet is independent moderate, and Aftonbladet is independent social democratic.

Within material selection, the choice fell on 1998 and 2018 as years of comparison. Both were election years and give sufficient time to allow for a longitudinal comparison. A list of all active politicians in ministerial or party-leading positions for those years was created, and those with the most media coverage were identified using Mediarkivet. The top four politicians for each year were selected, resulting in 64 unique articles about: Schyman, Wallström, Winberg, and Lindh for 1998, and Löf, Busch Thor, Wallström, and Lövin for 2018 (see Appendix 3). As the same articles were sometimes analysed in relation to several politicians, a total of 92 analyses of the 64 articles were carried out. The articles were published on the first two consecutive weekdays, two weeks before the election of each year. For 1998, the dates used were 31st of August and 1st of September. For 2018 this represented the 20th and 21st of August. This resulted in an unequal distribution between the two time periods (22 articles in 1998 versus 107 articles in 2018), and so an additional date for 1998 was added, namely 2nd of September. Weekday news was selected since weekend editions of newspapers tend to cater to entertainment and leisure reading.

All texts were retrieved from the digital news database Mediarkivet (Retriever Research). Articles that were physically printed and published online were both included in the analysis (see Appendix 1). Texts that were behind a paywall, were written by the politicians themselves or were reader submissions were excluded as they are limited in reach and/or not a part of the general portrayal of female politicians as created by newspaper agencies. Moreover, texts that simply mention the politicians were not included as a simple mention of their names do not reflect the public perception of female leadership.

4. Results

In this chapter, the results from the analysis are presented and discussed in relation to the research question. Fairclough's first dimension is represented within subchapters 4.1-4.5 where the aim is to report the findings from the primary analysis. In subchapter 4.6 and 4.7, Fairclough's second and third dimension is processed, and the findings presented in 4.1-4.5 are contextualised, expanded upon and analysed in relation to their social implications.

4.1. Gender

The texts were analysed for direct or implicit gender mentions. One way which the authors revealed the politicians' genders was by their female pronouns, which can be assumed is simply fulfilling basic journalistic practice. As this approach is also used for male politicians in the texts, it can not be seen as a gendered practice. Moreover, there was a clear difference in how politicians' names were mentioned in relation to their roles. In 1998 it was less common to refer to the politician's role when discussing them, and the leaders were mostly referred to by their whole name. The exception in 1998 was Margareta Winberg who was consistently introduced as Minister of Labour and/or Agriculture, possibly as she is the only non-party leader in the selection. There is a visible change when looking at the coverage from 2018. More than half of the articles include the title right before the name when discussing the politician, such as "the Christian Democrats party leader Ebba Busch Thor". This tendency directly attaches the leader to the power and authority of their roles, communicating more than just their party leadership—it signifies their expertise and authority. By linking their names with their positions, the media emphasises the leaders professional qualifications and leadership capabilities reinforcing their status as competent leaders.

Gudrun Schyman's connection to feminism and feminist policy is highlighted in several articles. She is, for example, blamed for stealing specifically women voters from the Social Democrats (article 74). In another article in which art experts, journalists and professional photographers discuss election posters, a young, unknown, beautiful woman is said to copy Gudrun Schyman's pose before highlighting that Schyman made the Left Party a feminist party in 1996 (article 77). In an article summarising one of Schyman's political speeches, the aspects relating to women and women's rights were highlighted, whilst her stance on taxes and other political questions were sidelined (article 71). Lastly, in an article describing political rallies by the Left Party and the Social Democrats, both Persson and Schyman are

very critically portrayed. Schyman is depicted as a poor leader, but during her speech the author claims she at least “said wise things about the womens’ movement”(sa kloka grejer om kvinnokampen)(article 72). By continuously associating Schyman with women voters, women’s rights and feminism while neglecting her other proposals, she is framed as a leader of women, not just a leader. In the 1998 articles about Wallström, she is given several different belittling epithets like “the prime minister's sidekick” (statsministerns vapendragare) and “Wallström the extra” (Wallström statisten). Similarly to Schyman, Wallström is connected to women’s rights and the women’s movement. One article writes: “Margot Wallström speaks a lot about gender equality at the meetings” (På mötena talar Margot Wallström mycket om jämlikhet)(article 79). The tendency of connecting female politicians to the women’s movement is not found in 2018.

4.2. Relationships

Secondly, the primary analysis took note of mentions of the politicians’ relationships, looking at outliers of neutral reporting which move away from reporting on political issues and instead focus on the leaders' private relationships with partners, friends or colleagues. In the 1998 corpus, a few instances are found, mostly related to Schyman. In article 74 there is a significant focus on Schyman’s relationship with her colleague Persson with questions about the status of it, asking e.g. "Why won't they dine together?" and “Do they even know each other?”. Schyman argues that a political collaboration might benefit from personal rapport, but is not dependent on a private relationship. Moreover, the author characterises Schyman and Persson’s lack of private relationship as a rejection of Schyman by Persson, stating that “Schyman wants nothing more than to govern with the Social Democrats. But Göran Persson doesn't even want to invite the 'Red Danger' to dinner” (Schyman vill inget hellre än att regera med Socialdemokraterna. Men Göran Persson vill inte ens bjuda ‘Röda faran’ på middag) (ibid.). The idea of Schyman being rejected on a private level by Persson is echoed and justified in other articles, for example: “He [Persson] has also rejected any deeper cooperation on very good grounds” (Han [Persson] har också på mycket goda grunder tackat nej till något djupare samarbete) (article 76,70 & 68).

Among the articles from 2018, a focus on personal relationships remains. Article 40 discusses three out of the four politicians as wives and mothers. When discussing Annie Lööf, her husband Carl-Johan Lööf is introduced, and their division of household chores is discussed as

“shared”. Additionally, the impact of her having a political role on their personal relationship dynamic is mentioned. Isabella Lövin’s husband is presented and then the reader is informed that “the husband had an environmentally hazardous diesel car in the garage - a type of vehicle that the Green Party taxes heavily” (maken hade en miljöfarlig dieselbil i garaget - en typ av fordon som Miljöpartiet beskattar hårt)(ibid.). Similar aspects are discussed in relation to Busch Thor, where one article mentions her pregnancy while it is not the topic at hand, suggesting that her emotional reaction to becoming party leader was heightened because of the pregnancy hormones (article 50).

4.3. Appearance

The analysis of the variable appearance includes mentions of dress, looks or other physical expressions. As this study excludes pictures, only textual mentions regarding appearance are included. The 1998 articles frequently reference the women's physical expressions, such as Wallström looking “slumped in an armchair” and Winberg and Lindh crying about their failures as ministers (article 78). However, most comments are directed at Gudrun Schyman, with six direct references. Schyman is described as looking “kind and funny” in a “beautiful photograph,” with remarks about her beauty appearing in two articles (article 66 & 77). She is also labelled as “by far the most photogenic politician” (article 66). The articles also contain gendered observations as Schyman is described as having a “male expression by crossing her arms in front of her chest” (ibid.), a sentiment echoed in another article noting her pose as “male” (article 77).

The 2018 coverage reveals far less mentions of appearance despite being proportionally larger. However, occasional comments are found such as Löf being described as “warm and smiling with natural makeup” (article 39). While Löfs makeup and visage is approved by the author, the general trend of the “strong woman” aesthetic on election posters, attributed to all of the female leaders appearing, is criticised as old and inauthentic. The topic of makeup appears in the very same article, where the author mentions how Isabella Lövin was scolded by another journalist for not wearing makeup at an event. The author assures the reader, saying that “none of this year's female politicians risk getting such a lecture this year [...] Lövin because she simply does not appear in any pictures, but otherwise, female politicians are frenetically made up and powdered” (ingen av årets kvinnliga politiker riskerar att få en dylik uppläxning i år [...] Lövin för att hon helt enkelt inte syns på några bilder, men i övrigt

sminkas och pudras det kvinnliga politiker så det står härliga till). Articles covering Busch Thor and Wallström did not mention their appearance, dress or physical expression.

4.4 Attributes

Very few direct uses of attributes appeared in the materials, with the language used to portray the politicians being neutral with little difference between the two time periods. The majority of character portrayals were implicit and covert, arising when the politician was compared to other actors in the texts.

In the few direct characterisations from the 1998 corpus, both Wallström and Schyman are characterised as bitter because they have been rejected by, or do not receive as much attention as PM Göran Persson, whom Schyman and Wallström are compared to and characterised as less than. In article 79, Persson is portrayed as the stronger politician, the “lead” (huvudrollsinnehavare) to Wallströms role as an “extra” (statist), “the powerful locomotive” (kraftfullt lokomotiv) to Wallströms “railway car” (rälsbuss) and the “strict pastor” (sträng pastor) which Wallström is “subordinate” to (underordnad). Moreover, when Wallström appears together with Persson, she “loses focus, [and] becomes embarrassed and perplexed” (förlorar koncentrationen, blir förlägen och rådvill). Besides these more apparent characterisations, the female leaders are shown to be portrayed as having both positive and desirable traits when one analyses indirect and covert characterisation. Schyman, for example, is depicted as in control and resilient, Wallström is painted as loyal and influential and Winberg is portrayed as strategic. Many of these traits are desirable traits for leaders regardless of their gender, and are oftentimes attributed to men (Schneider & Bos, 2014). Yet, the criticism in the 1998 articles is strong. Through indirect portrayals, the politicians were depicted as annoying, desperate, critical, frustrated and cunning (slug). Besides Schyman, all investigated politicians have been painted as overly emotional in article 85, which is one of the more commonly used female stereotypes. In the satirical editorial, a scene is sketched where the leaders are sitting in a governmental office, crying about the failings within their respective policy areas. Anna Lindh is said to have “tears running down her cheeks” (tårarna rinner nedför kinderna) while Margareta Winberg is sobbing, exclaiming that she has “ruined the lives of half a million unemployed!” (förstört livet för en halv miljon arbetslösa!).

In 2018, the direct characterisation is less prominent than in 1998. Lööf and Busch Thor are directly referred to as critical and Lövin was depicted as “unsure” about specific policies (article 15). Other than these instances, the only direct characterisation occurred when other political actors described the women. Jimmie Åkesson, for example, called Annie Lööf “naive”, “neoliberal” and even “positive”. Through indirect depiction, the politicians are rendered in both positive and negative lights, similar to the pattern found in 1998. Here however, all four politicians are credited with more attributes towards their professionalism and their potential as political leaders. Lööf is depicted as confrontational and pragmatic and Wallström as determined and experienced. Even typically feminine traits such as compassion and empathy are positively framed, showing a shift towards a more inclusive conceptualisation of leadership. Criticism and negative coverage is still apparent, however, mostly in relation to the politicians being too confrontative, critical, cocky or aggressive. Lövin receives the most negative characterisation, often being portrayed as evasive, clumsy and ineffective as a leader. In article 13 Lövin is said to have “had a hard time giving straight answers to straight questions” (hade problem med att ge raka svar på raka frågor).

4.5. Use of Language

4.5.1 Tone of Text, emphasis and wording

In the 1998 corpus, almost two thirds of all media pieces carried a negative tone, the remaining third being neutral. That implies the most striking result of the tone of text analysis, being that no article is written with a positive tone. Instead, all four considered politicians face tough criticism by multiple authors. In the case of Winberg, six out of eight articles are negatively coded, with wording ranging from dismissive, to sad, all the way to dystopian. While nine of the considered articles stay neutral, the coverage is recognisably belittling, degrading, and ridiculing the politicians and their efforts. The same was found for emphasis, in which the majority of articles emphasised a negative coverage of the analysed politicians, framing them as unwanted or less than other political actors who oftentimes are male.

20 years later, the scepticism is still visible within the tone of text. However, only less than one third of the articles were coded negative. Similar patterns to 1998 are present for wording, with the use of sarcastic or derogatory language or ridiculing elements. However, the majority of the material is neutrally coded, with a significant amount of articles being argumentative, fact-based, professional, and objective. Lastly, the 2018 selection shows the first four

positively coded articles as well, three about Busch Thor and one about Lööf. Here, as well as through some of the neutrally coded articles, the tone is proactive and partially forward-looking, at points being optimistic about the politicians and the future they are shaping. According to the analysis, the emphasis of the articles follow this pattern towards a more neutral or even positive framing, where the texts focus more so on the politicians' policy proposals or ideas, and their joint political efforts together with other actors.

The choice of words follow a similar pattern, contributing to the tone of the text by appealing to emotions using loaded words or references. Throughout the corpus of 1998, one finds words that are used to criticise, ridicule and diminish the politicians. For example, Schyman's decision to team up with the Green Party to strengthen their shared criticism of recent EU decisions is characterised as a "one-question cartel" (enfrågekartell), and the criticism is referred to as "populist Europe-policy" (populistisk Europapolitik)(article 76). Moreover, in article 66 the election material is called "The Left Party's little election manifesto" (Vänsterpartiets lilla valmanifest). The use of charged words like "cartel", characterising a party's election material as a "little manifesto", and describing policy as "populist" appeals to the reader's emotions and belittles, ridicules and dismisses the politician's actions and strategies. The wording found in 1998 is further questioning and doubting, where journalists ask rhetorical questions about the investigated women, implying a level of doubt towards the politicians themselves and their legitimacy as political actors. One example is found in article 79, asking about Wallström: "Why does she put up with being so subordinate to Göran Persson in the election game?" (Varför finner hon sig då i att vara så underordnad Göran Persson i valspelet?). Lastly, the analysis shows usage of words which are ironic, dramatic, and parodic which further feeds into the downplaying of the politician's legitimate perception.

Analysing the material of 2018 shows predominantly neutrally-coded wording that is less emotionally loaded. Similar is a certain level of scepticism through critical wording as well as figurative language. Comparing these two datasets allows for conclusions on visible differences: There's a significant reduction in emotionally-coded words, moving towards neutral reporting. Secondly, while there is criticism, the 2018 corpus seems more balanced and neutral rather than overly judgmental. A noteworthy similarity lies within the use of war and conflict metaphors, predominantly present in 1998. Examples are "two-front war", "attack", or "battle cry" in 1998, and "duel" or "attack" in 2018. These are utilised as a way of reproducing a common and masculine understanding of politics, as women are not seen as

‘violent’ or as ‘fighters’ and therefore do not fit into the conceptualisation of a strong leader or political actor.

4.5.2 Verbs and transitivity

Within verbs associated with the politicians and their actions, comparable patterns appear. Articles from 1998 again show emotionality through verbs such as “sighs”, “sobs”, or “cries”, illustrating the politicians as emotionally unstable. Another finding is the note of exclusion through for example “rejected”, “waiting for an invitation but hasn’t heard” or “not invited”, illustrating female politicians as not having a seat at the table and needing to be invited to the halls of power. Moreover, women are depicted as rather passive through verbs such as “takes over the matter”, or “waiting”. In general, the conceptualisation of the politician's agency is characterised using verbs that are negative or loaded. These findings differ from the reporting from 2018 in which women are illustrated as more active politicians with their own agency, through verbs such as “wants”, “resolves”, “demands”, “proposes”, “challenges”, or “pressures”. Additionally, in 2018 more neutral verbs were used to depict the leaders actions, with versions of “say” being the most used verb in this corpus. Despite emotional wording being present, there is less of a focal point on it, similarly to verbs related to failure. Here, the reporting moved away from wording such as “fails”, “loses”, or “fumbling” and more towards confrontational language such as “criticises” or “questions”. These findings are in line with the earlier described tone of text, wording used, and emphasis.

4.5.3 Metaphors, gendered comparisons and references

A further text-based tool of shaping opinions is the way authors play with metaphors to create certain images and illustrations of the people or matters at hand. Metaphors, comparisons and references are often used to add culturally specific understandings onto new events in order to situate them in an already existing cultural narrative and thereby help the reader more easily understand complex happenings. The articles contained very few direct metaphors, but the use of references and comparisons were recurring across both time periods. In the articles from 1998, the studied female politicians were often compared, directly or indirectly, to other politicians of both genders. Wallström is through the use of binary references and imagery, compared to PM Persson and depicted as less than (as discussed in 4.4). Similarly, in article 80, Margot Wallström and Göran Persson as a team is compared to Mona Sahlin and Ingvar

Carlsson, where both women are portrayed as less powerful and influential than their male counterparts. This pattern is found in the majority of articles in which several political actors are mentioned. Moreover, references to violence and battle were common, but almost exclusively used in relation to male politicians. In addition, references to communism were used in relation to Gudrun Schyman on several occasions, one article referring to her as “the Red Danger” (röda faran) (article 74). Another example is article 72 which mentions “dissidents”, “agitators” and “traditions of the labour movement”.

In the 2018 material, no metaphors or textual imagery were found. This absence of emotionally loaded ways of journalism plays into the findings of earlier subchapters, highlighting the change towards a more neutral reporting compared to 1998. Instead of metaphors, the authors use significant direct and indirect comparative framing to illustrate power dynamics between the politicians, one author even dividing the political field into winners and losers. Lööf, one of the winners, is continually portrayed as a force against fascism, nazism and the right-wing party the Swedish Democrats and their leader Jimmie Åkesson. She is also often depicted as a part of the Alliance (Alliansen), where Lööf is presented as more combative and outspoken than the other members of the group. This comparative depiction is mostly conveyed in a neutral way, where the authors do not place value on Lööfs expressions, but in some of the articles her strong stances are criticised as attacks or naive assumptions. Lövin is considered one of the losers, and is often compared to her male colleague Gustav Fridolin. On several instances, Lövin is described to step in instead of Fridolin at events or that her appearance is a desperate strategy from the party to generate attention as Fridolins approval is dwindling. The comparison between the representatives cast Lövin as the lesser of the two, with Fridolin being the main actor, and her being the second-choice.

4.6 The discursive dimension and the socio-cultural dimension

Within subchapter 4.1 about *gender*, a forwards-trend is recognisable through a reduction in gendered reporting. In the 1990s, interestingly, women politicians were often mentioned in relation to women's issues suggesting that these are indeed "soft" political areas belonging to female politicians, which has been suggested by previous research as well. This tendency was much less apparent in 2018 with only a few articles connecting the leaders to softer policy areas, mostly in the context of debates and policy discussions. Moreover, a shift in how journalists portray female politicians is found, where consistent usage of political titles is

implemented in the 2018 corpus. By attaching the politicians' names to their roles, journalists enhance their legitimacy and ultimately impact how professional and authoritative they are perceived by the public. Therefore, looking at the aspect of *gender* individually suggests progress when it comes to gender bias through a change in discursive practices relating to the portrayal of female leaders.

In regards to *relationships*, female politicians still face gossip-like reporting about their private lives (Braden, 2014). While few in number, the relationship mentions that do appear are reinforcing gender stereotypes and strengthen the established division between the private and the public and once more exile women into the private sphere. By only discussing division of household chores in relation to a female politician and not her male counterpart strengthens the idea that domestic labour is the responsibility of women. Furthermore, by not discussing household responsibilities in connection to male politicians, the connection between the public sphere and men is strengthened. In sum, traditional gender roles are reproduced by this narrative. Interestingly, only in the 1998 corpus are professional relationships between the politicians cast in the light of a private one when Schyman is portrayed as rejected by PM Persson and not invited to his "spaghetti-dinner" (article 74). In this bizarre conceptualisation of professional rapport, Schyman's lack of relationship with Persson is portrayed as strange and she is depicted as a rejected romantic interest rather than a political colleague. This narrative reproduces the objectification of women, and reinforces the connection between the private sphere and women, belittling Schyman as a political actor. No similar tendencies were found in the 2018 material, suggesting that the line between private and public have been redrawn.

In 1998, media coverage focused more on women's physical and emotional expressions than in 2018. Comments on *appearance*, such as descriptions of slumping or crying, reinforce traditional gender stereotypes that undermine their professional competence. For instance, Schyman is often described in terms of her looks or "male"/"strong" posture. By 2018, there was a notable reduction in appearance focus, suggesting a shift towards more substantive reporting. However, remnants of traditional gender expectations persisted. Female politicians were still occasionally scrutinised for their looks, and the critique of the "strong woman" aesthetic indicated that women in politics continue to face pressure to balance masculine and feminine traits. These evolving patterns might reflect broader changes in discourse and a re-negotiation of female leadership. The reduction in appearance-related comments marks

progress, highlighting female leaders for their policies, political stances, and leadership skills rather than looks. This shift enhances the perceived legitimacy of women's leadership by focusing more on their professional capabilities and less on their adherence to gendered expectations. However, ongoing scrutiny over aspects like the "strong woman" aesthetic reveals that female politicians still navigate a complex landscape of gender norms.

In regards to *attributes*, the analysis reveals a move towards more implicit characterizations of female politicians, with language becoming more neutral. In 1998, Wallström and Schyman were depicted negatively, often compared unfavourably to PM Göran Persson, reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. Descriptions like "bitter" and "emotional" undermined their professional competence, while indirect portrayals acknowledged some positive traits. In 2018, direct characterizations were less prominent, with a mix of positive and negative portrayals. Female politicians were increasingly recognized for their professionalism and leadership potential, with feminine traits like compassion framed desirably. However, negative portrayals persisted, especially for being confrontative or aggressive. Interestingly, as characterization relies more on indirect factors like context and interactions with other political figures, readers must use contextual cues to interpret political events and understand politicians. This trend can be problematic, illustrated by the case of Löf, often characterised in relation to Jimmie Åkesson, leader of the controversial Swedish Democrats party. Depending on their preexisting opinions and political affiliations, readers will interpret the texts differently. A Swedish Democrats supporter may see Åkesson's negative assessment of Löf as justified criticism, while a Löf supporter may view the same text as positive coverage, dismissing Åkesson's opinions as inaccurate and unwelcome. This underscores the subjectivity in media consumption, contributing to political polarisation. In this selection generally, there is a step back from the blatant preference of masculine traits in politics and a move towards a more indirect portrayal is found.

The analysis presented in 4.5 revealed similar results when comparing the 1998 and 2018 material. In 1998, the majority of articles had a negative tone, oftentimes leaning critical, diminishing or ridiculing. The fact that there are no positive-toned articles covering these women showcases the overall sentiment of the media landscape towards women in politics as a whole. This entails a two-fold problem; it degrades the rightfully earned expertise and efforts that women put in, and poses additional hindrance for women pursuing political leadership and public approval in the future. This tone is strengthened by the use of emotionally charged verbs such as "sighs", "sobs", or "cries", playing on the stereotype of the

emotional woman. This depiction belittles the female leaders and questions their ability to professionally execute political assignments. The frequent use of verbs that signal passivity such as “fumbling” and “rejected”, reinforce the covert narrative of women as passive and unfit for the political arena. In addition, the 1998 material uses several references to violence and battle, which previous studies have identified as a masculine coded conceptualisation of political affairs in which women struggle to be seen as legitimate actors.

In contrast, the material from 2018 reflects a move towards a more neutral portrayal of female leaders, with fewer emotionally loaded words and metaphors. The general change in tone is evident as the majority of articles used a neutral and reporting tone, and the corpus includes texts with positive tones. The wording is less charged, and the most commonly used verb is a variety of “say”. Moreover, indirect comparisons are more frequent, pitting politicians against each other, illustrating power dynamics among politicians. Winners like Annie Lööf are portrayed assertively, while losers like Isabella Lövin are unfavourably compared to her male counterpart. This apparent neutrality may still conceal underlying biases, as female politicians navigate a political arena shaped by entrenched gender norms.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Limitations, recommendations for further research, applications

Conducting this analysis unearthed certain limitations. The media availability in 1998 has proven to be rather limited compared to 2018 simply due to the media landscape not being as fully digitally available as its later counterpart. This required visual cues like pictures to be cut out from the analysis fully, excluding their impact on the perception of the texts. Further research could investigate the use of visual representation within the discourse in order to complement the findings suggested here. Moreover, in order to expand our understanding of the changing discourse, more politicians and timeframes can be investigated to either support or counter the findings in this study. This study does not include an analysis of differences across party lines, and does not account for possible differences in portrayals based on their positioning on the political spectrum. Other power structures, such as class, race and age were also excluded in this investigation and could be applied in future research in order to investigate how these factors impact media portrayal.

Furthermore, the method of CDA as applied in this study cannot and does not claim to generate objective knowledge as understood by positivism. Instead, these findings are constructed based on a systematic interpretation. In order to investigate the discourse from another, perhaps positivist perspective, future research could focus on the quantitative end of the analytical spectrum and analyse gendered tendencies in large-n corpi. To increase the width of the research, the scope can be broadened, including increased numbers of politicians as well as an extended timeframe.

The lessons learnt from this research should serve as a reminder for media to continuously challenge their own ways of working and to keep reevaluating one's journalistic standards against personal and societal values. Acknowledging biases highlights the importance for the inclusion of gender matters into the ethical committees or journalistic training within media companies. Further recommendations towards more equal treatments within politics and media could be programs that support media literacy, awareness of biased reporting, as well as promoting more diverse perspectives.

5.2 Conclusion

This study has investigated the question of how the discourse surrounding female political leadership has developed in Sweden between 1998-2018, by applying Fairclough's critical discourse analysis onto a selection of articles covering seven female political leaders. Following an analysis of 64 articles, the study provides insights into the development of the portrayal of female politicians, its change and lack thereof over the course of two decades.

Through the analysis, the study has contributed to the knowledge about female political leadership perception. The study has found that the discourse on female political leadership has become more neutral in language, while underlying gender roles continue to limit the political space of female leaders, portraying them as inferior within a masculine context. As more women have attained executive positions and female leadership becomes more common, the use of metaphors, imagery, charged wording, and negative coverage decreased, suggesting a reconfiguration of our semiotic and linguistic relationship with women in power. However, underlying power dynamics persist, evidenced by continuous negative comparisons, indirect characterisations and the use of battle and war language. While the language and approach seem to be changing, underlying patriarchal values remain.

Concludingly, much of Sweden's media portrayal is reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes that hold up an outdated image of women being inferior leadership candidates which can impede women's professional ambitions and perceptions. Secondly, the discourse seems to be evolving, showing both developments away from gendered patterns, and persistent remainders of them. Thirdly, this highlights the need not only for continued efforts, but for practical solutions that actively monitor biases and journalistic practices. Media as a channel should constitute a trustworthy source of information, not another obstacle on the path towards gender equality - in politics and beyond.

Bibliography

Material

For the full list of analysed materials, see Appendix 3.

Aftonbladet 1–2/9 1998 och 3–4/9 2018

Dagens Nyheter 1–2/9 1998 och 3–4/9 2018

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Svenska Dagbladet 1–2/9 1998 och 3–4/9 2018

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Appendix 1

This appendix specifies the source selection within Mediearkivet (Retriever Research).

Name	Mediatype	Category	Language	Country	Readership	Date of first article
Aftonbladet	web	Riksmmedia	Svenska	Sverige	1106545	2000-08-10
Dagens Nyheter	web	Riksmmedia	Svenska	Sverige	874000	2000-08-15
Expressen	web	Riksmmedia	Svenska	Sverige	1471080	2000-08-10
Svenska Dagbladet	web	Riksmmedia	Svenska	Sverige	656000	1999-04-18
Svenska Dagbladet	print	Riksmmedia	Svenska	Sverige	301000	1995-01-01
Expressen	print	Riksmmedia	Svenska	Sverige	300000	1990-01-02
Dagens Nyheter	print	Riksmmedia	Svenska	Sverige	483000	1991-11-13
Aftonbladet	print	Riksmmedia	Svenska	Sverige	347000	1994-09-01

Appendix 2

This appendix serves to exemplify the primary coding using the analytical framework presented in Chapter 3.3. These examples are taken from the coding of texts regarding and/or including Gudrun Schyman in 1998, and were chosen at random. NA in this context is an abbreviation of “not applicable”, and indicates no data from this text fits the category.

Article 11	Titel: Val 98. NOBBAD. Schyman förstår inte varför Persson inte vill träffa henne	av: Viveka Hansson
gender	<i>naming of gender</i>	kvinnor, hon/henne (kallas Röda Faran, och vänsterledaren, Gudrun Schyman, Schyman)
family and private relations	<i>familial associations, relationships</i>	pushar på Schymans relation med Persson: kommer de inte överens, varför ses de inte i mer privata sammanhang, varför vill han inte prata/diskutera med henne?
appearance	<i>physical appearance, dress, physical expression</i>	NA
attributes	<i>personal characteristics</i>	bitter (framställs som ljuger/hittar på/förfinar, hotfull till S framgång. bitter, inte önskad)
use of language	<i>a) tone of text</i>	Utmanande, frustrerad, förlöjligande
	<i>b) emphasis</i>	Persson har det tufft och gillar inte V/Schyman
	<i>c) wording</i>	Slag: tvåfrontskrig, vapendragare, regerar, attack.
	<i>d) verbs used in relation to subject</i>	försöker, borde avslöjas, attackerade, förklarade, talade, sträckt ut handen till Persson, inte bjuden, väntar på inbjudan men har inte hört ett ord, NOBBAD
	<i>e) metaphors and similes: gendered comparisons</i>	Röda faran, middag/spaghettimiddag, sträcker ut handen,
	<i>annat</i>	associationen till en privat relation där hon blir avvisad
Article 12	Titel: V och Mp i enad valfront mot EU	Av: TT
gender	<i>naming of gender</i>	NA (kallas Gudrun Schyman, Schyman)
family and private relations	<i>familial associations, relationships</i>	NA
appearance	<i>physical appearance, dress, physical expression</i>	NA
attributes	<i>personal characteristics</i>	målas upp som strategisk och slagkraftig
use of language	<i>a) tone of text</i>	rapporterande, neutral, objektiv

	<i>b) emphasis</i>	Mp och V tillsammans, hoppas ha hittat en ny strategi med EU-motståndet
	<i>c) wording</i>	spekulativ: hoppas, kan tänka sig, försökte lyfta, deras mål,
	<i>d) verbs used in relation to subject</i>	försökte, förhindra, vill lyfta
	<i>e) metaphors and similes: gendered comparisons</i>	EU-frågan är dynamit, Schyman kopplas ihop med Schlaug
	<i>annat</i>	NA
Article 13	Titel: Lika som bär	Av: NA
gender	<i>naming of gender</i>	NA (kallad Gudrun Schyman)
family and private relations	<i>familial associations, relationships</i>	NA
appearance	<i>physical appearance, dress, physical expression</i>	NA
attributes	<i>personal characteristics</i>	(framställs med följande ord "bönat och bett om uppmärksamhet" precis som MP, irrelevant)
use of language	<i>a) tone of text</i>	förlöjligande, nedvärderande, förminskande
	<i>b) emphasis</i>	Mp har problem och söker nu att samarbeta med V, inte bra, Schyman och Schlaug är lika men inte på ett bra sätt
	<i>c) wording</i>	maskrosorna (slang för MP-väljare), enfrågekartell (nedvärderande), EU-motståndares röster, generellt väldigt kritiskt och nedvärderande
	<i>d) verbs used in relation to subject</i>	bildar en enfrågekartell, vädjar,
	<i>e) metaphors and similes: gendered comparisons</i>	Schlaug och Schyman är likadana (lika som bär), populister som varken Persson eller högern gillar. MP och vänstern bildar en enfrågekartell. Schlaug blir som Schyman nu (som ses som ännu lägre rankad)
	<i>annat</i>	NA

Appendix 3

This appendix includes all of the investigated titles in relation to the studied political leaders. As several articles are analysed in relation to two or more of the leaders, the list includes 92 entries representing the 92 primary analysis carried through in this study. As mentioned in 3.4, this study is based on 64 unique articles.

Wallström (2018)

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Media outlet</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Article #</i>
Dags att stå upp för vårt svenska språk	NA	Aftonbladet	21.08.2018	1
Kinnunen om MP:s köttskattförslag: "Är lurendrejeri"	Knutsson, Andersson	Expressen	20.08.2018	2
Den här valnatten kommer inte att likna någon annan	Silberstein	Dagens Nyheter	20.08.2018	3

Lövin (2018)

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Media outlet</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Article #</i>
Stefan Löfven: Jag vill fortsätta regera med MP	Sjöshult, Knutson	Expressen	21.08.2018	4
Varm luft utan påverkan på miljön	Selling	Svenska Dagbladet	21.08.2018	5
Åkesson förlorade 22 000 följare - var fejkkonton	Skoglund	Expressen	21.08.2018	6
SD är ett hot mot klimatet	Sima	Aftonbladet	21.08.2018	7
Åkesson tappade flest när Twitter rensade fejkkonton	Omni	Svenska Dagbladet	21.08.2018	8
Regeringen: Beredskapen stärks inför nästa	Omni	Svenska Dagbladet	20.08.2018	9

sommar				
Fyra vinnare och fyra förlorare i valet om 20 dagar	Mellin	Aftonbladet	20.08.2018	10
Fridolin: ”Kan tänka mig samarbete med C och L”	Micu	Expressen	20.08.2018	11
Vem kläckte idén om att framställa partiledarna som hjältar i en actionserie?	Hultquist	Dagens Nyheter	20.08.2018	12
Bara vilja räcker inte, Miljöpartiet. Isabella Lövin pressades om brustna löften, klimathot och samarbetet med S	Mellin	Aftonbladet	20.08.2018	13
Männen & kvinnorna som lever ihop med Sveriges partiledare	NA	Expressen	20.08.2018	14
"Den borde jag kunna, va?"	Knutson	Expressen	20.08.2018	15

Lööf (2018)

Title	Author	Media outlet	Date	Article #
Åkesson och Lööf i debatt om svenska språket	Lundberg Andersson	Expressen	21.08.2018	16
Jimmie Åkessons hot mot alliansen – om Annie Lööf	Lundberg Andersson	Expressen	21.08.2018	17
Alliansens hets mot Löfven om debatterna	Knutsson, Svensson	Expressen	21.08.2018	18
Alliansen: Köerna i vården måste minska	Svensson	Aftonbladet	21.08.2018	19
Alliansen vill	TT	Aftonbladet	21.08.2018	20

straffa landsting för körlängd				
Alliansen: Straffade som inte uppfyller vårdgarantin	Svensson	Expressen	21.08.2018	21
Annie Lööf: Kriminalisera deltagande i nazipartier	Micu	Expressen	21.08.2018	22
Lööf vill göra upp om flyktingpolitiken med MP och S	Svensson	Aftonbladet	21.08.2018	23
Lööf beredd att låta den tillfälliga asyllagen stanna	Micu	Expressen	21.08.2018	24
Istället för ny energi kan Busch Thor få svekdebatt	Stenberg	Dagens Nyheter	20.08.2018	25
Alliansens utspel: Vill införa nytt visum för högutbildad arbetskraft	Nygren	Aftonbladet	20.08.2018	26
Alliansen: Inför obligatorisk språkförskola för nyanlända	Johansson	Dagens Nyheter	21.08.2018	27
Alliansen vill se nyanlända barn i språk-förskola	Svensson	Expressen	21.08.2018	28
Avhopparna får nya toppjobb av Stefan Löfven (print)	Svensson	Expressen	21.08.2018	29
Avhopparna får nya toppjobb av Stefan Löfven (web)	Svensson	Expressen	20.08.2018	30
Alliansens utspel: Vill införa nytt visum för högutbildade	Nygren	Aftonbladet	20.08.2018	31

Alliansen: Inför obligatorisk språkförskola för nyanlända	Svensson	Expressen	20.08.2018	32
"Hoppfullt när Löf talar om svenska värderingar"	TT	Svenska Dagbladet	20.08.2018	33
Annie Löf (C) gästar TV4	Knutson	Expressen	20.08.2018	34
"Får jag sova tre timmar i sträck är jag nöjd"	Roos	Expressen	20.08.2018	35
Ledare: Kristersson kan inte luta sig mot Åkesson	DN ledare	Dagens Nyheter	20.08.2018	36
Kinnunen om MP:s köttskattförslag: "Är lurendrejeri"	Knutson & Lundberg Andersson	Expressen	20.08.2018	37
Fåfånga högerpolitiker vill trissa upp varandra	Sundin	Aftonbladet	20.08.2018	38
Vem kläckte idén om att framställa partiledarna som hjältar i en actionserie?	Hultquist	Dagens Nyheter	20.08.2018	39
Männen & kvinnorna som lever ihop med Sveriges partiledare	NA	Expressen	20.08.2018	40
4 och säger nej till Åkesson	Lundberg Andersson	Expressen	20.08.2018	41
Den borde jag kunna va?	Knutson	Expressen	20.08.2018	42

Busch Thor (2018)

Title	Author	Media outlet	Date	Article #
Stefan Löfven- Jag vill fortsätta regera med MP	Sjöshult, Knutson	Expressen	21.08.2018	43
Alliansen: Köerna i vården måste minska	Svensson	Aftonbladet	21.08.2018	44
Alliansen vill straffa landsting för kölängd	TT	Aftonbladet	21.08.2018	45
Alliansen: Straffa de som inte uppfyller vårdgarantin	Svensson	Expressen	21.08.2018	46
Varm luft utan påverkan på miljön	Selling	Svenska Dagbladet	21.08.2018	47
KD vill höja avgiften till förskolan	Knutson	Expressen	20.08.2018	48
Hö-hö-högern saknar omdöme	NA	Expressen	21.08.2018	49
Ebba Busch Thor (KD): Vi ska inte låtsas som att kön inte finns	Eriksson, Bendjelloul	Dagens Nyheter	20.08.2018	50
Istället för ny energi kan Busch Thor få svekdebatt	Stenberg	Dagens Nyheter	20.08.2018	51
Alliansen: Inför obligatorisk språkförskola för nyanlända	Johansson	Dagens Nyheter	21.08.2018	52
Alliansen vill se nyanlända barn i språk-förskola	Svensson	Expressen	21.08.2018	53
Alliansen vill både bredda och öka rutavdraget	Kihlström, Wallberg	Svenska Dagbladet	21.08.2018	54
Avhopparna får	Svensson	Expressen	21.08.2018	55

nya toppjobb av Stefan Löfven (print)				
Alliansens utspel: Vill införa nytt visum för högutbildade	Nygren	Aftonbladet	20.08.2018	56
Alliansen vill ha obligatorisk språkförskola	TT	Aftonbladet	20.08.2018	57
Alliansen: Inför obligatorisk språkförskola för nyanlända	Svensson	Expressen	20.08.2018	58
KD-ledaren: De är långt ute i träskmarkerna	Jeppsson	Aftonbladet	20.08.2018	59
Fyra vinnare och fyra förlorare i valet om 20 dagar	Mellin	Aftonbladet	20.08.2018	60
KD vill höja avgiften till förskolan med 300 kronor	Knutson	Expressen	20.08.2018	61
Sverige behöver de stora partierna	Wetterberg	Expressen	20.08.2018	62
Männen & kvinnorna som lever ihop med Sveriges partiledare	NA	Expressen	20.08.2018	63

Schyman (1998)

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Media outlet</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Article #</i>
Stäng inte dörren	NA	Expressen	02.09.1998	64
Homosexuella gillar Schyman Bäst	Hedlund	Expressen	02.09.1998	65
Affisch-valet	Björkvall	Expressen	02.09.1998	66
Politikernas löften är godis för folket	Gunne	Aftonbladet	02.09.1998	67
Persson kräver besked från v	TT	Svenska Dagbladet	02.09.1998	68
Därför är personvalet dömt att misslyckas	Klein	Aftonbladet	02.09.1998	69
Vägen	NA	Expressen	01.09.1998	70
Vänstern kräver höjd a-kassa	TT	Svenska Dagbladet	01.09.1998	71
På Møllevången har aldrig funnits någon höger	Svenning	Aftonbladert	01.09.1998	72
Folkomröstningar	NA	Dagens Nyheter	01.09.1998	73
Val 98. NOBBAD. Schyman förstår inte varför Persson inte vill träffa henne	Hansson	Expressen	31.08.1998	74
V och Mp i enad valfront mot EU	TT	Svenska Dagbladet	31.08.1998	75
Lika som bär	NA	Expressen	31.08.1998	76
Helgonet och Lill-Göran- vad säger de oss?	Kratz, Sommelius	Svenska Dagbladet	31.08.1998	77

Lindh (1998)

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Media outlet</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Article #</i>
Terapi på regeringsnivå I	Moberg	Aftonbladet	02.09.1998	78

Wallström (1998)

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Media outlet</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Article #</i>
Enman(s)showen	Wendel	Expressen	02.09.1998	79
Vart tog du vägen, Mona?	Lundholm	Aftonbladet	02.09.1998	80
Terapi på regeringsnivå I	Moberg	Aftonbladet	02.09.1998	81
Därför är personvalet dömt att misslyckas	Klein	Aftonbladet	02.09.1998	82
Partiet ska inte ha något	Hansson	Svenska Dagbladet	02.09.1998	83
Val 98. NOBBAD. Schyman förstår inte varför Persson inte vill träffa henne	Hansson	Expressen	31.08.1998	84

Winberg (1998)

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Media outlet</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Article #</i>
Terapi på regeringsnivå I	Moberg	Aftonbladet	02.09.1998	85
Val 98. Minister körde över myndighet	TT	Dagens Nyheter	01.09.1998	86
Utbildning "Vi har prioriterat annat"	TT	Svenska Dagbladet	01.09.1998	87
Tisdag 1 september	Linder	Svenska Dagbladet	01.09.1998	88
Skogsjätte får	Kasvi, Ringman	Aftonbladet	31.08.1998	89

skattemiljoner Aftonbladet avslöjar				
Sundström:-Jag hade kontakter med SCA	Kasvi, Ringman	Aftonbladet	31.08.1998	90
Facket behövde en Jeanne d'Arc	Friborg	Dagens Nyheter	31.08.1998	91
Hårt slit för Ericssons mönsterkort	TT	Dagens Nyheter	31.08.1998	92