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How leadership is done in higher education is analysed through a longitudinal interview study among the heads of department at a Swedish university. The focus is directed towards the construction and reconstruction of leader identity from the time when the heads were novices up until four years later when they were more experienced. The main result is the emergence of a gendering process in the discourse on academic leadership. At the end of the leadership assignment period, male and female department heads did not ever share the same subject positions and leader identity was described in differing terms in subject positions held by women and men, respectively. Three common identity development processes emerged: a vague development process where a non-head of department identity was strong over time (men), a process towards a positive and clear manager identity (men), and a process towards a gender-focused and problem-oriented leader identity (women).

Introduction

The aim of this article is to shed light on the gendering processes of leader identity development in higher education (HE). A longitudinal study with the purpose of studying the discourse on academic leadership amongst department heads showed as the main result that leadership over time was done in a gendered way (Haake, 2004). This article focuses on the understanding of that interesting finding.

As in many other countries, the extensive 1993 reform in Sweden aimed at decentralising decisions, responsibilities and authority to the level of each HE institution (HEI). During this time of reformation, the shift towards massification, efficiency, accountability, outcome measurement, new sources of income, improved quality and performance, and stronger management was highlighted in various reports and

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research publications (Askling, Bauer, & Marton, 1999; Askling & Stensaker, 2002; RUT-93, 1995). The New Public Management trends of HE in Sweden resembled the change that other European countries were in the process of undergoing or had just undergone (Middlehurst, 2004; Yokoyama, 2006).

In the Swedish reform, decentralisation did not stop at institutional level. The administrative workload and increasing responsibilities for budget, staff, and working environment that followed on from the reform made leadership and management issues more important at departmental level. New demands on department heads were discussed as well as voices advocating stronger and more professional leadership and management in HE. Then, a debate ensued for and against this new managerial rather than collegial style of leadership in academia (RUT-93, 1995; SOU, 1992).

Since the reform took place, additional questions of interest in Swedish academia have been raised, such as gender equality in academic careers and leadership positions. As a country with overall high rankings regarding gender equality, Sweden was challenged (in the late 1990's) by the academy in the debates that followed on from the introduction of special professorships for women, the so-called "Tham-professorships" and from the study by Wold and Wennerås (1997), which showed that women needed to be much more qualified than men in order to get postdoctoral fellowships.

All these issues roused my interest in studying the discourse of academic leadership. The way the longitudinal study was performed allowed me to address questions about the logic and patterns of leader identity development processes over the years. Was, for instance, talk about a distinct and strong style of leadership something that emerged over time as being a central and natural part of that discourse after the 1993 reform?

Academic Leadership as a Social and Gendered Construction

From my point of view, a leader cannot be seen as something that a person is or as a person in whom leadership resides but as something that is done or constructed discursively. The shift of focus from the leader as an individual to the surroundings around him or her is significant (Knight & Trowler, 2001). One important part of a department head's surroundings is the kind of department and discipline he or she is in charge of (Kekäle, 1999). How leadership is done (not the being or becoming of leaders) comes into focus and leadership talk and actions comprise the discourse on academic leadership.

The social construction of men and women into two internally homogeneous groups is often taken for granted, with gendered behaviours being attributed to men and women (Bourdieu, 1999; Kugelberg, 2006). Especially in studies of "man"-agement, masculine discourses have been taken for granted (Collinson & Hearn, 1996). Like Butler (1990), I would argue that the way gender is done within a particular discourse has to be analysed and discussed. This is important in order to understand the logic and patterns of gendering processes within discourses.

When it comes to women in HE leadership positions, Deem (2003) concludes that women as leaders are motherly with a caring style and are better leaders but more insecure in their role than men. Even non-mother academics are seen as being motherly and natural caregivers but with expectations of putting extra time into their work compared with mother academics (Ramsay & Letherby, 2006). Some researchers argue that talk of female leadership styles is something that fits the rhetoric of academic leadership today, because the care of human resources, attentiveness, empathy, and teamwork are in demand, and many male leadership traits are seen as being antiquated (Middlehurst, 1999).

But can it be dangerous for women in leading positions to contribute to specific female values and behaviours? I suggest that we have to get away from the talk of women all being alike and different from men. Otherwise the result could be the stabilisation of traditional gender roles instead of making them more loose and changeable. The risk of viewing "women" as a relatively stable category is that it leads to the idea that women offer specific attributes as a complement to what men have to offer. This could imply that the academic leadership culture would change if only more women are included (Blackmore, 2006).

When looking at research on leadership and gender within academia, there are suggestions that the identities of academic leaders are shaped and constructed in a collective environment where gender is a strong factor for the forming of leadership roles (Blackmore, 2006; Deem, 2003). The fact that academia functions in this manner constitutes a problem at present which might be one explanation for why gender roles in HE are still constructed in a traditional and restraining way.

The "Masculine" HE Organisation and Culture

One common conclusion in research about HE culture, structure, and hierarchies is that women and men perceive things differently and are treated differently in academia. Women, for instance, have unequal conditions when it comes to recruitment to senior positions, advancement, and a career within the HEIs (Bagilhole, 2000; Bagilhole & White, 2008; Hearn, 2001; Madden, 2005; White, 2003).

Some studies show the importance of the opportunity for women to participate in women-only groups where open discussions and a sharing of experiences are possible, for example through women's networks, education for women, and women's role models and mentors (Viefers, Christie, & Ferdos, 2006). There may, however, be dangers in activities that do not go beyond providing support for women through activities for women only in homogeneous groups. Blackmore (2006) suggests that this type of action contributes to drawing more attention to differences between men and women and reinforces gender as a vital distinction in academia.

Many researchers emphasise the importance of making general and gender-conscious organisational changes within HEIs, instead of changing women to fit and adjust to the "male" academic world (Bagilhole, 2000; Blackmore, 2006; Husu, 2001; Madden, 2005). It has also been pointed out that the "male" culture of academia is more obvious and direct when the HEIs become more market-related

and shift from being managed by a collegial discourse to a (new public) management discourse. This will make women experience more conflicts in academic leadership (Blackmore & Sachs, 2001; Brooks, 2001).

Theoretical Foundations

My understanding suggests that leadership in HE is socially constructed within discourse. Reality is *discursive* and there is no subject outside of discourse (Foucault, 1980). Since knowledge about reality cannot be discovered or mirrored, the researcher has to construct a certain *discourse* as the object of study. To this end different discursive expressions may be studied and it is then possible to describe the system, patterns and contradictions in the specific discourse (Bacchi, 2005; Foucault, 1993). The discourse on academic leadership should be seen here as consisting of general, naturalised and self-evident ways of expressing academic leadership but also specific and conflicting means of doing the same. Subjects can be seen as shaped by power relations in discourse. In this way discourse speaks through us and uses people (Bacchi, 2005; Foucault, 1980).

The *subject positions* (Foucault, 1993; Haake, 2004) within discourse reflect the different and conflicting aspects of academic leadership and thereby the different leader identities of discourse. Leader identity is constituted through power relations in the discourse. The most interesting aspect is what is seen as the truth, the normal and natural in a particular subject position within the discourse and how that differs from other subject positions. This way of analysing one discourse, instead of conflicting discourses of academic leadership, differs from many other discourse-theory based studies. In this manner, I argue for an analysis of discourse where people cannot choose whatever subject positions they like. Identities are shaped by discourse and we cannot therefore select any identity we want. Instead, the analysis shows which subject position each head in the study expresses at a certain point of time and possible logic and schemas pertaining to that. Discursive relations can hereby be seen as power relations through subject positions (Foucault, 1980).

In the discipline of education, the becoming, shaping, and development of human beings are in focus. In this study, *identity development* is regarded as a discursive non-linear identity construction/reconstruction process. Identities are always in process and they are wholly social (Rorty, 2003). How the system and tensions of discourse change over time and what subject positions the informants give expression to at different times is one way of understanding identity development processes. The leader identity development processes are thus equivalent to subject position changes in the discourse on academic leadership.

Methodological Aspects

This study was performed at a general and relatively large university in northern Sweden. Interviews were carried out with 15, six females and nine males, heads of department on seven occasions in the late 1990s, from the time when they were

novices to a time, four years later, when they were more experienced. This article is based on the two interview occasions, the first and the last, that most distinctly show the changing of leader identities over time. These two rounds of interviews generated two empirically based discourse constructions of the discourse on academic leadership.

The in-depth interviews dealt with broad and open areas about being department heads and were designed to follow their ways of expressing thoughts on leadership, problems, and positive effects. No questions about gender were asked and there were no expectations on gender being the best explanation for identity development patterns amongst heads of department at this point in time. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed and the heads were anonymous and given names beginning on A to O.

In the processing of interview data, all aspects of talk about academic leaders or academic leadership were categorised with the help of NUD*IST. For the first discourse construction, the total number of empirically based categories for all questions together was about 180 and for the second about 170. At the next stage, each informant's categorised answers were related to all other informants' categorised answers for the same discourse construction. The purpose was to position them in relation to each other based on what aspects of talk about academic leadership they attached significance to during the whole interview. At this stage, "Homals", a variant of Multivariate Correspondence Analysis, was used (Hair, Andersson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

The result of the analysis was plotted onto a two-dimensional "map", with each dot corresponding to one informant. Those whose overall talk resembled that of others were clustered close to each other on the map and distant from other informants. Each cluster of dots (or informants) was viewed as expressing one subject position. Hence, each subject position expressed a certain and often complex leadership philosophy that was central for that position but not central for others.

The two different empirically based discourse constructions were compared with each other, that is the time when the heads were novices and the time, about four years later, when they were experienced. It was then possible to identify and construct shared categories, changes over time, and identity development processes.

Leader Identities for Novice Department Heads

As a result, the discourse on academic leadership amongst novice department heads in HE appears to be very heterogeneous and gender neutral at this point in time. The discourse is not gendered in the sense that most of the women and men tend to express different subject positions. Other background variables, such as discipline, are much more positioned than gender. Female department heads are spread over four of the five subject positions of the discourse and these women's talk does not have very much in common.

When the heads of department were novices, the discourse could be divided into five different subject positions. Position I is occupied by the largest number of heads,

position II comes next, and so on. The leader identities expressed at the beginning were:

- Position I: a non-head of department identity (three women, five men)
- Position II: a collegial leader identity (one woman, two men)
- Position III: an identity as visionary manager with overall responsibility (one woman, one man)
- Position IV: a dissociated and ambivalent leader identity (one woman)
- Position V: an identity as manager in order to feather one's own nest (one man)

By being expressed by the largest number of department heads, subject position I is the strongest position in this material at this time. The position can be described as containing indistinct and negatively connoted talk about leadership, with statements concerning needs for extensive support in order to cope with the task of being department head. Female and male department heads, many of them full professors from areas such as medicine, natural science, or technology, are strongly connected to this position.

The next position, II, consists of talk of academic leadership as being something collegial. People create and perform leadership together in collective and democratic processes and discussions. This position is the most mixed in terms of background variables.

Subject position III represents talk of academic leadership as being management-focused. The role is visionary and goal-aiming and does not imply taking care of the more operative aspects. Here the heads represent departments from the humanities, social sciences, or teacher education. They are assistant or associate professors and have been directors of undergraduate studies in their departments.

Subject position IV is characterised by talk about leadership in HE as something very complex where you have to be both a colleague and an executive manager at the same time. The woman in this position comes from a department in the humanities, social sciences, or teacher education.

At position V, talk about leadership is expressed as being something creative. Leadership contains a great amount of freedom and opportunities if the head succeeds in delegating responsibilities and tasks. The man that expresses position V also comes from the humanities, social sciences, or teacher education.

Leader Identities for Experienced Department Heads

The discourse construction at this time consistently shows some interesting changes. The logic and tensions of discourse emerge as being mostly a gender differentiation process. When the department heads were novices, the different subject positions were relatively gender-mixed and other background factors besides gender, such as discipline, determined the discourse logic. On the other hand, in the discourse construction done when the heads are experienced, the male and female department heads do not ever express or share the same leader identities. It has now become an explicit gendered discourse by defining possible subject positions for women and men.

The discourse now reflects roughly the following five leader identities:

- Position I: a gender-focused and problem-oriented leader identity (five women)
- Position II: a non-problematic and positive manager identity (four men)
- Position III: a negative and non-head of department identity (three men)
- Position IV: an administrative leader identity (two men)
- Position V: a collegial leader identity (one woman)

At this point in time, all five subject positions are gender-specific: positions I and V contain only women, and II, III, and IV only men. Subject position I is expressed by almost all female department heads. This female-specific position expresses many leadership aspects. The academic leadership role is constantly influenced by gender-related questions, mostly attaches problems to an interpersonal level and is highly time-consuming.

At the all-male position II, academic leadership is expressed as being something fun and positive. The assignment is filled with the power to influence and contribute to the development of diplomatic competence. The position contains male department heads with heavy teaching loads from areas in medicine, natural science, and technology.

The male-specific position III contains aspects about the headship contributing to escalating cynicism, as well as expressions of boring and routine-based administration taking too much time from research activities. The departments represented are from the same areas as in position II, but are heavily orientated towards research instead.

Subject position IV is characterised by men talking about positive administration and delegation aspects of leadership. This position also expresses the idea that economic questions are important but hard to handle. This position only contains men from departments in the areas of the humanities, social sciences, and teacher education.

The last position, V, contains one woman from the same area as position IV. Here, talk about leadership includes talk about a positive, collegial, and non top-down controlled academic leadership, where it is important that there is support for decisions.

In the analysis of how the female-specific subject positions differ from the male-specific at the end of the leadership period, it can be seen that the female-specific positions are more extensive in that they express more aspects of academic leadership significance compared with the men's. There are so many things they say that they have to do and be able to handle independently in their leadership role. Many aspects are also problematic, and critical incidents are manifested to a larger extent here. The critical incidents often refer to personal and interpersonal aspects of academic leadership. They also relate talk of leadership to gender (and to what is masculine and feminine) which the positions expressed by men do not.

In contrast, the positions held by men are characterised by a less extensive leader identity with fewer exclusively expressed leadership categories. The positions expressed by men generally contain more neutral, unproblematic, naturalised, and

Table 1.   Overview of contradictions and dissimilarities between female and male heads leader
identities at the end of assignment period

Subject positions expressed by men	Subject positions expressed by women
Less complex and extensive identities	Complex and extensive identities
Delegates and uses other institutional levels, functions and people to help out in various situations	Handles all questions and situations by herself, wants to develop her own competence in being a better leader, wants to be there for everyone
Sees problems at a distance and on system or organisational levels	Sees problems near herself and on an interpersonal level
Never talks about gender in relation to leadership questions	Talks a lot about gender in relation to leadership questions
Often expresses the wish to continue as head	Only a few want or are allowed to continue as heads
There are many positive aspects to being a head, for instance power	There are not many positive aspects to being a head; it is very lonely and demanding

positive talk about academic leadership. Their positions are more about questions related to systems, administration, organisation, and delegation. There are, however, positions that differ in part from the overall system presented above (Table 1).

Gendering Identity Development Processes for Academic Leaders

The study shows an emergence of three relatively common identity development processes in the discourse on academic leadership. The starting point for the heads of department differs between the five positions mentioned earlier, but their identity development can be constructed as follows.

A Vague Development Process Where a Non-Head of Department Identity is Strong over Time

This process may be seen as being an example of the discourse making it possible for men who are full professors at research-orientated departments primarily from areas like medicine, natural science, or technology to be positioned as expressing non-head of department identities over the years and not only at the beginning of the period. Here, the process is more like status quo. Mike is one of the heads that represent this identity development process. At the beginning of the assignment period, he (position I) said:

Interviewer: How did you feel about being chosen as head of this department?
Mike: I felt awful!
I: But why did you say yes then?
M: Well it's your duty to do it at some point or another. (…) It's part of your post as professor.
I: Okay. You don't exactly sound like you're jumping for joy.
M: That's right. I'm not.

At the end, when we were talking about what he had learnt from being a department head, Mike (position III) said:

> Put it this way, I don't think I've taken any step forward or backward in any particular direction as a human being because of this [being a head of the department]. The only thing is that I've become more cynical. If that's good or bad I don't know. I've always been a cynical person, and that part of me hasn't changed. It's intensified instead.

A Process of Development Towards a Positive and Obvious Manager Identity

The leader identities in focus here may be seen as examples of the discourse making it possible for men who are heads of departments with both research and education functions to express a process of development that turns more and more towards a confident and positive (administrative) manager identity. At the beginning, Nicolas (position I) was unsure of what kind of expectations the staff and superiors had on him as head of department.

> I don't know really [what is expected of me]. I have a picture of it which is influenced by my predecessor of course (…). I have very little to go on. (…) It's kind of like being in a room where you know where to put some furniture but the rest has to be filled in. (…) Partly it is about getting the formal organisational chart drawn and being shown where your department is located. (…) So, formal knowledge about the headship and the way the department works, that is what I have to obtain.

About four years later, Nicolas (position II) expressed a more confident and positive leader identity.

> Many things have been positive, nice, and challenging, so I will sign up for a new period as head of the department. (…) It is fun to have department board meetings. (…) When you work with management questions you learn a lot about the departments' and institutions' function and organisation, which is interesting. (…). All taken together, what you do is satisfying.

A Process of Development Towards a Gender-Focused and Problem-Orientated Leader Identity

One typical aspect of this identity development process is that the headship, for almost all women in this study, becomes problem-focused, personal, and gender-related over time. The gender of the department head seems to be the most important explanation in the structuring of this discursive process since women from very different kinds of disciplines come together in this process. Barbara (position III) could, when she was newly assigned as department head, be positioned as expressing an identity as visionary manager with overall responsibility.

> And then you should try to have visions and think ahead and present them in print. (…) And the particular goal I have foremost is that rules should be clear. (…) You get rid of routine-based questions—I think that is the best. I might get to work with more creative and developing tasks.

In the last interview, Barbara (position I) talked a lot about what she had learnt from being a department head, aspects which had to do with gender.

> As I said, a lesson that I have learnt… and that I did not believe in, is that gender matters more than you think. I thought that I was the kind of person where gender was something unproblematic and that I could handle it… I have been a staff member here for so long. (…) But unwillingly I have to admit that there actually is some truth in this. I never thought three and a half years ago that I would say this. Not ever! (…) There is something about how you handle the role as head of department and I think that the essential difference is that men can shake things off and move on but that women cannot. And why it works this way is pretty hard to tell. But in some way I think that men find it easier not to feel bad and maybe women want to be so capable that you want to be perfect. You don't want any criticism; everything has to run smoothly, and if it does not, you get worried.

Discussing the Gendering Processes of Leadership within HE

The main result of the study presented here is the visualisation of a gender differentiation process that the academic leadership discourse displays over time and the contradictory ways in which academic leadership is talked about in subject positions held by men versus women at the end of their leadership period. The system of the discourse turns "natural" and positive leadership into something that fits men. Leader identity formation is done in a gendering way within discourse.

At the beginning of the leadership period, the discourse system has to do with what type of discipline the department heads are in control of and not their gender affiliation (Kekäle, 1999). At this time, discipline intersects with subject positions. About four years later, the discourse system is distinctly gendered. The academic culture may be understood in this study as supporting a gendering process in the area of academic leadership (Bagilhole, 2000; Bagilhole & White, 2008).

At the end of the assignment period, academic leadership for men is expressed as a restricted and non-personal assignment that is fairly positive and easy to handle while leadership for women is described as being more extensive, personal, problematic, and gender-related. Some men from research-orientated science departments keep a non-head of department identity over time, but not the women. In addition, it is primarily men and not women who develop a positive, obvious, and natural manager identity.

For women, this gendering identity development process makes them go from seeing themselves foremost as different kinds of leaders to identifying themselves foremost as women, regardless of whether the staff and superiors, the heads are surrounded by, are men or women. Talk about leadership connected to gender is not very common at the beginning of the assignment period. At the end, however, gender-related leadership aspects are commonly expressed but only in female-specific subject positions (Bagilhole & White, 2008). In other words, the power relations of discourse make it possible for women, but not men, to talk about gender and academic leadership as being connected to each other, even though no questions about gender were asked in the interviews (Foucault, 1980).

The Swedish HE reform of 1993 was surrounded by rhetoric expressing stronger and more professionalised, instead of collegial, academic leadership. This management goal of HE is something that in this study appears only to be a possible discursive identity development process for men. At the end of the assignment period when the heads were more experienced, it was only women who expressed the collegial leader identity, while many men expressed positive and natural manager identities. At the same time, the discourse on academic leadership strengthened rather than weakened traditional gender roles in an analysis of the identity development processes in this study. Women are constructed, for example, as being caring (Bagilhole & White, 2008; Prichard, 1996).

Since identities are social constructions, both the men and the women in the study took on and were performing leadership in ways that the discourse opened up for them (Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Hearn, 2001). My interpretation is that the debates and discussions in Swedish HE concerning gender and leadership during this time also influenced the identity development patterns. As other studies show, the New Public Management wave of academia may be reinforcing a leadership agenda that is suited to and made explicitly for men (Blackmore & Sachs, 2001; Brooks, 2001).

The study has shown an overall discursive pattern that makes leader identities develop in an increasingly gendered way the longer the leader positions are held. Discourse speaks through the male and female heads of department in different ways over time and subject positions cannot therefore be seen as being individually chosen as some subject agency theories would argue (Webster, 2000). The contribution of this study is the visualisation of an identity development process that is increasingly gendering over time—the longer the department heads had had their leadership assignment, the more the men's and women's leader identities differed from each other. This is not so clearly shown in other studies, possibly because of the lack of longitudinal studies in the area.

Conclusions

Isn't it risky to suggest that women's identities become similar to each other but different from men's as was evident at the end of the leadership period in this research study? Am I simply contributing to the problem of viewing men and women as two separate categories of human beings instead of deconstructing those categories? Perhaps, but in this study the most interesting finding was that women and men share the same leader identities at the beginning, with the same worries, goals, and leader philosophies, and that the discourse seems to push and shape men and women into different subject positions over time. The categories of men and women in leadership are thus not stable but evolve over time into a gendered mode. The fact that the academic culture and discourse on academic leadership work this way needs to be addressed and the responsibility for this cannot be placed on women themselves.

There is the question however as to whether the solution is to invest in gender-specific support strategies. Some may feel this is positive. But with reference to the results of this study, I would conclude, like Blackmore (2006), that there is a risk of

being satisfied with female-specific actions for the very reason that they focus on gender differences. This can lead to a view of women as possessing low leadership skills and needing to be trained and supported. Investing in women as a group can also contribute to a situation of being satisfied with actions at the individual or group level instead of working with more comprehensive gender-related actions that include all levels of organisation, staff, and management and both men and women. Instead of activities for "deviant" or "weak" women, most attention should be turned towards the HE organisations and culture as the core of the problem (Bagilhole, 2000; Blackmore, 2006; Husu, 2001; Madden, 2005).

One example of what academia should work with is the contradictory conceptions, ideas, and prejudices regarding how women and men "should" act and be as good academic leaders, rendering gender roles to be relatively static and supporting gendering processes of leader identity development. Women and men need to meet in numerous situations where gender is discussed and critically examined. Leadership design could for instance be structured as management teams or "shared leadership" at departmental level, where male and female academics together discuss, among other issues, questions of leadership and gender. The focus would then not be directed towards a single, strong leader and could therefore influence new and possibly more gender-neutral leader identities and actions—or in other words, new ways of doing leadership in HE. These activities could be viewed as conditions for more equal and professionalised academic leadership. In Sweden, many HEIs work actively with these questions but still there seems to be overconfidence in activities for groups exclusively for women. In addition, organisational systems and structures such as salaries, recruitment procedures, judgement of qualifications, working hours, and decision patterns need to change in ways that do not discriminate against human beings due to their gender affiliation. This ongoing process of institutional policy and value changes in HE could and should be put higher up on the agenda.

Acknowledgements

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