Does the intersection of gender and ethnicity of a leader at workplace affect employee perception of leadership suitability?

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Abstract

Research within discrimination against ethnic minorities and females suggest that members of these groups face discrimination during recruitment processes in organizations. However, less is known on whether leaders from these groups are discriminated against due to their ethnicity and gender by being perceived less suitable as leaders at the workplace. Moreover, most previous research has focused on discrimination and stereotypes of members of single groups rather than of multiple group categories. In this study conducted in Sweden ($N=300$), we investigate whether the intersection of gender and ethnicity of a leader at the workplace affects employee perception of their leadership suitability and how signaling ethnicity and gender differs for Arab (minority) versus Swedish (majority) and Male (majority) versus Female (minority). The results show clear evidence of ethnic discrimination where a male Arab is less preferred to a leadership position than male Swede. However, there is no evidence indicating discrimination based on gender nor any significant interaction between gender and ethnicity.

Keywords: Discrimination, Gender, Ethnicity, Intersectionality, Leadership
Discrimination of Ethnic Minority Leaders and Female Leaders

Discrimination against ethnic minorities and female leaders continues to be a pervasive issue in the workplace. Research has shown that both groups are underrepresented in leadership roles and often face a number of challenges when attempting to advance in their careers (Ideta & Cooper, 2021; Sims & Carter, 2019). Despite progress towards inclusivity, these individuals continue to face unique challenges in organizations.

Research suggests that ethnic minority leaders are often subjected to negative stereotypes about their capabilities, competence and intelligence, in fact, they may experience more scrutiny than their majority counterparts and may be held to higher standards in order to prove their worth (Ideta & Cooper, 2021). Syed and Özbekin (2009) unpack this predicament, highlighting how ethnic minority leaders frequently encounter prejudiced attitudes and stereotyping, which can be deeply embedded within an organization's culture. Turning the lens to the Arab world, Le Renard (2014) provides compelling insights. Arab leaders, despite their authority in leadership positions, face a barrage of negative assumptions and stereotypes, often embedded within larger socio-political contexts. These stereotypes can impact their effectiveness and the respect they command in their positions. Understandably, the challenges faced by ethnic minority leaders, particularly Arab leaders, are not to be underestimated. These challenges, as illuminated by Le Renard (2014), are deeply ingrained within larger societal and organizational contexts, rendering them particularly stubborn to address. The lack of diversity in leadership positions has been linked to a lack of representation and voice for ethnic minorities within corporate structures (Maume, 2012). This lack of representation has been linked to decreased job satisfaction and a lack of career advancement for ethnic minority leaders.
Similarly, female leaders often face discrimination in the form of gender-based stereotypes when they take on leadership roles. Research by Sims and Carter (2019) have shown that women are often overlooked for promotion, paid less than their male counterparts, and subject to more criticism. Ryan and Haslam (2007) authored the term ‘glass cliff’ to portray the tricky administrative roles ladies are frequently elevated to, setting them up for expected disappointment and building up generalizations about their initiative abilities. The distinctive challenges faced by black women leaders are a testament to this. As Byrd (2009) elucidated, these leaders are often perceived as less competent and are scrutinized more heavily than their white counterparts. Such biases not only impede their performance but can also hinder their opportunities for advancement, underlining the profound impacts of intersectionality in leadership roles.

The landscape becomes even more intricate when we consider intersectionality. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) illustrated how women of color encounter a twofold bias, grappling with both gender and racial prejudices. Similarly, Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry (2013) shed light on female Arab leaders who, at the crossroads of gender, race, and religion, face amplified discrimination.

The concept of intersectionality introduces an added layer of complexity to the leadership narrative. In her seminal study on intersectionality perspective on gender, Shields (2008) argues that the precise definition of intersectionality may differ depending on the research context, but a recurring theme in all definitions is the understanding and acknowledgment of how multiple interrelated identities are influenced by societal power dynamics and privilege and how these identities play a role in shaping individuals' personal and collective experiences, as well as their overall sense of identity. As identified by Rosette et. al (2008), the intersection of gender and racial
biases can compound the leadership experience for women of color, presenting them with a unique set of challenges. This is particularly true for Arab women, as Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry (2013) noted, their leadership journey often intersects with religion, adding to the complexity. However, this paper aims to solely focus on discrimination faced by the intersection of ethnicity and gender in leadership roles specifically among Arabs and Swedes. With the influx of immigrants coming into Sweden, research has shown that there has been noticeable difficulties immigrants encounter, especially at the stage of entering the Swedish labor market (Snellman & Ekehammar, 2005). While past research has cast light on discrimination in recruitment processes, less focus has been given to discrimination in relation to leadership. The goal of this paper is to focus on ethnic and gender discrimination in leadership positions by investigating how suitable minority leaders are perceived to be for their leadership role. Therefore we raise the question, does the intersection of gender and ethnicity of a leader at the workplace affect employee perception of their leadership suitability as a result of discrimination?

**Research on Intersection of Ethnicity and Gender**

The exploration of the intersectional perspective on race/ethnicity and gender with regards to discrimination is embedded in the work of researchers and scholars studying women of color usually named multiracial feminism, multicultural feminism or postcolonial feminism (Browne & Misra, 2003; Mohanty, 1993). Intersection theory postulates that the discrimination of minority groups is based on more than one characteristic meaning it is inextricably tied to a number of forms of discrimination leading to complex forms of inequality in various social domains (Toren, 2009). This means that ethnicity and gender are interlocked, dependent upon one another and mutually constituted (Veenstra, 2011) especially when pertaining to inequality in the labor market resulting
Research has investigated and confirmed with profound and compelling evidence of discrimination based on ethnicity (Snellman et al., 2005) and gender (Hoyt & Simon, 2016). Snellman et al. (2005) found that people’s inclination to ethnic ranking correlates with ethnic prejudice and social dominance. Consequently, all this contributes to the understanding of how ethnic prejudice plays a role in the perception of an individual’s leadership role suitability and the creation of a prototype of a leader. Moreover, Bobbitt-Zeher (2011) found that gender stereotyping significantly contributes to workplace discrimination especially when combined with institutional policies that disadvantages women leading to unequal leadership opportunities for females.

In addition, gender and ethnicity has been significantly researched in isolation without due consideration on how they can simultaneously affect an individual in their interaction (Strinić et al., 2021). This interaction, although still being a relatively unexplored field, has attracted the interest of some researchers focussing on intersectionality studies that have investigated the relationship between race/ethnicity and gender in the labor market (Browne & Misra, 2003, Reskin & Padavic, 2006). Interestingly, this research focussed on three domains (a) wages inequality, (b) discrimination and stereotyping, and (c) immigration and domestic labor (Browne & Misra, 2003). Consequently, there seems to be a few research studies focussing on the intersection between gender and ethnicity with regards to the attainment and perceptions of leadership qualities and positions, respectively, among minorities. This means that most of the research studies available about gender and ethnicity in the labor market have been centered on the dynamics around hiring and recruitment (Maume, 2012; Derous et al., 2009; Snellman et al., 2005; Quillian et al., 2017). The available research has been conducted either specifically focussing on ethnicity
and gender in isolation or the intersection between gender and ethnicity at the initial job entrance level especially in lower status job positions.

Investigating the factors that predict gender and racial bias in leader evaluations Hoyt and Simon (2016), conducted a study in which they merged both implicit leadership theory and social dominance orientation (SDO) across two experimental studies using vignettes. They predicted that bias in the leadership position as a consequence of White and masculine standards is contingent on the extent to which people lean towards hierarchical group relationships (social dominance) and their degree of patriotism. The results showed that participants that scored high on social dominance orientation demonstrated a significant degree of bias against minorities based on both gender and ethnicity (Hoyt & Simon, 2016) thereby showing the double jeopardy effect (King, 1988) where one’s ethnicity and gender influence bias or discrimination. Hoyt and Simon (2016) also sheds some light on the mechanism behind this result by revealing that consensually held values, attitudes, beliefs or cultural ideologies can justify and perpetuate hierarchical social systems consequently resulting in inequality and oppression of some groups by others.

With a specific focus on intersectionality Mintz and Krymkowski (2010) using data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics investigated the intersectionality between gender and ethnicity. They were interested in whether changes in educational attainment over time among various racial/ethnic-gender groups (whites, African Americans and Hispanics would contribute to changes in the distribution of relevant groups across occupational types. With a notable increase in educational attainments over time among all groups, their results suggested that white men have maintained their privileged positions in the occupation hierarchy and there was a significant progress among white women than any other group (Mintz & Krymkowski,
Comparing indexes of dissimilarity among gender, ethnicity and race they found that gender remained the profound reason why occupations segregated and for both African Americans and whites, gender-based changes within racial groupings were larger compared to within gender, race changes.

**Theoretical Framework**

Previous research has shown that formation of ethnic hierarchies as a consequence of stereotyping and ingroup preference is apparent in multi-ethnic societies (e.g. Hagendoorn et. al., 1993; Hagendoorn & Hraba, 1989; Lange, 2000). Hence, the theoretical argument for expecting discrimination to moderate the impact of gender and ethnicity on leadership suitability draws on the stereotype content model (SCM) (Fiske et al., 2002); taste-based discrimination (Thijssen, 2016) and statistical discrimination (Mintz & Krymkowsky, 2010).

**Stereotype Content Model (SCM)**

The SCM contends that there are two dimensions apparent in social cognition which people use to make sense of both individuals and groups. The SCM terms these dimensions perceived warmth (trustworthiness, friendliness) and competence (capability, assertiveness) (Fiske et al., 2002). According to Fiske et al., (2002) people are evolutionarily predisposed to first assess the intentions of strangers by judging whether the stranger seeks to harm or to help them (warmth dimension) followed by another assessment of the stranger’s capacity to act on their initially perceived intention (competence dimension). In addition, Bodenhausen et al., (2012,) found that based on the SCM assessment, perceivers consequently operate on such stereotypes which are shared beliefs about common groups’ warmth and competence. The SCM postulates that people that are high in both warmth and competence, usually native citizens, middle class and dominant
religionists are relatively admired and face less discrimination. While those that score low on both warmth and competence usually the homeless, refugees, undocumented migrants, drug addicts, and nomads are perceived negatively and are significantly discriminated against especially when joining the labor market (Fiske et al., 2002). In support of this argument Carlsson and Rooth (2007) found that job applicants with a Swedish sounding name have a fifty per cent higher rate of receiving a call back for an interview than a job applicant with an Arabic sounding name. Therefore, we theorize that perceived warmth (trustworthiness) and competence will be the driver of perceived leadership suitability levels in this study, thus, our first hypothesis (H1) hypothesizes that candidates with Arab sounding names to be perceived as less suitable for leadership roles than candidates with Swedish sounding names (ethnicity).

**Taste-based discrimination theory**

Becker’s (1971) taste-based discrimination theory calls attention to the significance of interethnic attitudes in hiring decisions in his pivotal work, The Economics of Discrimination. His study theorizes that workplace discriminatory behavior is a result of an employer’s “taste”, who holds unfavorable attitudes toward ethnic minorities (Becker, 1971). He goes on to argue that an employer may discriminate against an applicant on the basis of ethnicity or potentially gender to avoid non-fiscal, psychic costs of employing a minority. Taste-based discrimination theory centers on the notion that “people” (employers, colleagues, customers) hold less favorable attitudes towards minorities and thus are less likely to be recruited and hired (Becker, 1971).

Thijssen’s (2016) work recognizes that Becker’s (1971) theory does not answer how such negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities were formed in the first place. Thijssen (2016) considers that psychological and sociological research highlight that stable personal characteristics
paired with dynamic intergroup bias could play a role in forming such attitudes. Personal characteristics, individually, can be due to a lifelong development of prejudice and discrimination that makes its way into the workplace. For instance, an individual-level theory of the authoritarian personality argues that strict and punitive parenting styles lead to repressed aggression and fear later in life which ultimately get projected onto outgroups, like ethnic minorities (Fiske, 1998). Dynamic intergroup bias, however, explores the macro-level explanation for discrimination like conflict theory (Quillian, 1995; Scheepers, 2002), observing a perceived competition of scarce resources like jobs or political power. Conflict theory identifies that cultural values between ethnic groups increase feelings of ethnic prejudice and threat, in a competitive society (Thijssen, 2016). Contrasting the negative societal implications of conflict theory, contact theory offers hope as it argues that under favorable circumstances like cooperation, support by authorities, shared goals, etc., interethnic contacts will in fact, reduce negative attitudes toward ethnic minorities (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Between individual, micro-justifications of discrimination and dynamic intergroup biases, Thijssen (2016) accounts for possible reasons Becker’s (1971) taste-based theory of discrimination towards ethnic minorities in hiring decisions and workplace culture.

**Statistical Discrimination Theory**

Statistical discrimination theory, however, argues that employers use real or perceived differences between groups, racial or gender, for example, to maximize profits (Tomaskovic-Devey & Skaggs, 1999). This model, however, places value on racist and patriarchal stereotypes and beliefs about productivity that are based on ingroup biases (Pager & Quillian, 2005; Reskin et al., 1991). The variables collected from this theory help explain processes generating occupational
segregation, considering the cost of, or “risk” of investing in training for employees who are stereotypically perceived as undependable or transient (Mintz & Krymkowsky, 2010). Women are often seen unreliable due to pregnancy or family obligations (Correll et al., 2007), whilst black people have been stigmatized by white people to be less dependable than their white counterparts, or ‘lazier’ than white or Hispanic workers (Fox, 2004).

Within statistical discrimination, the intersectionality of gender prejudices are racialized, and racial prejudices are gendered (Smith & Elliott, 2005). For instance, men are expected to succeed more at manual work while women are looked to succeed in clerical work (Charles & Grusky, 2004) but the stereotype of the “strong black woman” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005) suggests that black women belong in manual skilled labor over white women, and in some cases, based on the nature of the manual work, over male counterparts (Baunach & Barnes 2003).

While statistical discrimination theory looks at generalizations to make occupational people management decisions, it negates the context around why such stereotypes exist and how hiring and promotion decisions could positively affect these outgroups, and thus, the stereotypes altogether. It does, however, provide a framework used in this research to understand the potential generalizations that have been made about gender or race decisions in workplace leaders. Hence, in our second hypothesis (H2) we hypothesize that candidates with female sounding names to be perceived as less suitable for leadership roles than male leaders.

Job suitability and Trust in Leaders

This study aims to examine the perceived leadership suitability. This dependent variable comprises two components: job suitability and trust in leaders. Therefore, this research will be merging two scales to measure an overall perceived leadership suitability by finding the mean
Combining the Job Suitability Scale by Derous et al. (2017) and the Trust in Organization Inventory scale by Nyhan and Marlowe (1997) can comprehensively evaluate a leader's suitability within an organization. The underlying theoretical and empirical propositions inform this perspective of the respective scales. The Job Suitability Scale, developed by Derous et al. (2017), assesses a leader's qualifications and competencies, which are fundamental to effective leadership. It gauges the extent to which a leader possesses the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities for their role. Therefore, this scale provides an objective measure of a leader's job-related aptitude, thereby playing a crucial role in determining their job suitability.

On the other hand, the Trust in Organization Inventory scale by Nyhan and Marlowe (1997) measures an organization's trust in its leader. Trust is a fundamental element in leadership as it forms the basis of effective leader-follower relationships, influencing employees' commitment, satisfaction, and performance (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2009). High levels of trust in a leader can enhance collaboration, innovation, and risk-taking among team members (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2009). Therefore, this scale provides a nuanced understanding of the leader's interpersonal dynamics within the organization. Combining these two scales can provide a robust assessment of leadership suitability by addressing both task-based competencies and relational aspects of leadership, more specifically, trust. While the Job Suitability Scale provides insight into the leader's capability to perform their role effectively, the Trust in Organization Inventory scale assesses the leader's ability to foster positive relationships, which is critical for successful leadership.
Empirical research further substantiates this argument. Studies have shown that job competence and trust significantly influence leadership effectiveness (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). By integrating these two scales, a comprehensive perspective on leadership suitability can be achieved, accounting for the multifaceted nature of leadership roles. Hence, combining these two scales provides a more holistic and accurate evaluation of a leader's suitability within an organization.

**The Current Research**

This study investigates whether the intersection of gender and ethnicity of a leader affects employee perception of their leadership suitability focusing on Arabs and stereotypically Swedish citizens. Previous research has shown that there is significant and clear evidence of discrimination against ethnic minorities in the Swedish labor market and this research focussed on job applicants with Middle-Eastern sounding names receiving fewer job interview invites compared to applicants with Swedish or native sounding names (Agerström et al., 2012; Strinić et al., 2021; Bursell, 2014; Carlsson & Rooth, 2007). According to Carlsson and Rooth (2007) job applicants with a Swedish sounding name have a fifty percent higher rate of receiving a call back for an interview than a job applicant with an Arabic sounding name. Hence our first hypothesis (H1) expects that candidates with Arab sounding names to be perceived as less suitable for leadership roles than candidates with Swedish sounding names (ethnicity) whereas the second hypothesis (H2) expects that candidates with female sounding names to be perceived as less suitable for leadership roles than male leaders.

Unlike previous studies that focussed on discrimination during recruitment when applicants first apply for a job usually through sending curriculum vitaes (Maume, 2012; Derous
et al., 2009; Snellman et al., 2005; Quillian et al., 2017), this paper strives to find the dynamics of discrimination when one is already employed and is a candidate for a leadership position. Hence, this research goes a step further in examining the discriminatory behaviors apparent when minorities seek leadership positions. Another contribution of this study is that it provides an opportunity to study a combination of the effects of the intersection between gender and ethnicity among minorities of multiple group categories in leadership positions. Therefore, our third hypothesis theorizes that the perceived suitability of a leader is affected by signaling the intersection of ethnicity and gender. It explores and sheds light to the intersectionality between ethnicity and gender by examining how they interact with each other. Stated formally, the three hypotheses of this study are:

**Hypothesis 1:** Arab leaders are perceived less suitable for leadership roles than Swedish leaders

**Hypothesis 2:** Female leaders are perceived less suitable for leadership roles than male leaders

**Hypothesis 3:** The perceived suitability of a leader is affected by signaling the intersection of ethnicity and gender

**Method**

The hypotheses, design, materials, sampling and analyses were pre-registered on the Open Science Framework (https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/4NSVB). We ensured adherence to the ethical guidelines throughout the course of the research, specifically during data collection.

**Population and sampling**
The data was collected using convenience sampling social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp. Due to limited responses from these platforms, data was also collected from universities, cafes, stores and train stations. There was no payment for the participants to fill out the survey. The data collection was done in a period of a week due to a limited timeframe. It was terminated once the sample size had reached 304. Though it counters the targeted sample size in the registration that was initially determined through Cohen’s $d$ effect size at 0.3 and 80% power using G*power analysis software, the sample size however, was decided based on the time provided for data collection and the goal of having equal participants for each vignette.

Participants with less than 6 months of work experience were excluded in this study. Our belief is that it requires a minimum of 6 months of work experience for an individual to understand the dynamics of a leader and a follower and what is required of a leader in a workplace. Four participants were accordingly excluded from the analysis. The participants were also asked if they have lived in Sweden in order to ensure their comprehension of the ethnicity and the gender of names that are commonly known in Sweden. All participants answered “Yes” to this question. Among the participants who took part in the study, 149 (49.6%) were female, 150 (50%) males and 1(0.33%) preferred not to say. The mean age of the respondents is 31 ($SD=10.2$, range 19-69).

There were a total of 75 participants in each vignette.

**Procedure**

This experimental study is a 2x2 between-subjects design with two Independent variables; Gender (Male/Female) and Ethnicity (Swedish/Arab) and one Dependent Variable; Perceived leadership suitability. The survey in this study included a vignette designed by ensuring the signals
of warmth (trustworthiness) and competence of the aforementioned model, the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002), were given in the scenario. The scenario given in the vignette introduces a character with these signals that the participant is required to recommend into a leadership role. The study included four vignettes (see Appendix A) with the same scenario of the same description and the same scales, however, the manipulation in this study is the name of the candidate that the participants were expected to rate for leadership suitability which was different in every vignette. The name of the candidate/leader in the scenario was used to signal the ethnicity and gender of the leader. It was not revealed to the participants that the study is about discrimination in order to decrease possibilities of response bias and so the participants received different vignettes from one another. For instance, participant A receives the vignette with the Arab sounding male name; Mr. Ahmad Hassan, participant B receives the vignette with the Swedish sounding male name; Mr. Erik Svensson, participant C receives the vignette with the Arab sounding female name; Ms. Fatima Hassan and participant D receives the vignette with the Swedish sounding female name; Ms. Sofia Eriksson. The names were chosen from a list of common names in Sweden as per the Statistics Sweden’s name register (2020).

Due to limited resources for block randomization, the participants instead had to choose a color among four different colors (Green, Yellow, Red and Blue) at the beginning of the survey. Each color was assigned a different vignette such as Green was Arab sounding male name vignette, Yellow was the vignette with Swedish sounding male name, Red was Arab sounding female name vignette and Blue was Swedish sounding female name vignette. In order to ensure an equal number of participants per vignette, the respondents for each vignette were kept track of. Once a condition
has reached the required number of participants as per the registered sample size, that color was removed from the survey.

**Materials**

The dependent variable was measured by merging two scales to look at the overall perceived suitability as a leader. The first scale consisted of three questions adapted from Derous et. al (2017) using 7-Likert scale. Few of the items the participants were asked to rate were, "How suitable do you believe the potential candidate is for this leadership position?" (1 not at all; 7 very suitable) and "How likely are you to recommend the potential candidate among other candidates to be your leader?" (1 not at all likely; 7 very likely). To measure perceived leadership suitability, a second scale was used which measured the participants' trust to the assigned leader of the vignette, the Organizational Trust Inventory Scale by Nyhan and Marlowe (1997). It includes statements such as "My level of confidence that the potential candidate will make well thought out decisions about his/her job is_____ " (1 nearly zero; 7 nearly 100%) or “ *When the potential candidate tells me something, my level of confidence that I can rely on what he tells me is_____”* (1 nearly zero; 7 nearly 100%). Considering the scales were both 7-point Likert scales, the two scales were computed into an overall perceived leadership suitability score by finding the average mean score.

**Statistical analysis**

The data used was acquired and processed according to the pre-registration with a few changes. As mentioned earlier only 4 out of 304 datasets were excluded because they did not fulfill the minimum 6 months job experience. After testing for the assumptions of the t-test as per our registration using the Shapiro-Wilk’s test for normality, it indicated that there was enough
evidence in the data to reject the null-hypothesis/ assumption of normality of the suitability score ($W = .949, p < .001$). Hence to examine the effect of ethnicity on perceived leadership suitability in hypothesis 1, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted. To test the effect of gender on perceived leadership suitability in hypothesis 2, a Mann-Whitney U test was also conducted. For our third hypothesis, a two-way ANOVA was conducted to test if there is an interaction effect between ethnicity and gender. To accept or reject the hypothesis, the standard $p < 0.05$ was used for all the tests to determine whether the results are significant or not. The dependent variable, perceived leadership suitability, was calculated as the average of the items of the scales, the perceived job suitability score and the perceived trust score. The data was analyzed using R studio version 4.2.3.

Regarding exploratory analysis, we tested all three hypotheses using the two scales separately to examine if the merging of the scales as stated in our registration has influenced the results. We aimed to explore how the two different components of the scales; job suitability and trust in leaders, can influence the perception of leadership suitability individually. This was done by only using the data from the job suitability scale to test the influence of our independent variables (ethnicity and gender) on perceived job suitability. Similarly, we only used the data from the trust in organization scale to test the influence of the independent variables on trust in leaders. This was conducted using the Mann-Whitney U test for the first two hypotheses and ANOVA for the third hypothesis.

**Results**

**Confirmatory results**

**Table 1**

*Reliability/Consistency of the scales*
Alpha (95% Confidence Interval)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Merged scale</td>
<td>0.97 (0.97 - 0.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Suitability scale</td>
<td>0.92 (0.90 - 0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Organization scale</td>
<td>0.96 (0.95 - 0.97)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Cronbach’s alpha for the different Suitability scales used*

Reliability/ Consistency of the scales was measured using Cronbach’s alpha (Cronbach, 1951). In all cases the suitability scales yielded excellent internal consistency scores with alpha values of 0.92 and above.

Hypothesis 1 expects that Arab leaders will be perceived as less suitable for leadership roles than Swedish leaders such that most participants will choose Swedish leaders. Mann-Whitney U revealed that there was no significant difference on suitability scores based on ethnicity between Swedes (Md = 5.45, n2 = 150) and Arabs (Md = 5.45, n2 = 149), W = 10007, p = .098, hence there was not enough evidence in the data to reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 (Female leaders are perceived less suitable for leadership roles than male leaders) Mann-Whitney U test was also used to test the assertion that there may be some difference between the suitability depending on the person’s gender. Similarly, the Mann-Whitney U revealed that there was no significant difference on suitability scores between Males (Md = 5.45, n2 = 150) and Females (Md = 5.45, n2 = 149), W = 11080, p = .821, hence there was not enough evidence in the data to reject the null hypothesis.
With regards to hypothesis 3 (The perceived suitability of a leader is affected by signaling the intersection of ethnicity and gender) two way ANOVA was used to test whether there was an interaction between ethnicity and gender that may have influenced the perceived suitability scores. Table 1 below shows the results of two-way ANOVA – it is clear that the interaction was not statistically significant ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 1.061$, $F = .676$, $p = .412$)

Table 2

ANOVA results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sum Sq</th>
<th>Mean Sq</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Pr(&gt;F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.0011</td>
<td>0.0010</td>
<td>0.97447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>6.8587</td>
<td>6.1727</td>
<td>0.01353*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:Ethnicity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.7510</td>
<td>0.6759</td>
<td>0.41165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residuals</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>328.89</td>
<td>1.1111</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ANOVA results showing significance results on ethnicity.

The interaction plot below shows a clearer picture of these results. There is a bigger and much more significant difference between the ethnicities for males and not so much for females.

Figure 1.

Interaction plot
Table 3

**Tukey’s Post Hoc test**

|        | Estimate | Std. Error | t value | Pr(>|t|) |
|--------|----------|------------|---------|----------|
| Swedish-Arab | 0.3024   | 0.1217     | 2.486   | 0.0135   |

*Note. Results of the Tukey's Post Hoc test*

As discussed in our registration we used the Tukey’s HSD post hoc test to determine exactly which group means differ from each as a way to confirm the results from the two-way ANOVA test and the results were confirmed with a $p < .014$.

**Exploratory Analysis**

Since we merged two scales to measure one dependent variable (perceived suitability), this study aimed to explore if there will be any significant group differences if we separate the scales and analyze them individually. Using data from the suitability test with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.95, Mann-Whitney U revealed that there was no significant difference on suitability scores based on
ethnicity between Swedes \((Md = 6, n2 = 150)\) and Arabs \((Md = 6, n2 = 149)\), \(W = 10007, p = .098\), hence, there was not enough evidence in the data to reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 (Female leaders are perceived less suitable for leadership roles than male leaders) Mann-Whitney U test was also used to support the assertion that there may be some difference between the suitability depending on the person’s gender. Similarly, the Mann-Whitney U revealed that there was no significant difference on suitability scores between Males \((Md = 6, n2 = 150)\) and Females \((Md = 5.67, n2 = 149)\), \(W = 11019, p = .758\), hence there was not enough evidence in the data to reject the null hypothesis.

The third hypothesis, although not confirmed as well ANOVA results \((M = 57.7, SD = 11.6, p = .412)\), shows the same result as the analysis with merged scales with a significance \((p = .049)\) showing an adjusted effect only on ethnicity when controlling for gender. This was also confirmed by Tukey's HSD post hoc test \((p = .049)\) as shown below on Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Post hoc test*

|                | Estimate | Std. Error | t-value | Pr(>|t|) |
|----------------|----------|------------|---------|---------|
| Swedish-Arab   | 0.2910   | 0.1473     | 1.975   | 0.0491  |

*Note.* Results of the Tukey's Post Hoc test showing results of the Suitability scale.

We also observed the same pattern of results when computing only data from the *trust scale* with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.96. Hypothesis 1: Mann-Whitney U revealed that there was no significant difference on suitability scores based on ethnicity between Swedes \((Md = 5.38, n2 = 150)\) and Arabs \((Md = 5.29, n2 = 149)\).
Hypothesis 2: Female leaders are perceived less suitable for leadership roles than male leaders. Similarly, the Mann-Whitney U revealed that there was no significant difference on suitability scores between Males ($Md = 6, n_2 = 150$) and Females ($Md = 5.67, n_2 = 149$), $W = 11019, p = .758$, hence there was not enough evidence in the data to reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3 was not confirmed but also showed an adjusted effect on ethnicity with a significant result when focussing on Swedish males and Arabic males (same as the data from other scales). This was also confirmed by Tukey's HSD test ($p = .009$) as shown on Table 4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post hoc test</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish-Arab</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Results of the Tukey's Post Hoc test showing results of the Trust scale.

Overall, the results from the merged scales and the individual scales (trust and suitability scale) show the same pattern of results with no significant difference between groups based on both ethnicity and gender on both H1 and H2. With regards to the third hypothesis, the analysis showed that there is no significant interaction effect between ethnicity and gender however there was an adjusted effect of ethnicity (anova table/interaction plot) between Swedish males and Arab
males revealing higher preference/suitability for male Swedish leaders than male Arab leaders. All the results were confirmed by the Tukey’s HSD post hoc tests.

Finally, considering no interaction effect was found regarding the third hypothesis, no further analysis was necessary for the direction of the interaction as per our registration.

**Discussion**

We contribute to prior research on group intersections and discriminatory perceptions by investigating whether the intersection of gender and ethnicity of a leader at the workplace affect employee perception of their leadership suitability. Our first hypothesis that Arab leaders will be perceived as less suitable for leadership roles than Swedish leaders such that most participants will choose Swedish leaders was not supported. The second hypothesis is that female leaders are perceived less suitable for leadership roles than male leaders not supported either. Regarding our third hypothesis “The perceived suitability of a leader is affected by signaling the intersection of ethnicity and gender”, it was also not supported, however the analysis showed that there is a significant difference between ethnicities for males than for females (fig.2). This means that there is higher preference for male Swedish leaders than for male Arabic leaders. Although our first hypothesis is silent with respect to correlations between a male Swedes and male Arabs these findings partially support our first hypothesis which expected difference in perceived leadership suitability among ethnic lines. These findings suggest that when faced with a choice between a female Arabic leader and female Swedish leader most people will not discriminate (when controlling for competence) but when it's a choice between male Arabic leader and male Swedish leader most people tend to choose a male Swede as a leader.
These findings are in line with the predictions from statistical discrimination theory, postulating that discrimination can occur when recruiters consider the cost of, or “risk” of investing in training for employees who are stereotypically perceived as undependable or transient (Mintz and Krymkowsky, 2010). Interestingly, taste-based discrimination could also help explain the findings of this study regarding preference for male Swedes than male Arabs. Taste-based discrimination theory centers on the notion that “people” (employers, colleagues, customers) hold less favorable attitudes towards minorities and thus are less likely to be recruited and hired (Becker, 1971). Hence, people may have shown preference for male Swedes than male Arabs based on less favorable attitudes they hold on minorities. In addition, it could be participants’ perceived warmth and competence between male Swedes and male Arabs that influenced the leadership suitability levels as postulated by the SCM model.

Moreover, it can be argued that the preference for Swedish male is as a result of stereotyping which often leads to a ranking of the outgroups closer or further away contingent on what is socially and culturally acceptable in the ingroup (Verkuyten & Hagendoorn, 1998) Hence, negative stereotypes about male Arabs could be contributing low rankings in leadership suitability compared to male Swedes. Moreover, these stereotypes demean and exalts Swedes through the proto-type development process where persistent and historical exposure to one identity in a leadership role can create a leadership prototype that is disadvantageous to other people that fall out of the boundaries of the prototype (Rosette et al., 2008). In this case constant exposure to male Swedes in leadership positions could create a perception that male Swedes are more appropriate for leadership positions than male Arabs. In addition to the influence of stereotyping Kiser (2015), conducting research at a Swedish firm (558 employees), found that belonging to a stigmatized
group, including being a migrant, women or different religious group, is likely to have a negative impact in access to social capital consequently putting the same people in lower status jobs or hindering any career advancements.

With regards to the scales, regardless of which scale used the result remained the same as the significant difference between groups was only found among males of different ethnic groups. The use of different scales whether merged or individually aids and confirms the findings of this study due to the consistency of the findings. However, our failure to confirm our second hypothesis on all scales reveal that people are not discriminating on gender lines with regards to leadership suitability and this is in line with the findings by Hultin (1998) who determined that the sex or gender of the people in recruitment positions does not play a significant role in determining chances of people reaching managerial or supervisory positions. Hence this could explain why our second hypothesis was not confirmed among the Swedish population.

**Implications**

Although our hypothesis was not confirmed, we found that there is discrimination between Swedes and Arabs among males. According to Cook et al., (2013), “Stereotypes regarding minorities’ inability to lead limits minorities’ access to leadership positions, including head coaching positions” (p. 170). Therefore, our study provides valuable insights and contributes to organizations on both individual and organizational levels.

On an individual level, such a study can shed light on the challenges faced by ethnic minority leaders in the workplace. It can reveal the different forms of discrimination they may encounter, such as bias in promotion opportunities, unequal pay, or exclusion from decision-making processes. Understanding these issues is crucial for organizations to develop targeted
interventions and support systems to address and mitigate discrimination. This can be achieved by identifying the barriers faced by these leaders first and then by implement training programs, mentoring initiatives, or diversity and inclusion policies aimed at promoting equal opportunities and creating a more inclusive work environment which will allow minority leaders to thrive and contribute their full potential to the organization.

On an organizational level, this study raises awareness on discriminatory behaviors. Creating an environment that values diversity and inclusivity not only benefits the individuals directly affected by discrimination but also has a positive impact on the overall organizational culture. It can attract and retain top talent from diverse backgrounds, improve employee morale and engagement, and enhance the organization's reputation as a socially responsible and inclusive entity.

**Limitations**

Research on discrimination of an intersection of gender and minority ethnic groups is compelling, however, there are several limitations to this study. One of the main limitations is the randomization of the participants. The pseudorandomized method employed in the data collection for this study is a potential limitation that could have influenced the results. According to Salil (2012), pseudorandomness is “the theory of efficiently generating objects that “look random” despite being constructed using little or no randomness” (Abstract). Our sampling method may appear to be random however, that may not have been the case. Pseudorandomization, in contrast to true randomization, involves a deterministic process, which may inadvertently introduce patterns or biases. In support of this, according to Shadish et al. (2002), procedures that seem random can actually contain selection biases and that falls under “Haphazard assignments”.
Consequently, as this study’s participants were not assigned to experimental conditions with complete randomness but rather, they opted for self-selection based color to be assigned to their manipulation instead of a more effective randomization method, there's a possibility that confounding variables, which in this case is the choice of the color at the beginning of the survey, may have been unevenly distributed between the groups, potentially leading to systematic and sample selection biases that could impact the reliability and validity of the findings.

Alternatively, it would have been more appropriate to manually randomize the links of the questionnaire with a random number generator or switch the type of data collection. Even though the color selection method used had no relation to the immediate purpose of the study, it could have still been a major influence on the participants’ responses in regards to a relationship between color preference and perceived leadership suitability. Therefore, future studies can be conducted to replicate these findings using an improved randomized design.

The use of convenient sampling is another limitation that further complicates the generalizability of the study as the findings can not be directly applicable to populations outside of Sweden. Moreover, though this study included an online survey where the participants were informed of its anonymity to reduce any possibilities of social desirability bias, the participants could have still responded in a manner that portrays themselves as fair in evaluating a candidate in the vignettes regardless of the name of the candidate that signals their gender and ethnicity. This limitation is highlighted by Brenner and DeLamater (2016) who claim that the reduction of social desirability bias in an anonymous study is not as significant as anticipated, as respondents still strive to present themselves positively.
One other limitation would be the merging of two different scales measuring two different variables. After having done the data analysis and seen the results of the explorative analysis, it can be stated that the merging of scales added complications to our research as a whole considering that the two scales measure two different components that although can be argued to be measuring leadership suitability, however, not necessarily is the case when combined. Despite the fact that the internal consistency or the reliability of the combined scales have shown to be quite high in the study, however, the relative nature of self-estimated subjective data limits this study in confidently assessing and evaluating the aspects of validity of the measure which could have influenced the results. This indicates that the results of this study should be taken with caution.

**Conclusion**

The marginalization of ethnic minorities and female leaders in leadership roles is a critical, yet under-discussed issue. Despite the growing body of research, the hurdles experienced by these groups, particularly within leadership contexts, require further exploration and understanding (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). The current study contributes to the limited existing research on discrimination of minority groups members of multiple categories in leadership positions. It sheds light on how discrimination can go beyond recruiting stages where minority groups are protected by laws and legislation in many countries such as Sweden; however, that is not the case once these members hold leadership positions where they may be perceived as less suitable leaders than their majority counterparts and therefore be more prone to face discrimination on daily basis. Our research has shown that groups of ethnic minorities, more specifically males, are less preferred to a leadership position than their major counterparts, which invites future research to investigate minorities of all groups in leadership positions and how it may affect their progress and satisfaction.
at work. By identifying the unique barriers and opportunities they encounter, future researchers can shed light on the complexities and dynamics of leadership experiences for marginalized groups. Moreover, examining the interaction between individuals, organizational culture, and career advancement can provide insights into improved strategies for fostering inclusivity, promoting diversity, and creating supportive environments that enhance the success and satisfaction of minority leaders.
References

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Appendix A

(Green)

1- Read the following scenario. Given the information you will read about this candidate, rate the statements to follow:

Imagine that you have been working in your dream job at a well-known Swedish company for several years now. You work with an excellent team that you really get along well with. Today, you find out that your leader has been promoted to a higher position in a different department in the company you work for. Following your leader’s promotion, the company management announces that they are looking for a new leader within the same organisation.

Among the eligible candidates considered by the management is Mr. Ahmad Hassan who has been working efficiently for the organisation for almost 10 years as one of the junior managers. He graduated from one of the top universities in Sweden with merits. He speaks Swedish and English fluently. Most consider him to be friendly and trustworthy. Other candidates considered for this position are of similar qualifications.

You have thus been invited to give your recommendation for suitable candidates among the already chosen cohort. Based on this limited information, we would like you to answer/guess what you can infer about the leader’s suitability.

1- How suitable do you believe the potential candidate is for this leadership position?
2- How likely are you to recommend the potential candidate among other candidates to be your leader?
3- What is your general impression of the potential candidate?
4- My level of confidence that the potential candidate is technically competent at the critical elements of his job is_____ 
5- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will make well thought out decisions about his job is_____ 
6- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will follow through on assignments is ____
7- My level of confidence that the potential candidate has an acceptable level of understanding of his job is____
8- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will be able to do his job in an acceptable manner is____
9- When the potential candidate tells me something, my level of confidence that I can rely on what he tells me is____
10- My confidence in the potential candidate to do the job without causing other problems is_____ 
11- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will think through what he is doing on the job is____

(Yellow)

2- Read the following scenario. Given the information you will read about this candidate, rate the statements to follow:

Imagine that you have been working in your dream job at a well-known Swedish company for several years now. You work with an excellent team that you really get along well with. Today, you find out that your leader has been promoted to a higher position in a different department in
the company you work for. Following your leader’s promotion, the company management announces that they are looking for a new leader within the same organization.

Among the eligible candidates considered by the management is Mr. Erik Svensson who has been working efficiently for the organization for almost 10 years as one of the junior managers. He graduated from one of the top universities in Sweden with merits. He speaks Swedish and English fluently. Most consider him to be friendly and trustworthy. Other candidates considered for this position are of similar qualifications.

You have thus been invited to give your recommendation for suitable candidates among the already chosen cohort. Based on this limited information, we would like you to answer/guess what you can infer about the leader’s suitability.

1- How suitable do you believe the potential candidate is for this leadership position?

2- How likely are you to recommend the potential candidate among other candidates to be your leader?

3- What is your general impression of the potential candidate?

4- My level of confidence that the potential candidate is technically competent at the critical elements of his job is_____

5- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will make well thought out decisions about his job is_____

6- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will follow through on assignments is_____

7- My level of confidence that the potential candidate has an acceptable level of understanding of his job is_____
8- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will be able to do his job in an acceptable manner is____

9- When the potential candidate tells me something, my level of confidence that I can rely on what he tells me is____

10- My confidence in the potential candidate to do the job without causing other problems is____

11- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will think through what he is doing on the job is____

(Red)

1- Read the following scenario. Given the information you will read about this candidate, rate the statements to follow:

Imagine that you have been working in your dream job at a well-known Swedish company for several years now. You work with an excellent team that you really get along well with. Today, you find out that your leader has been promoted to a higher position in a different department in the company you work for. Following your leader’s promotion, the company management announces that they are looking for a new leader within the same organization.

Among the eligible candidates considered by the management is Ms. Fatima Hassan who has been working efficiently for the organisation for almost 10 years as one of the junior managers. She graduated from one of the top universities in Sweden with merits. She speaks Swedish and English fluently. Most consider her to be friendly and trustworthy. Other candidates considered for this position are of similar qualifications.
You have thus been invited to give your recommendation for suitable candidates among the already chosen cohort. Based on this limited information, we would like you to answer/guess what you can infer about the leader’s suitability.

1- How suitable do you believe the potential candidate is for this leadership position?

2- How likely are you to recommend the potential candidate among other candidates to be your leader?

3- What is your general impression of the potential candidate?

4- My level of confidence that the potential candidate is technically competent at the critical elements of his job is ______

5- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will make well thought out decisions about his job is ______

6- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will follow through on assignments is ______

7- My level of confidence that the potential candidate has an acceptable level of understanding of his job is ______

8- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will be able to do his job in an acceptable manner is ______

9- When the potential candidate tells me something, my level of confidence that I can rely on what he tells me is ______

10- My confidence in the potential candidate to do the job without causing other problems is ______

11- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will think through what he is doing on the job is ______
1- Read the following scenario. Given the information you will read about this candidate, rate the statements to follow:

Imagine that you have been working in your dream job at a well-known Swedish company for several years now. You work with an excellent team that you really get along well with. Today, you find out that your leader has been promoted to a higher position in a different department in the company you work for. Following your leader’s promotion, the company management announces that they are looking for a new leader within the same organisation.

Among the eligible candidates considered by the management is Ms. Sofia Eriksson who has been working efficiently for the organisation for almost 10 years as one of the junior managers. She graduated from one of the top universities in Sweden with merits. She speaks Swedish and English fluently. Most consider her to be friendly and trustworthy. Other candidates considered for this position are of similar qualifications.

You have thus been invited to give your recommendation for suitable candidates among the already chosen cohort. Based on this limited information, we would like you to answer/guess what you can infer about the leader’s suitability.

1- How suitable do you believe the potential candidate is for this leadership position?

2- How likely are you to recommend the potential candidate among other candidates to be your leader?

3- What is your general impression of the potential candidate?
4- My level of confidence that the potential candidate is technically competent at the critical elements of his job is_____

5- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will make well thought out decisions about his job is_____

6- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will follow through on assignments is_____

7- My level of confidence that the potential candidate has an acceptable level of understanding of his job is_____

8- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will be able to do his job in an acceptable manner is_____

9- When the potential candidate tells me something, my level of confidence that I can rely on what he tells me is_____

10- My confidence in the potential candidate to do the job without causing other problems is_____

11- My level of confidence that the potential candidate will think through what he is doing on the job is_____