

The Modern Gender Gap?

*A comparative analysis of young men's and women's views on
national security*

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Abstract

When examining individuals' perspectives on political issues, gender appears to be a crucial indicator. Political issues are viewed differently by men and women, according to previous research. Data from previous research also show that men and women have different perspectives on national security. However, previous research is, to a large extent, quantitative. To broaden the knowledge of the issue, therefore, this study examines the question: Is there a gendered difference in perceptions of national security among youths in Sweden? If so, what are the differences in perception, and how might this impact support for the Swedish Armed Forces? The study is a case study carried out in Sweden. The material is based on comprehensive data from 10 focus groups with Swedish upper secondary school students. The findings indicate that women are more likely to perceive threats of harm, violence, and structural issues. Men do not perceive the threat of violence as a threat to the same extent; however, they generally thought it was more important for Sweden to have a strong defense than women. Both men and women were positive about international involvement. However, women appear to choose diplomatically oriented international institutions, like the UN, over military alliances like NATO. On the contrary, men were more optimistic about NATO than the UN. The disparity between men and women in their perception of national security may be a possible explanation for why the Swedish armed forces struggle to recruit more women to the institution.

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1. Introduction

In the most recent UNDP Human Security report, 6 out of 7 people reported feeling unsafe in their everyday life. This is also true in the world's wealthiest countries, where anxiety levels are higher than in the last ten years. People feel insecure because of threats such as technological advancements, conflicts, and healthcare (UNDP, 2022). Just as the world's population had started to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia invaded Ukraine at dawn on the 24th of February, 2022. Sweden's response to this has been immense. According to the website of the Swedish government, Sweden supports Ukraine against Russia's aggression. Sweden has implemented significant sanctions against Russia and is sending military equipment and medical supplies to Ukraine. In parallel, Sweden is strengthening its defense (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022). This may be observed by the fact that Sweden intends to join NATO shortly and by the fact that the previous conscription system was resurrected in 2018 with one significant change; it now includes women as well.

Since Sweden aims to reinforce its defense, the country needs support for the institution. The institution of the armed forces has been deeply intertwined with the rest of the political sphere for decades; for men, it has been a way to earn citizenship.

“The army strongly associated conscription with active and democratic male citizenship, as a dual relationship of rights and obligations. A man became a Swedish citizen through soldiering. Civil rights and welfare benefits were not something the subject could simply claim or were entitled to by birth or residence; they had to be earned partly through military service.” (Sturfelt, 2014:52).

According to Choulis et al. (2021: 242f), conscription can increase people's propensity to the idea of the military. Support for the armed forces increases through direct and indirect support. Direct support from those who take part in military service themselves, and indirect support through friends and family to those who have conducted military service, who gets to experience the values and culture second-hand (Choulis et. al 2021: 242f). Women have not participated in the military to the same degree as men; thus, they should be less inclined to directly support the organization.

There are significant advantages to having more women serve in the military forces. In 2000 the UN adopted the 1325 resolution on women, peace, and security (United Nations, 2000).

While addressing the fact that among civilians, women and children are often the ones who suffer the most from war and conflict, the resolution also highlighted the crucial part that women play in promoting peace. Furthermore, the resolution stresses the significance of increasing women's involvement in conflict prevention decision-making (United Nations, 2000). Additionally, the 1325 resolution is a part of NATO's security agenda (NATO, 2022). Moreover, several studies suggest that equality between men and women can have a conflict-reducing effect (Caprioli, 2003; Regan & Paskeviciute, 2003; Kronsell, 2012; Gardner & El Bushra, 2004).

According to Heikkilä & Laukkanen (2020:605), gender-related security issues have become more prevalent in recent years. However, a significant portion of the field is US-based research and is frequently linked to sociological and sexual harassment issues within the field. Eichenberg (2019:1) further points out that prior studies on how men and women see national security have also mainly been focused on the United States. According to Eichenberg (2019:2), policymakers may need to reassess military action in some cases, given the results of his research. There are situations where the majority of males support the use of force, and the majority of women are against it, which could imply that military intervention in response to a conflict may become less desirable with an increased number of women involved in politics.

Since there is a lack of case studies in other political contexts than the United States, conducting a case study in another country could be of interest. Sweden is ranked among the top nations in the world for gender equality. The Swedish Government needs public support to strengthen the military and also aims to increase the number of women serving. Since women have not participated as much as men historically, they should be less likely to support the institution (Choulis et. al, 2021). However, it is also crucial to deepen the knowledge of why women are less involved in military practices. One possible explanation is that women are less interested in joining a military institution because men are more positive about military operations than women. Since Sweden aims to join NATO and also states that they are reinforcing its defense, it is of interest to investigate whether these political actions have public support.

1.1 Purpose and research question

The Swedish Armed Forces depend on its conscription system and young people's engagement and willingness to remain in the institution after completing military service. A way to broaden the selection was to include women on the same basis as men. However, if men and women view national security differently, this may help explain why the armed forces still struggle to integrate more women into the organization.

The research problem is that while the Swedish Government is strengthening its defense, the armed forces also work to integrate women into the institution. However, previous research shows that as gender equality increases, the disparity in the perception of national security is widening (Eichenberg, 2019). As a result, the support for strengthening the defense might decrease in the future. In light of this, the research questions this study aims to answer is:

- Is there a gendered difference in perceptions of national security among youths in Sweden? If so, what are the differences in perception, and how might this impact support for the Swedish Armed Forces?

The issue that is the subject of this study will be referred to as national security. In his research, Eichenberg (2019) uses this term to describe several issues, including perspectives of threats, international involvement, balance of power, and acceptance of war. Throughout the study, the term national security will refer to the abovementioned issues.

This study aims to make a theoretical contribution by examining young men's and women's perceptions of national security. The intention is to contribute to the field by interviewing young people who have not yet participated in the labor market or further education since previous research indicates that the gender gap has widened as women have evolved in the labor market and increased their educational level (Eichenberg, 2019, Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2006; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). The study also provides a significant empirical contribution by adding qualitative material to existing quantitative data. Numerous studies have been done on the subject, but most are quantitative and based on studies in the United States; this research aims to deepen the knowledge with findings from Sweden through ten focus groups conducted with young males and females.

2. Previous research and theoretical framework

This section will first describe previous research within the field of gender in security studies and then explain the theory used to conduct the study. The previous research section will focus on four parts of gender issues within the security field. The first part focuses on conscription to increase equality since Sweden has applied conscription for both men and women since 2018. This section is needed to broaden the picture of Sweden's Armed Forces and military service. The second part will discuss gender stereotypes within the armed forces to give a broader view of research on how men and women play different roles within the armed forces. The third section will describe research on how women's participation in the military can reduce conflicts as women are expected to contribute to the armed forces in other ways than men. Lastly, the fourth part discusses how men's and women's perception of politics differs in a broader sense than security issues. Lastly, the theoretical framework is presented. The theory describes the differences between men and women in their perception of national security.

2.1 Previous research

2.1.1 Conscription and equality

During the Cold War, several nations abandoned conscription as a recruitment strategy. However, the countries in the far north—Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland—kept the conscription system in place with only minor changes (Persson & Sundevall, 2019:1040). Several states have abolished conscription as a recruitment method and replaced it with professional volunteer forces since it is argued that professional volunteer forces are more efficient and effective (Choulis et al., 2021:240). Nevertheless, several countries still have mandatory military service, but how they recruit people differs. About 85 countries still have some mandatory military service and some conscript women (World Population Review, 2022). The figure below shows European countries that still have compulsory military service and which of them conscript men and women on equal terms.

Table 1. European countries with conscription

COUNTRIES WITH CONSCRIPTION	GENDER REQUIREMENTS
AUSTRIA	Males
AZERBAIJAN	Males
BELARUS	Males
CYPRUS	Males
DENMARK	Males
EGYPT	Males
ESTONIA	Males
FINLAND	Males
GEORGIA	Males
GREECE	Males
LITHUANIA	Males
MOLDOVA	Males
NORWAY	Males and females
RUSSIA	Males
SWEDEN	Males and females
SWITZERLAND	Males
TURKEY	Males
UKRAINE	Males and females (Gender requirements unclear)

(World Population Review, 2022)

Sweden was the second nation to enlist women under the same conditions as men, following Norway as the first to alter its recruitment practices (Heikkilä & Laukkanen, 2020:604). In Sweden, conscription was temporarily abolished between 2010 and 2018. However, it was agreed in 2017 that the system would be reestablished on January 1st 2018, and that the new system would be gender-neutral, including both men and women on the same basis. Both volunteers and youth conscripts are used in the recruitment process. (Swedish Government Offices, 2017)

Choulis et al. (2021:240) suggest that conscription has another positive outcome than the efficiency and effectiveness argument for professional armed forces. According to their study, conscription increases support for the armed forces in society as a whole. Conscription has a beneficial effect in intensifying social and professional engagement, reducing the gap between society and the military (Choulis et al., 2021:240f).

The positive effect of conscription on the general public's perception of the armed forces can be divided into direct and indirect support. Since a significant portion of the population will be enlisted, they will gain first-hand knowledge of the military and its role in society, thus, direct support. Conscription gives considerably better chances to reach more diverse social groupings

than voluntarily military service. If you have served in the military, you are also more likely to understand the value of the armed forces and to support the institution as a result (Choulis et al., 2021:242).

The indirect support comes from the fact that conscription, as mentioned earlier, involves a diverse group of people from different social groups in society. This enables the culture of the armed services to spread through all facets of society, friends, and family to those who serve in the military. As a result, friends and family will become more familiar with the military and its mission, and society will be exposed to more interactions with the armed forces. Thus, it is also probable that they can relate to their actions and aims and, therefore, support the institution (Choulis et al., 2021:243).

According to Heikkilä & Laukkanen (2020), it is crucial to include conscription as an equality metric when assessing equality between men and women. Their study highlights that numerous studies have demonstrated that elevating women's status has a good impact on maintaining peace and preventing conflicts (Heikkilä & Laukkanen, 2020:604).

2.1.2 Gendered stereotypes within the armed forces

Men and women are believed to bring different qualities to the armed forces. The stereotyped woman is more helpful, kind, and emotionally expressive, while the stereotyped man is more autonomous, self-assured, competitive, and leader-like (Boldry et al., 2001:690). Thus, the characteristics of a victorious soldier are the same as those describing the stereotypical male; stereotypical feminine characteristics are the opposite of those characteristics identified as being a good soldier (Boldry et al., 2001:690).

Eduards (2012:53) describes several paradoxes within the Swedish Armed Forces regarding gender equality. One is the paradoxical claim that men and women should be treated equally within the institution while pointing out the new traits that women can offer and the distinctions between genders. Furthermore, the Swedish military is supposed to be a gender-neutral organization. It claims to be so by pointing out that men and women should be treated equally within the institution. This also implies that the obstacles within the institution are the same for both genders. (Eduards, 2012:55). Boldry et al. (2001: 701) find a gendered difference in evaluations of men and women in an environment dominated by men. Their study suggests that the stereotypical atmosphere within the military is an issue for women since the characteristics

describing stereotypical women are not what is required to perform effective military performance.

Furthermore, a study on young men conducted in Thailand by Bjarnegård et al. (2022:1) revealed that patriarchal norms could influence who decides to engage in violent conflict. The study discovers a high association between patriarchal ideals and the self-selected decision to serve in the military, which suggests that patriarchal institutions and stereotypes of masculine toughness can help explain why men voluntarily join the armed forces (Bjarnegård et al., 2022:11). Thus, there is a correlation between patriarchal values, the usage of violence, and men's willingness to partake in the military.

2.1.3 Gender equality to reduce conflict

Gender equality within a country can have a conflict-reducing effect. However, Reagan & Paskeviciute (2003:287) states that the role women play in peacebuilding is unexplored to a large extent.

According to Caprioli (2003:197), structural equality within a state can have a dual impact on how that state behaves globally. First, how structural hierarchies are formed internally heavily depends on norms of violence within the state, which will spill over into international behavior. Secondly, if men are more supportive of war than women, women will not be able to express their points of view in a society with a structural hierarchy (Caprioli, 2003:197). Moreover, as women's power increases in the political sphere, the possibility for women to influence political decisions increases. Since it is expected that men and women have different perspectives on using force in a conflict, it is reasonable to draw a connection between the number of women in positions of power and the possibility that the state in question will use force (Reagan & Paskeviciute, 2003:290).

Scholars offer several theories for why women are more pacifist than men. For instance, there are theories that suggest that it is dependent on the nature or nurture argument. However, testing these arguments would only be possible with unethical methods. If men are more aggressive than women, then as long as men are the dominant social group, the state's foreign policy will reflect masculine, hence militant, policies. Independent of the nature or nurture argument, the basis is the same, if women support less aggressive state policies, then aggressive policies will decrease as women gain political power (Caprioli, 2003:197).

Other scholars contend that women's pacifist beliefs are caused by institutional hierarchies that bind them to predetermined standards. According to this line of thinking, eliminating the structural standards associated with masculinity and femininity will lead to a reduction in violence. Even though scholars contend that males are just as impacted by societal hierarchies as women are, masculinity and militarism have a close relationship today. Men are not naturally aggressive, but they are bound to norms of violence, just as women are bound to pacifist norms (Caprioli, 2003:198f).

When structural equality is achieved, the aggression connected to masculinity will be eliminated. However, without structural hierarchies, women could express aggression to the same extent as men, and men could express pacifism to a greater extent. Although the elimination of structural hierarchies dependent on gender would lead to a more peaceful world with fewer conflicts since the use of force is often intertwined with structural inequality. Thus, domestic equality between men and women should have a conflict-reducing effect on international relations (Caprioli, 2003:199).

2.1.4 Gendered differences in politics

Previous research indicates that men and women hold different political views. For instance, Conover (1988:986) notes that men and women tend to make different voting decisions. According to the study, women tend to back candidates more to the left and men more to the right politically. Nevertheless, the study finds no difference between men's and women's political values. There are, however, differences in fundamental moral principles; women are typically more devoted to protecting the weakest members of society, and an "ethics of care" permeates their attitudes (Conover, 1988:1004).

Scholars suggest that this gap has widened when women's educational levels have increased and when women participate in the labor market to a greater extent (Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2006; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). When women, for the most part, were at home, families were often seen as a political unit. According to Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006:2), women's increased education level and participation in the labor market have resulted in that we have to see family members as individuals in their political opinions. Even if women might have had political views that differed from their male partners earlier, women with education and employment are more likely to express them. In their study on voting in Europe, Abendschön & Steinmetz

(2014:339f) support Inglehart's & Norris's theory on development that the gender gap is widened as countries become more secularized and modernized.

Moreover, according to Clayton & Zetterberg (2018:916), the implementation of quotas for women in politics has been one of the most significant developments in representative democracies during the past 20 years. According to their findings, governments with electoral gender quotas have increased the representation of women in politics, which has resulted in a more considerable portion of the national budget being dedicated to public health. The increased funding for health care must mean a decrease in another area; the research finds that in countries with electoral gender quotas, there is a decrease in military spending (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018:929). Thus, an increased number of women in politics affects which political issues are prioritized.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Several studies suggest that men and women value political issues regarding national security differently (Gardell et al., 2021; Brooks & Valentino, 2011; Wagnsson et al., 2020). Eichenberg (2019:28) also examines men's and women's differences in opinion regarding national security. Through his research, he aims to close gaps within the field of gender differences in national security. He has considered larger and smaller conflicts while examining conflicts in the study, which includes a variety of security-related topics. Additionally, he assesses the significance of global institutions and the power dynamic in the current world order (Eichenberg, 2019:137).

No evidence of gender disparities in the general questions about international involvement was discovered in Eichenberg's research. These findings are cross-national; differences in opinions regarding international involvement do not occur in any of the states studied. The notion that men and women have different worldviews is unsupported (Eichenberg, 2019:3).

The study also compares how men and women perceive their surroundings. The research shows that women in Western Europe and the United States perceive the violence in Iraq and the spread of disease as particularly dangerous. There were no gender disparities in other topics like terrorism and nuclear weapons; the gender difference is more related to the type of threat the issue is about (Eichenberg, 2019:29ff). According to the findings, the gender gap between men and women depends on how dangerous a problem is to a particular person; women appear

to be more threatened by threats of direct violence and harm (Eichenberg, 2019:31). A gender disparity is also discovered by Wagnsson et al. (2020:810) within the concept of security in a more general sense. They find that women in Sweden are influenced by an ethics of care when considering something as a security threat and that women are more concerned about security concerns due to structural issues.

Furthermore, women are more likely than men to exhibit sensitivity to violence, experience victimization, and recognize external dangers, according to previous research. It is unknown why this phenomenon occurs, but one argument is that social structures teach women to feel more vulnerable, but experience may also play a role. A third argument is that women's sense of vulnerability and their dread of sexual assault are strongly related (Eichenberg, 2019:17).

Eichenberg (2019:32f) also evaluates if there is a disparity between genders in the issue of power balance between countries. The question addressed the use of military force as a means to establish peace and the need for a balance of power between states to maintain peace. In contrast to the United States and Turkey, where most people considered military power as a means of establishing peace, it was discovered that only a minority of people in Europe supported using force to maintain peace (Eichenberg, 2019:31).

The study also discovers evidence of a gender gap across national boundaries regarding whether war is sometimes required. The size of the gender disparity varies by nation. However, in Sweden, for instance, males are 20 percentage points more likely than women to believe that war is occasionally necessary (Eichenberg, 2019:36). According to the research, the cognitive abilities and political representation of women within the state are related to the difference between men and women's perceptions of war. Therefore, as women become more educated and politically represented, the difference between men's and women's perceptions of war also widens (Eichenberg, 2019:38). Similar to this, Brooks & Valentino (2011:271) state that all research to date demonstrates that women are less likely than men to use violence.

Wagnsson et al. (2020:810) also mention this tendency; women are more likely to resolve conflicts using diplomatic and dialogic means rather than military force. According to Wagnsson et al. (2020:810), women preferred the UN to emphasize cooperation, advancing democracy, and dialogue. This finding suggests that support for global involvement depends on what that involvement entails. Moreover, according to Brooks & Valentino (2011:271),

women are more likely than males to support military action if the UN approves the mission. They also discover that the nature of the conflict significantly influences the gender gap; for example, when escalating conflict aims to save lives, women are typically even more in favor of the action than men (Brooks & Valentino, 2011: 283).

In conclusion, perspectives on international involvement do not appear to differ between genders. However, the study's findings indicate that women perceive the threat of harm and violence to a greater extent than men do. Generally, men are also more prone to the thought that violence is sometimes necessary. Moreover, the ways and effects of international engagement cause a difference in men's and women's views of involvement. Men and women agree that there should be international cooperation. However, there remains a gender gap between those who favor the initiatives of international organizations like the UN and NATO. The author concludes that this disparity between men and women is a result of the frequently implied use of armed force by international organizations (Eichenberg, 2019:46). Several other studies support this, the context of the conflict must be taken into consideration, and the reasons for the war are also of significance (Wagnsson et al. 2020; Brooks & Valentino, 2011).

3. Research design and methodology

The following section describes the study's research design, methods for collecting data, and the analytical framework used when assessing the material for the analysis. Furthermore, the section also describes the material used and possible limitations and delimitations the research might have.

3.1 Research design

This study investigates differences in how young women and men perceive national security. Numerous research on men's and women's perceptions of conflict and threats have been conducted. However, they are primarily based on quantitative research techniques. This study intends to explore a particular case—Sweden—in greater detail and explore young people's perspectives in a qualitative rather than a quantitative context. Since the study aims to determine whether a pattern from previous research can be found in a particular case, the study follows a positivist logic.

The research will be based on focus groups conducted with students at the end of their education at the Swedish upper secondary school. Focus groups can be used to investigate how people feel and think about a particular topic. Finding members with shared traits related to the focus group's intended topic is the goal of the selection process (Kreuger & Casey, 2014:26). Focus groups are designed to provide a casual environment where participants can talk about underlying norms that are common to those participating. Focus groups are most effective when the interviewer moderates the topic rather than getting too involved. Focus groups seek to explore the dynamics and disclose the relationships between individuals participating (Parker & Tritter, 2006:24f).

As focus groups' primary objective is to foster an atmosphere in which participants feel free to voice their opinions on the subject at hand, it is crucial that the participants feel similar in some manner, such as traits like age, gender, or occupation, it helps them feel at ease (Kreuger & Casey, 2014:30f). The focus groups' participants were all students attending an upper secondary school in Sweden. Furthermore, since everyone was still enrolled in school but was required to be older than 18, they were all in a similar age span. They were also divided by gender to create a secure setting for the participants. This was also done to be able to compare the focus group discussions.

Ten focus groups, six female and four male, served as the basis for the material. Several non-binary participants were included; they had the option to select which group they wished to participate in. Every focus group had four to eight members. Depending on how many people were in the group, the interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. The groups differed in size depending on how many students were interested in participating in the classes. However, this will not impact the result since the time consumption was adjusted depending on how many participants were included in the focus group. The important part of focus groups is the discussions between the participants, not how many participate in the discussion.

Table 2. Participants in focus groups

1 (F)	2 (M)	3(F)	4(F)	5(M)	6(M)	7(F)	8(F)	9(M)	10(F)
6 part.	6 part.	4 part	5 part	7 part	5 part	8 part.	4 part.	5 part.	6 part.

F= Female groups, 33 female participants
M= Male groups, 23 male participants

The teachers, who were contacted through mail, hand-selected the participants. This also implies that the majority of focus groups contained students who were acquainted with each other. This needs to be considered when analyzing the answers; students could be affected by their classmates' responses. Men and women were divided for several reasons; one was to reduce the possibility that the opinions of others would sway students and because it was anticipated from the research that men and women would hold different viewpoints. Furthermore, the study is qualitative. Therefore, the initial goal of the research was not to be representative but to test the theory on the modern gender gap in a new setting through a case study. Discussing young men's and women's perspectives can point to causes for this occurrence that can be further investigated and tested in subsequent studies.

The focus groups were conducted at school, and before the focus groups were completed, the students got information on how the interview would pursue. All the students got information about the study on an information sheet and signed a consent form. To be able to transcribe the interviews afterward, the interviews were recorded. The focus groups were conducted in Swedish since that is the mother tongue of both the interviewer and the participants.

3.2 Case selection

The study will be conducted as a case study in Sweden. A case study aims to comprehend a real-world phenomenon to recognize particular circumstances within the case (Yin, 2018:50). According to previous research (Eichenberg, 2019; Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2006; Inglehart & Norris, 2003), you could argue that Sweden is a least likely case (Flyvbjerg, 2006:231). Since previous research has shown that as women advance in education and the labor market, the disparity between gender increases. Thus, as men and women become more equal, the divide in politics deepens. The fact that Sweden proactively pursues these issues might be a way of counteracting the widening of the gap.

It is also possible to argue the case of Sweden as a critical most likely case. The basic assumption is that if there is a gender disparity in views of national security in Sweden, it would likely be proper in other countries (Flyvbjerg, 2006:231). Since Sweden, as the second country in the world, conscript men and women on the same grounds and has had a pro-active feminist foreign policy since 2014 (Regeringen, 2019), young men and women should have a similar perception of the armed forces since they appear to have comparable prospects. Sweden has, for a long time, been at the forefront of discussions around gender equality. However, it is also

possible to claim that proactive feminist politics results in even more pronounced distinctions between men's and women's perspectives.

Sweden is an interesting case since women in the country are politically mobilized, and previous research suggests that the disparity between men and women should, therefore, be extensive. On the other hand, the fact that Sweden works deliberately to close this disparity suggests that men and women should perceive issues regarding national security equally. An examination of the case of Sweden is, therefore, particularly interesting.

3.3 Ethical considerations

When conducting interviews in groups, it is vital to consider how to sustain anonymity for everyone participating in the focus groups. This is crucial because everyone involved must feel free to express themselves. Before the interviews were conducted, a letter explaining the research and their anonymity was distributed. Each participant got to sign a consent form, which made it clear that they could withdraw their participation in the study at any moment.

Since the focus groups were conducted with students who were acquainted, it was also stated beforehand, to ensure anonymity, that the participants should refrain from addressing one another by name during the recording. This ensured that it was impossible to associate any of the students with the recording after the file was uploaded and transcribed.

The quotes included in the thesis have also been translated into English because the interviews were held in Swedish. To make the quotes more manageable, they have been condensed. To ensure that the participants are correctly cited, the translation and brevity of the quotes have been done with care.

3.4 Limitations and delimitations

The fact that the interviews were performed in focus groups may be a limitation of the study because it may impact the participants' responses. The goal of focus groups is to stimulate conversation among the members. Focus groups with young people who know each other, however, run the risk of participants being influenced by the responses of their friends and, therefore, do not answer the questions honestly. To prevent this, it was crucial to clarify that there are no correct or incorrect responses and several ways to approach the topics raised.

There were also certain delimitations made because of the time frame. All of the interviews were conducted in two cities because traveling to other cities to conduct interviews would be too time-consuming. It would have been possible to conduct interviews through zoom. However, since several participants took part in the discussions, having the participants in different rooms would have limited the ability to ensure that everyone was heard during the conversation. Additionally, the fluency of the dialogue, which is critical in focus groups, depends on conducting interviews live. Furthermore, the interviewer also plays a vital role in ensuring that the participants feel safe in the context; it is easier to create trust between the participants and the interviewer when meeting in real life.

The interviews took place during the allotted class time. Thus, there was a time limit on the discussions as well. The focus groups' sizes and the amount of time the teachers could allot for the groups varied partly because of this. However, the time allotted to each group made sure that everyone had a chance to comment on each question. Furthermore, the participants might have found it challenging to maintain concentration if the interviews were longer.

3.5 Analytical framework

The analysis is based on deductive thematic analysis, meaning that the analysis is theory-driven, and the questions asked are born out of the theory (Clarke & Braun, 2012:60). It is crucial to analyze the focus group participants' responses using a methodological framework. Thematic analysis is a comprehensive technique that applies to numerous disciplines. Its adaptability allows it to offer a comprehensive set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006:78).

Thematic analysis can be used to find and examine various themes in a material, in this case, the discussions from focus groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). The purpose of employing themes is to identify critical components of the information that could provide an answer to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006:86).

The themes provide a framework for understanding the critical points of what was discussed and how the discussions were pursued. Based on the theory of the modern gender gap and how men and women perceive national security, the analysis will be separated into three main themes. The theory examines three key points: how threats are perceived differently by men and women, how conflicts should be resolved, including whether to use force, sanctions, or

diplomatic means, and power relations and how external actors should involve in conflicts. Threats, means, external actors, and relationships of power will therefore be the themes investigated during the interviews.

The analysis will be based on a summary of the participant discussion and quotes that serve as samples of their viewpoints. The first topic will also be broken down into sub-themes to understand the disparities in how men and women perceive threats. Specific quotes will be utilized to emphasize the critical topics in the groups.

4. Analysis

Men's and women's perceptions of national security will be analyzed through themes identified in the findings of the focus groups. The observed themes are closely connected to the theory of the modern gender gap since the questions asked were closely related to the theory. Three key themes emerged from the interview. These are outlined below. Perceived threats to Sweden and the world overall was the first theme identified. How to respond to threats was the second theme recognized. The third theme discusses global cooperation, international organizations, and power relations between states.

4.1 What are the biggest threats to Sweden and the world today?

The first topic of discussion was what the participants believed to be the most significant security concern currently affecting Sweden and the world. The threats acknowledged during the session will be sorted into four themes; the threat of war, the threat of climate change, the threat of cyberattacks, and internal threats in Sweden.

4.1.1 The threat of war, Russia, and nuclear weapons

Nearly every male and female group mentioned the threat of war, weaponry, and Russia as the first threat. However, the groups' perspectives on the threat varied.

Concerning the Russian threat and the possibility of war in Europe, there was strong agreement among the female participants in a majority of the groups. Four out of six female groups identified it as the most concerning threat. All the male groups discussed the threat posed by Russia, but the focus shifted more toward whether or not it was a threat. None of the male groups could agree upon the most significant threat. A number of the male participants

acknowledged that Russia is an issue and that the conflict between Ukraine and Russia may one day encompass other nations. However, they did not consider it to be a significant threat. One male participant, for instance, described that he was accustomed to Sweden remaining neutral and felt safe since Sweden has avoided confrontation in the past; he did not think that the country was in danger today.

The fact that five out of six focus groups with women brought up the risk of nuclear weapons was another distinction between the male and the female focus groups. One issue discussed in a female group was that if we join NATO, we may need to install nuclear weapon systems on Swedish soil, and how this could increase the perception of Sweden as a country that is a threat to the rest of the world. Two female groups also discussed that they did not see many world leaders as trustworthy of having access to nuclear weapons, and the threat posed by these weapons is pervasive. In contrast, none of the male groups brought up nuclear weapons in their discussions.

The female groups saw the decision by Sweden to join NATO as a move that might make the threat from Russia greater rather than as a means of enhancing national security. NATO was not viewed as a threat among the male groups but as a means of reducing Sweden's susceptibility to Russia. The female groups discussed it as a threat because Sweden might be threatened by countries outside of NATO, but they also discussed what it would mean to be protected by the United States. Three of the female groups discussed that joining NATO raised the likelihood that, if you have conducted military service, you might have to fight a war in a nation whose principles and values you disagree with. Something they discussed felt like a personal threat rather than a threat to Sweden.

Table 3. Illustrative quotes for military threats

Quotes from female groups	Quotes from male groups
<p>Interview 1, participant 4: "...Since we are now entering NATO, or are in the process, we have increased the threat quite significantly from when we were this kind of little brother-country that was seen as neutral, now it is quite uncertain what will happen"</p>	<p>Interview 2, participant 4: "Right now I think it is Russia since Sweden has helped Ukraine --- so I don't think Sweden and Russia have the best relationship --- It has been obvious that Sweden chose Ukraine's side ---- That is the biggest threat I think"</p>
<p>Interview 3, participant 3: "Yes, nuclear weapons absolutely feel like a big threat, not just Russia's nuclear weapons but... There are other countries as well"</p>	<p>Interview 5, participant 5: "I don't really think he [Putin] is a threat. He might be the biggest military threat, but I still don't think that it is that big of a threat"</p>
<p>Interview 8, participant 2: "I guess that would be if Sweden joins NATO and there would be a war just like the one between Ukraine and Russia"</p>	<p>Interview 6, participant 3: "... it might sound dramatic to say it, but it doesn't feel completely impossible that there could be a large-scale war In Europe again --- If you compare it to the other threats we have been talking about, a war seems --- more unlikely than them. --- The most accurate threat might not be a war, but if there would be a war, that would have the worst effect..."</p>
<p>Interview 10, participant 3: "... I'm not thinking that much about if there is a threat that there could be a war in Sweden, but maybe like wars in nearby areas and how that affects us"</p>	<p>Interview 9, participant 5: "... Or I don't think we have a direct connection to Russia --- There is no reason for Russia to... There is no conflict that would make them attack us. Of course, it could happen, but there are other countries that are more at risk..."</p>

To sum up, there was agreement in four out of six female groups that the threat of war and conflicts is the most severe and accurate current threat. Even though two male participants in the male groups agreed that war and conflict posed the most significant threat, none of the male groups could agree on this. The female groups also discussed nuclear weapons and the lack of trust in global leaders, whereas none of the male groups did. In addition, the female groups considered joining NATO a threat rather than a way to maintain security, in contrast to the male groups who regarded the move as a way to ensure Sweden's security.

4.1.2 The threat of climate change and the energy crisis

The second threat recognized was climate change and problems associated with the current energy crisis. The quotes below reflect that this topic was explored more in-depth in the male groups than the female ones. One of the male groups debated whether the likelihood of war or the effects of climate change was the most significant concern. They concluded that a war in Europe did not feel as accurate of a threat since climate change is occurring. Two out of four male groups said climate change posed a more significant threat than the war between Ukraine and Russia. Four out of six female groups brought up the topic of climate change, but they did not believe it posed a severe threat to Sweden. The discussion concentrated on how it would have a more significant impact on other nations.

The energy crisis was also an essential topic of discussion in two male groups. However, they also acknowledged that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine contributes to the scarcity of energy and resources. The discussions concentrated on how this might result in a crucial outcome from an economic perspective. Additionally, the issue of the energy crisis was also brought up in one of the female groups. The conversation, however, centered on how energy issues impact those most vulnerable in society.

Furthermore, one male group discussed that there could be a snowballing effect of the climate crisis, bringing more refugees to Europe and Sweden, causing food shortages, and causing economic problems. In comparison to one of the female groups, which instead discussed Sweden's capacity to assist other nations in distress by providing money and accepting immigrants rather than discussing accepting refugees as an issue.

Table 4. Illustrative quotes for the threat of climate change and energy crisis

Quotes from female groups	Quotes from male groups
Interview 3, participant 4: “And the climate... climate change, absolutely a threat as well”	Interview 2, participant 4: “I also thought about the energy issues, and the prices for energy right now, and now it might be a bit political but you know with nuclear power, wind power, that we have been lacking with nuclear power...”
Interview 3, participant 2: “Absolutely... I would say like... It is a threat to the world [climate change], but it would not affect us that much. But it is a big threat of course, but I don’t know”	Interview 2, participant 7: “... There are a lot of things regarding --- there have been gas leaks that no one knows who caused them, and also the energy crisis, and that we are lacking of energy in many places in Sweden--- lacking of different resources is a quite big threat”
Interview 7, participant 4: “... And I’m also thinking economically, with the electricity now”	Interview 6, participant 6: “Yes, well I would say that an obvious answer is the threat of climate change of course”
Interview 8, participant 3: “And the climate of course. That we have a government that does not fucking care about it now --- It is now we need actions the most, in a while it will be too late”	Interview 6, participant 3: “Yes, well I think I would say that the most serious threat is the climate crisis, but then a war would be worse on a short sight, but that is less likely”

In conclusion, two of the male groups delved more deeply into the subject of climate change and the energy crisis than the female groups did overall. While two of the male groups believed it to be the most severe threat, none of the female groups agreed that it was. Two of the four male groups discussed the energy crisis and its effect on society. One of the female groups addressed the energy crisis but connected to how it would impact society’s most vulnerable people. Additionally, there was a difference in how one male group and one female group approached the potential impacts of climate change, with the male group discussing refugees as a potential threat and the female group discussing how Sweden can assist other nations, for example, by receiving refugees.

4.1.3 The threat of cyber-attacks

The third threat identified in two male groups and one of the female groups was the threat of cyber-attacks, which was discussed as a means to use in conflict as warfare. In the male groups, it was also discussed as something that could be performed by individuals or smaller groups, not necessarily by one state against another in conflict. Even if one female participant mentioned the threat of cyber-attacks, it was not something the group discussed further. None of the groups found this as the most pressing issue. However, in one group, they discussed that if Sweden were under a cyber-attack as a weapon in warfare, for example, if a foreign power

were to shut down our electrical grid, we would not have the means necessary to solve the problem within a reasonable time frame.

Table 5. Illustrative quotes for cyber attacks

Quotes from female groups	Quotes from male groups
Interview 1, participant 2: “Yes, I’m also thinking, for example, that since we are online all the time there are also a lot of risks with technology and cyber threats and things like that”	Interview 5, participant 5: “I would also say that there could be cyber-attacks --- because of the development of the internet in the last years.”
	Interview 6, participant 6: “But for example, with cyber-attacks, we are very vulnerable for like --- if the electricity goes out, or if someone attacks our infrastructure, we are screwed”

4.1.4 Internal issues in Sweden

Internal threats were discussed in two of the male groups and three of the female groups. The issue was approached from different angles and discussed to different extents. In one of the male groups, a participant brought up the escalating gang conflicts in Sweden as a threat. However, the group did not discuss the issue further. Participants in one of the female groups discussed Sweden’s politics and the threat posed by the increasing segregation. Segregation was discussed both by the fact that it leads to gang violence but also that right-wing extremists might pose a threat in the future. Another internal issue within Sweden discussed in one male group and one female group was the increasing gap between classes in society.

Table 6. Illustrative quotes on internal issues in Sweden

Quotes from female groups	Quotes from male groups
Interview 7, participant 4: “To be honest, segregation. And thus like gang violence as well, I guess”	Interview 2, participant 5: “... I think that another threat is these shootings and that crime is increasing --- it is a threat that sometime it could escalate and like --- maybe there could be a civil war between the gangs in Sweden”
Interview 8, participant 3: “... I think that the scariest thing is that there is a racist part that is the biggest [on the winning side] and that it is similar to Germany before World War II and the holocaust...”	Interview 9, participant 2: “I’m thinking about hatred of ethnic groups, the fact that antisemitism has become stronger for example”
Interview 10, participant 3: “Right-wing extremists could also be a threat in the future, if it goes that far”	

4.2 Means in conflicts

To determine whether the participants believed it is sometimes necessary to use violence in conflict, they were asked about different means to solve conflicts. States can employ tools such as diplomacy, economic sanctions, and military means. An illustration of diplomacy is that Sweden should serve as a mediator in negotiations, operate as a safe space for states in conflict, and persuade other nations to adopt our principles. An example of sanctions was that Russia cut off the gas supply to Europe, and Europe imposed trade sanctions on Russia. The fact that Sweden is joining NATO and that we ship weapons to nations at war, like Ukraine, are examples of military methods.

Overall, both the male and the female groups agreed that the first course of action in a disagreement should always be diplomacy. However, it was also discussed that, depending on the circumstances, using military force might be required. For instance, all the groups agreed that Sweden sending weapons to Ukraine was a good idea. Thoughts on the value of helping other countries in need were more prevalent in the female focus groups. For instance, one of the female groups debated whether Sweden should join NATO because doing so may require Sweden to assist nations with differing political views. However, it was agreed that if one of Sweden's neighbors—such as Norway—was in danger, Sweden should assist.

Moreover, the male participants generally turned the discussion to the fact that using force is sometimes necessary to a greater extent than the female groups did. For instance, one of the male focus groups instantly thought participating in conflict required using force. At the outset of the conversation, the group's attention was primarily drawn to the technical aspects of a battle. This suggests that any discussion of action in a war also implies the need for military action.

Additionally, there were significant differences between the male and female groups throughout the debate on sanctions. Everyone in the female groups concurred that sanctions were a tool that might be utilized in a conflict. For instance, it was said that imposing nonviolent acts in addition to delivering weaponry to Ukraine is a suitable complement to making a statement against Russia. The findings in the male groups indicated that they found sanctions as a conflict resolution technique ineffective. The groups' explanations for why sanctions do not work differed. One persistent view was that attempts to sanction Russia has been unsuccessful. One

group said that Sweden is too small to have any impact; they distinguished between the possibility of sanctions against Russia by the United States or Great Britain and the possibility of sanctions by Sweden. Sweden has suffered worse than Russia as a result of Sweden's imposed sanctions on the country.

However, a significant concern with sanctions, that they primarily affect innocent civilians in Russia was discussed in two female groups and one male group. However, all of the groups concluded that for Russian citizens to exert pressure on Putin, they might need to be dissatisfied with the current state of affairs. One female group examined sanctions from the perspective of those in Sweden who are most economically vulnerable. They discussed that they suffer the most from the economic impacts the sanctions placed on Russia have had on Sweden and Europe.

Table 7. Illustrative quotes for means in conflict – female participants

Quotes from female focus groups	
<p>Interview 1, participant 2: “I also think that depends on what kind of threat we are under. --- Ukraine tried to talk to Putin and so did Macron and like France as well, several world leaders have tried to talk to Putin, but he invaded Ukraine anyway. --- you should try diplomacy as much as possible and try to be peaceful, but at the same time, you cannot do that if the other part just attacks another country...”</p>	<p>Interview 3, participant 5: “I also think like, diplomacy would have worked well if the world leaders were reasonable... but Putin for example, is like mentally ill, so we have to prepare for him. But at the same time, I think that it is scary to like an arms race because it feels as if it has led to wars in the past, that you prepare for a war which leads to war.”</p>
<p>Interview 4, participant 2: “Like, I don’t think that war is the solution to problems, so I think it would be better if every country, not just Sweden, would instead just start talking with each other.”</p>	<p>Interview 7, participant 8: “... It is hard with sanctions and things like that [diplomacy]. It doesn’t always help, like with Russia for example. Putin doesn’t really care, does he? He doesn’t want to solve anything with love, he just want to fight and gain land. --- In some cases, violence might be necessary.”</p>

Table 8. Illustrative quotes for means in conflict – male participants

Quotes from male focus groups	
<p>Interview 2, participant 4: “Like, I would say that the example of Russia is hard because the reason why Russia invaded Ukraine have like a historical background with like communism and different ideologies, so I don’t think sanctions will work because we have sanctioned them for a long time. There is a deep ideological reason for why this war is happening and Sweden is not involved in that. Although, I don’t know how you should handle it...”</p>	<p>Interview 6, participant 3: ”... so our defense strategy is kind of built on guerilla warfare. Small battalions that do hit and run at units from the state attacking. --- Our strategy is built on destroying as much as possible since we know we would lose against a full-scale army from a big country --- either it is hoping that we can do as much damage that the attacking country does not think that it is worth it, or to join NATO and hope that they will help us.”</p>
<p>Interview 9, participant 5: “... Sweden is very rich of a country and well developed technologically, so the best thing we can do is help with that [weapons]...”</p>	<p>Interview 5, participant 4: “It would be one thing if the United States or China put sanctions [on Russia] since they have much more power and influence --- and for example England, they have a lot of Russian oligarchs, which they have sanctioned, There aren’t that many rich Russian’s living in Sweden so”</p>

In conclusion, the belief in sanctions was shown to be the most significant difference between the male and female groups during the discussion of measures in conflict. The participants in the male groups generally felt far more negatively about applying sanctions. The male groups' discussions focused more on the fact that sanctions are ineffective. In contrast, the participants in female groups that did criticize sanctions primarily motivated it by the fact that it impacts the wrong individuals. Even though it was discussed that it is challenging to behave diplomatically with nations with undiplomatic leaders, both the participants in the male- and female groups believed that diplomacy should always be the primary course of action. Lastly, the participants in both the male and female groups agreed that there are times when using force is necessary. However, whereas participants in the male groups were more concerned with whether Sweden would be attacked, the female participants talked more about military activities to help other nations.

4.3 International involvement and international actors

The third theme clarifies the subject of international involvement and concentrates on involvement in conflict. Furthermore, this relates to a more in-depth analysis of Sweden's membership in NATO and the relationship between great powers.

4.3.1 International involvement and conflict

Participants in both the male and female groups generally agreed throughout the topic on international involvement that it is occasionally required—however, the discussion in the male and female groups on how that involvement should appear differed. In the female focus groups, there was explicit consent among the participants that international involvement heavily depended on the needs of those in the country. They were generally favorable toward the UN and the EU, even if they also discussed the issue of veto rights for some countries in the UN.

The participants in the male focus groups were not against the UN per se, but generally, they discussed veto rights as a significant problem. Several participants claimed that the UN's system is rendered useless in wars. Generally, the female participants emphasized the importance of the UN as a forum for dialogue and peacemaking than as a venue for conflict resolution outside of mediation. The male participants also discussed the positive effects of the council as a forum for discussion but focused more on the fact that it was ineffective in resolving conflicts. For instance, they examined how the UN's veto rights limit its ability to assist a country like Ukraine.

Additionally, it was discussed in both male and female groups entering a conflict between two countries requires caution. It must be carefully considered whether entering a conflict will enhance the risk that the conflict between the two countries escalates. For instance, one female participant suggested that it could be easier for Sweden to mediate in a conflict in Europe, like Russia and Ukraine, rather than in a foreign country whose values differ too much from Sweden's. For instance, since Sweden is a secular country, the country might not act as a good negotiator in a religious conflict.

However, the most significant difference between the male and female focus groups participants was their attitude toward NATO. A majority of the male participants were firmly in favor of Sweden joining NATO. In contrast, a majority of the female participants were far

more ambivalent and generally more concerned that it would have a negative impact on Sweden's security. The following chapter will focus on this in more detail.

Table 9. Illustrative quotes on international involvement – female participants

Quotes from female focus groups	
Interview 1, participant 4: “But that is the reason why the UN exists, to prevent conflict and to make sure that conflicts are solved peacefully, and that is why there are different types of actions, not just violent actions, but rather monetary actions with trade and whatever...”	Interview 4, participant 5: “And especially when it is regarding poverty and youths, like the UN fights a lot for everyone's right to go to school and try to fight poverty, things like that. And I think that it is good that they involve themselves when needed because no one else will help these people.”
Interview 3, participant 4: “That is good I think [the UN]. When you have the possibility to talk to each other you can also come up with solutions. There is less of us and them thinking and more all of us together kind of.”	Interview 10, participant 5: I mean, the idea is good. But it is so hard to determine the situations in countries, and conflicts can differ. And it is not always easy to decide on a good side and a bad side --- And then the UN has to pick a side if they are going to act with force. And it is hard when it is a conflict regarding religious issues. --- It is very hard to solve diplomatically, but it is worth a try.

Table 10. Illustrative quotes on international involvement – male participants

Quotes from male focus groups	
Interview 6, participant 6: “Well I would say that it is good that both the UN and the EU exist. But then I can also think that at least when it comes to the UN, it feels quite fatuous because of the system with veto rights for some countries where all of the great powers have veto rights --- So what is the point in having a peacekeeping agency where every country that conducts warfare also has the possibility to stop actions against that war? I think it feels quite weird and dumb.”	Interview 9, participant 6: “Generally, it is hard to say, --- all of these organizations differ a lot. I definitely think in military organizations it is a lot easier since they have a clear goal, while the UN, for example, they have a lot harder to keep focus because they are doing so many different things at the same time, and don't have the same goal, so it depends I would say.”
Interview 2, participant 3: “Yes, well I agree that with the legislation around veto rights some countries have advantages. As it is for like China and Russia, they are perceived as quite dangerous in our society, and they have somewhat power over security in some matters; if they vote against a certain matter. And that is bad I think.”	Interview 5, participant 7: It can be good and bad. Like, I mean if the UN would help Ukraine, that is good for Ukraine, but it is not that good for Russia --- because Russia only sees one perspective, everyone who helps them are against us. --- Maybe they can feel like pushed into a corner and go nuts you know”

To sum up, both male and female participants were generally positive to international involvement. However, it was heavily dependent on what the involvement was regarding. Generally, the female participants thought it was essential to involve in conflict if human rights were violated or to fight poverty, for example. Additionally, the female participants were also generally in favor of the UN. Although they also believed that sometimes involvement from other countries was necessary, the male participants were more critical of the UN. However, they were more in favor of NATO than the female participants were. In general, both the male and female participants discussed the importance of reconsidering whether becoming involved in a conflict could risk escalating it.

4.3.2 NATO membership and relationship with great powers

In general, the female participants had conflicting opinions toward NATO. Many participants believed it to be a difficult question with pros and cons. As stated in the examples below, the participants in the female focus groups discussed whether Sweden should join NATO for safety reasons. However, they also talked about whether the threat against Sweden was severe enough that joining NATO was necessary since they also believed that it might increase the perception of Sweden as a threat to the rest of the world. Two of the female focus groups also talked about the implications of Sweden joining NATO from the country's idealistic views. If a NATO country were under attack, it might imply that Sweden would have to send troops to other NATO members, including states with different political ideologies from Sweden's.

Most female participants responded affirmatively when asked if they believed Sweden's threat would increase if the country joined NATO. Additionally, since NATO is a military alliance, the groups also asserted that other international institutions were preferable because they have tools other than military ones. They all concurred that they preferred the UN and the EU over NATO.

Participants in the male focus groups were significantly more likely to favor Sweden joining NATO than those in the female focus groups. The discussions focused on the idea that since Sweden's defense is insufficient, Sweden needs protection from the outside in an insecure world. Even though it was discussed in each of the male groups that joining NATO might make Sweden more vulnerable to threats, particularly from Russia, the participants widely agreed that no country would have the courage to attack Sweden if the country was a part of NATO. The

male groups' conversations centered on how Sweden may benefit from joining NATO rather than what Sweden might have to give up if it did.

In the female focus groups, the main arguments against Sweden joining NATO were linked to idealistic views of Sweden's role as a democratic nation and a refusal to help nations that do not share Sweden's principles towards democracy and equal rights for everyone. One group also discussed what it would mean for them individually to be called up for military service. Serving in the military felt more burdensome because it may require you to assist nations with which you disagree on important topics.

Table 11. Illustrative quotes on NATO – female participants

Quotes from female focus groups	
<p>Interview 1, participant 4: "...I prefer the UN because they don't exist for warfare, they have like peace soldiers that are there to help people in need in war, and yes they carry weapons, but they do so to protect the people who are not really a part of the war --- NATO is preaching for war in another way, if there is an attack against one country, it is an attack on all countries. I believe that in Sweden's situation, it is going to do more harm than good."</p>	<p>Interview 4, participant 2: "And if you are a part of NATO, then I think you have to send soldiers to other NATO countries to help in conflict, so that would also have a huge impact on us. But I also agree that it shows very much where we stand militarily, but at the same time I don't think, okay we might have joined NATO now because of what happens between Russia and Ukraine in case something happens, but it has been a discussion for a long time as well so I don't know"</p>
<p>Interview 8, participant 5: It depends on what questions it is regarding. Because the UN is good for liberty and things like that --- while military alliances like NATO feels problematic because then there is a big group of countries against another group..."</p>	<p>Interview 3, participant 2: "Yes exactly, and I'm also thinking like it is good [to be a part of NATO] if there would be a war, to get help from other countries, or to help each other. But since Sweden aren't under a big, big threat it might feel a bit hasty or like too big of a risk to join NATO."</p>

Table 12. Illustrative quotes on NATO – female participants

Quotes from male focus groups	
Interview 2, participant 2: “[On joining NATO] Both yes and no, it puts us on the opposing side, but we also have better protection with the new alliance as well. So, we might get into war, but we would also have better opportunities for protection...”	Interview 6, participant 3: “Yes, but I would say that we might appear as a more prominent target when we cooperate with NATO without being a part of it. We still sympathize with NATO and cooperate with them, but we wouldn’t get their protection if we were attacked.”
Interview 5, participant 6: Personally, I feel safer at least [If Sweden joins NATO]. You have a position that makes them [Russia] scared. You have an uncle on your back that can help you. The United States is there and you have Europe with you, like a stronger bond”	Interview 10, participant 6: ... But I think that in the long run, it is good that Sweden joins NATO --- it is useful to have a contract with other countries that have nuclear weapons because that hinders other countries to build nuclear weapons --- That is one way to see it --- but that could increase other risks as well...”

The power dynamics between the United States and Russia and their impact on other relationships in the global order were a topic that participants in both the male and female groups discussed.

In general, the participants in the female groupings had pacifist views; everyone concurred that violence is rarely necessary. Several participants raised the possibility that Sweden's threat from NATO membership could escalate and that joining NATO would only protect us in the event of an attack. However, a few participants also expressed skepticism regarding American influence in NATO and that they are considerably more proactive in warfare than Sweden. For example, one group talked about how, because Norway and Finland are like brothers to Sweden, Sweden would defend them if they were attacked. However, protecting rather than attacking is the primary goal.

In the male focus groups, the conversation on warfare was more focused on the need for a strong defense. Although many participants agreed that there are always alternatives to conflict, the conversation frequently turned to Sweden's need to be ready to defend itself in case of an attack. Several groups also discussed the difficulty of being an idealistic and diplomatic nation in a world where not everyone is. It was brought up in every group that diplomatic relations with Russia are unattainable.

However, one of the male groups discussed the role of the world's superpowers in a manner comparable to that of the female groups. Fighting in other nations is a means by which Russia

and the United States play off one another. The participants in the groups disagreed on whether or not this was a good thing; one participant thought it was wrong to use other nations' conflicts as leverage, while another participant believed it was better for the world if the two countries were at war, rather than if great powers such as the United States and Russia were at war themselves, that would be devastating to the world.

Table 13. Illustrative quotes on great powers and international relationships – female participants

Quotes from female focus groups	
<p>Interview 7, participant 4: “But I think that it is scary --- If Sweden joins NATO, we would not be the top dog --- so we would have to respond to Turkey and the United States, and now in the negotiations about joining NATO, Turkey have a lot of requirements --- I feel like the government would betray their citizens, or like Kurds for example --- I don’t like that we have to betray our Swedish principles to be able to join NATO --- And I don’t think we will be safer by joining ATO honestly.”</p>	<p>Interview 8, participant 4: And I also think that is questionable that Sweden is supposed to like support minorities and oppressed groups, being on the oppressor’s side, but when we want to join ATO then it is like --. Then they go and make up to Turkey --- They do it because it favors us now, I don’t know what I feel about that”</p>
<p>Interview 1, participant 6: “And I’m also thinking like, if another NATO country gets attacked then all NATO countries are seen as attacked, and then it gets to a question, which country is attacked? Is it a country that we disagree with? Is it a country whose values we disagree with, that oppresses minority groups and women for example? Turkey is a great example of that...”</p>	<p>Interview 4, participant 6: “Because it is also like, not all countries that are a part of NATO are really democracies. And we are a democratic country, and we stand up for that [our values] a lot. And if there is a war in one of these undemocratic countries, then we might not be able to decide for ourselves if we want to stand with them or not because we have to stand with them, so we won’t have that choice anymore.”</p>

Table 14. Illustrative quotes on great powers and international relationships – male participants

Quotes from male focus groups	
<p>Interview 2, participant 4: “Yes it is like --- I get that war is never good, but like, where were these countries when there were wars in other countries? Okay, I get that this is Ukraine and it is absolutely not good when there is a war, --- but now when Russia attacked Ukraine, it was very obvious. But like in other countries, in the Middle East for example. There you can see countries helping the bad side with weapons and things like that... Yes the United States I would say wants to destroy Russia in some way and since they don’t want to start a war themselves, then they help the country that fights Russia</p>	<p>Interview 6, participant 3: “But that is like the thing we discussed in History class: with power hegemony and balance of power, peace can come from different measures. One of them is that one state has so much ability that no one can attack that country --- and that has been the case with the United States. But this balance of power has been disturbed lately, and the other type of power balance is that there are two or more different sides that are so strong that they cannot destroy each other, and that is the situation we have today. We have two quite distinct blocks, with Russia and China on one</p>

with weapons and stuff to try to take down Russia. And that has been the way before when there are two countries fighting each other. --- So the two great powers want to get rid of each other, but they don't attack each other directly. They use warfare through others.

side and the United States and NATO countries on the other, and neither can attack the other. And since no one can get to the other, we can establish peace, even if that peace might be fragile but yes.”

Interview 9, participant 5: Yes, but I'm also thinking about colonialism and things like that. The easiest way to prevent that from happening again is through pacts I think, because otherwise there is nothing that prevents a bigger country from taking over a smaller country really.

To sum up, the female participants were more ambiguous about joining NATO than the male participants were. The main concerns of the female participants regarding Sweden joining NATO were that it might increase the threat against Sweden by taking a stand in the international order and that it would also mean participating in more conflicts because the United States takes a more proactive approach to war. A majority of the male participants believed that Sweden's national security would enhance if the country joined NATO. However, both male and female participants agreed that Sweden would be more involved in the global power struggle between great powers if the country joined NATO. Although, this generally seemed as a more significant concern for the female participants than the male participants.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This part aims to discuss the findings in the analysis in comparison with the theory and previous research. It also contains concluding marks and suggestions for further research on the subject.

5.1 Discussion

The analysis provides evidence to support the modern gender gap argument. The research shows that although men and women acknowledge the same threats, they do so in fundamentally different ways. The Iraq War and illnesses were given as examples in the theory, which contends that women see threats that heighten the likelihood of harm and violence as more severe threats than men. This was also observed in the focus groups conducted for this study; the female groups were considerably more concerned with the possibility of war and interstate conflict, hence, a higher risk of harm and violence. However, the theory amplified that men and women feel just as threatened by the risk of nuclear weapons, something that the analysis does not support. None of the male participants mentioned nuclear weapons. While generally, the female groups showed fear of nuclear weapons.

The male groups discussed the risk of cyber-attacks and climate change to a greater extent than the female groups. Several male participants also perceived climate change as a more significant threat than war since interstate conflict felt more unlikely. The lack of a threat of harm and violence associated with climate change may be one reason why it was not discussed as much in the female groups. However, when the female groups did discuss climate change, it was often from a structural point of view, emphasizing how the energy crisis affects society's most vulnerable citizens and how Sweden, a wealthy nation, will be able to take in refugees from countries more severely impacted by climate change.

The male focus groups did disagree on whether climate change or military attacks posed the greatest threat to Sweden. Despite this, in several groups, the discussion quickly turned to military action and the fact that using violence or military force was sometimes necessary. Even if they did not explicitly say that Sweden should use military means, several times, the discussion came back to the fact that if Sweden were attacked, it was essential to be able to defend the country. This is intriguing since they simultaneously expressed that the threat of Sweden being attacked was minimal; none of the participants expressed a great fear of Sweden being under attack. In comparison, even though they believed that war posed a more significant

threat, female participants did not discuss Sweden's need for a strong security defense like the male participants did. The female group members also discussed that military measures might sometimes be needed. Still, it was often in regard to helping other countries in need or protecting the citizens of a country in conflict. For instance, none of the female participants thought that it was wrongful of Sweden to send weaponry to Ukraine. This indicates that the male participants were more prone to the idea that violence is sometimes necessary, supporting the theory of men's and women's perceptions of national security.

Additionally, the participants in three of the female groups considered the internal problems in Sweden to be a threat. The topic of party politics and the potential danger that right-wing parties could offer to Sweden's democracy came up in the conversation. Additionally, they talked about the potential threat posed by widening social disparities. This is not a fear of harm and violence. However, it is supported by previous research by Wagnsson et al. (2020) that women also value security from a structural point of view. This is also supported by previous research by Conover (1988); an ethics of care politically drives women. There was one male participant that mentioned gang violence as an issue. However, generally, none of the male groups discussed it, and the participant who did mention it did not discuss it as a structural matter. However, it is impossible to predict where that conversation would have ended because it was not continued in the male group.

The methods employed in conflict were the other highlighted theme. Overall, both the male and female groups said that diplomatic measures should always be used first when attempting to resolve issues. Although the female groups were also optimistic about using sanctions, the male groups were more pessimistic about sanctions, at least from Sweden's point of view. The male participants generally talked about what negative effects sanctions have had on Sweden. For example, one group discussed that sanctions against Russia have mostly affected Sweden's citizens due to higher energy costs, etcetera. Furthermore, they talked about the fact that Sweden using sanctions as a method was useless since it is too small of a country.

The theory suggested that there is little difference between men and women in Europe regarding using military measures in conflict, which could also be seen in the material of this research; none of the groups advocated using military measures if not necessary. However, a difference was that the male participants were much more positive about Sweden joining a military alliance whose most influential member, the United States, is much more prone to using

violence in conflict. Furthermore, since NATO is a military alliance, it indicates that Sweden will increase their military defense, which the male participants were positive about. Therefore, there are indications that the male participants are more optimistic about using violence than the female participants, even if it was not expressed directly. This is also supported by previous research on the subject; women are generally more pacifist than men are.

Furthermore, the theory states that there is no division between genders and that international involvement is sometimes necessary. The material also supports this; all of the focus groups agreed on the fact that international involvement could sometimes be required. However, the discussion on when international involvement was needed differed. Moreover, the male groups were generally more negative toward the UN than the female groups were. Both the male and the female participants acknowledged the fact that an organization as big as the UN, with several countries having veto rights, could have a hard time making decisions, especially in conflicts. However, the female participants generally thought that the importance of the UN was for it to be a place for discussion between countries.

Furthermore, the female participants also discussed that the UN does a lot of things for the citizens rather than the states. The fact that female participants were generally more supportive of the UN than the male participants acknowledges the fact stated in the theory; that women are often more optimistic about interventions if they are conducted by the UN. One possible explanation for this could be, as stated by one of the participants, that the UN cares for the people rather than the states, an ethics of care.

Since the female participants were also generally more pacifist than male participants, this could explain why women do not want to take part in the military to the same extent as men. Furthermore, since several female participants were also very ambiguous about Sweden joining NATO, it could explain why they do not want to partake in a military that will probably work closely with NATO. This could also be seen in the fact that several female participants mentioned that military service might mean fighting a war for NATO in the future.

To sum up, the study finds similarities in how men and women perceive national security. They touch upon similar issues, however; they perceive these issues differently. The analysis supports the theory that women seem to feel more threatened by issues regarding harm and violence than men do. Generally, the female participants were also more concerned with structural issues,

such as poverty and human rights violations. Generally, male and female participants thought international involvement was sometimes necessary. However, the female participants mentioned the citizens in states in conflict to a more considerable extent. If citizens were harmed, it is essential to take measures, including military ones. The theory also supports this. Both male and female participants strongly believed in cooperation through international organizations. However, the male participants were generally more optimistic about NATO, while the female participants preferred the UN.

5.2 Conclusions

This thesis aimed to answer the question, “Is there a gendered difference in perceptions of national security among youths in Sweden? If so, what are the differences in perception, and how might this impact support for the Swedish Armed Forces?” By doing so, contribute to research on the gendered differences in national security. To answer the question, students at the Swedish upper secondary school were asked about their views on national security. This study finds a gendered difference in the perception of national security among youths in Sweden. The study also indicates that this could explain why the Swedish Armed Forces struggle to increase the number of women within the institution.

This thesis strengthens the theory of the modern gender gap; there is a difference in how men and women perceive threats and how they prefer that the country acts on threats. Previous research on the modern gender gap often suggests that the gap between genders has widened as women participate in the labor market and education to a greater extent. An important finding in this research is that this gap between genders exists at earlier ages than suggested in previous research. The gap is also present among youths, which is an interesting finding; one possible explanation is that Sweden is a modernized society, and the values that come from equality permeate the whole society. However, it is something that needs to be investigated further.

Previous research within the field has often been quantitative; this thesis has added to that through entirely new material through focus groups and included views of a new group of people in the field. In the future, it would be interesting to investigate possible explanations for the division between the perception of males and females on national security. This will be of interest as we are approaching a new, more unsafe world; at the same time, equality between men and women is increasing in many parts of the world. According to the findings in this research, the world will become more pacifist as equality between genders increases.

Furthermore, further research should focus on conducting more case studies in other contexts. This study has shown a gendered gap in national security, which supports previous research. However, since Sweden is known to be a country at the forefront of issues regarding equality and a country that actively has tried to decrease stereotypical thinking among genders, it would also be of interest to test the theory in other contexts to see if there are similar findings in other states.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Interview Questions

Start-up questions

- Har ni blivit kallade till mönstring?
 - Hur gick kallelsen till?
- Vill ni själva genomföra värnplikt?

Theme 1 – the modern gender gap

- Vilka tycker du är de allvarligaste hoten som Sverige står inför idag? Vilka är de allvarligaste hoten i världen?
- Hur tycker du att Sverige ska agera mot externa hot från andra stater?
 - Militära medel, sanktioner eller diplomati,
 - Om eleverna behöver exempel:
 - Exempel på militära medel är att Sverige ska svara på utomstående hot med militärt motstånd, vi skickar vapen till andra länder som står inför hot, vi går med i en militär organisation som NATO
 - Sanktioner i världen idag sker genom ekonomiska sanktioner som att stoppa handel, stänga av förbindelser för el (vilket Ryssland gjort mot Europa)
 - Diplomati kan vara att Sverige agerar som en diplomatisk stat, kan erbjuda samtal mellan länder. Att försöka influera andra med sin egen syn och på så vis undvika eskalerad konflikt
- Hur tror du att de kommer hjälpa Sverige att vi går in i NATO? Är samarbete genom sådana organisationer som NATO och FN bra?

7.2 Information sheet

Information till forskningspersoner

Jag vill fråga dig om du vill delta i ett forskningsprojekt. I det här dokumentet får du information om projektet och om vad det innebär att delta.

Vad är det för ett projekt och varför vill ni att jag ska delta?

Syftet med projektet är att studera unga kvinnor och mäns inställning till nationell säkerhet. Du är student vid ett gymnasium i Sverige, och kan efter din studietid bli kallad att genomföra värnplikt i den svenska Försvarsmakten, i och med detta passar du in på den profil som vi söker till detta projekt.

Hur går projektet till?

Du kommer att få delta i en fokusgrupp som tar ca 30 minuter till maximalt 45 minuter att genomföra. Intervjun genomförs i grupp, ljudupptagning kommer att ske under tillfället. Under intervjun kommer du att svara på intervjuarens frågor och diskuterar frågorna som ställs med övriga deltagare.

Möjliga följder och risker med att delta i projektet

Intervjun kommer att innehålla frågor som du besvarar utifrån vad du själv tycker och tänker, inga kunskapsfrågor kommer att förekomma. Du kan när som helst under intervjun avbryta din medverkan.

Vad händer med mina uppgifter?

Projektet kommer att samla in och registrera information om vad du tycker och tänker om de frågor som ställs. Inga svar registreras och kopplas samman till dig som person, utan du är en del av alla de intervjuer som kommer att genomföras.

Forskaren i detta projekt kommer att arbeta med det material som samlas in, dvs. de svar som du och andra i studien har angivit samt ifrån de olika kreativa övningar som genomförs. Materialet förvaras elektroniskt.

Dina svar och dina resultat kommer att behandlas så att inte obehöriga kan ta del av dem.

Deltagandet är frivilligt

Ditt deltagande är frivilligt och du kan när som helst välja att avbryta deltagandet. Om du väljer att inte delta eller vill avbryta ditt deltagande behöver du inte uppge varför.

Om du vill avbryta ditt deltagande ska du kontakta den ansvariga för projektet (se nedan).

Ansvariga för projektet

Ansvarig för projektet är:

Fanny Johansson

Telefonnummer: 070-508 94 82

Mejladress: Fanny.johansson@student.fhs.se

7.3 Consent form

Samtycke till att delta i projektet

Jag har fått muntlig och/eller skriftlig information om studien och har haft möjlighet att ställa frågor. Jag får behålla den skriftliga informationen.

- Jag samtycker till att delta i projektet **The modern gender gap**
- Jag samtycker till att mina svar sparas på det sätt som beskrivs i forskningspersonsinformation.

Plats och datum	Underskrift
	Namnförtydligande