Doing gender and leadership
A discursive analysis of media representations in a reality TV show*

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This article examines the media representations of gender and leadership discourse in the debut season of the American reality TV show The Apprentice. By drawing upon the method of discourse analysis, I analyse the leadership styles that two male and two female project managers employ in 'doing leadership'. The analysis shows that two of the managers display discourse styles of leadership which largely conform to traditional gendered expectations, and that two other managers employ a 'mixed' leadership style by making use of some discourse features that are indirectly indexed for the other gender. It is revealed that a masculine discourse style is still represented as the preferred, default way of doing leadership, and that the combination of discourse strategies which are stereotypically coded as masculine and feminine in 'doing leadership' is represented most favourably in the reality TV show. Based on the data analysis, it is also argued that female managers may be under more constraints in using 'mixed' gendered strategies and in violating stereotypically gendered speech norms when enacting leadership at work.

1 Introduction

Investigating workplace discourse is regarded as an important research area, as social interaction in the workplace has important implications for career success and satisfaction as well as smooth interaction with co-workers (Boxer 2002). In particular, exploring interaction in workplace settings is of interest to sociolinguists, since workplace environments constitute very rich and complex sociolinguistic contexts, largely owing to “the influence of individual institutional settings and the issue of more global influences on interaction, such as institutionalized social practice, for example, corporate meeting protocols” (McRae 2004: 41). Apart from that, workplace communication is also constantly shaped by a whole range of
sociolinguistic variables, not least the variables of power, status, and gender, as well as other contextual considerations. Indeed, it has been demonstrated repeatedly in a large body of research that these social variables have a significant impact on how communication is carried out in different workplaces (see, e.g., Drew and Heritage 1992; Holmes and Stubbe 2003). Moreover, workplace communication is further complicated by the fact that workplace talk varies a lot from one workplace to another in terms of what is considered the appropriate way of interaction, depending on the nature of work of the organization and the specific organizational culture.

For the purpose of this study, I regard workplace communication as a particularly important avenue for research on language and gender, given the strong gendered connotations attached to the concept of ‘workplace discourse’. Because men have historically occupied key managerial positions in most workplaces, it has been argued that workplace norms are predominantly masculine norms (Baxter 2010; Kendall and Tannen 2001; Mullany 2007; Sinclair 1998). As a result, men’s interactional styles have always been taken for granted as the normative ways of speaking in most workplaces, and have been institutionalized as ‘unmarked’ ways of enacting power and authority in most workplaces. However, over the last decades, with women’s increasing participation in the workplace, their feminine interactional styles have effected considerable changes in modern-day workplace discourse, possibly altering the predominantly masculine communication styles (Cameron 2003; Coates 2004; Peck 2006). In a recent study, Baxter (2010) also found that many female managers have developed a sophisticated range of linguistic strategies in order to enact their authority and meet business goals in effective and successful ways (see also Sung, 2011).

The present study aims at investigating gender and ‘simulated’ workplace communication, and draws upon interactional data taken from the popular US reality TV show *The Apprentice* in an attempt to examine the representations of gender and workplace discourse in the media. To the best of my knowledge, there has not been any research which systematically explores gender and workplace communication in the mass media from a discursive approach. It is my intention to address this research gap by exploring the representations of gender and workplace discourse on the reality TV show *The Apprentice* from a discourse analytical perspective, particularly given the potential influence of the show on the audience’s perceptions and understanding of workplace communication. As Evans (2005) suggests, media representations play an important role in shaping the ways in which audiences understand and make sense of the social world. In particular, the media are likely to contribute to audiences’ perceptions of what constitutes appropriate gendered behaviour (see, e.g., Gill 2006; Matheson 2005). It is therefore considered worthwhile to explore the gendered representations of workplace communication in the media.
2. **Language, discourse and gender**

Starting from the mid 1990s, the notion of gender in sociolinguistic research has moved away from the dependence on binary oppositions, and has begun to recognize interaction of gender with other social categories, including class, race and age, in influencing how people speak. In line with such a trend, gender is conceived of as a social construction, rather than a ‘given’ social category. Instead of being viewed as something that we possess, gender is something that we do (Zimmerman and West 1975), or something that we perform (Butler 1990). As Kendall and Tannen (2001:556–557) put it, “gendered identities are interactionally achieved”. In other words, gender is viewed as something that is performed, enacted, and accomplished, and is “never static but is produced actively and in interaction with others every day of our lives” (Coates 2006:66). In short, gender does not pre-exist the individuals, but is actively negotiated and constructed in the performance of their gendered identities, which in itself is an on-going process.

As Holmes (2006) points out, ways of speaking can be ‘gendered’. As suggested in a great deal of language and gender research, masculine styles of interaction are characterized by competitive, contestive, and challenging ways of speaking, while feminine speech styles are characterized by co-operative, facilitative and smooth interaction (see, for example, Holmes, 2006; Schnurr, 2009). And such masculine styles of discourse are discursively realized in the production of extended speaking turns, the dominance of the speaking floor, the one-at-a-time construction of the floor, and the frequent use of interruptions (Coates 1997, 2004; Zimmerman and West 1975; see also Talbot 2010; Schnurr 2009). On the other hand, a feminine discourse style, which pays more attention to relational aspects, is linguistically expressed in the collaborative construction of the floor in conversation, the use of politeness strategies and hedging devices, the avoidance of confrontations, and the use of minimal responses and supportive feedback (Tannen 1990; Holmes 1995; Coates 1998, 2004; Sunderland 2004; Talbot 2010). Table 1 shows a list of widely cited features of feminine and masculine interactional styles.

By looking at the linguistic realizations of such masculine and feminine discourse styles, this article examines differently gendered leadership styles in the reality television show *The Apprentice*. Drawing on the methods of discourse analysis, I shall analyse the leadership styles that two male and two female managers employ in ‘doing leadership’. In particular, in the analyses of the interactions, I shall pay attention to the linguistic devices and discursive strategies that make up their leadership styles, in an attempt to explore the representations of gendered discourses in the TV show.
Leadership, in the area of organizational studies, is generally defined as the ability to influence others with the aim of achieving a commonly agreed goal which benefits the organization and its members (Dwyer 1993). However, in sociolinguistics, particularly in research which takes a social constructionist perspective, what is of interest is the ways people use language to construct and perform certain social identities, including identity as a leader or manager. Thus, it is useful to see leadership as a process, a performance, or an activity, rather than as the achievements or outcomes of a leader. By emphasizing the dynamic and interactional aspects of leadership, it is possible to identify the discursive strategies and linguistic devices employed to ‘do’ or ‘perform’ leadership. According to Holmes et al. (2003: 32), “‘doing leadership’ entails competent communicative performance which, by influencing others, results in acceptable outcomes for the organization (transactional/task-oriented goal), and which maintains harmony within the team or community of practice (relational/people-oriented goal)”. Indeed, leadership has only recently received some attention in sociolinguistics (see Baxter 2010; Holmes et al. 2003; Holmes 2006; Schnurr 2009). It is worth noting here that Holmes et al.’s definition of leadership specifically focuses on the communicative aspects of ‘doing leadership’, and draws attention to both the transactional and relational aspects of doing leadership.

As may be expected, leadership is closely linked to gender, as it has stereotypically been associated with men and with masculinity. And since leadership positions in different workplaces have traditionally been dominated by males, it is not surprising that the concept of leadership carries a strong gender bias (Hearn and Parkin 1989; Martin Rojo and Gomez Esteban 2005; Sinclair 1998). As Marra et al. (2006: 240) suggest, “[w]orkplace leadership is a gendered concept”. However, with women beginning to gain prominent positions in different workplaces and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEMININE</th>
<th>MASCULINE</th>
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<tr>
<td>facilitative</td>
<td>competitive</td>
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<tr>
<td>supportive feedback</td>
<td>aggressive interruptions</td>
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<td>conciliatory</td>
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<td>indirect</td>
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<tr>
<td>collaborative</td>
<td>autonomous</td>
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<td>minor contribution (in public)</td>
<td>dominates (public) talking time</td>
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<td>person/process-oriented</td>
<td>task/outcome-oriented</td>
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<td>affectively oriented</td>
<td>referentially oriented</td>
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Table 1. Widely cited features of feminine and masculine interactional styles (Holmes and Stubbe 2003: 574)
Doing gender and leadership gradually making it to the top in the corporate world in the twenty-first century, it would be interesting to investigate the question whether workplace leadership is still performed predominantly in normatively masculine ways. In Mullany’s (2007) study, both male and female managers were found to break stereotypical gendered speech styles in the workplace. Mullany also observed a wide range of evidence of female and male managers drawing upon similar, stereotypically feminine speech strategies to enact their power and authority more covertly (see Baxter 2010; Mullany 2007; Sung 2010). It is worth examining whether the media representations of gendered discourses are consistent with recent research findings.

For the purpose of exploring the notion of gendered leadership styles, I shall adopt Marra et al.’s (2006), Holmes’ (2006) and Schnurr’s (2009) conceptualization of the relationship between gender and leadership styles: while communicative behaviours concerned with transactional or task-oriented goals are closely linked with masculinity, verbal behaviours oriented to more relational or people-oriented goals are associated with femininity (see also Holmes 2006). As regards the discursive characteristics of communication associated with differently gendered leadership behaviours, Marra et al. (2006) and Schnurr (2009) point out that whereas normatively masculine strategies of leadership are characterized by assertiveness, directness, competitiveness, display of power, dominance, individualism, and task-orientation, a stereotypically feminine speech style of leadership is characterized by indirectness, politeness, collaborativeness, supportiveness, nurturing, caring, egalitarianism, and relationship-orientation (see also Holmes and Stubbe 2003).

4. Data: The Apprentice

Data used in the study are drawn from the debut season of *The Apprentice*, a popular reality TV show in the United States, later transferred under the same title to the UK. In its debut season, sixteen contestants compete in an elimination-style competition, vying for the top job at one of Donald Trump’s companies with its $250,000 salary. During the 15 episodes of the show, they embark upon a televised, extended job interview in order to become an apprentice of Donald Trump, a well-known American real estate magnate as well as host and executive producer of *The Apprentice*.

In the show, the contestants consisting of eight men and eight women are divided into two teams, initially divided according to gender, called corporations. Each week, each team is required to select a project manager to lead them in the assigned task of the week. The two teams compete against each other every week in a business-oriented task which is intended to test their business skills and expertise. Every week, the winning team is rewarded spectacularly, while the losing
team faces Donald Trump (henceforth DT) and his two assistants George and Carolyn in the boardroom, where the reasons for the failure in the task are discussed. At the end of each episode, DT makes the decision on who did the worst job in the losing team and, consequently, should be fired with immediate effect.

An important reason accounting for the rise of *The Apprentice* as a cultural phenomenon is that it “stands alone as the first television show to use business savvy and business scenarios as the basis of competition, to pit businesspeople against each other, and to purport to be able to identify the next highly successful executive” (Kinnick and Parton 2005:430). In light of its popularity not only in the United States, but also in many other countries around the world, I consider *The Apprentice* an important and invaluable site worthy of investigation, especially with regard to the notion of leadership.

In this article, I shall only look at four project managers in the show for the sake of space, and they are chosen for analysis for two main reasons. First, they exemplify the use of both ‘gender-congruent’ and ‘mixed’ discursive styles of leadership which are portrayed in the show. Second, these project managers are shown to be engaged in acts of ‘doing leadership’, and their leadership discourse is considered analyzable in the sense that it constitutes a coherent, meaningful, and typically continuous stretch of talk. Given the small size of the data analysis, it should be cautioned that the analysis of their leadership styles should not be considered generalizable to other contestants in the show, or to other reality TV shows.

5. Data Analysis: Using ‘gender-congruent’ leadership styles in same-sex groups of contestants

In the following analysis, I shall examine the discourse styles of a male project manager and a female project manager who ‘do leadership’ in a way which matches their gender in same-sex groups of contestants.

5.1 Analysis of Jason’s Leadership Style

I shall first examine how Jason does leadership in the men’s group by drawing upon a stereotypically masculine discursive style. In Excerpt 1 below, the men’s group is meeting to discuss the plan to arrange an advertising campaign to promote jet service. Jason is chairing the meeting in which the group has to make critical decisions concerning the advertising campaign.
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EXCERPT 1

(Episode 2)

1 JAS: so you know what?
2 what we should do is this
3 I’ll- I’ll have to be the floater
4 I’ll go from back and forth okay +
5 I think Nick +
6 I think Bill + need to do creative okay
7 I think you guys should come up with okay
8 here’s how we’re gonna do it
9 that’s it
10 come up with your print ads
11 talk to who you need to talk to
12 you’re thinking corporate
13 you’re thinking young and sleek
14 come in the //middle\
15 TROY: /can\ I just interject real quick?
16 these two gentlemen are our clients
17 we should really find out what they want to have accomplished
18 KWA: who are our clients?
19 TROY: William J Allard and Ken Austin
20 they are the ones that have employed us + to do their marketing campaign
21 we should find out what they want to have done
22 JAS: honestly do I think we need to meet them?
23 I don’t think we need to meet with them +
24 what are we seeing //them for?\
25 KWA: /I disagree\ with that
26 NICK: what’s the //objection ()?\n27 KWA: /I think\ you should know what your customer wants=
28 NICK: =I’m not sure
29 what do you hope to gain from the meeting?
30 what questions would you ask them?
31 JAS: here’s what we need to do
32 we’re doing it right now
33 okay + we don’t have time to go and meet with them
34 I mean it’s gonna take an hour
35 I think it’s a waste of time

In this excerpt, Jason is witnessed as performing a leader identity by drawing upon a number of discourse strategies indicative of a typically masculine discursive
style, including so-called “bald-on-record”, unmitigated directives, challenging questions, and I-statements. It needs to be noted, however, that the example shows a rather extreme case of using a masculine style in doing leadership. Having said that, it is interesting to see how such a stereotypically masculine way of leadership is being perceived by other participants in the show.

In the excerpt, Jason first issues the statement, *what we should do is this*, to signal that he is about to announce the strategy of the advertising campaign, establishing his status as project manager (line 2). He goes on to propose the division of labour in the form of statements rather than suggestions (lines 3–9). In particular, he uses a *need*-statement to get Nick and Bill to do the creative aspects of the campaign: *I think Nick + I think Bill + need to do creative* (lines 6–7), which can be said to be typical of a masculine discourse style, despite being mitigated by the pragmatic particle *I think* (lines 6–7). He also issues his directives firmly and decisively in the form of imperatives: *come up with your print ads* (lines 10), *talk to who you need to talk to* (line 11) and *come in the middle* (line 14). Here, his way of giving instructions can be coded as stereotypically masculine (Holmes 2006), even though his directives in lines 10 and 11 can be considered as evidence of empowering others, typically associated with women (see Fletcher 1999), by giving his members freedom in trying out their ideas and getting things done in their own ways. Also, by specifying his own role explicitly as *the floater* (line 3), he spells out his responsibility to oversee and supervise the whole project. In doing so, he, again, establishes his leadership position within the team by invoking his dominant and central role in the team.

It is notable that Jason’s use of *okay* (in lines 4, 6 and 7) does not intend to seek agreement from the members of the team, or solicit comments from the members. Rather, *okay* is used to check the understanding of the members, ensuring that every member of the team fully understands what he has said so far. This interpretation can be supported by the absence of pausing after the utterances of *okay* to invite possible comments or questions. Also, he does not use a rising intonation to possibly signal its function as a question. Rather he uses a falling intonation. It is evident that the team members share such an interpretation, as they have not given any responses after his use of *okay*, not even minimal responses such as *mm*. And, rather than using the inclusive pronoun *we* consistently which emphasizes collective responsibility and expresses solidarity, Jason chooses to use the pronouns *you* (lines 11, 12, 13) and *you guys* (line 7) to establish status differentials between him and the other members. Note that he only uses the inclusive pronoun *we* twice (in lines 2 and 8) in situations where his involvement is clearly evident.

It is also interesting to note the frequent use of the first person pronoun *I* by Jason in the meeting (lines 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 22, 23 and 35). Here, the repeated occurrence of *I*-statements could be interpreted as emphasizing his status as project manager
to make executive decisions. By conveying the message that 'I am the one who is taking centre stage in the meeting,' the use of I may also be regarded as implicitly evoking the authority bestowed upon him in giving instructions, and highlighting the status differential between him and the other members. As Peck (2006) notes, the use of the egocentric pronoun I is an example of strategies associated with directness. So, we can see that the repeated use of the pronoun I in such a way is typical of a masculine, direct discourse style.

In lines 16–17, Jason rejects Troy’s proposal to meet with the clients in a direct and explicit way by producing a challenging question: what are we seeing them for (line 24), implying that he sees no point in meeting the clients. And by saying here’s what we need to do (line 31), Jason not only signals his intention to return to the agenda, but also implies that his decision is final. He also orders the team to do what he proposes right now (line 32), making his directive all the more imposing. And rather than providing explanations for rejecting Troy’s suggestions, he merely expresses his disagreement explicitly by saying I think it’s a waste of time (line 35), albeit mitigated by the pragmatic particle I think. It seems that he does not think that it is necessary to justify his rejection, implying that he possesses ultimate jurisdiction regarding the entire plan of the campaign.

Here, we can see that Jason employs a conventionally masculine style in ‘doing leadership’, characterized by his explicit orientation to the transactional and task-oriented goals. His way of delegating specific tasks to the team members clearly shows his firm, authoritative, and decisive style of leadership. Jason issues his commands in the form of imperatives without mitigation or modification. He even signals that his words are final by saying that’s it (line 9). And when he rejects suggestions from his team members, he does not provide any justifications. It is evident that his direct and unmitigated interactive style indexes masculinity, discursively displaying overt power as project manager.

As we shall see in Excerpt 2 below, Jason’s normatively masculine leadership style is not only recognized, but also highly commended by one of his team members, which is evident in the comments made by Nick in the boardroom meeting with DT.

EXCERPT 2
(Episode 2)

1 DT: go ahead Nick
2 NICK: I think Jason performed well especially the way we started off
3 midway through
4 he took the reins
5 he took charge
made quick decisions
cos we had to get things in under certain timelines +
and I thought he performed well
his choices were well thought out=
=are you saying that
because you don’t want Jason to pick you as one of the /two?\n/not one bit\ not one bit
I thought his decisions were real sharp and well thought out

In Excerpt 2, Jason’s stereotypically masculine leadership style is judged positively by Nick, who comments that Jason’s decisions were *well thought out* (lines 10 and 14) and *real sharp* (line 14). In particular, Nick notes that Jason *made quick decisions cos we had to get things in under certain timelines* (lines 7–8). It seems here that a masculine leadership style is recognized and valued particularly for the efficiency it brings to the decision making process, especially under a tight schedule.

5.2 Analysis of Katrina’s Leadership Style

I shall now turn to examine the leadership style of a female manager, Katrina, in the all-female team. Unlike Jason, Katrina draws upon a range of discursive strategies typically associated with a feminine register in ‘doing leadership’. Excerpt 3 shows a conversation between Katrina and Jessie, in which they have a disagreement over how decision making should be done in the team.

EXCERPT 3
(Episode 4)

1 JES: [taken from the individual interview] but I could tell Katrina was irritated that
2 maybe I went ahead and did something
3 and didn’t consult the group
4 KAT: [taken from the individual interview] the tables downstairs weren’t being effective +
5 I approached Jessie and said +
6 shut it down
7 she took great offence to that

8 JES: well if you wanna change it + you’re the leader
9 so you tell me
10 you’re obviously getting mad that I’m thinking on my own
11 KAT: no I’m not getting mad at you for thinking on your own
12 all I’m saying is that
13 I’ve been told four times that this is a bad idea
In the excerpt above, Katrina is witnessed using a stereotypically feminine discourse style and orienting to the relational needs of her team member. In line 8, Jessie says that if you wanna change it, you’re the leader (line 8), implying that even though she may not necessarily agree with Katrina’s decision, she will not object to her decisions, given Katrina’s role as the project manager of the group. Jessie goes on to issue a direct challenge telling Katrina to give clear instructions to her: so you tell me (line 9), and speculates that Katrina has got angry with her since she made decisions by herself without consulting Katrina: you’re obviously getting mad that I’m thinking on my own (line 10). In response to Jessie’s speculation, Katrina explicitly denies Jessie’s claim: no I’m not getting mad at you for thinking on your own (line 11). By saying that she does not get mad at Jessie, she orients to maintaining a harmonious relationship with Jessie and attempts to pay attention to her positive face needs. She then states what she thinks of Jessie’s ideas: I’ve been told four times that this is a bad idea (line 13). It is noteworthy here that Katrina does not criticize Jessie directly; rather, she shifts the target of the criticism to the decision itself by saying this is a bad idea (line 13). And, instead of stating that it is she who...
thinks that Jessie’s idea is bad, she says I’ve been told (line 13). By using the passive voice where the agent of the criticism may be omitted, she impersonalizes the criticism and distances herself from the negatively affective speech act. Here, we can see how Katrina attenuates the face-threatening criticisms directed at Jessie, and this could be seen as a prime example of ‘doing leadership’ in a conventionally feminine way.

Katrina can also be seen to display orientation to the relational goals of doing leadership by paying attention to the emotional states of Jessie. In line 14, Jessie asks Katrina why she is getting mad: why are you spazzing out. Note that Jessie’s use of the colloquial expression spazzing out, originating from the word spastic, in describing Katrina’s emotional states, may be said to carry offensive connotations. Jessie goes on to ask Katrina are you upset because. In line 16, Katrina replies that she is upset because Jessie is upset. Here, by recycling the same lexical items upset and because in her response (line 16), she could be said to display a certain degree of a cooperative discourse style. Moreover, by saying I’m upset because you’re upset, she also shows her concerns about, or at least awareness of, Jessie’s emotional state of being upset. In this way, she may be oriented to the relational goals here and attempts to address Jessie’s distress through displaying her understanding and sympathy.

Furthermore, Katrina explicitly emphasizes the importance of the group and teamwork, which is stereotypically associated with more feminine leadership styles. In line 17, Jessie denies that she is upset, and goes on to speculate that Katrina is frustrated because something is not working well and she is trying to put the blame on somebody else (lines 18–21). In response, Katrina explains that she is frustrated because Jessie does not agree with what the team is doing: when all of us are trying to work as a team and I feel like one person doesn’t agree with what we’re doing (lines 25–26). Here, she uses the phrase I feel like (line 26) to attenuate the negative impact of her criticism, thereby making it less directly confrontational. And by emphasizing the concept of a team (line 25) and by using the pronouns us (line 25) and we (line 26), she lays emphasis on the importance of teamwork and plays down her own authority, thereby enacting an egalitarian and consensual mode of interaction, which is characteristic of a feminine leadership style.

Here, the excerpt demonstrates how Katrina, as project manager, pays attention to the face needs and emotional states of her team member. In so doing, she achieves the relational or people-oriented goals of doing leadership. It is evident that she does not pursue an authoritative leadership style, but prefers to lead using a stereotypically feminine, collaborative style. Indeed, there is little evidence that she is intent upon evoking her power or status explicitly at any point in the interaction. In the individual interview (lines 22–24), she states explicitly that when Jessie was the leader in the previous week, she was more supportive of her decisions.
Again, this illustrates that Katrina sees the importance of supportiveness in the achievement of leadership, and embraces a stereotypically feminine and collaborative style in ‘doing leadership’.

As can be seen in the interview commentary, Jessie expresses doubts about whether they are going to win (lines 29–32). Implicitly, she shows her disappointment with Katrina’s leadership style which could be classified as normatively feminine. Here, we see that her stereotypically feminine style is not perceived positively or judged as particularly effective. Excerpt 4 illustrates that another team member, Tammy, does not show approval of Katrina’s leadership style either.

EXCERPT 4
(Episode 4)

1 TAM: [taken from the individual interview] it was confusing to me
2 cos no one knew what was going on really
3 and then when George tried to corner Katrina our project manager to see what was going on
4 she really couldn’t coherently articulate what the plan was
5 cos she really was just flying by the seat of her pants

In this excerpt, Tammy remarks that Katrina has not explained the arrangements of the plan clearly and explicitly enough to the group (line 2). Further, Tammy comments that Katrina has not given much careful thought to the whole plan of the task (line 5), nor is she able to articulate the plan clearly (line 4). Here, her inability to deliver and explain the arrangements in an assertive, forceful manner is being pointed out. Overall, given Jessie and Tammy’s evaluations of Katrina’s leadership styles, it seems clear that her feminine style of leadership is perceived negatively and is not approved of by her team members.

5.3 Commentary

As we can see in the analysis, the two project managers are represented as displaying different styles of leadership which are in accordance with the traditionally dichotomous gendered expectations. As revealed in the analysis, while Jason’s leadership style is stereotypically masculine, characterized by directness and authoritativeness, Katrina’s leadership style is normatively feminine, emphasizing group consensus and relational goals.

It is worthy of note that the representations of gender differences in The Apprentice do not seem to carry the connotations of “different, but equal” (Case 1994: 161; see also Cameron 1995). It has been shown in the analysis that while the male manager receives positive peer comments for the use of a masculine speech style in ‘doing leadership’, the female manager does not receive any praise for using
a feminine discourse style in enacting a leader identity. In other words, conforming to the stereotypical gendered speech norms in performing leadership does not necessarily guarantee positive evaluations. As Hearn and Parkin (1989) suggest, given that leadership has been traditionally performed by men, notions of leadership have been assumed to imply maleness, and the necessary and desirable qualities of ‘doing leadership’ are assumed to be masculine. And such an assumption “is deeply entrenched in thinking and language, so that the language of leadership often equates with the language of masculinity to include qualities such as aggression, assertiveness, abrasiveness, and competitiveness” (Hearn and Parkin 1989: 21). As Martin Rojo and Gomez Esteban (2005) note, the criteria used to measure competence in leadership continue to be associated with the male stereotypes. While displays of masculinity in the workplace are likely to result in success, displays of femininity may lead to derision and marginalization (Peck 2000). It is therefore argued that a masculine discourse style is still represented as the default and preferred way of doing leadership. As Thimm et al. suggest, “men appear as the “default” gender in successful or leading positions” (2003: 536). As a result, *The Apprentice* may be seen to perpetuate the masculine style as the norm of ‘doing leadership’ and reinforce men as the ‘unmarked’ prototype of a competent and effective leader.

## 6. Data Analysis: Using ‘mixed’ leadership styles in mixed-sex groups of contestants

In line with the social construction framework, it is considered possible for men and women to defy, transgress, or subvert the gender norms which are deeply rooted in society. While some project managers in the TV show use discourse strategies that accord with their gender, as discussed in the previous section, other project managers, in addition to employing discourse elements which correspond to their own gender, also make use of elements of speech styles which are stereotypically associated with the other gender and are engaged in ‘mixing’ differently gendered discourse strategies. In what follows, I shall examine two other project managers who employ ‘mixed’ discourse strategies, thereby challenging the stereotypical gendered speech norms in performing leadership. In both cases, they do leadership in two mixed-sex groups of contestants.

### 6.1 Analysis of Omarosa’s Leadership Style

I shall first look at the performance of leadership with a ‘mixed’, yet predominantly masculine, discourse style by a female project manager, Omarosa, in Episode 6. In
the next excerpt below, Omarosa is in a cab with Heidi, and she receives a phone call from Jessie and Kwame, who request Omarosa to get them the number of the foundation which they are going to work with. However, Omarosa rejects their requests in a relatively masculine discursive style.

EXCERPT 5
(Episode 6)
1 OMA: \[answering the call from Jessie\] hello?
2 JES: hey Omarosa can I get the number for Katie Card +
3 your contact for the foundation?
4 OMA: okay why- + why are we calling her?
5 […]
6 OMA: hey let me speak to Kwame + + +
7 KWA: yeah give me the number for //Katie-
8 OMA: /\ wanna talk with her as well
9 cos I haven’t + had an opportunity to talk with her just yet
10 KWA: right now we need the number quickly
11 OMA: \[talking to Heidi\] are we here?
12 (we are here)
13 KWA: okay- what’s the number?
14 OMA: let’s talk when we get together
15 KWA: would you please give it to me?
16 [Omarosa hangs up her cell phone]
17 hello?
18 OMA: \[talking to Heidi\] I’m sorry I had to bang it on them
19 they’re not listening to me

20 JESS: \[taken from the individual interview\] Omarosa creates such negative energy all around her
21 it’s gonna be a huge fiasco
22 I think it would be best for the team if Omarosa was fired

As we see in the excerpt, Omarosa uses salient masculine discourse features as well as some features of a feminine discourse. Jessie asks Omarosa to get the number for Katie Card (line 2). But Omarosa questions the need for them to make the phone call rather directly by asking the question: why are we calling her? (line 4). Her question may be seen as face-threatening, as it implies that she does not see the point in calling. In line 6, Omarosa asks Jessie to pass the phone to Kwame. On picking up the phone, Kwame reiterates the request to get the number and issues a command in the form of an imperative: give me the number for Katie (line 7). In response, Omarosa states that she wants to talk with Katie (line 8), and provides a reason for it (line 9). Here, she appears to be making an executive decision, and
in doing so, emphasizes her power and authority as project manager. Also, by stating her decision to call the person in charge of the foundation personally, she may further underline her status in the group. Note, however, that while Omarosa may seem uncooperative, her discourse can be said to be generally other-oriented. For example, she makes the suggestion using *let’s* (line 14): *let’s talk when we get together*, which can be interpreted as a cooperative offer. In other words, she does not directly refuse the request for the number; rather, she chooses to refuse to provide it through avoidance strategies.

It is also clear that Omarosa does not observe the etiquette of ending the telephone conversation: she hangs up her cell phone without closing the conversation properly, or politely, even though Kwame reiterates the request before the conversation is cut off. In line 18, she says explicitly to Heidi that *I’m sorry I had to bang it on them*. Her improper, or impolite, telephone behaviour could be coded as being stereotypically masculine, although she does acknowledge that she might appear rude (line 18), which may imply her awareness of breaking the expected norm of politeness and her orientation to relational aspects of the interaction.

In the excerpt, we can see that Omarosa seems to make the decision of not giving the number to Kwame and Jessie solely based on her personal preference. In the telephone conversation, she does not explain why she refuses to give them the number, despite their repeated requests. Hence, Omarosa can be viewed as adopting a rather authoritarian style in ‘doing leadership’ in the mixed-sex group, although certain feminine discourse features are also in evidence. In particular, she is witnessed exercising and displaying her authority in a relatively explicit manner by imposing the decision on the group by authority and rejecting any possible negotiation. In response to Omarosa’s predominantly masculine leadership style, Jessie notes in her individual interview that *I think it would be best for the team if Omarosa was fired* (line 22), expressing her disapproval of Omarosa’s leadership style in very strong terms. Jessie also explains that Omarosa creates *negative energy all around her* (line 20) and produces *a huge fiasco* (line 21).

In the next excerpt, we shall see that the group is going to meet with a celebrity to discuss the arrangements of the charity auction they are responsible for. Omarosa is speaking to the whole group before the meeting begins.

**EXCERPT 6**

(Episode 6)

1 OMA: listen you all
2 regardless of what happens
3 we have got to come out of here with something
Here, Omarosa is witnessed as doing leadership in a predominantly masculine way, clearly orienting to the transactional goals of the meeting. In the excerpt, she first draws the attention of the members with the imperative *listen* and the directive pronoun *you all* (line 1). She goes on to state the objective of the meeting and her expectations in firm and strong terms: *regardless of what happens we have got to come out of here with something* (lines 2–3). Here, she uses the firm modal of obligation *have got to* (line 3) in stating the directive, which is a typically masculine way of giving instructions, albeit coupled with the use of the inclusive pronoun *we* to indicate shared responsibility, which shows an awareness of group orientation. And by saying *regardless of what happens* (line 2), she emphasizes that it is almost ‘a must’ for the group to reach an agreement by the end of the meeting. In so doing, she not only stresses the transactional goals, or the outcomes of the meeting, but also implies that any glitches in the process will not be tolerated for any reason. Here, we can see that she does leadership in an assertive and rather masculine style, with strong task orientation.

During the individual interview, Jessie shows her disapproval of Omarosa’s way of doing leadership in the negotiation process. Specifically, Jessie thinks that Omarosa’s controlling style adversely affects her ability to negotiate (line 5), which could eventually result in a negative impact on the outcome of the meeting. Overall, as seen in Excerpts 5 and 6, the use of masculine discourse features is judged very negatively, in spite of the fact that there are also some features of a feminine discourse. As a result of the use of a predominantly masculine speech style in doing leadership (and perhaps also partly due to her rudeness), she is subjected to negative evaluations.

6.2 Analysis of Kwame’s Leadership Style

I shall now turn to examine how a male project manager draws upon feminine and masculine stylistic features in ‘doing leadership’ in a mixed-sex group. As we shall see in the next excerpt, Kwame can be viewed as combining both feminine and masculine discourse styles in dealing with a potential crisis in the mixed-sex group in Episode 15. Heidi expresses her concerns to Kwame that she feels like she is not trusted by him. He is talking to Heidi, trying to put her mind at ease about her concerns.
EXCERPT 7
(Episode 15)
19 HEI: can I just express my concerns right now?
20 KWA: yeah
21 HEI: it’s not personal + well it actually is
22 [coughs] this is what I have a problem with
23 I was in charge of meet and greet
24 you also put Troy in charge I don’t- it’s fine
25 if that’s the way you wanna do it that’s fine
26 I don’t know if you don’t //trust me\
27 KWA: /I asked him\ to help you
28 HEI: but he is helping a lot which I don’t //mind\
29 KWA: /okay/\
30 HEI: but here’s the thing
31 I know he’s your right-hand man +
32 but then don’t say
33 okay you’re in charge of meet and greet
34 because you have put us both in charge of it
35 KWA: I have not
36 you are in charge of the meet and greet
37 HEI: but you had put Troy in charge of both
38 now I feel like if something happens bad
39 it’s all on you Heidi =
40 KWA: = if something happens bad Heidi
41 it’s all on me actually [laughs]
42 let me clarify it right now
43 you are in charge of the meet and greet
44 I want you to run it and structure it appropriately
45 make the decisions that are necessary to make it a successful event
46 Troy’s a copilot to help you with the meet and greet
47 HEI: if something was to go wrong
48 I have never done a meet and greet in my life
49 I don’t know if //autographs-
50 KWA: /Heidi\ I’ve never done a meet and greet either
51 he’s never done a meet and greet
52 everybody’s doing stuff for the first time
53 that’s why I’m relying on you +
54 and your expertise to try to get it done
55 that’s it
56 I’ve never done it
57 I’m not saying I’m any better at it or not
all I’m saying is I can’t be in all these different places
that’s why I’ve just delegated it out
just like I delegated promotion to him + logistics to her
I’m delegating meet and greet to you
so you can be successful with it

In the excerpt above, Kwame makes use of a combination of masculine and feminine discursive strategies in addressing Heidi’s dissatisfaction skillfully, resolving the potential crisis within the group effectively. In an attempt to alleviate her concerns, Kwame explains that if something happens bad Heidi it’s all on me actually (lines 40–41) in a humorous tone of voice. His laughter (line 41) serves to defuse the tensions at the time, projecting a less serious and relaxed atmosphere. In line 42, he begins his clarification with the metalinguistic statement: let me clarify it right now. By using the metadiscoursal clarify (line 42), he removes any possible ambiguity of the force of his utterance so that he could deal with her concerns right away. He then spells out her duties and responsibilities in the task as well as giving some direct and authoritative instructions to Heidi: you are in charge of the meet and greet (line 43) and I want you to run it and structure it appropriately (line 44). Here, while using typically masculine discourse strategies, he can also be viewed as empowering Heidi by giving her liberty to make decisions in organizing the meet and greet. In doing so, he shows his trust and faith in her ability in accomplishing the task successfully, thereby orienting to the relational aspects of the interaction.

In response to Heidi’s concerns about messing things up (line 47), Kwame positively acknowledges and gives credits to Heidi’s expertise, that’s why I’m relying on you and your expertise to try to get it done (lines 53–54), drawing attention to her valued expertise in the group and paying attention to her positive face. Note that he attempts not to position himself as an expert or overtly display his authority even if he is the project manager. He also acknowledges the fact that I’ve never done it (line 56), possibly downplaying his own expertise and minimizing the power differential between Heidi and himself, which can be coded as features of a stereotypically feminine discourse. Meanwhile, there is evidence of the use of rather assertive, typically masculine discourse: that’s it (line 55). Kwame also attempts to position himself on an equal footing with the other members in the team by saying I’m not saying I’m any better at it or not (line 57). He then goes on to provide justifications for the importance of division of labor eloquently to Heidi (line 58–60), attempting to pacify Heidi’s discontent and frustration. Towards the end of the interaction, he reassures Heidi by reiterating that she is in charge of the meet and greet clearly (line 61). By saying so you can be successful with it (line 62),
he displays his trust and confidence in Heidi that she is capable of running the event successfully.

Here, Kwame can be witnessed as drawing upon both masculine and feminine discourse features, and adopting a supportive and empowering style in ‘doing leadership’. Rather than only focusing on getting things done, he also pays attention to the relational aspects of the interaction with Heidi. He addresses Heidi’s concerns and dissatisfaction by providing reassurances and emphasizing the value of her skills being brought to the task. By paying attention to Heidi’s positive face needs in softening her distress, Kwame secures her co-operation and her contributions to the group, whilst contributing to the accomplishment of the transactional goals by mixing both masculine and feminine discourse strategies.

In another excerpt, Kwame is dealing with a pressing problem regarding the logistics of the meet and greet. His team has previously reserved a room which can only accommodate approximately thirty people, but just shortly before the event, he is informed that there will be more than one hundred people coming in for the meet and greet event. He is talking with the staff members who are in charge of the event, trying to work out the problem.

EXCERPT 8
(Episode 15)
1 XF: yesterday we present a list to Troy of 92 VIP guests ++
2 um no one told them
3 KWA: so now we’re talking about a total of 150 potentially
4 okay + so what we have planned to do in the room is actually just have
traffic flow
5 we ‘re gonna have people come in the room in small groups
6 sign autographs from Jessica Simpson
7 congregate for a small time with Operation Smile
8 and then head out
9 so it wasn’t gonna be a full hundred /plus-\$
10 XM: //not\ all in at the same /time\$
11 KWA: //yeah\ that was the goal
12 is that okay?
13 XM: if that works for you yeah
14 XF: [smiles] great

15 GEOR: [taken from the individual interview] Kwame’s handling it well
16 I think it’s by far a very difficult task to do
17 he seems to have it fairly much under control
18 putting all the pieces together
19 and seeing that it runs smoothly is a real challenge
20 I think Kwame's doing well
21 KWA: [taken from the individual interview] I'm nervous
22 but any good leader knows that if a leader's freaking out
23 and you're the person who's running around like Chicken Little with your
   head cut off
24 then that's the tone that you're gonna project to the team +
25 and to the people who are evaluating you

In Excerpt 8, Kwame can be seen integrating both masculine and feminine discourse features in enacting his leader identity, successfully resolves a crisis smoothly. Informed of the latest situation by the person-in-charge (lines 1–2), Kwame shows his understanding of the problem (line 3). Beginning with the discourse marker okay (line 4), he proposes the gist of the solution: *so what we have planned to do in the room is actually just have traffic flow* (line 4). Here, he uses the adverbial *actually* (line 4) and the minimizer *just* (line 4), which serve as hedges, mitigating the force of the instructions. He goes on to spell out his plan to fix the problem eloquently by detailing the logistics in a step-by-step manner (lines 5–8). Here, he succinctly outlines his plan of controlling the traffic flow rather assertively and forcefully. Note that he provides his instructions without any modification or hedging, which can be said to be representative of a stereotypically masculine discursive style.

He goes on to state explicitly the expected result of his plan, *so it wasn't gonna be a full hundred plus* (line 9), trying to give the staff members some assurances. His plan is immediately supported by the male staff member who agrees with Kwame’s plan by saying *not all in at the same time* (line 10). Kwame concludes by saying explicitly *that was the goal* (line 11). He goes on to check the understanding of the staff members involved with a question uttered in a rising intonation: *is that okay?* (line 12). Here, he tries to make sure that the staff members fully understand his plans, and allows them to ask questions, which is representative of a feminine discourse that stresses negotiation. In response, the staff members show their support of Kwame’s plan, which is evident in their replies in lines 13 and 14. Note that the smile on the face of the female staff member also confirms the effective leadership displayed by Kwame, albeit in a rather subtle way. Here, we can see that Kwame, with the effective use of both masculine and feminine discourse strategies, resolves the pressing problem, and receives approval from the staff members. Indeed, his handling of the situation is commended overtly by George who considers that Kwame is doing the job well and that he is having everything under control (lines 15 and 20).

In the individual interview, Kwame speaks of his philosophy of what counts as leadership. He confesses that even though he is nervous, he clearly understands
that as a leader, he needs to be calm and confident at all times, since this will affect the impression that he projects to the team (lines 21–25). In this way, he is constructed as a calm leader who does not lose his head in the face of crises. And George’s comments and Kwame’s own narratives, which immediately follow Kwame’s handling of the thorny situation, seem to reinforce the positive representations of Kwame’s effective leadership behaviour through the use of both masculine and feminine discourse features.

6.3 Commentary

Despite the fact that both project managers are witnessed using discourse features that do not accord with their gender and employing a ‘mixed’ leadership style, they are perceived very differently. While the female manager using a predominantly masculine discourse style is negatively evaluated, the male manager who uses a range of masculine and feminine discursive features is highly commended. From the analysis, it can be seen that using a predominantly masculine and aggressive leadership style by a female manager is not seen in a positive light, and that the mixing of various ‘gendered’ discourse strategies is perceived more positively for the male manager than for the female manager.

Based on the analysis above, I shall postulate that women may be under more constraints in enacting leadership than men when they transgress stereotypical gendered expectations for their speech patterns. As seen in the analysis, Omarosa’s deviation from the norms of feminine verbal behaviour is being censured and attracts harsh criticisms from her team members. It appears that violating stereotypical expectations of gender-appropriate verbal behaviours comes at a social cost. It may be considered inappropriate for women to use normatively masculine discourse strategies in enacting power and authority at work, and if they do so, they are likely to be subjected to negative evaluations. In Bergvall’s (1996) study on the discursive enactment of gender identity by female engineering students, she argues that “they are particularly vulnerable to attack when their attempts to enact apparently androgynous behaviours result in retaliatory acts” (193). Instead, female managers may be expected to display at least certain feminine speech characteristics in order to be accepted as leaders and to be judged positively. Hence, the incorporation of stereotypically masculine speech features by Omarosa in doing leadership is negatively sanctioned.

In contrast, the use of both masculine and feminine discourse strategies in enacting leadership by the male project manager, Kwame, is recognized and presented positively. It may be that it is not usually seen as problematic for male managers to break stereotypically gendered speech norms as for female managers. It may be that because feminine discourse is not viewed as a naturalized part of the
self for men, it is rewarded as an occupational resource (Wajcman 1999, as cited in Peck 2006). In other words, male managers who make use of some feminine discourse strategies may be viewed as making an extra effort in doing leadership, and as such, are perceived positively. Furthermore, since leadership has traditionally been closely associated with men, the incorporation of feminine discursive characteristics into the leadership style by a man does not raise serious questions about his identity as a leader. Here, we can see that the mixing of differently gendered discourse strategies in doing leadership is evaluated very differently for male and female managers. While the male manager is commended and judged positively, the female manager is judged to be overly aggressive and is penalized for not conforming to the feminine speech patterns.

Interestingly, such observations in The Apprentice appear to echo Thimm et al.’s (2003) finding that professional men and women are measured by different standards, and as such, women are sanctioned into less flexible ways of behaving while men are allowed to use a greater range of acceptable verbal behaviours. As they explain, “stereotypical expectations restrict women’s interactional behaviour more than men’s. Whereas men are allowed a wide variety of styles, women very often are not” (Thimm et al. 2003: 532). Here, it seems likely that the different evaluations of Omarosa’s and Kwame’s enactment of leadership may be the result of the impact of stereotypical gendered norms and the existence of what Thimm et al. (2003) call ‘double standards’ in the expectations for male and female professionals in the workplace. Hence, women may be penalized for violating the norms of feminine speech behaviour for doing leadership, while men may not be subjected to such stringent gendered norms, and are allowed to make use of a mixture of differently gendered discursive features in their speech.

It is also noteworthy that a ‘wide-verbal-repertoire speech style’ (see Case 1993, 1994; Holmes 2006) of leadership enacted by Kwame is presented most positively in The Apprentice. In the TV show, the use of different proportions of masculine and feminine speech characteristics is represented as the most effective way of enacting leadership. As Barrett (2004:400) suggests, “a masculine approach is most effective if it includes a feminine element”. As Jule (2008:62) also notes, corporate organizations are “increasingly valuing the blending of various leadership styles”, as they recognize certain feminine traits, such as the ability to share power and to build consensus, as “positive traits regardless of one’s sex”. Hence, consistent with the recent findings of what counts as effective leadership, my analysis of The Apprentice appears to portray the most effective way of doing leadership as involving the skillful use of both masculine and feminine speech strategies.
7. Conclusion

In this article, I have shown that two project managers in *The Apprentice* employ speech styles which are to a great extent in accordance with widely held gender stereotypes, whereas two other project managers make use of discourse elements which are associated with the other gender and are engaged in ‘mixing’ differently gendered speech strategies. It seems that such representations of gendered leadership styles in *The Apprentice* not only contest the exclusive association of a particular gendered leadership style with one gender, but also challenge the well-established popular belief about gender differences of ‘doing leadership’ which has been perpetuated by gender ideologies and stereotypes (see Cameron 2007). Importantly, such representations may help to de-stabilize simplistic and essentialist notions such as ‘men’s leadership style’ and ‘women’s leadership style’, and weaken the dichotomous conceptions of men’s and women’s leadership styles by showing intra-gender differences in the enactment of leadership and a wide range of options available in ‘doing leadership’ discursively.

Although the project managers are seen to use varying degrees of ‘gender-congruent’ and ‘mixed’ discourse strategies in ‘doing leadership’, their leadership styles are shown to be evaluated very differently by other contestants. Several main findings have emerged from the analysis. First, although the male and female project manager discussed in Section 5 employ gendered discourse strategies which are largely congruent with the prevailing codes of gender, the adoption of a predominantly masculine leadership style by the male manager is judged positively and is represented as the default way of ‘doing leadership’. Second, while the male and female project manager discussed in Section 6 combine and ‘mix’ differently gendered discourse in ‘doing leadership’, they are perceived very differently. In particular, it is observed that violating stereotypical gendered norms in performing leadership may be interpreted differently for male and female managers, owing to the existence of double standards, and that female managers may be seen to be under more constraints in violating stereotypically gendered speech norms when enacting leadership at work. Finally, it is revealed that the skillful use of a combination of both masculine and feminine discourse features is presented as the most effective way of ‘doing leadership’ in the reality TV show.

This article has tried to demonstrate the value of applying a discursive approach to analyzing leadership, gender and workplace communication in media texts, and to stimulate further research in employing the method of discourse analysis in the exploration of media representations of gendered discourses. In light of the paucity of research on the representations of leadership and gender in media discourse, a promising research direction would be to pursue further analysis by adopting a multi-disciplinary perspective through drawing on methodolo-
gies from various disciplines such as discourse analysis, organizational studies, psychology, and sociology, in order to reflect the complexity of the issues involved.

Notes

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1. It was filmed in 2003 and was broadcast weekly on the National Broadcasting Company, or NBC, in the United States from 8 January 2004 until 15 April 2004. It had an average viewership of 20.7 million people each week in the United States.

2. Although numerous interactions in the show are potentially useful for analysis, they are piecemeal in nature. In most cases, they are cut off by the insertion of particular individual interviews and do not form a continuous stretch of interaction. As such, these interactions are not chosen for analysis.

3. It should be noted that in Episodes 1 to 4, the contestants are divided into two teams based on their gender; in later episodes, however, the teams have a mixed gender composition.

4. See Appendix: Transcription Conventions. Also note that italics are used for commentary provided by DT or other contestants to the programme makers during the individual behind-the-scene interviews which do not constitute a part of the interaction.

References


### Appendix: Transcription Conventions

- **yes** underscore indicates emphatic stress
- [laughs] paralinguistic features in square brackets
- + pause of up to one second
- xxx // xxxxx \ xxx simultaneous speech
- = latching between the end of one turn to the start of the next
- (3) pause of specified number of seconds
- () unintelligible word or phrase
- (hello) transcriber’s best guess at an unclear utterance
- ? raising or question intonation
- - incomplete or cut-off utterance
- XM/XF unidentified male/female
[comments] editorial comments italicized in square brackets

*words in italics* commentary taken from behind-the-scenes individual interviews

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