Faculty & Research
Working Paper

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2012/117/DS
(Revised version of 2011/128/DS)

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Abstract

This paper focuses on women leaders' self-views linked to their gender and leader identities.

In particular, we examine the antecedents and psychological and motivational consequences

of *identity conflict*, which occurs when women leaders perceive an incongruity between their

gender and professional identities. Applying structural equation modeling techniques on a

large sample of women leaders who represent a diverse range of countries and industries, we

found that consistent with our hypotheses, women leaders' identity conflict increased stress,

lowered their life satisfaction, and caused them to construe leading as a duty as opposed to an

attractive goal. As for the antecedents, our results emphasize the importance of holding a

positive gender identity. We found that positive gender identity reduced identity conflict of

women leaders. Moreover, compared with women in more male-dominated organizations,

women in organizations with proportionally more women held a more positive gender identity

and experienced less identity conflict. In contrast, *positive leader identity* was not related to

women leaders' identity conflict, while leadership experience directly reduced the conflict.

We discuss the implications of our results for women's advancement in organizations and the

development of their identity as leaders.

Keywords: Women leaders, identity conflict, positive social identity, well-being, motivation

to lead, leader development.

"It is hard to live in a man's dominated logic for ten hours each day and then go home/leave office and be feminine, caring, sweet, well-coiffed, in a good mood… it is really very hard."

An anonymous participant

As this comment of an anonymous participant of our study suggest, women leaders have to navigate between the requirements of their work and personal roles, which at times may be neither easy nor pleasant. The concept of identity has been proposed as the psychological substrate that helps individuals to make sense of the self when enacting different roles (Gecas, 1982; Stets & Burke, 2003), and holding a healthy and integrated sense of self has been shown to have numerous positive psychological effects (e.g., Dixon & Baumeister, 1991; Niedenthal, Setterlund, & Wherry, 1992). These findings have attracted leadership scholars and a fast-growing body of literature suggests that leadership development requires working toward the development of a leader identity as a central component of the individual's self-concept (e.g., Ibarra, Snook, & Guillén Ramo, 2010; Lord & Hall, 2005). While interpersonal processes certainly play an important role in the development of a leader identity (e.g., DeRue & Ashford, 2010), intrapersonal identity processes should also be considered to better understand the emergence and acceptance of female leaders in organizations (Hogue & Lord, 2007). However, despite recent calls for more studies in this area (e.g., van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003), surprisingly little research exists on how women leaders see themselves and how they experience leadership roles. In this paper, we aim to shed light on these issues. To do so, we focus on women leaders' self-views linked to their gender and leader identities and elaborate on women leaders' *identity conflict*, which occurs when women perceive an incongruity between their gender and professional identities (Settles, 2004; Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981; see also Biddle, 1986).

We propose and empirically test a model of identity conflict, examining both its antecedents and consequences. To develop our model, we build on the theories of role incongruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002), leadership identity (e.g., DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Kark

& Van Dijk, 2007; Lord & Hall, 2005), and positive social identity (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Roberts & Dutton, 2009). In terms of consequences, the model proposes that identity conflict negatively affects women leaders' well-being, reduces their affective motivation to lead but enhances the social-normative component of the motivation to lead (Chan & Drasgow, 2001), thereby causing women to construe leading as a duty as opposed to an attractive goal. In terms of antecedents, we advance an idea that *identity positivity* plays an important role in mitigating women leaders' identity conflict. We propose that a more positive view on their gender and leader identities reduces women's perceptions of the difficulty of combining the roles of woman and leader. In addition, we consider the factors that increase the positivity of women's leader and gender identities and investigate the role of leadership experience and organizational demography in these processes.

The data from 638 women leaders who represent a diverse range of industries and countries supported our hypotheses on the link between identity conflict and psychological and motivational outcomes for women leaders and revealed the importance of holding a positive *leader* and especially *gender* identity. Our research provides novel results that integrate the ideas of leadership identity theory and gender dynamics, thereby filling a critical gap in the leadership literature (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). In deriving implications of our findings, we emphasize the importance of cultivating and maintaining a positive gender identity to diminish identity conflict.

Women Leaders' Identity Conflict: Definition and Conceptual Framework

Identity is a set of meanings that individuals attach to themselves (Gecas, 1982). As social identity theory postulates (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel, 1982), these meanings include a social component that is related to the social roles enacted by a person and his/her identification with collectivities or social categories s/he belongs to. As the individual enacts multiple social roles and identifies with multiple social categories, his/her self-concept

includes multiple social identities (Deaux, 1993; Tajfel, 1982; Thoits, 1983). For example, one might possess the multiple identities of a woman, friend, leader, political activist, and a European. However, holding multiple identities comes not without risk. When enacting a social role, individuals make deliberate efforts to live up to the standards ascribed to that role (Lord & Brown, 2004), and a potential mismatch of the requirements ascribed to different roles may be threatening and difficult to handle. For example, work-family research (e.g., Aryee, 1992; Coverman, 1989) has explored the negative consequences of perceived incompatibility between work and family roles (i.e., being a professional and being a spouse or a parent). In contrast, in this paper, we focus on the perceived conflict between women leaders' gender identity (i.e., being a woman) and their leader identity (i.e., being a leader). Women's gender identity refers to the meaning that women attach to their membership in the social category of "female" (Ely, 1995). Similarly, women's leader identity refers to how they interpret their belonging to the social category of "leaders."

To study the perceived incompatibility of these two roles is particularly important since, according to the role incongruity model (Eagly & Karau, 2002), the characteristics and behaviors typically expected from women and leaders differ dramatically. Gender role stereotypes prescribe more *communal* behavior to women: "warm," nurturing, caring, cooperative, and selfless (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000). In contrast, successful leaders are often described as possessing and requiring *agentic* characteristics such as assertiveness, direction, competitiveness, and problem-solving (Martell, Parker, Emrich, & Crawford, 1998). Agentic characteristics are more strongly ascribed to men than women (Eagly et al., 2000), thereby revealing the "think leader-think male" stereotype (Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Schein, 1973, 2001). These gender stereotypes imply that women are less likely to be judged as qualified for leadership positions, and that once in the leadership positions, they are perceived less favorably (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Women leaders may feel pressure to

accommodate the conflicting demands arising from prescriptive beliefs about how women

and leaders ought to behave (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). To be perceived as

effective when exercising their authority, women may opt to display more agentic and less

communal behaviors—a strategy that can, however, backfire, leading to social disapproval

(Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004;

Rudman & Glick, 1999).

Thus, to the extent that a woman perceives that the pressures of one identity interfere

with the performance of another because of conflicting meanings, norms, and demands

inherent in the identities, she may experience identity conflict (Ashforth & Mael, 1989;

Biddle, 1986; Settles, 2004; Van Sell et al., 1981). When a woman acts—or believes that she

is expected to act—in a way that is inconsistent with the meaning of being a woman or being

a leader, her identity conflict may represent a threat (Petriglieri, 2011) to either her gender or

leader identity. For example, being a woman may posit a threat to her leader identity by

making her doubt whether she can effectively carry out the core tasks of leadership: "Am I

capable to influence others given that I am a woman?" and thus be a leader: "Am I too

feminine to be an effective leader?" At the same time, enacting the role of a leader may

represent a threat to her gender identity: "Am I feminine enough given that I am a leader?"

Experiencing identity conflict prevents individuals from feeing authentic (Kernis &

Goldman, 2006; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997); it is associated with negative

psychological outcomes (e.g., Settles, 2004) and lower motivation to persist in the conflicting

role (Dutton et al., 2010; Steele, 1997). We develop the hypotheses that identity conflict

negatively affects women leaders' psychological well-being and reduces the extent to which

they find the leadership role attractive. On the other hand, we propose that because perceiving

a conflict between the roles of woman and leader is likely to make women more sensitive to

others' disapproval and more willing to alter the status quo, identity conflict increases the

social-normative (i.e., duty-related) component of the motivation to lead.

Identity conflict is linked to other identity-related factors. For example, identity centrality, or the salience and importance that an individual places on one identity, may increase the vulnerability to identity-threatening thoughts and experiences (Thoits, 1991). Identity centrality has also been shown to exacerbate the negative effect of identity conflict on psychological well-being (Brook, Garcia, & Fleming, 2008). The research on identity centrality has provided valuable insights into identity processes, documenting situations of heightened identity risk. However, it falls short of explaining why sometimes identity conflict may reduce psychological well-being regardless the centrality of conflicting identities, as Settles (2004) reported in a study of identity conflict of women scientists. We propose that identity conflict is better understood when studied together with a yet another identity facet—*positive social identity*, which we define, following an evaluative approach to the identity positivity (Dutton et al., 2010), as a favorable regard for the identity content. We suggest that identity positivity plays a major role in preventing individuals from construing their multiple selves as incompatible. In particular, we develop the hypothesis that because a positive social identity gives access to self-affirmational resources and contributes to integrative identity processes, the more positive gender and leader identities of women leaders, the less conflict they see between being a woman and being a leader.

Following the idea that both individual and organizational characteristics impact women's self-views as leaders (Ely & Rhode, 2010), we elaborate on two factors that are likely to affect the positivity of women leaders' social identities. First, we hypothesize that leadership experience, a crucial factor for developing a leader identity (Lord & Hall, 2004), increases women's appreciation of the social category of leaders and thereby diminishes their identity conflict. Second, we theorize that the numerical representation of women in the organization is likely to affect the extent to which women leaders are socially accepted as

such and/or stereotyped. Consequently, we propose that compared with women in more male-dominated organizations, women in organizations with proportionally more women hold a more positive gender identity and therefore experience less identity conflict. We present a model with the conceptual framework in Figure 1 and develop our hypotheses in detail below.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Consequences of Identity Conflict

Well-being

Well-being is a multi-faceted construct that includes emotional responses to daily circumstances (e.g., stress) and global judgments of life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Holding multiple identities that one perceives as complementary increases opportunities to self-affirm (Niedenthal, Setterlund, & Wherry, 1992) and helps one to effectively cope with daily failures (Dixon & Baumeister, 1991), thereby increasing well-being. In contrast, the perceived dissonance between the meanings of different identities that one holds can lead to negative psychological outcomes, including diminished well-being (Brook et al., 2008; Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi, & Cree, 2004; Settles, 2004; Simon, 1995).

We predict that women leaders who perceive greater conflict between their gender and leader identities experience more stress and report lower levels of life satisfaction. First, stress may arise from threats to the perceived self-worth (Creswell et al., 2005; Keough, 1998). For women leaders, the greater the perceived conflict, the more they may feel that the act of leading constitutes a threat to their deeply rooted gender identity and questions their self-concept, and this may trigger stress reactions. Second, role-accumulation literature suggests that integrating professional and personal roles (e.g., parent and spouse roles) enhances women's self-acceptance, self-esteem, and life-satisfaction (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002). This reasoning implies that identity conflict may reduce women's global

judgments of life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1. Woman/leader identity conflict is positively associated with stress.

Hypothesis 2. Woman/leader identity conflict is negatively associated with life

satisfaction.

Motivation to Lead

On one hand, one might think that identity conflict should not affect women's

willingness to assume leadership roles because high social value and external rewards such as

high salary, authority, and administrative power associated with them (Day, Harrison, &

Halpin, 2009) might compensate for the negative effects of experiencing inner conflicts. On

the other hand, it is also reasonable to argue that these rewards may be insufficient to

compensate for the effects of identity conflict, and thus the latter should make women more

reluctant to assume and persist in leadership roles and to seize the opportunities to "claim" a

leader identity in interactions with others (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). If this is the case, it may

have important consequences for women's advancement in organizations. Therefore, we next

seek to understand if and how women leaders' identity conflict is linked to their motivation to

lead. Motivation to lead has been defined (Chan & Drasgow, 2001: 482) as an "individual-

differences construct that affects a leader's or leader-to-be's decisions to assume leadership

training, roles, and responsibilities and that affects his or her intensity of effort at leading and

persistence as a leader." Leadership literature distinguishes between two cognitive

components of motivation to lead: affective and social-normative (Chan & Drasgow, 2001).

Individuals who score high on the affective component would lead for the pleasure of doing

so. In contrast, those who score high on the social-normative component would lead for

reasons such as a sense of duty or responsibility.

Affective motivation to lead. When the perceived conflict between the roles of

woman and leader is high, assuming a leadership role is likely to result in an incoherent or

fragmented self-concept and thus threaten one's sense of self (Thoits, 1991) and make women

feel inauthentic (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). One strategy to reduce the conflict is to integrate

multiple identities, which however takes time and requires both individual effort and

favorable external conditions (Ibarra et al., 2010; Lord & Hall, 2005). Individuals may choose

instead to exit one of the conflicting identities to reduce the conflict (Dutton et al., 2010;

Steele, 1997). Arguably, excluding the *acquired* social identity of leader from the sense of

self is more feasible than excluding the *ascribed* gender identity. Identity theory supports this

view by suggesting that in order to hierarchically organize their multiple identities,

individuals more firmly commit to the ascribed or involuntary identities than to the identities

that are acquired or voluntary (Deaux, 1991). This reasoning implies that if women construe

leadership behaviors as "inappropriate" for women, i.e., as behaviors that result in an internal

conflict, they will be less willing to commit to their leader identity and will find less pleasure

in the act of leading. Consequently, we expect identity conflict to reduce the positive affect

that women associate with leading.

> *Hypothesis 3. Woman/leader identity conflict is negatively associated with affective*
>
> *motivation to lead.*

Social-normative motivation to lead. We further suggest that identity conflict makes

women construe leading as a duty and thus increases their social-normative motivation to

lead. First, women leaders assume a more prevention-oriented approach whereby they seek to

avoid others' disapproval (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007). This is consistent with status

characteristics theory (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977; Ridgeway, 1991) that

postulates that many behavioral gender differences can be explained by the differential status

value that society ascribes to men and women. In our society, women have less power, and

female is generally considered to be a lower status than male (Henley & LaFrance, 1984;

Williams & Best, 1990). Lower status and less power are associated with a greater focus on

avoiding others' disapproval (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). These arguments imply that because of the status value attached to their gender, women leaders are likely to manifest a prevention-oriented approach. Prevention strategies precisely emphasize what one *ought* to do rather than what one *likes* to do (Higgins, 1997), and the social-normative component of motivation to lead is related to the prevention focus (Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). Because identity conflict posits a threat to one's sense of self (Thoits, 1991), the more identity conflict, the more focused women will be on avoiding the disapproval—both from self and from others. In other words, the emphasis on what one ought to do will be greater when women leaders perceive more identity conflict.

Second, the literature on self-construal suggests that women may consider not only personal motives when embarking in professional roles, but also integrate the motives related to others and thus persist in leadership roles even when doing so is not personally pleasant. In particular, women have a more prominent interdependent than independent component of self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) which means that they view themselves more in terms of connectedness to others than separateness from others (Cross & Madson, 1997). While an independent self places a greater importance on individual goals, an interdependent self strives to further the interests of his/her social group (Singelis, 1994) and feels more capable of effecting a noticeable social change through his/her actions (Cojuharenco, Cornelissen, & Karelaia, 2011). We thus suggest that women leaders who are aware of gender-related barriers may feel that they must persist in leadership positions precisely because of the difficulties associated with it—in order to challenge the current status quo that is unfavorable to their social group.

> *Hypothesis 4. Woman/leader identity conflict is positively associated with social-normative motivation to lead.*

Positive Social Identity

Individuals wish to hold positive identities (Gecas, 1982). While there are many ways to instantiate a positive identity (Roberts & Dutton, 2009), one basis for identity positivity is a favorable regard for the identity content (Dutton et al., 2010). Research on *collective self-esteem* supports this idea by suggesting that the evaluation of one's social identities is an important attribute of social identification (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990). Collective self-esteem includes both how positively one evaluates the goodness of one's social group ("private" component) and how positively one believes that others evaluate the social group ("public" component; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Taken together, the public and private components refer to the positivity of a certain social category for the individual. Thus, a more favorable regard a woman has—and/or believes that others also do—for her leader or gender identity, the more self-esteem she derives from it, and the more *positive* the identity is for her. We propose that the more positive gender and leader identities of women are, the less likely they are to perceive these identities as incompatible. Several arguments support this view.

In general, having a positive social identity helps individuals to maintain an overall self-perception of worth (Hogg, Abrams, Otten, & Hinkle, 2004) and, as a consequence, induces a more positive construal of one's world (Taylor & Brown, 1988). More specifically, the more positive an individual's social identity, the more access to self-affirmational resources the individual has and thus is better able to cope with identity-threatening thoughts and experiences (Dutton et al., 2010; Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993). Self-affirmation theory postulates that holding positive self-conceptions in one domain helps to protect a person's self-worth in yet another domain, or another contingency of self-worth (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Steele, 1988). As Sherman & Cohen (2006: 189) indicate, when global self-worth is affirmed, "otherwise threatening events or information lose their self-threatening capacity because the individual can view them within a broader, larger view of the self." Applied to our context, these ideas imply that women holding a more positive gender identity

will be less vulnerable to thoughts and experiences that can potentially threaten their self-view as effective leaders (e.g., "Am I capable of being an effective leader provided that I am a woman?"). Similarly, women holding a more positive leader identity will be less inclined to interpret their leader behavior as a threat to their gender identity (e.g., "Am I feminine enough provided that I am a leader?").

Another way in which identity positivity may help women leaders to deal with their potentially conflicting roles is by enriching their behavioral repertoire and creating positive spillovers between gender and leader identities. In particular, individuals are less likely to suppress the enactment of their identities when these identities are favorably regarded (Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi, 2001; Ely, 1995; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Thoits, 1983). It implies that the greater regard women leaders have for their gender and leader identities, the less likely they are to suppress any of the two, the more likely they are to "blend" both, and thus the more authentic they will feel in performing their professional role. Ultimately, this integrative process may lead women to cognitively reframe their leader and gender identities to be compatible (Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009), by, for example, emphasizing the characteristics of leadership coherent with behaviors typically considered as more feminine, such as being participative and relational (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). On a related note, because self-affirmed individuals and in general individuals with more positive self-views are less influenced by social expectations and stereotypes (e.g., Arndt, Schimel, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2002; Brockner, 1988; Sherman & Cohen, 2006), they are more likely to use their inner voice as a guidance for behavior. Therefore, the more positive social identities women leaders hold, the more freedom they will feel about the way they can lead, and the more likely they will be to develop their own way of leading that makes them feel comfortable and authentic. This, is turn, should reduce the feeling that their gender and leader identities conflict.

Hypothesis 5. Positive gender identity is negatively associated with woman/leader identity conflict.

Hypothesis 6. Positive leader identity is negatively associated with woman/leader identity conflict.

Positive Gender Identity and Organizational Demography

What factors are likely to affect the positivity of women's gender identity? Since, as we hypothesize, the positivity of women's gender identity will have an indirect effect on their motivation to take on and persist in leadership roles, understanding what organizational factors may impact this aspect of women's gender identity becomes especially important (see also Ely, 1994, 1995). We propose that women's numerical underrepresentation across all levels in an organization makes it more difficult for them to maintain a positive meaning of their membership in the category "female."

We base our hypothesis on the symbolic interactionism perspective (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934) that emphasizes the importance of social interactions for the development of identity and meaning in general. According to this view, identity content is a product of acts taken by a person and responses to these acts by other individuals. Thus, social acceptance is a necessary element for shaping one's self-view as a leader, making the interactions with peers, subordinates, and superiors crucial for the development of a leader identity. More recently, leadership scholars have argued that a person constructs his/her leader identity through a series of claims of the leader identity that are reciprocated by the affirmative responses of followers who thereby "grant" that identity to the leader (Bartel & Dutton, 2001; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). Importantly, this reasoning implies that a leader identity can be reinforced—or questioned—in interactions not only with immediate subordinates, but also with peers, superiors, and all other members of the organization who may endorse a person as a leader (see also Ibarra, 1999). We propose that

organizational demography and, in particular, the numeral representation of women in the organization is likely to modify the extent to which women leaders perceive social acceptance within their organizations, which in turn may impact the positivity of their gender identity.

Supporting this hypothesis, previous studies have shown that women in leadership roles tend to be devalued stronger when they occupy male-dominated roles and when their evaluators are male (Eagly et al., 1992). The results of a more recent meta-analysis of more than 60 studies published between 1975 and 2005 (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011) suggest that although the masculine construal of leadership has decreased over time, both women and men still construe it in masculine terms, and men are likely to do so to a greater extent. This implies that organizations with proportionally fewer women are more likely to have an *agentic* organizational culture (Kulik & Oleakalns, 2012) and build a gendered definition of leadership that values stereotypically male behaviors more than behaviors socially expected from women. Moreover, skewed gender distributions are more likely to activate gender stereotypes (Perry, David-Blake, & Kulik, 1994). Thus, in organizations with proportionally fewer women, female leaders' behavior is more likely to be compared to how a stereotypical woman should behave. As a consequence of these processes, in such organizations, women's behavior may not be perceived as leadership attempts and thus their claims of a leader identity may not be reinforced with supportive grants. Simultaneously, women will observe that leadership attempts of their male colleagues find more recognition and reinforcement. Gender being the salient difference in this comparison, women may attribute the difference in the ease of claiming a leader identity to gender. As a result, it will be especially challenging for women leaders to maintain a positive gender identity in male-dominated organizations (see also Ely, 1995), which ultimately will result in more identity conflict.

Hypothesis 7. Positive gender identity mediates the effect of the proportional

representation of women in the organization on woman/leader identity conflict, so that

the smaller the proportion of women, the less positive gender identity and,

consequently, the more identity conflict they experience.

Positive Leader Identity and Leadership Experience

We have proposed that positive leader identity reduces women leaders' identity

conflict. A logical question is then how women leaders can enhance their evaluations of the

social category of leaders. Because the attractiveness of belonging to a social group may

increase with one's contact with this social group (Stephan, 1987), we expect that the

positivity of women's leader identity increases as they accumulate leadership experience.

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) provides support to this idea by predicting that

people who invested a considerable amount of time in a particular task (e.g., pursuing a

managerial career) may learn to value the task only because they need to believe that their

time was well used.

Identity literature also suggests that women leaders who manage to rise to the top of

organizational hierarchies learn to incorporate their leader identities into their broader sense

of self (Day & Harrison, 2007; Ely et al., 2011; Hall, 2002; Ibarra et al., 2010; Lord & Hall,

2005). A history of successful leadership attempts makes the processes of claiming a leader

identity more habituated and mindless and creates a leadership reputation that carries over

into new situations (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Thus, more time in a leadership role implies

that the leader is more likely to receive further leadership recognition. Supporting this view,

leadership literature has shown that leadership experience positively relates to the ratings of

leadership potential made by peers and immediate supervisors (Chan & Drasgow, 2001). This

reasoning implies that women may become more comfortable in a leadership position the

more leadership experience they accumulate. This in turn should make them view their leader

identity more positively, thereby reducing their identity conflict.

Finally, self-enhancement motives, whereby individuals value more domains in which they are successful (Taylor & Brown, 1988; Tesser & Campbell, 1980), further imply that women's positive view of the social category of leaders is coextensive with their leadership experience.

> *Hypothesis 8. Positive leader identity mediates the effect of leadership experience on woman/leader identity conflict, so that the more leadership experience, the more positive leader identity and, consequently, the less identity conflict women experience.*

Method

Procedure and Sample

The invitations to participate in an on-line survey were sent to about 5,900 women alumni of two major European business schools. Within two weeks, we received complete responses from 722 women. This implies a response rate of approximately 12%, which is comparable with other studies surveying executives (Cycyota & Harrison, 2006). We excluded from the final sample eighty-four participants who reported occupying other than managerial positions (for a similar treatment of managerial and non-managerial positions in the leadership literature, see, e.g., Eagly et al., 1992; Grant, Gino, Hofmann, 2011; Rosette & Tost, 2010). In the final sample ($N = 638$), 12% of women were either CEOs or managing partners, 30% were in senior executive management positions, 39% were middle managers, and 19% were first-level managers. These women reported having an average of 7 direct reports ($SD = 16$). Admittedly, leadership is not synonymous with holding a managerial position. However, according to the claiming-granting framework of leadership (DeRue & Ashford, 2010), being placed in a managerial position within a formal structure represents a powerful institutionalized grant of a leader identity. Moreover, "leadership" is an inherent part to a manager's job (Mintzberg, 1973), and within formal social hierarchies, it is often expected that managerial roles include leadership (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Thus, our final

sample of women occupying managerial positions suits well the purpose of testing our hypotheses.

Participants were between 27 and 68 years old (M_{age} = 40.63, SD_{age} = 7.84); 50% had children; 69% were married or lived with a partner. They represent 67 different countries of origin and 55 countries of current residence (69% resided in Europe and Russia, with 9% in France, 16% in Germany, and 16% in the UK; 11% in the USA and Canada; 8% in Asia; and 12% were distributed between Mexico, Central and South America, Australia and New Zealand, the Middle East and Africa, with no more than 5% in each region). In terms of education, 12% had only a bachelor's degree, 74% had also completed at least one master's program, and 5% had a PhD. Respondents who were unemployed at the time of the survey (9%) were asked, for the purposes of the survey, to consider the last organization in which they had worked. The women had an average of 16.35 years of working experience (SD = 7.71) and 9.45 years of managerial experience (SD = 7.26).

These women represent a variety of sectors and industries: manufacturing (14%), professional services (e.g., accounting, consulting, law; 21%), services (e.g., travel, banking, food; 19%), technology and communications (11%), consumer goods (9%), government, educational, and non-profit organizations (6%), media and entertainment (3%), and other industries (e.g., energy; 17%). The number of participants was nearly equally distributed between large (more than 25,000 employees), medium (between 501 and 25,000 employees), and smaller companies (up to 500 employees)—31%, 39%, and 30%, respectively. The majority of our participants (76%) were employed by the organizations where men represented more than 50% of employees across all levels. For 25% of the respondents, the proportion of women in their organizations did not surpass 25%; 8% of the respondents reported working at organizations that employed at least 75% women.

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all items used a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. Measures (except for demographics) were counterbalanced to control for possible order effects.

Woman/leader identity conflict. To measure the degree to which being a women and being a leader were perceived to conflict with one another, participants completed a three-item scale adapted from Settles (2004; see also Tompson & Werner, 1997). The items included "I feel that other managers do not take me seriously because I am a woman," "Being a manager makes me less feminine," and "I think that I am not influential enough because I am a woman." The scale was anchored at 1 = not at all true of me, and 7 = extremely true of me.

Psychological well-being. Participants completed the 5-item satisfaction with life scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and 4 items from the perceived stress scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Sample items include "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal" (life satisfaction) and "In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?" (stress). The stress scale was anchored at 0 = never and 4 = very often.

Motivation to lead. We used the 9-item affective-identity motivation to lead scale and the 9-item social-normative motivation to lead scale (Chan & Drasgow, 2001) to assess affective and social-normative components of motivation to lead. Sample items include "I am the type of person who likes to be in charge of others" (affective) and "I feel that I have the duty to lead others if I am asked" (social-normative).

Positive gender and leader identities. To measure the positivity of women's gender and leader identities, we used eights items of the collective self-esteem scale (CSES; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), corresponding to the private and public components of the value of social identities. Participants were asked first to respond to the eight items in terms of their

gender identity and then in terms of their leader identity. The questions were adapted accordingly. Sample items include "In general, I'm glad to be a woman [manager]." and "In general, others respect women [managers]."

Leadership experience. Participants were asked to indicate how many years they had hold managerial positions.

Proportion of women in the organization. Participants were asked to indicate how many women were working at their organization. In particular, they were instructed to choose one of four options: less than 25%, between 25% and 50%, between 50% and 75%, and more than 75%. The variable was coded as a categorical variable (from 1 to 4).

Control variables and demographics. Because leadership self-efficacy directly affects one's motivation to lead (Chan & Drasgow, 2001), we included the 8-item leadership self-efficacy perceptions scale (Murphy, 2001). The scale measures an individual's perceptions of his/her general capabilities to lead (e.g., "In general, I am very good at leading a group of my peers").

Identity centrality may affect the extent to which women perceive a conflict between their gender and leader identity (Thoits, 1991; cf. Settles, 2004). To control for identity centrality, we thus included the importance to identity subscale (4 items) of the original CSES (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The same 4 items, adapted accordingly, were used to measure the importance of gender and leader identities. Sample items include "Being a woman [manager] is an important reflection of who I am."

At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents indicated their age, marital status (coded then as a categorical variable from 1 to 4), number of children, education (coded as a categorical variable from 1 to 6), employment status, countries of origin and current residence, years of working experience, several characteristics of their organization (industry, number of employees—coded as a categorical variable from 1 to 9), their role within the

organization, number of their direct reports, number of role models they have had in their career, and number of female role models.

Results

Analysis Overview

We used structural equation modeling (SEM) to evaluate our model (Figure 1). SEM isolates the impact of each variable in the model by examining the relationship among multiple variables simultaneously. Following Anderson and Gerbing (1988), before testing the hypothesized model, we examined the measurement model of latent constructs to address the concerns of common method variance/bias and discriminant validity (Meade, Watson, & Kroustalis, 2007; Podsakoff, McKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). SEM analyses were conducted with LISREL 8.80 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). All multi-item measures were standardized prior to SEM analyses.

We used single indicators for latent constructs (Bentler & Chou, 1987). For multi-item constructs, we corrected the variance-covariance matrix for measurement error by multiplying the variance of each latent construct by its reliability (Hayduk, 1987). Following recommendations of Carmines and Zeller (1979) and McDonald (1999), we used coefficient omega to calculate reliability estimates. Coefficient omega is a generalization of Cronbach's (1951) alpha that does not assume equal loadings of all items and thus provides the closest estimate to the true measure reliability. We assumed measurement without error for single-item variables (age, education, marital status, having children, role models, female role models, years of leadership experience, number of employees, and proportion of women in the organization).

To test the hypothesized model, we followed a multi-step approach recommended by Shook, Ketchen, Hult, and Kacmar (2004). We first evaluated the fit of the hypothesized model and then conducted a series of nested model comparisons to improve the fit (Anderson

& Gerbing, 1988) and test for the mediating role (MacKinnon, Lockwood, West, & Sheets, 2002) of identity conflict and positive social identities. Finally, we tested models with alternative structural relationships among the variables to check for the existence of equivalent causal models (MacCallum, Wegner, Uchino, Farbigar, 1993).

Measurement Models

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation procedures implemented in LISREL (Bentler & Dudgeon, 1996) to verify the hypothesized factor structure of our target variables. We first assessed the underlying structure of positive gender and leader identities. As mentioned above, we used two subscales of CSES (i.e., public and private collective self-esteem components) for measuring the positivity of each social identity. Another subscale of CSES was used to measure one of our control variables, i.e., identity centrality. Thus, assessing the adequateness of combining the public and private components into a single factor (i.e., positive social identity) and assuring its discriminant validity with respect to a second factor (i.e., identity centrality) for each social identity was important. To do so, we first tested a two-factor model including all items (i.e., positive social identity and identity centrality) as a single underlying dimension for each social identity (i.e., gender and leader). Global fit indexes were as follows: $\chi^2(216) = 848.90$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .068, comparative fit index (CFI) = 1.00, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .069. Second, we compared the two-factor model to a four-factor one that included positive identity as one factor (i.e., that, as hypothesized, combined the public and private components of collective self-esteem) and identity centrality as a separate factor for each social identity. This model fit the data well ($\chi^2(210) = 605.85$, RMSEA = .054, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .057) and provided a significant improvement in fit over the two-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 243.05$, $\Delta df = 6$, $p < .001$). Third, we analyzed a six-factor alternative model that in addition separated positive identity into public and private

components (χ^2(202) = 739.68, RMSEA = .065, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .079). This model resulted in a significant decrease in fit over the four-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 133.83, Δdf = 8, $p <$ .001). These results indicate the appropriateness of grouping the identity items into positive identity and identity centrality, both for gender and leader identities.

Analogous confirmatory factor analyses of motivation to lead revealed that a model with two factors (χ^2(134) = 706.60, RMSEA = .082, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .070) resulted in a significantly better fit ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 771.15, Δdf =1, $p < .001$) than a one-factor model with affective and social-normative motivation to lead collapsed into one scale (χ^2(135) = 1,477.75, RMSEA = .125, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .098). These results indicate that the two components of motivation to lead should be analyzed separately.

We also conducted several tests to address the concerns of discriminant validity/bias and common method variance shared by the seven multiple-item latent variables. First, we performed Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) to examine whether a single factor could account for scale variance of the scales. More than one factor emerged, and the first factor accounted only for 16% of total variance. Moreover, a one-factor model demonstrated a poor fit to the data (χ^2(989) = 11,109.02, RMSEA = .13, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .11). Second, a seven-factor model (χ^2(968) = 3,138.27, RMSEA = .06, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .06) revealed that this model fit the data significantly better than the one-factor solution ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 7,970.93, Δdf = 21, $p < .001$). These results support the theoretical independence among our variables and imply that the measures represent seven distinct constructs (James, Mulaik, & Brett, 1982). Finally, following Podsakoff et al. (2003), we assessed an eight-factor model that comprised the seven theoretical factors plus an additional unmeasured latent method factor. Items were allowed to load on their theoretical constructs as well as on the common method factor. This alternative model (χ^2(924) = 3,108.89, RMSEA = .06, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .06) did not provide a significant improvement over the hypothesized seven-factor model

($\Delta\chi^2$ = 29.38, Δdf = 44, n.s.). All in all, these analyses indicate that common method variance

is not a major concern in these data.

Meade, Watson, and Kroustalis (2007) highlighted the importance of assessing

common method bias as opposed to common method variance, because common method bias

inflates the correlations among one-source measures. We addressed this concern by applying

the correlated uniqueness model technique (Marsh & Bailey, 1991) that allows the error terms

of latent variables to correlate. The results of this model (χ^2(760) = 2,400.59, RMSEA = .06,

CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .06) indicated that the average correlation among the constructs was .30.

The analogous correlation in the model that did not allow the errors to correlate was .32.

These results suggest that the common method bias in our measures is relatively small and

does not represent a challenge to the validity of the results.

Test of Hypotheses

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables appear in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Test of hypothesized structural model. When testing the hypothesized model

(Figure 1), the variance-covariance matrix was adjusted for measurement error as described

above. The residuals for affective and social-normative components of motivation to lead

were allowed to correlate because of their empirical and conceptual overlap (Chan &

Drasgow, 2001). Similarly, we allowed the residuals for (1) life satisfaction and stress; and

(2) positive gender identity and positive leader identity to correlate. Apart from the paths

specified in the hypothesized model (Figure 1), we set the paths from control variables to each

multi-item latent variable. Control variables included gender and leader identity centrality,

leadership self-efficacy, number of role models, number of female role models, education,

children, marital status, age, and number of employees in the organization. Overall, the model

provided an adequate fit to the data (χ^2(22) = 86.56, RMSEA = .069, CFI = .98, SRMR = .021). We used the model as a baseline for comparisons with a series of nested models to improve fit and to test our mediation hypotheses (MacKinnon et al., 2002).

Table 2 provides the results of these comparisons. In model 2, we excluded the paths from the proportion of women to positive gender identity and from leadership experience to positive leader identity. The model resulted in a significant worse fit to the data ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 17.48, Δdf = 2, p < .001). It implies that the indirect paths from the proportion of women and leadership experience to identity conflict through positive identities should be retained. Next, to test our hypotheses that positive gender and leader identities indirectly impact psychological and motivational outcomes through identity conflict, we added direct paths from positive gender identity (model 3) and positive leader identity (model 4) to each outcome variable (i.e., life satisfaction, stress, affective and social-normative motivation to lead). It may be that positive social identity leads to a more positive well-being (Lee & Robbins, 1998), irrespective of the extent to which women perceive their gender and leader identities to be in conflict. Model 3 resulted in a significantly improved fit over the baseline model ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 22.16, Δdf = 4, p < .001) and revealed that the direct path from positive gender identity to life satisfaction was positive and significant, indicating that this path should be retained. Model 4 also resulted in a significant fit improvement ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 29.69, Δdf = 4, p < .01). The added paths from positive leader identity to affective and social-normative motivation to lead were positive and significant, indicating that maintaining a positive view of leaders as a social category directly contributes to women's willingness to take on and persist in leadership roles.

In sum, the nested model comparison results indicated that the hypothesized model should be modified by adding direct paths from positive gender identity to life satisfaction and from positive leader identity to affective and social-normative components of motivation

to lead. The "best" fit model (model 5) includes these changes ($\chi^2(19) = 43.92$, RMSEA = .046, CFI = .99, SRMR = .014). Table 3 reports further information related to the mediation tests performed with this model, including detailed effects decompositions.

Insert Tables 2 and 3 and Figure 2 about here

Standardized estimates for this final model are presented in Figure 2. According to this model, in support to Hypotheses 1 and 2, identity conflict was associated negatively with life satisfaction (-.29, $p < .001$) and positively with stress (.37, $p < .001$). In support of Hypotheses 3 and 4, women who scored higher on identity conflict had lower scores on affective motivation to lead (-.14, $p < .001$) and higher scores on social-normative motivation to lead (.13, $p < .001$). Positive gender identity was negatively related to identity conflict (-.49, $p < .001$), in line with Hypothesis 5. In contrast, and contrary to Hypothesis 6, the coefficient of the path between positive leader identity and identity conflict, although in the hypothesized direction, was nonsignificant (-.07, n.s.).

In support of Hypothesis 7, positive gender identity meditated the effect of the proportional representation of women on identity conflict. In particular, women from more women-dominated organizations reported more positive gender identity (.13, $p < .001$). Moreover, the direct effect of the proportion of women on identity conflict (-.05, n.s.) was nonsignificant, while the indirect effect through positive gender identity was negative and significant (-.06; $p < .001$), suggesting full mediation. Finally, Hypothesis 8 stating that positive leader identity mediates the effect of leadership experience on identity conflict was not supported. Leadership experience was directly linked to identity conflict (-.13, $p < .05$), but the indirect effect through positive leader identity (.01, n.s.) was nonsignificant. The coefficient of the path between leadership experience and positive leader identity was nonsignificant either, although in the hypothesized direction (.08, n.s.).

In the final model, positive gender identity was linked to life satisfaction directly (.15, $p < .001$) and indirectly through identity conflict (.14, $p < .001$), thereby suggesting partial mediation. The indirect effects of positive gender identity through identity conflict were also significant for stress (-.18, $p < .001$), affective (.07, $p < .001$) and social-normative (-.07, $p < .01$) motivation to lead. These results, taken together with the fact that the direct effects of positive gender identity on these three outcome variables were nonsignificant in the nested model comparisons (Table 2), suggest full mediation through identity conflict.

In contrast, positive leader identity was directly linked to both affective (.14, $p < .001$) and social-normative (.19, $p < .001$) motivation to lead, while the indirect effects through identity conflict were nonsignificant (.01, n.s., and -.01, n.s., respectively), suggesting that identity conflict was not mediating the relationship between positive leader identity and these two dependent variables. In addition, the indirect effects of positive leader identity on life satisfaction and stress through identity conflict were nonsignificant (.02, n.s., and -.03, n.s., respectively). Together with the results of the nested model comparisons (Table 2) that the direct paths from positive leader identity to the measures of well-being should not be retained in the final model, these findings question the impact of positive leader identity on women's life satisfaction and stress.

In sum, the results on positive gender and leader identities suggest that appreciating leader identity increases women's desire to lead, but does not lower their identity conflict and does not affect their psychological well-being. On the other hand, holding a positive gender identity not only directly increases women's life satisfaction, but also affects it (as well as stress and motivation to lead) indirectly—by lowering the perceived conflict between their gender and leader identities.

The significant effects of control variables in the final model, not shown in Figure 2 for simplicity, were as follows: leadership self-efficacy was negatively related to identity

conflict (-.11, $p < .001$) and stress (-.26, $p < .001$), and positively related to life satisfaction (.10, $p < .01$), as well as affective (.42, $p < .001$) and social-normative (.19, $p < .001$) motivation to lead. Gender identity centrality was related to identity conflict (.15, $p < .001$), stress (.10, $p < .05$), and positive gender (.21, $p < .001$) and leader (-.12, $p < .01$) identities. Leader identity centrality was positively related to affective (.27, $p < .001$) and social-normative (.16, $p < .001$) motivation to lead. Age was negatively related to stress (-.03, $p < .01$) and affective motivation to lead (-.01, $p < .05$). Having children was positively related to life satisfaction (.41, $p < .001$) and positive gender (.14, $p < .05$) and leader (.18, $p < .01$) identities. Finally, the number of female role models was positively related to social-normative motivation to lead (.11, $p < .01$). The amount of variance explained was 36% for identity conflict, 25% for life satisfaction, 30% for stress, 43% for affective motivation to lead, and 17% for social-normative motivation to lead.

Tests of alternative structural models. Finally, we conducted a series of additional model comparisons to determine whether structural models with alternative causal relations among our variables could fit the data better than the best model. We used the final model (model 5 in Table 2) as a baseline for these comparisons, the results of which are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

In model 2, we tested the possibility that motivation to lead was an antecedent rather than a consequence of identity conflict. This model included the paths from affective and social-normative components of motivation to lead to identity conflict. The alternative model did not provide a better fit to the data than the final model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 2.97$, $\Delta df = 2$, n.s.), and none of the two added paths was significant. Model 3 tested the possibility that psychological well-being was the cause of identity conflict and not a consequence, as hypothesized. This

model did not provide an improvement to the final model either ($\Delta\chi^2 = 0.60$, $\Delta df = 2$, n.s.), and the added paths were nonsignificant. These results support Hypotheses 1-4 that identity conflict is an antecedent to life satisfaction, stress, and motivation to lead.

Model 4 further explored the hypothesized channeling effect of identity conflict between the antecedents and the outcome variables of our theoretical model. In this model, we included identity conflict, positive gender and leader identities, the proportion of women, and leadership experience as direct antecedents of the four outcome variables. This model demonstrated a poor fit to the data ($\chi^2(10) = 221.38$, RMSEA = .184, CFI = .93, SRMR = .047). These results provide overall support to the final model (Figure 2).

General Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the antecedents and the consequences of women leaders' identity conflict that occurs when women perceive an incongruity between their gender and leader identities. We hypothesized and found that identity conflict is not only associated with more stress and lower life satisfaction, but also causes women to construe leading as a duty as opposed to a goal which they are motivated to attain. In particular, identity conflict undermines women's affective motivation to lead, but enhances their sense of duty to assume leadership roles. Furthermore, our results highlight the importance of holding a positive gender identity for women's well-being and leadership motivation. We found that unlike positive *leader* identity, positive *gender* identity increases women leaders' life satisfaction and reduces their identity conflict, thereby indirectly further affecting women's well-being and willingness to take on and persist in leadership roles. Our results also revealed that positive gender identity fully mediated the effect of women's proportional representation in the organization on their identity interference. Finally, leadership experience directly reduced women leaders' identity conflict, and the effect was not mediated by the positivity of leader identity. Our results contribute to several streams of literature.

Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to the growing literature on identity in organizational studies by advancing knowledge about the challenges that women leaders face when developing their leader identities. As such, this research takes a step toward addressing recent calls to better understand the interplay of leadership identity development and gender processes (Ely et al., 2011). Although attitudinal barriers to women's advancement to leadership positions (Ely & Rhode, 2010) have attracted scholars' attention, little empirical research has examined how women leaders conceive of themselves as women and leaders, and how this affects their lives. Our research is among the first empirical efforts to document women leaders' identity conflict and to examine its effect on women's psychological well-being and professional motivation.

Our findings that women leaders' identity conflict increases their stress and lowers their life satisfaction extend current knowledge regarding the interplay of multiple identities and psychological outcomes (e.g., Brook et al., 2008; Settles, 2004) and are consistent with the previously documented link between norm-incongruent behaviors and negative affect (Higgins, 1989; Wood, Christensen, Hebl, & Rothgerber, 1997). As one of the women in our sample indicated, "*It seems to me that to stand out in a man's world, women have to compensate for their gender with outstanding performance every single time. It is good in the sense that women get better and better [in] what they do, but, on the other hand, it is extremely tiring...*"

Importantly, by making a step toward understanding the role of positive social identities in the process of identity work, this research provides a valuable contribution to the rapidly growing body of literature on positive social identities in the organizational context (e.g., Dutton et al., 2010; Roberts & Dutton, 2009). We theorized and found supportive evidence that holding a positive gender identity helps women leaders to integrate the potentially conflicting identities of woman and leader into their self-concept. Our results show

that the effect of positive *gender* identity is not symmetric to the effect of positive *leader* identity.

In particular, we found that positive leader identity is directly linked to motivation to lead, but does not relate either directly or indirectly—through identity conflict—to women leaders' well-being. This suggests that while appreciating the belonging to the social category of leaders may translate into more leadership ambition, it does not relieve women from the internal conflicts that they may experience due to conflicting personal and professional identities. In contrast, our results revealed that holding a more positive gender identity reduces women leaders' perceived conflict between their self-views as women and leaders. Thus, cultivating and maintaining a positive gender identity helps women leaders to improve their well-being not only directly, but also indirectly—by reducing identity conflict. Moreover, positive gender identity also indirectly, through identity conflict, impacts women's motivation to lead. By reducing identity conflict, a more positive gender identity increases the joy of leading and decreases the sense of obligation to do so.

While these findings are consistent with previous research on the protective effect of positive social identities against, for example, perceived discrimination (Corning, 2002), to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to document the effect of women's positive gender identity on the perceived conflict between their personal and professional roles. Moreover, these findings contribute to the literature on multiple identities (e.g., Deaux, 1993) that suggests that the hierarchy of an individual's identities may play a role in how s/he perceives internal identity conflicts and the strategies s/he may use to reconcile them. Our results indicate that ascribed identities (e.g., gender identity) may be more powerful to protect an individual's self-view than acquired identities (e.g., leader identity).

This research also represents a step toward theoretically integrating attitudinal and structural barriers to women's advancement in organizations (Ely et al., 2011). Previous

research has shown that women's underrepresentation in the upper echelons of organizations is an important factor for understanding women's workplace experiences (Ely, 1994). We provide a valuable contribution to the literature on gender processes and organizational demography by documenting a link between women's proportional representation across all levels of an organization and women leaders' identity conflict. Furthermore, we theorized and found that positive gender identity mediates the effect of women's proportional representation in organizations on their identity conflict. These results support the idea that interactions with others—across all levels of the organization—play a significant role in the development of the leader's identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Ibarra, 1999). Our finding that women leaders experience more identity conflict in more male-dominated organizations is also consistent with the literature on stereotype threat. Women are less likely to express an interest in assuming a leadership role after being reminded of general female stereotypes (Daviers, Spencer, & Steele, 2005). Our results indicate that in male-dominated organizations, women leaders may more often be "reminded" of the incongruity between their professional and gender roles. It has been suggested that because others may see women's leadership attempts as less legitimate and thus accept them less, women may find it more difficult to develop self-concepts as leaders (Eagly, 2005; Ridgeway, 2003). Our result that the proportion of women in the organization is linked to women leaders' identity conflict implies that for women, the road of developing a self-concept as a leader may be especially bumpy in the environments where women are numerically underrepresented.

Our research provides additional contributions to the leadership literature. First, by showing that leadership experience helps women to integrate their multiple identities, we expand the body of knowledge regarding the development of professional identities (Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Day & Harrison, 2007; Ibarra, 1999; Lord & Hall, 2005) and the search for an optimal balance between personal and professional identities (e.g., Kreiner, Hollensbe, &

Sheep, 2006). Second, our research extends the understanding of the antecedents of motivation to lead (e.g., Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). We theorized and found that identity conflict is negatively associated with women's affective motivation to lead. We also showed that identity conflict increases women's social-normative motivation to lead—that is, the feeling of duty to attain and persist in leadership positions.

The latter finding implies that women who are aware of gender-related barriers may be motivated to alter the status quo, possibly to facilitate career advancement for future generations of women. While further research will enable a deeper understanding of specific duty-related motives of women to lead, this result is consistent with women leading in a more transformational style (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001) that includes striving to become a role model (Bass, 1998). Importantly, future longitudinal studies should address the question of whether duty-related motivation to lead is sufficient to guarantee one's long-term persistence in a leadership role. Our conjecture is that leaders who do not enjoy the act of leading are more likely to vacate their positions, even if they feel the responsibility to persist.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is subject to limitations that point toward directions for future research. First, because our focus was on intrapersonal processes and perceptions, addressing common method variance/bias was particularly important. The results of several tests we conducted in order to assure the validity of our conclusions suggest that common method variance/bias is not a serious concern in our data. Moreover, the measures of two antecedents of identity conflict (i.e., leadership experience and the proportion of women) were, arguably, not perceptual. Nevertheless, future studies could further explore women leaders' identity conflict by using multiple sources to assess, for example, women's motivation to lead and job performance. One additional concern is the cross-sectional design of the study. Although our analyses showed that structural models with alternative causal relations among our variables

fit the data worse than our final model, one cannot rule out completely the existence of equivalent causal models for the data (MacCallum et al., 1993). Further longitudinal studies should improve our understanding of antecedents and consequences of women leaders' identity conflict by exploring, for example, the interplay between leadership experience and women leaders' identity conflict.

Second, the response rate to the survey was somewhat low (although consistent with response rates in similar populations, Cycyota & Harrison, 2006), potentially limiting the generalizability of our results. It is possible that women experiencing more gender-related challenges at the workplace were more responsive to our invitation to participate in a study on "female leadership challenges." However, the scores of woman/leader identity conflict that 90% of our participants reported were distributed in the lower 2/3 of the identity conflict scale, thereby indicating that the sample is not skewed by participants with extreme perceptions of the incongruity between their gender and professional identities.

Third, this study focused only on the identity conflict of women. It would be interesting to examine whether men in occupations traditionally considered "feminine," such as nursing, elementary school teaching, and social work, also experience identity conflict and what role their gender-related self-esteem plays in their identity processes. While men in gender-atypical occupations often enjoy hidden advantages—such as rapid advancement to higher-status positions (Williams, 1992), they may also face a negative reaction from other men (Zimmer, 1988). Future studies can address men's own view on the combination of their gender and professional identities.

Furthermore, while we adopted the view that the process of claiming and granting a leader identity happens in social interactions across all levels within the organization (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) and thus operationalized organizational demography as the overall proportion of women in the organization, the representation of women among those holding

senior positions is also crucial for the development of women's identity as leaders (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007). Previous research has shown that in male-dominated organizations, women may find it more difficult to identify with appropriate role models, and this may signal to women that their gender identity is incompatible with the values of the organization (Ely, 1994). Future studies should specifically investigate how the representation of women at different hierarchical levels relates to women leaders' identity conflict.

Finally, we focused on identity positivity as an antecedent of identity conflict and explored how identity positivity is shaped by leadership experience and organizational demography. Future research should examine other individual and organizational characteristics that may exacerbate or mitigate women leaders' identity conflict. For example, the extent to which women hold traditional gender role beliefs can be explored as a potential moderator.

Practical Implications

Our research offers valuable practical insights for women's advancement in organizations. It suggests that organizations that commit to developing and retaining female talent should consider not only interpersonal attitudes toward female leaders, but also intrapersonal processes related to women leaders' self-perception. Our results imply that holding a positive gender identity is fundamental to the developmental task of integrating the leadership role into women's self-definitions. In this light, understanding how current organizational practices may affect women leaders' gender identity is particularly important. For example, our results support the importance of mentoring practices. We believe that establishing formal mentoring programs will not only provide psychological support to women leaders and leaders-to-be (Noe, 1988), but also convey the value that the organizations place on their female contributors. Our results imply that such interventions will be especially effective in organizations where women are a numerical minority.

In addition, organizations may be better off by paying attention to the informal practices that signal how leadership is implicitly defined within the organizations and to whether this definition contains or not gendered elements. For example, it would be desirable to pay attention to language and symbols used to define successful leadership performance and to have low organizational tolerance for humor that implicitly delegitimizes women's leadership attempts. Minimizing such practices is likely to have a beneficial effect on the positivity of women's gender identity that, as we showed, has important consequences of women's leadership motivation and well-being. Moreover, women's leadership motivation may be enhanced if organizations emphasize the valuable characteristics of leaders that are compatible with women's self-schemas. Recent theories on leadership note the importance of such "female" interpersonal qualities as collaboration, care, inspiration, and interpersonal sensitivity (Ely & Rhode, 2010). The ideas behind transformational and authentic leadership further suggest that effective leaders provide individualized support to their followers and encourage their personal and professional development (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), and such behaviors concord with stereotypically feminine behaviors (Vinkenburg, van Engen, Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2011).

This research also has important implications for job design strategies. In particular, it suggests that structuring positions such that women have more direct contact with other women, both within and outside of their organization, may enhance women's well-being and their motivation to assume leadership tasks. Our research thus supports the importance of positions' social characteristics and in particular of relational job design that scholars have recently emphasized (e.g., Grant & Parker, 2009).

Moreover, our results suggest that in leadership development executive education programs, a combined approach—with both single-sex and co-educational sessions—may work best to catalyze women leaders' identity work. Given that self-esteem derived from

social memberships comprises both private and public components (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), the link that we demonstrated between identity conflict, positive gender identity, and proportional representation of women in organizations implies that to facilitate women leaders' identity work, both women-only (Debebe, 2011; Ely et al., 2011) and co-educational sessions are instrumental. Co-educational sessions may help women to cultivate the feeling of acceptance by others (not only by women but also by men) and thus allow for a more comprehensive development of their leader identity.

Finally, this study has important implications for counseling and coaching practices. Our results emphasize the importance of cultivating and maintaining self-esteem related to gender identity to diminish identity conflict. Thus, successful coaching interventions should not only address specific leadership skills but also explore clients' perceptions of the fit of their gender identity at work. Our findings suggest that any action that aims to increase women leaders' professional effectiveness but potentially reduces the positivity of their gender identity may have undesirable effects on their psychological well-being and professional motivation.

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TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics

	Variable	Mean	SD	Correlations																
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1	Identity conflict	2.92	3.88	(.71)																	
2	Positive gender identity	2.57	3.17	**-.39**	(.73)																
3	Positive leader identity	2.73	2.74	**-.24**	**.32**	(.75)															
4	Proportion of women in the organization	2.93	0.85	**-.14**	**.14**	.03	-														
5	Leadership experience (years)	9.45	7.26	**-.15**	.07	**.11**	**.12**	-													
6	Life satisfaction	5.04	5.88	**-.32**	**.27**	**.19**	.06	**.11**	(.89)												
7	Stress	3.41	3.28	**.34**	**-.20**	**-.20**	-.01	**-.19**	**-.53**	(.80)											
8	Affective motivation to lead	5.26	7.98	**-.22**	**.12**	**.34**	.00	**.15**	**.18**	**-.21**	(.84)										
9	Social-normative motivation to lead	4.64	6.99	.02	.02	**.20**	-.04	.02	**.14**	-.06	**.31**	(.71)									
10	Gender identity centrality	4.90	4.87	.03	**.13**	.03	.08	-.02	-.01	.05	.05	.04	(.71)								
11	Leader identity centrality	4.48	4.93	.07	**-.10**	**.28**	-.04	.04	-.02	.01	**.29**	**.21**	**.26**	(.81)							
12	Leadership self-efficacy	5.51	6.10	**-.21**	**.20**	**.27**	.05	**.27**	**.19**	**-.33**	**.48**	**.19**	**.10**	**.13**	(.90)						
13	Role models	3.05	2.66	-.02	-.07	.06	.04	.02	**.09**	-.05	.03	.00	.01	.04	-.04	-					
14	Female role models	0.82	1.09	-.01	-.01	-.00	**.11**	**-.11**	.06	-.00	-.04	.06	**.09**	.03	**-.10**	**.58**	-				
15	Education	3.16	1.00	-.07	.03	.03	.00	.07	-.03	-.03	.01	.01	-.04	-.02	.01	.01	.03	-			
16	Children (0/1)	0.94	1.11	-.02	.03	.07	.04	**.27**	**.23**	-.01	.06	.05	.07	.05	.06	.01	-.06	-.02	-		
17	Marital status	1.86	0.57	-.02	.01	.03	.07	**.21**	**.09**	-.01	**.08**	.05	-.03	.05	**.10**	.01	-.04	.03	**.32**	-	
18	Age	40.63	7.84	**-.10**	.06	.04	**.11**	**.75**	**.09**	**-.18**	.06	-.01	-.05	-.02	**.22**	-.00	**-.10**	**.11**	**.33**	**.24**	-
19	Number of employees	6.70	2.33	.04	.05	.07	**-.34**	**-.12**	-.01	-.00	.04	.02	-.01	.04	.03	-.01	.00	-.07	-.03	-.04	**-.11**

Note. $N = 638$. Significant correlation coefficients ($p < .05$) are in **bold**. Among these, correlations greater than .10 in absolute magnitude are significant at $p < .01$; correlations greater than .13 in absolute magnitude are significant at $p < .001$. Reliability estimates (coefficient omega) appear across the diagonal in parentheses.

TABLE 2

Comparisons of Nested Structural Models

Model	χ^2	*df*	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	Comparison to Model 1	
						$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
1 Hypothesized Model	86.65	22	0.98	.069	.021	-	-
2 Hypothesized Model without the paths from proportion of women in the organization to positive gender identity and from leadership experience to positive leader identity	104.13	24	0.98	.073	.023	17.48***	2
3 Hypothesized Model with four additional paths: from positive gender identity to (1) life satisfaction, (2) stress, (3) affective motivation to lead, and (4) social-normative motivation to lead	64.49	18	0.99	.064	.017	22.16***	4
4 Hypothesized Model with four additional paths: from positive leader identity to (1) life satisfaction, (2) stress, (3) affective motivation to lead, and (4) social-normative motivation to lead	56.96	18	0.99	.059	.014	29.69***	4
5 Final Model, Hypothesized with three additional paths: from positive gender identity to life satisfaction and from positive leader identity to (1) affective and (2) social-normative motivation to lead (*Figure 2*)	43.92	19	0.99	.046	.014	42.73***	3

Note. $N = 638$; *** $p < .001$; χ^2 = chi-square statistic; *df* = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.

TABLE 3

Standardized Effects Decomposition

	Independent Variable (IV)	Mediating Variable	Dependent Variable (DV)	Direct effect of IV on DV	Indirect effect of IV on DV	Total effect of IV on DV	Degree of mediation
1	Proportion of Women in the Organization	Positive Gender Identity	Identity Conflict	-.05	-.06***	-.12**	Full
2	Leadership Experience	Positive Leader Identity	Identity Conflict	-.13*	-.01	-.13**	None
3	Positive Gender Identity	Identity Conflict	Life Satisfaction	.15***	.14***	.30***	Partial
4	Positive Gender Identity	Identity Conflict	Stress	-	-.18***	-.18***	Full
5	Positive Gender Identity	Identity Conflict	Affective Motivation to Lead	-	.07***	.07***	Full
6	Positive Gender Identity	Identity Conflict	Social-Normative Motivation to Lead	-	-.07**	-.07**	Full
7	Positive Leader Identity	Identity Conflict	Life Satisfaction	-	.02	.02	None
8	Positive Leader Identity	Identity Conflict	Stress	-	-.03	-.03	None
9	Positive Leader Identity	Identity Conflict	Affective Motivation to Lead	.14***	.01	.15***	None
10	Positive Leader Identity	Identity Conflict	Social-Normative Motivation to Lead	.19***	-.01	.18***	None

Note. $N = 638$; entries are standardized beta coefficients; *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

TABLE 4

Comparisons of Alternative Models with Different Causal Relationships

Model		χ^2	df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	Comparison to Model 1		
							$\Delta\chi^2$		Δdf
1	Final Model (*Figure 2*)	43.92	19	0.99	.046	.014	-		-
2	Model 1 with two additional paths: from affective and social-normative motivation to lead to identity conflict	40.95	17	0.99	.047	.014	2.74	n.s.	2
3	Model 1 with two additional paths: from life satisfaction and stress to identity conflict	43.32	17	0.99	.050	.014	0.58	n.s.	2
4	Proportion of women in the organization, leadership experience, identity conflict, and positive gender and leader identities are direct antecedents of the four dependent variable	221.38	10	0.93	.184	.047	-		-

Note. $N = 638$; χ^2 = chi-square statistic; df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.
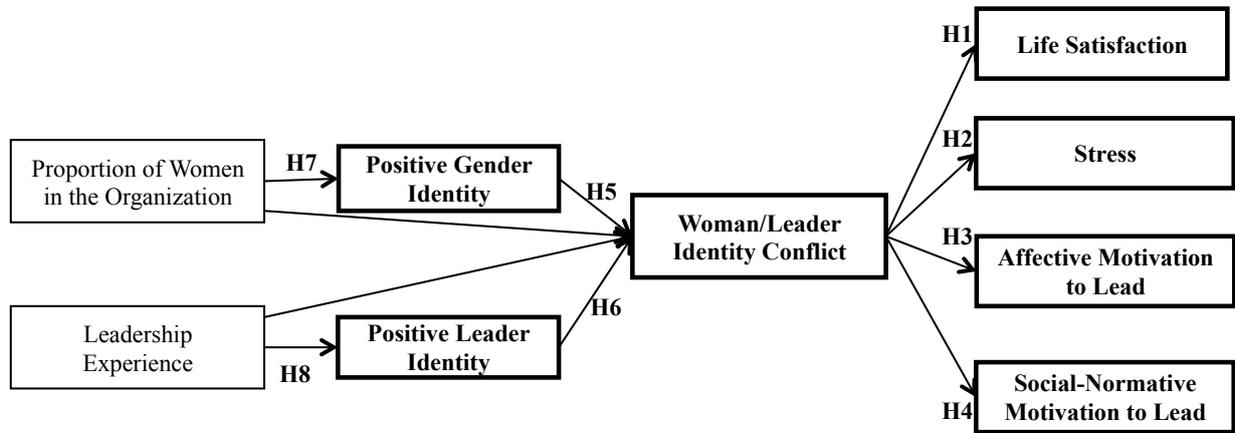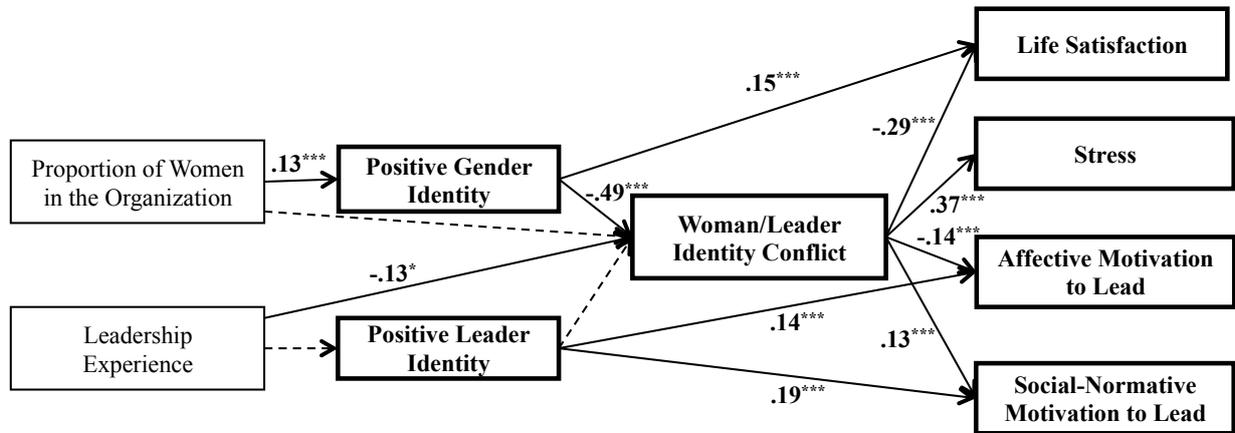
FIGURE 1

Hypothesized Model

FIGURE 2

Standardized Solution for Final Structural Equation Model

Note. *N* = 638. Standardized estimates are reported. Results are with control variables in the model and correcting for measurement error. Control variables include gender and leader identity centralities, leadership self-efficacy, role models, female role models, education, children, marital status, age, and number of employees in the organization. Dashed lines represent nonsignificant paths. All other paths are significant (*** *p* < .001; * *p* < .05).

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