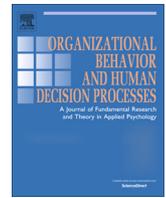




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Me, a woman and a leader: Positive social identity and identity conflict

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on women leaders' self-views as women and leaders and explores consequences of *positive social identity* (i.e., positive evaluation of the social category in question) for women in leadership positions. We hypothesized that holding positive gender and leader identities reduced perceived conflict between women's gender and leader identities and thereby resulted in favorable psychological and motivational consequences. Studies 1 and 2 revealed that *positive gender identity* indeed reduced women leaders' identity conflict. In Study 3, we found that by lessening identity conflict, *positive gender identity* reduced stress, increased life satisfaction, and caused women to construe leading more as an attractive goal than a duty. In contrast, *positive leader identity* directly affected women's motivation to lead, but did not reduce their identity conflict. Overall, these results emphasize the protective role of women's positive gender identity for their advancement in organizations and leader identity development.

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"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]

Introduction

As this comment of an anonymous participant of our study suggests, women leaders have to navigate between the requirements of their work and personal roles, which at times may be neither easy nor pleasant. Scholars have long noted that holding a healthy sense of self helps to deal with competing role requirements (e.g., Dixon & Baumeister, 1991; Niedenthal, Setterlund, & Wherry, 1992). In parallel, a fast-growing body of leadership literature acknowledges that integrating a leader identity into one's overall self-concept is essential for leadership development (e.g., Ibarra, Snook, & Guillén Ramo, 2010; Lord & Hall, 2005), and, consequently, intrapersonal processes need to be taken into account to understand the emergence of 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 at exploring these issues.

To do so, we focus on women leaders' self-views linked to their gender and leader identities. We build on the growing literature on the role of *positive social identities* in organizations (e.g., Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010) and explore the consequences of women leaders' favorable evaluations of their membership in the social categories of women and leaders on their psychological well-being and motivation to lead. We propose that the effects of positive gender and leader identities are better understood when considered together with a yet another identity aspect—*identity conflict*, which occurs when women leaders perceive an incongruity between being a leader and being a woman (Settles, 2004; Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981; see also Biddle, 1986). We suggest that the perceived conflict between the two identities mediates the effect of positive gender and leader identities on psychological and motivational outcomes. In particular, we propose that holding a favorable regard for the social categories of women and leaders prevents women from construing the gender and leader roles as incompatible and thereby increases women's well-being and causes them to perceive leading as an attractive goal as opposed to a duty.

To test our hypotheses, we first verified the link between positive social identities and identity conflict in a survey and an experiment, both using samples of women leaders and leaders-to-be. We then used data from a large sample of women leaders who represent a diverse range of industries and countries. Our research provides novel results that contribute to the leadership literature in several ways. First, we integrate the ideas of leadership identity

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and gender dynamics thereby filling a critical gap in the leadership literature (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). This is important because while much has been written on the benefits of positive self-concept, findings obtained from broad samples may not be applicable to women leaders who face a unique set of demands (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002). Second, we contribute to the research on leader identity by demonstrating that the positivity of women leaders' social identities plays an important role in women's psychological adjustment to the requirements of their professional and personal life. Third, we advance our understanding of the mechanisms through which positive social identity affects life and work outcomes. In particular, our results emphasize the importance of cultivating and maintaining a positive gender identity to diminish identity conflict. We present our conceptual model in Fig. 1 and develop our hypotheses in detail below.

Social identities

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. In this paper, we focus on two social categories: women and leaders. Leader identity is linked to an achieved state (i.e., "leader") and, applying Tajfel's (1982) definition of social identity, refers to the part of one's self-concept related to his/her membership in the social category of leaders. Gender identity is based on an ascribed characteristic and refers to the part of one's self-concept shared with other individuals of the same gender. Importantly, gender identity is to be distinguished from sex identity, which is determined by one's biological characteristics. In contrast, gender identity is linked to cultural expectations of beliefs, behavior, and feeling states associated with male and female social categories (e.g., Deaux & Stewart, 2001; Ely & Padavic, 2007).

Numerous researchers have argued that social identity is a multidimensional concept that includes such attributes as self-categorization (i.e., identifying self as a member of a particular social category), evaluation (i.e., the positive or negative attitude toward the social category in question, or positive–negative valence of the social category), importance (i.e., the degree of importance of a particular social identity to the overall self-concept), and content (i.e., the extent to which traits and dispositions associated with the social category are endorsed by the individual as self-descriptive) (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; see also Deaux, 1996; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Jackson & Smith, 1999; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998).

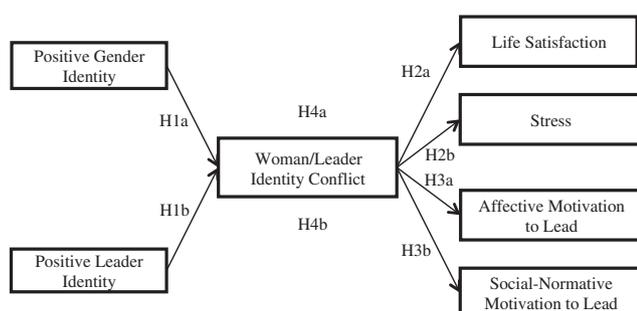


Fig. 1. Hypothesized Model.

Taking women's gender identity as an example, these attributes mean the following (Ashmore et al., 2004): self-categorization into "women" (as opposed to "men") arguably happens automatically, importance is determined by the extent to which being a woman is central to the individual's overall sense of self, content includes self-attributed characteristics, as represented, for example, by various measures of femininity and masculinity (e.g., Bem, 1974), and evaluation refers to the extent to which women hold a favorable regard for women as a social category. The evaluative attribute of social identities has been evoked as an important source of individuals' self-esteem (e.g., Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Hogg, Abrams, Otten, & Hinkle, 2004), a shield against perceived discrimination and distressful events (e.g., Corning, 2002), as well as a trigger of positive outcomes for individuals in organizations (e.g., Dutton et al., 2010). We next theorize on the effect of positive evaluations of social identities for women leaders.

Positive social identities

Ashmore et al. (2004: 86) suggested that "conceptualizing social identities as varying on a dimension of positive to negative evaluation or favorability" is "perhaps the simplest way to think about identity."¹ Crocker and Luhtanen (1990) echoed this idea by indicating that the evaluation of one's social identities is an important attribute of social identification. Indeed, individuals are fundamentally motivated to hold positive social identities (Gecas, 1982), and holding a favorable regard for a social identity in question is a straightforward way to instantiate a positive social identity (Dutton et al., 2010; Roberts & Dutton, 2009). We thus define the *positivity of one's social identity* in terms of positive–negative valence of one's affective and evaluative judgment of the social category in question (Ashmore et al., 2004; Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Sellers et al., 1998).

There are two interrelated components of positive evaluations of a given social category (Ashmore et al., 2004; Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Dutton et al., 2010; Sellers et al., 1998). The first is one's own evaluation of the social identity. The more favorable judgment people make about their membership in a given social category (e.g., "I am glad to be a woman"), the more positive their social identity. The second component is related to the favorability judgments that one perceives others to hold about the social category in question (e.g., "Others respect women"). The inclusion of the second component is important because others' attitudes toward an individual affect identity development (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959), and social acceptance is a necessary element for shaping one's self-view as a member of a social category (e.g., Bartel & Dutton, 2001; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). The two components of positive evaluations of a given social category have been referred to as private and public components or private and public regard (e.g., Ashmore et al., 2004; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Sellers et al., 1998). The public and private components are often positively correlated, except for stigmatized racial identities (e.g., Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Sellers et al., 1998). Thus, our definition of positive social identity implies that the more favorable evaluation of the social category of women (leaders) an individual holds, the more positive her gender (leader) identity, and the more self-esteem she derives from it.

Identity conflict

While holding multiple identities that one perceives as complementary increases well-being (e.g., Dixon & Baumeister, 1991;

¹ Ashmore et al. (2004) also emphasized that the evaluative element of a social identity should not be confused with the importance of the identity to the overall self-concept, since a person may hold a favorable view of an identity without acknowledging it as being centrally important to the definition of self and vice versa.

Niedenthal et al., 1992), the perceived dissonance between the meanings of different identities that one holds may be threatening and difficult to handle (e.g., Brook, Garcia, & Fleming, 2008; Coverman, 1989; Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi, & Cree, 2004; Settles, 2004). The perceived conflict between being a woman and being a leader 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, & Diekmann, 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; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002; Schein, 1973, 2001). Consequently, 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 & 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 these 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?”

Protective role of positive social identities

We propose that the more positive gender and leader identities women hold, the less likely they are to perceive these identities as conflicting. There are several reasons for why identity positivity may alleviate identity conflict. In general, having a positive social identity helps individuals to maintain an overall self-perception of worth (Hogg et al., 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, which enables him/her to better 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 and 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, in turn, should reduce the feeling that their gender and leader identities conflict.

Hypothesis 1a. Positive gender identity is negatively associated with woman/leader identity conflict.

Hypothesis 1b. Positive leader identity is negatively associated with woman/leader identity conflict.

Experiencing identity conflict prevents individuals from feeling authentic (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997) and is associated with negative psychological outcomes (e.g., Brook et al., 2008; Downie et al., 2004) and lower motivation to persist in the conflicting role (Dutton et al., 2010; Steele, 1997). Next, we develop in more detail the hypotheses on how identity conflict is linked to women leaders’ psychological well-being and motivation to lead.

Consequences of identity conflict

Psychological outcomes

Previous research suggests that the perceived conflict between the different identities that one holds can lead to diminished well-being. For example, Settles (2004) showed that perceived conflict between personal and professional identities lead to lower well-being among women scientists. Downie et al. (2004) studied multicultural individuals in Canada and reported a negative effect of perceived incompatibility between individuals’ heritage culture and Canadian culture on self-reported and peer-reported psychological well-being. In a study by Brook et al. (2008), university students who were asked to consider conflicts between their multiple social identities (related to gender, race/ethnicity, politics, nationality, sports teams, work, social/academic clubs and social roles such as student, sibling, parent, employee, friend, and others) also reported lower well-being. Similarly, based on qualitative interviews of employed married couples, Simon (1995) suggested that perceived conflict between work and family roles might explain differences in well-being between spouses.

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). Building on the literature cited above, 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. Further arguments support this assertion. 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 in turn may trigger stress reactions. Second, role-accumulation literature suggests that integrating professional and personal roles (e.g., parent and spouse roles) should enhance women's self-acceptance, self-esteem, and life-satisfaction (Ruderman et al., 2002), while perceived conflict between roles should be associated with greater depression and poorer health (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Coverman, 1989; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1997) and lower overall life satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). This reasoning implies that identity conflict may increase women leaders' stress and reduce their global judgments of life satisfaction.

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

Hypothesis 2b. Woman/leader identity conflict is positively associated with stress.

Motivational outcomes

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, if these rewards are insufficient to compensate for the negative effect of identity conflict, the latter should reduce job involvement, as the work-family conflict literature suggests (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998), and make women more reluctant to assume leadership roles and 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.

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" and has shown to be related to positive job outcomes such as leadership potential ratings (Chan & Drasgow, 2001). Once in leadership roles or when aspiring to become a leader, individuals want to be perceived as leaders, both by others and by themselves (Schlenker, 1986; Swann, 1990), and thus may make efforts to display behaviors associated with leadership (Lord & Brown, 2004). However, motivation to lead may have different underlying nature. In particular, 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. Because one's self-view and perceptions of what leading entails affect the willingness to assume and persist in leadership roles (Lord & Maher, 1993), women leaders'

identity conflict is likely to be an important antecedent of both components of motivation to lead.

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, as pointed out above, 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, gender identity has lower mobility than leader identity whereby excluding the *acquired* social identity of leader from the sense of self is more feasible than excluding the *ascribed* gender identity. Indeed, identity theory suggests 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). Thus, if women construe leadership behaviors as "inappropriate" for women, i.e., as behaviors that result in an internal conflict, they will find less pleasure in the act of leading and thus will be less willing to commit to their leader identity. Furthermore, when individuals' self-image is congruent with their perception of behaviors and characteristics of leaders, they are more likely to see themselves as leaders (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) and report more positive affect when leading (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2010). We therefore expect identity conflict to reduce the positive affect that women associate with leading.

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

Social-normative motivation to lead. We further suggest that identity conflict may make women construe leading as a duty and thus increase 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) postulating 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 (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 prominent interdependent 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). An interdependent self strives to further the interests of his/her social group as opposed to focusing solely on individual goals (Singelis, 1994) and feels more capable of effecting a noticeable social change through his/her actions (Cojuharenco, Cornelissen, & Karelaia, 2014). 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 3b. Woman/leader identity conflict is positively associated with social-normative motivation to lead.

In sum, we hypothesize that positive social identity of women leaders reduces their identity conflict, and that identity conflict in turn is linked to various psychological and motivational outcomes. Implicit to this line of reasoning is the mediating role of identity conflict in explaining why positive social identity of women leaders should be expected to have psychological and motivational consequences, and thus we propose:

Hypothesis 4a. Identity conflict mediates the relationship between positive gender identity and (a) life satisfaction, (b) stress, (c) affective motivation to lead, and (d) social-normative motivation to lead.

Hypothesis 4b. Identity conflict mediates the relationship between positive leader identity and (a) life satisfaction, (b) stress, (c) affective motivation to lead, and (d) social-normative motivation to lead.

Overview of studies

We conducted three studies to test our hypotheses. In Study 1, we collected data from a sample of women leaders and leaders-to-be to test the relationship between how positively women view their gender and leader identities and how much identity conflict they experience. We found that only positive gender identity, and not positive leader identity, was negatively related to women's identity conflict. To further test for the protective role of positive gender identity, we run Study 2 in which we experimentally manipulated the extent to which women saw their gender identity as positive and assessed the effect of this manipulation on identity conflict. We found that women who were induced to think positively about their gender identity reported less conflict between being a woman and being a leader than women who were induced to think about negative aspects of their gender identity. Finally, in Study 3, we collected a large sample of data from women in leadership positions to test all hypothesized paths in our model (Fig. 1), i.e., to assess both the antecedents and the consequences of identity conflict. The data provided support for our hypotheses regarding psychological and motivational outcomes of identity conflict. As for the antecedents of identity conflict, the results were consistent with Studies 1 and 2, such that positive gender identity was negatively linked to identity conflict, while the effect of positive leader identity on identity conflict was more ambiguous.

Study 1

In Study 1, we tested a fundamental part of our model: our goal was to verify the hypothesized link between women's positive social identities and their identity conflict. To do so, we collected data from a sample of women leaders and leaders-to-be.

Method

Procedure and sample

We sent email invitations to 1278 women alumni of a major business school to participate in an on-line survey. Complete responses were received from 109 women. This implies a response rate of approximately 9%, which is comparable with other studies surveying executives (Cycyota & Harrison, 2006). The survey was in English, which was also the language of all programs the women had graduated from.² Participants were between 26 and 62 years old ($M_{age} = 36.55$, $SD_{age} = 7.74$); 33% had children; 61% were married or lived with a partner. Respondents who were unemployed at the time of the survey (7%) were asked to consider the last organization in which they had worked. The women had an average of 13.35 years of working experience ($SD = 8.38$) and 6.83 years of managerial experience ($SD = 7.25$). Fifty-six percent of the participants were in middle or senior executive management positions, 31% were first-level managers, and the remaining 13% reported occupying other positions. An average number of direct reports per participant was 6 ($SD = 17$). Eighty-nine percent of the participants had at least a master degree. The sample was diverse in terms of countries of origin (37) and countries of residence (32; 40% residing in Europe, 19% in the USA and Canada, 25% in Asia). Industry-wise, the sample was also diverse, with 7% coming from manufacturing, 18% from professional services (e.g., accounting, consulting, law), 19% from services (e.g., travel, banking, food), 15% from technology and communications, 12% from consumer goods, 6% from government, educational, and non-profit organizations, and 4% from media and entertainment, among others. Participants were representing small (up to 500 employees; 31%), medium (between 501 and 25,000 employees; 45%), and large companies (more than 25,000 employees; 24%), with only 22% of all companies having more than 50% of women across all levels.

Measures

Because we focus on the intrapersonal processes and perceptual variables as seen and experienced by women, the women themselves are best suited to report their *perception* of identity positivity and identity conflict. Thus, given the objectives of this study, it is particularly appropriate to use self-report measures (Conway & Lance, 2010; Spector, 2006), which we did. Unless otherwise indicated, all items used a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Positive gender and leader identities. We measured the positivity of women's gender and leader identities with eight items of the collective self-esteem scale (CSES; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), corresponding to private and public regard for a given social category. This measure is the most straightforward way to assess the extent to which an individual evaluates positively a given social identity (Ashmore et al., 2004). 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]."

Woman/leader identity conflict. Identity conflict was measured using six items, adapted from Settles (2004; see also Tompson & Werner, 1997). The items reflected our operational definition of identity conflict (see above) and included: "I feel that other managers do not take me seriously because I am a woman," "Being a manager makes me less feminine," "I think that I am not influential

² We also asked respondents to indicate their level of understanding of English. Ninety-eight percent indicated that they were either native speakers or fluent in English, the remaining 2% reported having a "good" level of English. Excluding these 2% ($n = 3$) of respondents does not substantively change the results reported below.

enough because I am a woman,” “I run into obstacles in my role as a manager/leader because I am a woman,” “I feel uncomfortable being a woman when I am with a group of other managers,” and “Being a manager/leader does not conflict with my being a woman.”

Control variables. To more rigorously assess the relationship between our focal variables by adjusting these relationships for other variables, we measured the following control variables, theoretically linked to our independent and dependent variables (Becker, 2005). First, *leadership experience* allows women leaders 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) and therefore might reduce identity conflict and make one see leader identity more favorably. Accordingly, we asked participants to report their leadership/managerial experience (years).

Second, the extent to which an identity is psychologically important to one's sense of self may affect whether this identity is seen as conflicting with another one (Thoits, 1991). For example, the work-family literature suggests that the worker and parent roles may be less likely to be seen as conflicting if the individual does not give much importance to either of the roles (e.g., Cinamon & Rich, 2002; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). This reasoning implies that women who place less importance on their leader identity (or gender identity) may be less likely to report a conflict between being a woman and being a leader. As the same time, the importance of a given social identity to self-definition is positively related to one's motivation to maintain a favorable view on that identity (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1994). Thus, to filter out the effect of the *importance* of gender and leader identities, we included the “importance to identity” subscale (four items) of the CSES (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). This scale has been suggested to be “the purest operational definition” of explicit importance of a given social identity to one's self-concept (Ashmore et al., 2004). The items were adapted accordingly to measure *leader identity importance* and *gender identity importance*. Sample items include “Being a woman [manager] is an important reflection of who I am.”

Third, women's numerical underrepresentation in the organization is likely to increase women leaders' identity conflict because organizations with proportionally fewer women are more likely to activate gender stereotypes (Perry, Davis-Blake, & Kulik, 1994) and to have an agentic organizational culture (Kulik & Olekalns, 2012) with a gendered definition of leadership that values stereotypically male behaviors more than behaviors socially expected from women. We thus asked participants to indicate the *proportion of women* employed by their organization. In particular, they were instructed to choose one of four options: less than 25%, 25–50%, 50–75%, and more than 75%. The variable was coded as a categorical variable (from 1 to 4).

Results and discussion

Means, standard deviations, and measure reliabilities³ are presented in Table 1.

Measurement models

We first assessed the underlying structure of the measures of positive gender and leader identities through a confirmatory factor analysis (Bentler & Dudgeon, 1996). The four-factor model that for each social identity (i.e., gender and leader) included positive iden-

tity (i.e., public and private components) as one factor and identity importance as a separate factor demonstrated a good fit with the data according to the rules of thumbs in the literature (Hu & Bentler, 1999; $\chi^2(210) = 285.18$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .08) and provided a significant improvement in fit over the two-factor model that included all items as a single underlying dimension for each social identity ($\chi^2(215) = 307.71$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .10; $\Delta\chi^2 = 22.53$, $\Delta df = 5$, $p < .01$). A six-factor model that partitioned positive identity into public and private components did not yield a significant improvement in fit over the four-factor model ($\chi^2(202) = 284.76$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .08; $\Delta\chi^2 = 0.42$, $\Delta df = 8$, *ns*). These results indicate the appropriateness of grouping the items into positive social identity and identity importance.

Hypothesis testing

To analyze the relationship between positive leader identity, positive gender identity, and identity conflict, we conducted regression analyses. A model with identity conflict as the dependent variable and the positivity of leader and gender identities as two independent variables revealed that positive gender identity significantly predicted identity conflict ($\beta = -.39$, $p < .001$). In contrast, the effect of positive leader identity on identity conflict was not significant ($\beta = -.10$, $p = .32$). The model predicted 19% of the variance of identity conflict. An analogous model that included in addition control variables (importance of gender identity, importance of leader identity, leadership experience, and proportion of women) predicted 28% of the variance of identity conflict and yielded similar results: the effect of positive gender identity on identity conflict was significant ($\beta = -.31$, $p < .01$), while the effect of positive leader identity was not ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .29$). In addition, leadership experience appeared to reduce identity conflict ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .01$). These results provide initial support for the protective role of positive gender identity (Hypothesis 1a) and indicate that positive leader identity may not have such protective potential (contrary to Hypothesis 1b).

Study 2

Based on the results on Study 1, we designed a second study to experimentally demonstrate the role of positive gender identity in reducing women leaders' identity conflict. While Study 1 revealed that positive gender identity might have a protective effect, the experimental design allowed us to further illuminate the causal relation between positive gender identity and identity conflict. In particular, we first asked women to write a short essay focusing either on positive or negative aspects of their gender identity and then measured their identity conflict.

Method

Procedure and sample

Sixty-five women leaders and leaders-to-be participated in this on-line experiment. The women were recruited via email invitations sent to women alumni of a major business school (942 invitations were sent to alumni e-mail addresses; the sample was non-overlapping with that of Study 1). The experiment was in English, which was the language of instruction in the school the women had graduated from.⁴ Participants were randomly assigned to either *positive* gender identity condition or *control* condition. We first asked participants to complete a writing task that, for half of the partici-

³ 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.

⁴ Eighty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they were either native speakers or fluent in English, 5% reported having either a “good” or “moderate” level of English, and 6% did not provide an answer. Excluding the “good” and “moderate” categories ($n = 3$) does not substantively change the results reported below.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics, Study 1.

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Correlations						
					1	2	3	4	5	6	
1 Positive gender identity	5.17	0.80	2.00	6.63	(.80)						
2 Positive leader identity	5.43	0.63	4.00	6.63	.40	(.74)					
3 Identity conflict	3.12	0.99	1.00	5.50	-.43	-.25	(.72)				
4 Leadership experience (years)	6.83	7.25	0	30	.29	.04	-.38	–			
5 Gender identity importance	5.09	1.24	1.25	7.00	.12	.03	-.03	.02	(.85)		
6 Leader identity importance	5.00	1.14	1.50	7.00	.03	.16	-.15	.10	.38	(.85)	
7 Proportion of women in the organization	2.00	0.79	1	4	-.15	-.10	-.01	.16	.15	.05	

Note. $N = 109$. Significant correlation coefficients ($p < .05$) are in bold. Among these, correlations greater than .24 in absolute magnitude are significant at $p < .01$; correlations greater than .30 in absolute magnitude are significant at $p < .001$. Reliability estimates (coefficient omega) appear across the diagonal in parentheses. Proportion of women in the organization: 1 = less than 25%, 2 = 25–50%, 3 = 50–75%, 4 = more than 75%.

pants, was aimed to make them see their gender identity in a more positive light. For the remaining half of the participants, the writing task was aimed to make them see their gender identity less positively. In a later task, we measured participants' identity conflict.

Participants were between 27 and 59 years old ($M_{age} = 36.92$, $SD_{age} = 8.20$); 35% had children; 62% were married or lived with a partner. One woman (2%) who was unemployed at the time of the survey was asked to consider the last organization in which she had worked. The women had an average of 13.37 years of working experience ($SD = 8.44$) and 6.57 years of managerial experience ($SD = 6.44$). Fifty-six percent of the participants were in middle or senior executive management positions, 26% were first-level managers, and the remaining 21% reported occupying other positions. Ninety percent of the participants had at least a master degree. The women represented 27 countries of origin and 27 countries of residence (61% residing in Europe, 10% in the USA and Canada, 16% in Asia). Industry distribution was as follows: 23% from manufacturing, 23% from professional services (e.g., accounting, consulting, law), 15% from services (e.g., travel, banking, food), 13% from technology and communications, 5% from consumer goods, 3% from government, educational, and non-profit organizations, and 3% from media and entertainment, among others. Participants were representing small (23%), medium (38%), and large companies (39%) (same category definition as in Study 1), with 23% of all companies having more than 50% of women across all levels.

Manipulation and measures

Positive gender identity manipulation. The positivity of women's gender was manipulated through a writing task. Participants in the positive gender identity condition were asked to think about "specific reasons that made them and/or others think positively of women," to write down these reasons and to explain briefly how each of them related to their personal experience. Participants in the control condition were asked to focus on "reasons that made them and/or others think negatively of women."

Manipulation check. To test the effectiveness of our manipulation, we administered the 8-item scale of the positivity of gender identity (the same as in Study 1), $\omega = .69$.

Woman/leader identity conflict. Identity conflict was measured using the same six items as in Study 1, $\omega = .76$.

Results and discussion

Participants in the positive gender identity condition reported that they saw their female identity is a more positive light ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 0.77$) than those in the control condition ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 0.75$), $t(63) = 1.91$, one-tailed $p = .03$. Thus, our manipulation

was effective in changing the extent to which participants view their gender identity as positive. As for identity conflict, participants in the positive gender identity condition reported lower levels of conflict between their gender and leader identities ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.92$) than those in the control condition ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.06$), $t(63) = 2.08$, $p = .04$. These results are consistent with Study 1 and indicate that positive gender identity indeed has a protective effect for women leaders and leaders-to-be such that it reduces their identity conflict (Hypothesis 1a).

Study 3

The purpose of Study 3 was to test the full hypothesized model depicted in Fig. 1 using a large sample of women leaders. To do so, we followed previous leadership research (e.g., Eagly et al., 1992; Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011; Rosette & Tost, 2010) and collected data from women occupying managerial positions in organizations. 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, using a sample of women occupying managerial positions suited well the purpose of testing our model.

Method

Procedure and sample

The invitations to participate in an on-line survey were sent to about 5900 women alumni of two major business schools (the sample was non-overlapping with those of Studies 1 and 2). As in Studies 1 and 2, the survey was in English, which was the language of instruction of all programs the women had graduated from and a prerequisite for their admission to the business schools. Within two weeks, we received complete responses from 722 women (which implies a reasonable response rate for a sample of executives, Cycyota & Harrison, 2006). We excluded eighty-four participants who reported occupying other than managerial positions. 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. The women reported having an average of 7 direct reports ($SD = 16$), 16.35 years of working experience ($SD = 7.71$), and 9.45 years of managerial experience ($SD = 7.26$). They 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. The women represented 67 countries of origin and 55 countries of residence

(69% residing in Europe, 11% in the USA and Canada, 8% in Asia, and 12% elsewhere). Seventy-four percent of the women had at least one master degree, 5% had a PhD, and only 12% did not have more than a bachelor's degree. Respondents who were unemployed at the time of the survey (9%) were asked to consider the last organization in which they had worked. Industry distribution was as follows: 14% from manufacturing, 21% from professional services (e.g., accounting, consulting, law), 19% from services (e.g., travel, banking, food), 17% from energy, 11% from technology and communications, 9% from consumer goods, 6% from government, educational, and non-profit organizations, and 3% from media and entertainment, among others. Participants were nearly equally distributed between small (30%), medium (39%), and large companies (31%) (same category definition as in Studies 1 and 2), with 24% of all companies having more than 50% of women across all levels.

Measures

As in Studies 1 and 2, our focus was on the intrapersonal processes (i.e., identity-related *self-perceptions* and *subjective* experience of well-being and motivation to lead), and we therefore used self-report measures (Conway & Lance, 2010). In order to mitigate possible order effects and reduce the potential for response sets, all measures (except for demographics) were counterbalanced. Unless otherwise indicated, all items used a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Positive gender and leader identities. The positivity of women's gender and leader identities was measured as in Study 1.

Woman/leader identity conflict. Identity conflict was measured with three items included in Studies 1 and 2: "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 five-item satisfaction with life scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and four 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. To measure women's motivation to lead, we used the nine-item affective-identity motivation to lead scale and the nine-item social-normative motivation to lead scale (Chan & Drasgow, 2001). 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).

Control variables. In addition to the control variables included in Study 1 (importance of gender identity, importance of leader identity, leadership experience, and proportion of women), we measured two more variables. First, we included a measure of *leadership self-efficacy* because it strongly affects one's motivation to lead (Chan & Drasgow, 2001). Furthermore, because self-efficacy facilitates coping with distressful events and leads to an overall more positive appraisal of the environment, it might serve as a filter through which individuals see themselves (Bandura, 1982; Bandura, Cioffi, Taylor, & Brouillard, 1988; Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1992). We thus expected that leadership self-efficacy would correlate with participants' self-assessments along our focal dimensions and that controlling for it would allow us to partial out

the association between our focal variables that could be due to the common source and method biases (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). We used the eight-item leadership self-efficacy perceptions scale (Murphy, 2001), which 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").

Second, because the availability of role models affects the ease with which individuals adapt to new professional roles (Gibson, 2003), the number of role models and in particular female role models may affect women's motivation to lead and the extent to which they find it stressful to enact multiple roles. We thus asked participants to indicate the total *number of role models* and the *number of female role models* they have had in their career.

Results

Means, standard deviations, correlations, and measure reliabilities appear in Table 2.

Analysis overview

We used structural equation modeling (SEM, LISREL 8.80, Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) to evaluate our model (Fig. 1). SEM isolates the impact of each variable in the model by examining the relationship among multiple variables simultaneously. Although it has been recently suggested that common method bias (Meade, Watson, & Kroustalis, 2007; Podsakoff et al., 2003) might be less a concern than is commonly assumed (e.g., Conway & Lance, 2010), we adopted a conservative approach and, following recommendations from Anderson and Gerbing (1988), began by reexamining the measurement model of latent constructs to address both concerns of common method variance/bias and discriminant validity. To do so, we first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation procedures (Bentler & Dudgeon, 1996). We then standardized all multi-item measures 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). We assumed measurement without error for single-item variables (role models, female role models, years of leadership experience, and proportion of women). 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 test the mediating role of identity conflict (Brown, 1997; MacKinnon, Lockwood, West, & Sheets, 2002).

Measurement models

As in Study 1, we first assessed the underlying structure of the measures of positive gender and leader identities. The four-factor model that for each social identity (i.e., gender and leader) included positive identity as one factor (i.e., public and private components) and identity importance as a separate factor demonstrated an excellent fit with the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999; $\chi^2(210) = 605.85$, RMSEA = .05, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .06) and provided a significant improvement in fit both over the two-factor model that included all items as a single underlying dimension for each social identity ($\chi^2(215) = 662.53$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .07; $\Delta\chi^2 = 56.68$, $\Delta df = 5$, $p < .001$), as well as over a six-factor model that partitioned positive identity into public and private components ($\chi^2(202) = 738.35$, RMSEA = .07, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .08, $\Delta\chi^2 = 135.50$, $\Delta df = 8$, $p < .001$). These results indicated the appropriateness of grouping the items into positive social identity and identity importance.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics, Study 3.

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Correlations															
					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13			
1 Positive gender identity	5.14	0.79	2.13	7.00	.73															
2 Positive leader identity	5.46	0.69	3.13	7.00	.32	.75														
3 Identity conflict	2.92	1.29	1.00	7.00	-.39	-.24														
4 Life satisfaction	5.04	1.18	1.00	7.00	.19	.27	.71													
5 Stress	3.41	0.82	2.00	5.75	.34	-.53	.89													
6 Affective motivation to lead	5.26	0.89	2.00	7.00	.12	.34	.80	.84												
7 Social-normative motivation to lead	4.64	0.78	2.33	7.00	.02	.20	.02	.31	.71											
8 Leadership experience (years)	9.45	7.26	0	50	.07	.11	.15	.19	.02	.02										
9 Leadership self-efficacy	5.51	0.76	1.88	7.00	.20	.27	.19	.48	.19	.10	.90									
10 Gender identity importance	4.90	1.22	1.00	7.00	.13	.03	.03	.05	.04	.10	.26	.71								
11 Leader identity importance	4.48	1.23	1.00	7.00	-.10	.28	.07	-.02	.21	.13	.05	.08	.81							
12 Proportion of women in the organization	2.07	0.85	1	4	.14	.03	-.14	.06	-.04	.12	.05	.08	-.04							
13 Role models	3.05	2.66	0	30	-.07	.06	-.02	.09	-.06	.00	.02	-.04	.01	.04						
14 Female role models	0.82	1.09	0	8	-.01	.00	-.01	.06	.00	-.04	.06	-.11	-.10	.09	.03	.11	.58			

Note. N = 638. Significant correlation coefficients ($p < .05$) are in bold. Among these, correlations greater than .10 in absolute magnitude are significant at $p < .001$. Reliability estimates (coefficient omega) appear across the diagonal in parentheses. Proportion of women in the organization: 1 = less than 25%, 2 = 25–50%, 3 = 50–75%, 4 = more than 75%.

Analogous confirmatory factor analyses of motivation to lead revealed that a model with two factors ($\chi^2(134) = 706.60$, RMSEA = .08, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .07) resulted in a significantly better fit ($\Delta\chi^2 = 771.15$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .001$) than a one-factor model with affective and social-normative motivation to lead collapsed into one scale ($\chi^2(135) = 1477.75$, RMSEA = .13, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .10). These results indicated that the two components of motivation to lead should be analyzed separately.

We next conducted several tests to specifically address the concerns of discriminant validity and common method variance shared by the seven multiple-item latent variables of our hypothesized model (Fig. 1). First, we tested a seven-factor model that demonstrated a good overall fit ($\chi^2(968) = 3138.27$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .06), while an alternative one-factor model will all variables loading onto a single factor demonstrated a comparatively worse fit and failed to achieve Hu and Bentler's (1999) cutoff values for several indices ($\chi^2(989) = 11109.02$, RMSEA = .13, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .11, $\Delta\chi^2 = 7970.75$, $\Delta df = 21$, $p < .001$). These results supported the theoretical independence among our variables and implied that the measures represent seven distinct constructs (James, Mulaik, & Brett, 1982). Second, following Podsakoff et al. (2003), we assessed an eight-factor model that comprised the seven theoretical factors plus an additional common method factor. Items were allowed to load on their theoretical constructs as well as on the common method factor. This alternative model ($\chi^2(924) = 3108.89$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .06) did not provide a significant improvement over the hypothesized seven-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 29.38$, $\Delta df = 44$, ns). Third, to assess potential common method bias (Meade et al., 2007), we applied the correlated uniqueness model technique (Marsh & Bailey, 1991) that consists of allowing the error terms of latent variables to correlate. The results of this model ($\chi^2(760) = 2400.59$, 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. All in all, these results suggested that if any, the common method bias in our measures was small and did not represent a challenge to the validity of the results.

Structural models

We then tested our hypothesized model (Fig. 1), first with and then without control variables. Apart from the paths specified in the hypothesized model, the model with control variables included the paths from control variables to each multi-item latent variable. Due to their conceptual overlap, we allowed the two components of motivation to lead to correlate. Similarly, we allowed (1) life satisfaction and stress, and (2) positive gender and leader identities to correlate. The fit statistics for this and other model are reported in Table 3. Overall, this model (Model 1) provided an adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2(12) = 82.91$, RMSEA = .10, CFI = .97, SRMR = .02) although the value of RMSEA failed to reach an acceptable level (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

We then fit two additional nested models to improve fit and test our mediation hypotheses (MacKinnon et al., 2002). Table 3 shows the fit statistics for these models and between-model comparisons. The first additional model (Model 2) included all paths from the hypothesized model as well as direct paths from the two independent variables (positive gender identity and positive leader identity) to the four dependent variables (life satisfaction, stress, affective and social-normative motivation to lead). This model resulted in a significant better fit to the data than the hypothesized model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 53.24$, $\Delta df = 8$, $p < .001$). However, the paths from positive gender identity to affective (–.08) and social-normative motivation to lead (–.02), and from positive leader identity to life satisfaction (.02) and stress (–.05) were not significant ($ps > .07$). The second alternative model (Model 3) therefore included all

Table 3
Comparisons of nested structural models.

Model	χ^2	df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	Model comparisons	
						$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
1 Hypothesized Model	82.91	12	.97	.10	.02	–	–
2 Hypothesized Model with additional direct paths from positive gender identity and positive leader identity to all four dependent variables	29.67	4	.99	.10	.01	53.24*** (Model 2vs1)	8
3 Hypothesized Model with additional direct paths from positive gender identity to life satisfaction and stress, and from positive leader identity to affective motivation to lead and social-normative motivation to lead (Best Model)	34.84	8	.99	.07	.01	5.17 ns (Model 3vs2) 48.07*** (Model 3vs1)	4 4

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. Model fit is considered acceptable if CFI is greater than .90 (.95 is excellent), RMSEA is less than .08 (.05 is excellent), and SRMR is less than .08 (.06 is excellent) (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

*** $p < .001$.

paths from the hypothesized model as well as direct paths from positive gender identity to life satisfaction and stress, and from positive leader identity to the two components of motivation to lead. This more parsimonious model resulted in a similar χ^2 value as Model 2 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 5.17$, $\Delta df = 4$, ns) while improving the value of RMSEA up to an acceptable level (.07, Hu & Bentler, 1999). This “best” model also fit the data better than Model 1 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 48.07$, $\Delta df = 4$, $p < .001$).

Standardized estimates for the best model are presented in Fig. 2. Overall, the hypothesized model received a considerable amount of support, with all hypothesized direct paths being significant, except the path from positive leader identity to identity conflict. Positive gender identity was negatively related to identity conflict ($-.48$, $p < .001$), consistent with Hypothesis 1a and Studies 1 and 2. In contrast, and contrary to Hypothesis 1b (but consistent with Study 1), the coefficient of the path between positive leader identity and identity conflict, although in the hypothesized direction, was nonsignificant ($-.08$, ns). Identity conflict was associated negatively with life satisfaction ($-.28$, $p < .001$) and positively with stress (.35, $p < .001$), showing support to Hypotheses 2a and 2b. Higher identity conflict led to lower affective motivation to lead ($-.14$, $p < .001$) and higher social-normative motivation to lead (.13, $p < .01$), in support of Hypotheses 3a and 4b.

Results related to mediation analyses including detailed effects decomposition are reported in Table 4. Regarding the mediating effect of identity conflict, in the best model, positive gender identity was linked to life satisfaction directly (.19, $p < .001$) and indirectly through identity conflict (.13, $p < .001$), thereby suggesting partial mediation. The direct effect of positive gender identity on stress was nonsignificant in the best model ($-.03$, ns), while the indirect effect through identity conflict was significant ($-.17$, $p < .001$), indicating that identity conflict fully mediated the effect of positive gender identity on stress. As for motivation to lead, the

direct paths from positive gender identity to affective and social-normative components were nonsignificant in the first alternative nested model (Model 2, Table 3), while the indirect effects through identity conflict were significant (.07 and $-.06$, $p < .01$, Table 4), which suggests full mediation of the effect of positive gender identity on motivation to lead through identity conflict. Thus, the mediation Hypothesis 4a was supported for all four dependent variables, with one partial and three full mediation effects.

In contrast, identity conflict did not mediate the effect of positive leader identity on the two indicators of well-being, since neither the direct paths from positive leader identity to life satisfaction and stress (Model 2, Table 3) nor the indirect effects through identity conflict (.02 and $-.03$, Table 4) were significant. As for motivation to lead, positive leader identity was linked directly to both affective (.15, $p < .001$) and social-normative (.20, $p < .001$) components. At the same time, the indirect effects through identity conflict were nonsignificant (.01 and $-.01$, ns), suggesting that identity conflict did not mediate the relationship between positive leader identity and motivation to lead. Thus, the mediation Hypothesis 4b was not supported for any of the four dependent variables.

The significant effects ($p < .05$) of control variables (not shown in Fig. 2 for simplicity) were as follows. Leadership experience appeared to reduce identity conflict ($-.09$) and stress ($-.10$). Leadership self-efficacy was positively related to positive leader identity (.29), positive gender identity (.29), life satisfaction (.22), affective (.53) and social-normative (.24) motivation to lead, and negatively related to identity conflict ($-.26$) and stress ($-.38$). The importance of gender identity appeared to increase the extent to which this identity was seen as positive (.21), identity conflict (.05), and stress (.11), and reduce the positivity of leader identity ($-.11$) and affective motivation to lead ($-.11$). The importance of leader identity increased the extent to which this identity was seen

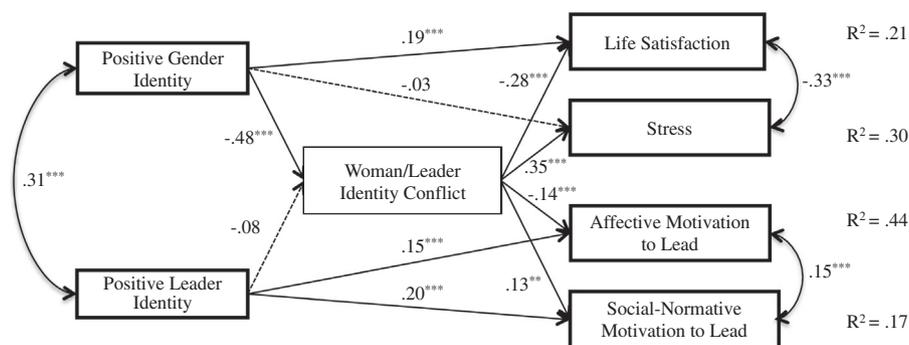


Fig. 2. Standardized solution for final structural equation model.

Note. $N = 638$. Standardized estimates are reported. Control variables include gender identity importance, leader identity importance, leadership experience, leadership self-efficacy, role models, female role models, and proportion of women in the organization. Dashed lines represent nonsignificant paths. All other paths are significant. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$. R^2 for identity conflict = .35.

Table 4
Standardized effects decomposition for the model with control variables (Fig. 2).

	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	Positive gender identity	Identity conflict	Life satisfaction	.19***	.13***	.32***	Partial
2	Positive gender identity	Identity conflict	Stress	-.03	-.17***	-.21***	Full
3	Positive gender identity	Identity conflict	Affective motivation to lead	-	.07***	.07***	Full
4	Positive gender identity	Identity conflict	Social-normative motivation to lead	-	-.06**	-.06**	Full
5	Positive leader identity	Identity conflict	Life satisfaction	-	.02	.02	None
6	Positive leader identity	Identity conflict	Stress	-	-.03	-.03	None
7	Positive leader identity	Identity conflict	Affective motivation to lead	.15***	.01	.16***	None
8	Positive leader identity	Identity conflict	Social-normative motivation to lead	.20***	-.01	.19***	None

Note. N = 638; entries are standardized beta coefficients.

*** p < .001.

** p < .01.

as positive (.35), affective (.31) and social-normative (.26) motivation to lead, and reduced the positivity of gender identity (-.23). Proportion of women in the organization was positively linked to positive gender identity (.12) and negatively to identity conflict (-.13). Finally, the number of role models appeared to increase life satisfaction (.08), while the number of female role models increased social-normative motivation to lead (.14).

We then fit the model without control variables. The model included the same paths between our focal variables as the best model (Fig. 2) and displayed acceptable fit on several indices ($\chi^2(8) = 56.21$, CFI = .97, SRMR = .05), although failed to achieve Hu and Bentler's (1999) cutoff value on another (RMSEA = .10). The results of this model, displayed in Fig. 3, were qualitatively similar to the results of the best model with control variables. The only difference was that the path from positive leader identity to identity conflict (Hypothesis 1b) became significant in this model, although its magnitude (-.12) was still smaller than that of the path from positive gender identity (-.49). Overall, the paths between our focal variables were larger in magnitude in the model without controls (Fig. 3) than in the model with controls (Fig. 2), which may indicate that the model with control variables provides more rigorous, less inflated estimates of the relationships between our focal variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Discussion

Consistent with Studies 1 and 2, these findings provide support for our suggestion that *positive gender identity* reduces identity conflict. Women with a more positive gender identity reported less identity conflict, which consequently improved their psychological well-being and made it more likely that they construe leadership as a pleasant activity (i.e., affective motivation to lead) as opposed to a duty (i.e., social-normative motivation to lead). In contrast to positive gender identity, the evidence that *positive leader identity*

also reduces women's identity conflict was, in line with Study 1, more ambiguous. Even in the model in which this relationship was statistically significant (i.e., model without controls), the beneficial effect of positive leader identity on identity conflict appeared to be weaker than the effect of positive gender identity.

General discussion

The purpose of this research was to understand the consequences that holding a positive social identity has for women leaders. Taken together, our findings suggest that *positive gender identity* may reduce perceived conflict between being a woman and being a leader and thereby increase women's well-being and cause them to construe leading as an attractive goal as opposed to a duty. The three studies provide consistent evidence for our claim that holding a favorable regard for their gender identity may help women leaders to blend their gender and professional roles. In contrast, we found that while *positive leader identity* may directly increase women's motivation to lead, it appears neither to reduce their identity conflict nor enhance their psychological well-being. Our findings extend previous research by identifying positive gender identity as an important ingredient for a successful adaptation of women leaders to their professional roles.

Theoretical contributions

This research contributes to the growing literature on identity in organizational studies by advancing knowledge about the role of positive social identity for overcoming 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

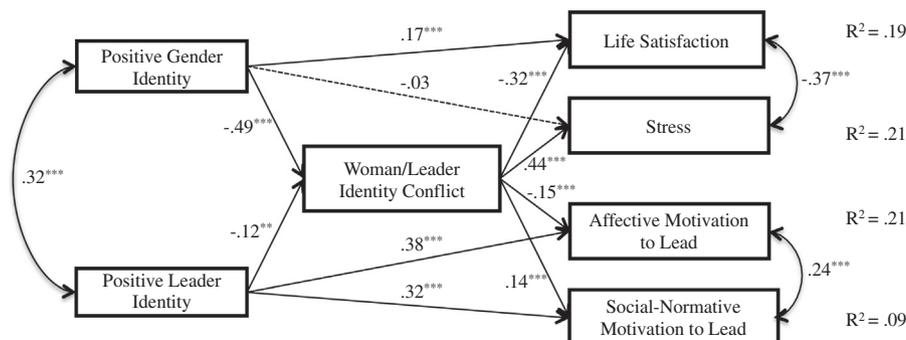


Fig. 3. Standardized solution for the structural equation model without control variables.

Note. N = 638. Standardized estimates are reported. Dashed lines represent nonsignificant paths. All other paths are significant. ***p < .001; **p < .01. R² for identity conflict = .30.

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 examine the interplay between the positivity of women leaders' social identities, identity conflict, and women's psychological adjustment to the requirements of their professional life as well as their overall well-being.

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 growing body of literature on positive social identities in the organizational context (e.g., Dutton et al., 2010; Roberts & Dutton, 2009). While we theorized and found supportive evidence that holding a positive gender identity may help women leaders to integrate the potentially conflicting identities of woman and leader in their self-concept, our results revealed that the effect of positive *gender* identity is not symmetric to the effect of positive *leader* identity. Our finding that positive leader identity is directly linked to women's motivation to lead, but does not relate to their identity conflict suggests that while appreciating the belonging to the social category of leaders may translate into more leadership ambition, it may not relieve women from the potential internal conflict between personal and professional identities. In contrast, the results across three studies consistently showed that holding gender identity in a favorable regard might reduce women leaders' identity conflict and improve their well-being not only directly, but also indirectly—by reducing identity conflict. Moreover, by reducing identity conflict, positive gender identity may increase the joy of leading and decrease 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. Our findings suggest that positive gender identity may reduce the perceived need to suppress gender-typical behaviors and thereby diminish strain and fatigue resulting from the self-regulatory processes (Grandey, 2000; Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005). Future studies should explicitly examine whether and how positive gender identity affects the expression of gender-typical behaviors by women leaders, as well as their confidence while doing so. If our conjecture is correct, we should expect that women leaders with a more positive gender identity are more likely to develop a leadership style that integrates gender-congruent behaviors. Collecting data to better understand how a more positive gender identity and less identity conflict affect women's actual leadership behaviors thus seems to be a promising direction for future research.

These findings also 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). On the other hand, the asymmetric effect of positive gender identity and positive leader identity may indicate that the source of women leaders' identity conflict is not symmetric either. In particular, it is possible that women leaders mainly experience identity conflict because they find their gender identity to interfere with their leadership performance (i.e., "I am less effective as a leader because I am a woman") and not because they believe their leader identity to affect the expression of their gender identity (i.e., "I am less feminine because I am a leader"). Given the importance of the issue, future

research that would disentangle different sources of identity conflict for women leaders seems warranted.

Furthermore, our findings provide valuable contributions to the leadership literature. By showing that positive gender identity 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). In line with the self-presentation and self-regulation literature (e.g., Vohs et al., 2005), our result on the protective effect of positive gender identity against identity conflict suggests that holding a positive gender identity may free women from the pressure to conform to prescriptive models of leadership they do not identify with and help them find their own, authentic way of leading. This in turn would facilitate the integration of the leadership role with the individual's value structure and thus the development of a leader identity (Ibarra et al., 2010; Lord & Hall, 2005). Further research should explicitly examine the consequences of positive gender identity for women's definition of leadership and the extent to which professional women feel authentic in their professional roles. It would also be illuminating to examine how these processes ultimately affect followers' perception of these women as leaders. It is possible that positive gender identity allows women leaders to not only feel more confident and authentic in their role, but also to be perceived as effective without being punished for behaviors that do not conform to stereotypical leader behaviors (Heilman et al., 1989; Powell et al., 2002; Schein, 2001).

Our research also extends the understanding of the antecedents of motivation to lead (e.g., Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Kark & van Dijk, 2007). We theorized and found that women leaders' identity conflict is associated negatively with affective motivation to lead and positively with social-normative motivation to lead, that is, the feeling of duty to attain and persist in leadership positions. While further studies are needed to replicate these results using different samples of women leaders, 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 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), future longitudinal studies should address the question of whether duty-related motivation to lead is sufficient to guarantee one's long-term persistence and success 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. Moreover, seeing leadership more as a duty and enjoying it less may lead to experiencing and expressing less positive emotions, which in turn may, through emotional contagion, translate into less positive emotions experienced by coworkers and ultimately lower perceived leader effectiveness (Bono & Ilies, 2006). Future studies should examine the direct link between women leaders' identity conflict and social, leadership, and personal costs of leading with less joy.

Finally, a closer look at the effects of our control variables in Study 3 provides some insights on the aspects of the workplace that may affect women leaders' social identities. In particular, our results suggest that women's underrepresentation in the organization may reduce the positivity of their gender identity and thereby represent an additional challenge to the healthy integration of their self-view as leaders into the overall sense of self. These results support the idea that interactions with others—across all levels of the organization (cf., Ely, 1994)—play a significant role in the development of the leader's identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Ibarra, 1999). It is possible that, consistent with the

literature on stereotype threat (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005), in male-dominated organizations, women leaders are more often “reminded” of general female stereotypes and attribute the difficulty of claiming a leader identity to their gender. 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 results imply 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.

Limitations and future directions

As all studies, this study is subject to limitations that point toward directions for future research. First, common method variance could be seen as a potential concern in our large-scale Study 3 (as well as Study 1) since we used self-report measures to collect information about intrapersonal processes of women leaders. However, it is difficult to get accurate information about internal states with any other method (Conway & Lance, 2010; Spector, 2006). Moreover, several scholars have recently argued that biases due to common methods might be greatly overestimated (Lance, Dawson, Birkelbach, & Hoffman, 2010; Spector, 2006). Nevertheless, as a precaution, we took this concern seriously. First, to reduce the potential bias, we counter-balanced the order of our variables (Conway & Lance, 2010). Second, we conducted several tests to assure the validity of our conclusions. The results of these tests suggest that common method variance was of little concern in our data. Moreover, the average absolute correlation among all our latent measures in Study 3 was .19, which can be considered relatively low and thus does not support the idea that common method variance might be seriously inflating observed relationships (Spector, 2006). Another potential concern is the cross-sectional design of Studies 1 and 3 that makes causal inferences difficult (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). Although the results of our experimental Study 2 were consistent with the survey studies and revealed a protective effect of positive gender identity for women leaders, further longitudinal studies should improve our understanding of the interplay between women leaders’ positive social identities, identity conflict, and psychological and motivational outcomes. On a related note, in the experimental Study 2, the control condition, to which we compared the positive gender identity condition, asked women to think about *negative* aspects of their gender identity. It is possible that the effect of positive gender identity on identity conflict that we observed in this study would have been smaller had we used a different control condition (e.g., no valence of gender identity is evoked or no gender identity is evoked at all). Further longitudinal and experimental studies thus seem warranted to better understand the consequences of positive social identity for women leaders.

Second, the response rate to the invitations to participate in our studies was somewhat low (although consistent with response rates in similar populations, Cychota & 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 studies on “women in leadership.” However, in Study 3, for example, 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 was not skewed by participants with extreme perceptions of the incongruity between their gender and professional identities.

Third, there may be important variations in the positivity of women leaders’ social identities and their identity conflict across

different occupations. Because our data were widely spread between different occupations and industries, assessing such variations was not possible and constitutes a viable direction for further research. Moreover, 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 challenges. 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 view on their gender identity and the combination of their gender and professional identities in such environments.

Finally, we explored the direct link between the positivity of social identities and identity conflict. Future research should examine individual and organizational characteristics that may exacerbate or weaken this link. For example, the extent to which women hold traditional gender role beliefs can be explored as a potential moderator of the effect of positive gender identity on identity conflict.

Practical implications

Our findings suggest 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 favorable regard for one’s gender identity and believing that others also view this social category favorably is fundamental to leadership development. In this light, understanding how current organizational practices may affect the positivity of women leaders’ gender identity is particularly important. For example, our results support the importance of mentoring practices, which can convey to female contributors the value that the organization places on them as a group and thereby enhance the positivity of their gender identity (i.e., public regard: “Others respect/value women”). In addition, organizations may be better off by paying attention to the informal practices that can affect the extent to which women see their gender identity favorably or believe that others see it favorably. For example, it could be instructive to assess the level of organizational tolerance for humor that implicitly delegitimizes women and their leadership attempts. Moreover, women’s identity conflict may be reduced and their affective motivation to lead may be enhanced if organizations emphasize the characteristics of leaders that are compatible with women’s self-schemas. For example, 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 (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) also emphasize behaviors that concord with stereotypically feminine behaviors such as providing individualized support to followers and encouraging their personal and professional development (Vinkenburg, van Engen, Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2011).

Finally, our result on the importance of holding a favorable regard for one’s gender identity to diminish identity conflict has important implications for counseling and coaching practices. 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 imply that interventions aimed at both shaping women’s professional motivation and improving their psychological well-being should not only focus on women leaders’ professional effectiveness, but take a more holistic approach by considering also the impact of any action on the positivity of their gender identity.

Conclusion

Although more and more women have access to leadership positions, little is known about women leaders' identity processes and how those are linked to women's motivation to lead and well-being. Our research identifies an important ingredient for a successful adaptation of women leaders to their professional roles: positive gender identity. As one of the women in our studies 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..." Our findings suggest that a favorable regard for one's gender identity may help overcome identity conflict and thereby improve individuals' motivational and psychological outcomes.

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