Assuming the Mantle: Unpacking the Process by Which Individuals Internalize a Leader Identity

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The way we perceive ourselves, our identity, can have profound effects on the way we feel, think, and act, and on what we strive to achieve in life (James, 1892; Leary & Tangney, 2003). Individuals' self-perceptions are thought to encompass social and role identities, representing the groups and roles they feel tied to, and also a personal identity. Personal identity refers to "a sense of self built up over time as the person embarks on and pursues projects or goals…" (Hewitt, 1997, 93). A personal identity is based on a set of attributes that individuals believe differentiate them from other individuals, and thus reflect their "true self" (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). We experience our personal identity as a set of dispositional traits or behavioral tendencies that are considered "core" to ourselves (Thoits & Virshup, 1997). Examples may include single attributes such as smart or kind, or more complex constellations of traits and tendencies such as environmentalist, or good corporate citizen. In this way, personal identity is a set of labels that individuals come to internalize as descriptive of the self. The designation or attribution of these personal attributes to the self, which we refer to as internalization, is often embedded in a particular social context and asserted during the course of social interaction (Deaux, 1996; Snow & Anderson, 1987). Thus, while personal identity is a cognitive representation of oneself, the process by which any particular personal identity comes to be internalized is decidedly social.

The two most prominent theories on identity, identity theory and social identity theory, discuss the idea of personal identity, but primarily to differentiate it from other forms of identity (Stets & Burke, 2000). In identity theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000), one's identity is thought to be tied to hierarchically structured roles that become salient as situations call for a particular role. In this sense, one's identity is based on the properties of a particular role and does not necessarily reflect anything unique about the individual. Likewise, social identity theory (Hogg & Abrams,

1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1985) treats identity as a function of one's membership in various social collectives and focuses primarily on the commonalities between people in different groups, not what differentiates individuals from each other (Hogg, 2001). In this sense, neither identity theory nor social identity theory explain how individuals develop personal identities.

Another limitation of identity theory and social identity theory in explaining the development of personal identities is related to the degree of clarity versus ambiguity of one's personal identity. In both identity theory and social identity theory, one's identity is based on a clear referent (i.e., a formal role, a social collective or category) that is external to the self and offers social cues regarding characteristics of the identity. In contrast, the basis for one's personal identity can be much less clear. Aspects of personal identity (e.g. leader, good citizen, nurturing person) are often based on multiple personal attributes that are sometimes ambiguous in meaning (Hitlin, 2003). Indeed, the meaning of individual traits and behavioral tendencies can be vague (e.g., what does it mean to be nurturing?), dynamic (e.g. what nurturing means changes over time and situation), and socially constructed (e.g. others give one signals about what is and is not nurturing from their perspective). As a result, there is significant ambiguity in assessing and determining whether one does or does not embody a particular personal identity. Consequently, how one best exhibits a particular attribute in specific contexts is also often unclear. Considering the potential ambiguity underlying one's personal identity, current theories of identity development do not sufficiently explain why some individuals internalize a specific personal identity and other individuals do not. Therefore, our objective in this chapter is to describe the processes and underlying mechanisms by which individuals develop personal identities when the identity itself is ambiguous and socially constructed.

To achieve this objective, we focus on "leader" as an ambiguous personal identity that some but not all people come to internalize as part of their self concept. The leader personal identity provides a theoretically interesting and appropriate backdrop for several reasons. First, there is no objective measurement of whether one "is" or "is not" a leader, making leader an especially ambiguous personal identity that one may internalize or not. Second, leadership can be a social exchange process that can be independent of any formal role (e.g. people can lead in groups with no assigned leader), depends on reciprocity, and holds the potential for two-way, mutual influence (Hollander, 1978). Thus, it is likely that one's personal identity as a leader is subject to social cues, thereby providing a useful context for examining the relational processes that lead to the internalization of ambiguous personal identities. Given that individuals often aim to resolve identity ambiguity through social interactions (Bartel & Dutton, 2001), the decidedly social process of leadership makes it an apt choice to examine the internalization process for personal identities. Finally, scholars often cite the development of a leader identity as one of the most important predictors of effective leadership and career development (Day & Harrison, 2007; Hall, 2004). The internalization of a leader identity is thought to be a positive, generative process that empowers people to assume the mantle of leader and thereby more effectively engage in leadership processes that facilitate the accomplishment of organizational goals (Hall, 2004). Thus, not only is "leader" an ambiguous personal identity that is socially constructed and theoretically interesting, but it also is a personal identity that holds positive value for individuals and organizations. Given the tangible and symbolic rewards for thinking of oneself as a leader or being seen as a leader, the process by which individuals internalize this identity is worthy of study. Leader is a positive personal identity and social designation in most contexts. Individuals have an interest in developing their leadership capabilities and organizations often see the

development of leaders within their ranks as key to their vitality and success. Thus, the study of how individuals come to internalize this positive personal identity is important.

In articulating the processes by which individuals come to internalize a leader personal identity, this chapter makes several important contributions to our understanding of identity-related processes in organizations. Although a processual interactionist perspective is not new to theories of identity (e.g., Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959), social interaction processes have not played a central role in the current literature on personal identity. Yet, it is likely through social interaction that ambiguous personal identities such as a leader are negotiated and internalized. Given the positive consequences of this internalization for both individuals and organizations, understanding and articulating the social processes that prompt internalization becomes important. To begin understanding this process, we generalize a concept invoked in Bartel and Dutton's (2001) work on ambiguous organizational membership to the larger question of how individuals come to internalize particular personal identities. Specifically, we explore how the personal identity of leader is constituted through interactions with others in the form of claiming and granting acts (Bartel & Dutton, 2001). Claiming entails the behaviors that individuals engage in to assert an identity, in particular the verbal or non-verbal, acts intended to reflect the characteristics that are unique and essential to a particular personal identity. In the case of leader, claiming acts might include taking the seat at the head of a meeting table or asserting one's expertise in a particular domain. Granting refers to the behaviors that others in a social interaction engage in to assert their own opinions of that person's identity. Granting involves verbal or non-verbal acts, which are intended to affirm that an individual personifies the characteristics that signify a particular identity. In the case of leader, granting acts might include deferring to the claimer's opinion or seeking out his or her help and expertise. Together,

claiming and granting behaviors constitute the joint work that leads to personal identity growth. This claiming-granting framework constitutes the social interactions that become the inputs to the process of internalizing an ambiguous personal identity such as leader. Thus, we emphasize that the internalization of leader as a personal identity is not simply an intrapersonal, cognitive act but also a social process of mutual claiming and granting through word and deed that gets enacted over time. In this sense, our chapter draws attention to the social processes by which people come to internalize the positive personal identity of leader.

We present our theory as follows. First, we articulate a conceptual definition of ambiguous identities and specify why leader is a particularly ambiguous personal identity. Next, we elaborate the process by which individuals come to internalize leader as a personal identity. Our emphasis on the process of internalizing a leader identity also yields a broader understanding of the possible boundary conditions associated with the process. Thus, we go on to posit that personal and contextual factors can constrain or enhance one's ability or willingness to claim a personal identity or grant it to others.

What is an Ambiguous Identity?

Some identities are unambiguous. A person is or is not a female, or is or is not a mother. In the area of personal identities, things are less clear. A personal identity is especially *ambiguous* when it meets the following criteria. First, identities that are composed of multiple attributes can be especially ambiguous. For example, the personal identity of "punctual" is less ambiguous because it is one attribute; by contrast, a personal identity of "good corporate citizen" is more ambiguous. Being a "good corporate citizen" may entail being helpful to others, raising concerns on behalf of the organization, and/or supporting organizational values, rules, and regulations (Organ, 1988). Second, personal identities are ambiguous when the relationship

between the personal attributes within the particular personal identity or their relative importance is unclear, contextually bound and socially constructed. To use the same example of "good corporate citizen", the relative importance of raising concerns to others versus obeying organizational rules and regulations in any particular social context is ambiguous and may vary across people. Finally, just how one should enact some identities is ambiguous, as some identities have less consistency and social consensus about how they should be enacted in particular contexts than do others. In other words, when the appropriate behavior associated with a particular identity is vague, uncertain, variable across contexts, and/or dynamic, there is likely to be greater difficulty in concluding that the identity is descriptive of oneself (and therefore internalizing the identity).

Based on these criteria, a leader identity seems particularly ambiguous. As noted earlier, there are no objective measures or indicators of whether one is or is not a leader. Rather, multiple traits and behavioral tendencies are associated with leadership, and there is often disagreement as to the relative importance of these attributes for defining what just what is a leader. Although individuals often have implicit theories and schemas for what personal attributes are prototypical of effective leaders (Lord 1985), how individuals should enact leadership in any given context is often unclear. In any single situation, scholars and laypeople alike often have different cognitive representations or schemas about what leadership behaviors and actions are appropriate. These differing views about what leaders should do and what behaviors are appropriate, along with the fact that leadership occurs in the context of relationships and involves social exchange and influence processes, make the leader identity particularly ambiguous and susceptible to social construction. In the next section, we specify how one's schema of leadership influences the

interpersonal processes that then facilitate the internalization of the ambiguous personal identity of leader.

Process of Internalizing a Leader Identity

Recent literature has begun to explore the process by which individuals actively shape their identities (Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Pratt, Rockman & Kaufman, 2006; Snow & Anderson, 1987). Drawing on social interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959) and reflecting an emphasis on personal agency, the broader concept of identity work "refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003, p.1165). This notion of identity work reinforces the symbolic interactionist idea that the meaning of the self is dynamic and negotiated through interactions with others (Goffman, 1959).

Past research in this area has addressed how people engage in activities to create, present, and sustain identities which are positive despite troublesome social conditions such as among the homeless (Snow & Anderson 1987), and how identity work can cleanse a "dirty" occupation of its negative social meaning (Ashforth & Kreiner 1999). Identity work also describes how individuals negotiate among different identities, such as between the personal and social identities (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep 2006), or how individuals customize an identity to fit their evolving understanding of a setting (Pratt et al., 2006).

Our perspective draws from this prior research. It takes an interactionist perspective regarding how identities are formed in social contexts. This perspective is similar to one taken by Bartel and Dutton (2001) who developed a picture of identity work in situations where membership in an organization is ambiguous. They applied Goffman's idea of "working consensus" to the example of temporary workers whose status as organizational members is not

always clear and cannot be taken for granted. In this work, Bartel and Dutton proposed that whether or not these workers would be seen as organizational members is developed through an active and relational process of claiming and granting. The moves and acts that temporary workers undertake to establish themselves as legitimate members of the organization (claiming) are met by responses from others (granting), which resolve the ambiguity of membership.

We propose that this claiming-granting process not only occurs when situations or social group memberships are ambiguous (e.g., as in the case of organizational membership for some), but also when the identity itself is ambiguous (as in the case for many personal identities, including a leader identity). Figure 1 and the following sections provide a description of how this process unfolds with respect to leader as a personal identity. As shown in Figure 1, our depiction of how a leader identity comes to be internalized (a cognitive outcome) is inherently interpersonal and iterative. In this model, we posit that individuals engage in claiming a leadership identity and others engage in granting (or not granting) a leader identity to the individual. Through this iterative process, the individual comes to internalize "leader" as a personal identity.

Claiming

Our depiction of the process begins with an assumption that people have at least a perspective on what leaders "look like" and what leadership entails. This sense is developed over time through personal experience (e.g., with family, school or church leaders), historical accounts (e.g., military and political leaders), culture (e.g., social and artistic leaders), and media (e.g., accounts of business or world leaders). Over time, individuals integrate these various cultural vocabularies (Weick, 1995) to form a loose schema for what leadership is (i.e., what it means to be a leader in terms of attributes and behaviors). When individuals first think about the

question of whether or not they are a leader, they compare their self-view of their own personal attributes (e.g., traits, behaviors, skills) to their own cognitive schema of leadership (Kenney, Schwartz-Kenny, & Blascovich 1996). Based on this *internal-to-self* comparison process, individuals choose whether or not to assert a leader identity in social interactions. Their subsequent acts in a particular social context, which are intended to display characteristics that they see as embodying attributes of a leader, are claiming behaviors.

At times, this choice to claim a leader identity will be fairly automatic based on a perceived match of the individual's attributes and those attributes specified within his or her leadership schema. However, this comparison process could also be the result of a deliberate and conscious process whereby the individual thinks through whether the attributes of a leader are self-descriptive. If the self-view corresponds to the individual's schema of leadership, this match should encourage an individual to claim a leader identity. In other words, if people see themselves as leaders, they are more likely to exhibit leader-like qualities and engage in behaviors and actions that are consistent with their views of leadership. Individuals engage in schema-consistent behavior because they are motivated to act in accordance with their self-view as a way of expressing their true self (Foote, 1951), especially when the personal identity, like leader, is positively valued in society.

Claiming can also occur when there is discrepancy between the self-view and one's schema of a leader. In this case, the individual may become motivated to experiment with or "try out" a possible rendition of the self that is compatible with his or her view of leadership. Through this process, individuals claim a leader identity within their social environment. Thus, we expect that individuals may claim a personal identity of leader for one of at least three reasons. First, individuals are motivated to act in accordance with their view of self (Foote,

1951), and to bring others in line with their self-view (Swann & Read, 1981). Second, being leader-like and being seen as a leader is socially valued in many organizational settings. Based on research by Higgins (1987) and Markus and Nurius (1986), we expect that individuals will experiment with such rewarded and socially-valued "ideal selves." Finally, people may have multiple conceptions of what it means to be a leader based on their life experiences and observations of various role models. For example, one schema of leadership may emphasize authoritarian attributes, another may emphasize democratic or participative attributes, and another might highlight more servant-leader ideals. An individual aware of multiple possible schemas of leadership might invoke any of these schemas in their internal-to-self comparison process and choose to experiment with one or another as a possible identity. Consistent with Ibarra's (1999) research on how individuals experiment with "provisional selves," we propose that by taking small steps to act *like* a leader, the individual can explore where they stand with respect to a leader personal identity in their particular social context. We extend this idea of identity experimentation to emphasize that the "trying on" of a personal identity is also an interpersonal process; it involves both claiming by the self and granting by others.

Beyond the reasons for why one might claim a leader identity, there is also a question of how one would claim this ambiguous personal identity. Literature on the broader construct of identity work, which explores how people shape their identities, provides some insight into various context-specific tactics for claiming an identity. Examples include "identity patching" for new medical residents (Pratt et al., 2006) or "inquiring" for those with ambiguous organizational memberships (Bartel & Dutton, 2001). At a more molar level, the literature also offers a distinction between verbal acts of claiming (e.g., making statements that one is a leader or statements consistent with being a leader) and nonverbal or behavioral acts such as managing

one's appearance or dress to convey a personal identity (Snow & Anderson, 1987). Another example related to a leader identity would be employing physical artifacts associated with leadership (e.g., hanging a picture of a famous leader in one's office, use of space in a way that claims a leader-like position). Behavioral claiming might also include the display of relational claims such as noticing or demonstrating closeness with recognized authorities. This is similar to Snow and Anderson's (1987) notion of "associational embracement" or "distancing" behaviors. Given that the aim of this chapter is to describe the overall process of developing a leader identity, we stop short of developing an organizing framework of these specific claiming tactics, but this would be a worthy target of future research. This research could leverage prior research on how new medical residents (Pratt et al., 2006) construct their identities and temporary workers negotiate their membership status in the organization (Bartel & Dutton, 2001).

We note that one contribution that our model implies for the investigation of specific claiming tactics – and identity work more generally – is that assertions of identity should not be seen as simple impression management (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006), but as actions that can reflect *both* the expression of one's own self-perceptions as well as attempts to shape others' perceptions. Our core propositions related to claiming are that individuals will engage in claiming acts under three different conditions: (a) when individuals desire to express an already internalized leader personal identity, (b) when there is extrinsic value in being seen as a leader in a particular context, and (c) when they are uncertain as to whether they are a leader or not.

Granting

Comparable to how the focal individual goes through an internal-to-self comparison process that results in claiming, others within the social environment go through a similar cognitive comparison process of their own. They have their own schema for what it means to be

a leader based on their own background and experiences. We propose that they compare the focal person's attributes in terms of traits, skills, and behaviors to this schema, and based on this comparison process, choose to either grant or not grant the focal individual a leader identity in their social interaction. Granting behaviors are actions which express how others perceive the focal individual. Their actions either affirm or disaffirm whether that person is seen as a leader. Granting acts, or the lack thereof, will help shape whether the focal individual internalizes leader as part of his or her personal identity.

Except under conditions that we will discuss later, we theorize that others will grant the focal individual a leader identity when their attribute-to-schema comparison process results in a match. In other words, according to the perceiver, the focal individual looks like, seems like, and acts like a leader. This matching process and the recognition of leadership likely depend on how well the focal person corresponds to the perceiver's implicit theory or schema of leadership (Lord & Maher, 1991). This cognitive process, which like claiming can be conscious or unconscious, shapes and is shaped by the highly contextual and social processes of claiming and granting and are the central focus of our attention.

Although granting in the presence of and in response to claiming acts is more likely, we expect that granting can occur without a prior claim by the focal person. For example, the schemas used by the focal person and others may or may not be similar, and so others may see something in the focal person (e.g., leader attributes) that he or she does not yet see. Thus, the process of internalizing a personal identity as a leader may begin with a granting act (such as unexpectedly designating someone as the leader of a group or task force). It is also possible that on some occasions, even when there is a discrepancy between what others observe of the focal person's attributes and their leadership schemas, granting may also occur based on other

intentions or motives. For example, mentors might choose to grant a leader identity to mentees in the hopes of spurring the internalization of the mentee's leader identity and subsequent leader behaviors. The mentor's granting behaviors construct and affirm the mentee as a leader in their interactions, helping the mentee to think of him or herself as a leader.

Similar to the claiming process, granting can include both verbal and non-verbal acts. Others in the social context might grant an individual a leader identity via verbally affirming ("you are our leader") and/or behaving *as if* the individual is a leader (e.g., consulting the individual's opinion and deferring to his or her wishes). Likewise, granting might occur via the use of physical space; an example might be when an individual is given a prominent position at the meeting table. Granting may also be accomplished via the manipulation of artifacts, as when giving someone the dry erase marker in a brainstorming meeting.

Internalization of Personal Identity

When the focal person claims a leader identity and others in the social environment grant the leader identity to this person, together they accomplish the social achievement of a leader identity for the individual. Specifically, as others in the social environment validate the individual's leader claims through granting, the individual comes to see the leader identity as reflective of his or her true self and internalizes it. In this sense, the leader identity becomes part of a "working consensus" (Goffman, 1959) that the focal person is a leader in this particular context, resulting in the leader identity becoming a stronger and more salient part of one's personal identity.

Conversely, others not granting the individual a leader identity may begin to call into question the focal individual's claims of a leader identity. Ungranted claims signal to individuals that others do not perceive them in a way that is consistent with their self-view. For example, if a

member of a consulting team sees himself as a leader, consequently petitions to lead an upcoming client presentation, and that claiming act is met with resistance from other team members, the focal individual may begin to question whether he truly is a leader in this team. This discrepancy between claiming and granting acts likely causes individuals to adjust their self-view to reduce the inconsistency, leading to fewer subsequent leader identity claims. Alternatively, if individuals are deeply interested in seeing themselves as a leader, or are in situations where a leader identity is particularly valuable for extrinsic reasons, they may engage in stronger subsequent efforts to claim a leader identity and attempt to change others' perceptions.

We propose that this claiming-granting process is iterative and developmental over time. As more claims and grants are made, the personal identity of "leader" becomes a more salient and central part of one's self-concept. As noted, the process need not begin with an initial claim. Rather, the process may begin with an initial grant as others perceive the individual to match their schemas of leadership prior to the individual having made any claims for this personal identity. The granting itself in this case can be the stimulus for the individual to make the internal-to-self comparison, thus inviting the question of "Who me? Am I a leader?" The comparison work stimulated by this initial grant may cause the focal individual to reevaluate his or her self-view and/or leadership schema, further illustrating how social interactions and cognitive processes together shape individuals' personal identities.

Positive and Negative Spirals

The iterative nature of the claiming-granting process suggests two possible spirals of identity development. When individuals claim the leader identity and others grant the identity, a positive spiral ensues. Because grants from others not only convey how they see the focal

individual but also signal what is valued in the social environment, the grant of leader identity not only strengthens the identity in the focal individual's self-concept, but may also leave the individual more motivated to value the identity. Thus, grants from others increase both the salience and valence of the personal identity. Further, the identity grant may lead to the individual feeling more empowered to act in accordance with his or her leadership schema. Being seen as a leader by others may affect a person's efficacy beliefs with respect to leadership. Both of these effects directly lead to more leader identity claims being engaged in with greater confidence. If others then continue to grant in response, these more frequent and confident claims lead to a positive spiral.

Alternatively, a negative spiral can emerge when the individual is not granted a leader identity. One likely response is for the focal individual to engage in fewer or weaker claiming behaviors. If these leader identity claims also remain ungranted, the individual further reduces the number and/or strength of future claims. There are several reasons for the emergence of this negative spiral. First, a long history of research on motivational processes concludes that behaviors not positively reinforced are less likely to be repeated in the future (Ferster & Skinner, 1957). Second, when claiming acts are not met with mutually reinforcing grants, it is likely that individuals will begin to question or doubt their leadership capabilities and thus revise their self view to be less inclusive of a leader personal identity. In addition, the lack of a "working consensus" signified by claiming acts not followed by granting causes uncertainty about the claimer's status within the group, which may lead the person to withdraw from the social environment. The negative spiral based on these three mechanisms occurs unless there is a particular motive to be seen as a leader, thus leading to claiming behavior in the absence of

granting by others. However, it is most likely that accumulating ungranted claims over time results in the individual coming to see the leader identity as not self-descriptive.

In addition to positive or negative spirals, we also propose that personal identity development is not a smooth or linear process. Drawing from stage theories of human development (e.g., Kegan, 1982; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978), we posit that individuals will initially develop a leader identity in relation to specific situations. As claiming and granting occurs in one context, the leader identity will be specific to that context, such as "I am a leader on the new product development team." However, through repeated claiming-granting processes across situations and over time, we posit that this situation-specific and socially affirmed leader identity will begin to transcend across situations and grow stronger. This evolution of the leader identity requires that the individual draw connections across leadership situations, which may look very different and involve different behaviors. This process is akin to Sluss and Ashforth's (2007) notion of moving from specific to generalized identities. As the individual begins to make this transition, various context-specific leader identities should cohere into a single, clear, and strong identity as a leader ("I am a leader"). In this sense, the identity "leader" would come to play a larger cross-contextual role in the content and structure of the individual's personal identity.

Boundary Conditions of Claiming and Granting

We have highlighted an integrated social and cognitive process in which individuals first match their perceptions of their personal attributes to their schema of leadership, claim a leader identity in their social worlds, and are granted that identity by others. However, it is also likely that various contextual and personal factors influence this process. In particular, these factors can

constrain or enable the individual's ability or willingness to claim a leader identity, as well as others' ability or willingness to grant a leader identity.

In terms of the social context, one factor that likely influences the claiming of a leader identity is whether or not the focal individual holds a formal supervisory role in a particular group or setting. The endorsement represented by a formal supervisory role reflects a "granting" of leadership, if not by the current group members, then by a formal social structure that all group members operate within and to some extent endorse. Roles are made up of sets of activities or behaviors expected "to be performed, at least approximately, by any person who occupies that office" (Katz & Kahn, 1966, p. 173). Thus, it is likely that others hold expectations of a supervisory role that are indicative of leadership. When this is the case, others are more likely to grant that individual a leader identity unless that individual is ineffective or acts in ways that are considerably inconsistent with existing schemas of leadership. We also expect that individuals in formal supervisory roles will feel particularly free to try "leader-like" acts, which should facilitate further granting of a leader identity. Indeed such behaviors, in that they are likely aligned with the expectations of role-senders, will be reinforced and affirmed by those role senders, creating greater freedom to experiment in the leadership domain over time (Tsui & Ashford, 1994: Tsui, Ashford, St. Clair, L. & Xin, 1995). Thus, it is likely that a person's leader identity will be enhanced over time by being placed in formal supervisory roles.

On the other hand, in self-managing groups where there is no hierarchical role differentiation among members, individuals may be less certain about whether they should (or could) lead. In contexts where formal role differentiation does not exist, claims to the leader identity may be met with only ambiguous social feedback as to their efficacy (i.e., tentative or unclear grants). This should be especially true in contexts where the competition for leadership is

high. If members of a self-managing group all covet a leader identity, the simultaneous claiming of the leader identity could lead to effective sharing of leadership or to conflict over personal identities. If members of the group share an aversion to the leader identity, however, this might produce a void of leadership in the group.

Another feature of the social environment that likely influences the claiming-granting process proposed here is the degree to which the environment provides an opportunity to experiment with a provisional leader identity. In some organizational or cultural contexts, taking on leadership responsibilities in a group might be encouraged (e.g., empowered, decentralized organizational cultures). In other contexts, acts of leadership might be discouraged for those who are not appointed formal hierarchical roles. This idea is evident in research showing that the emergence of informal leaders in social contexts can be constrained by factors present in that context (Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001; Neubert & Taggar, 2004). We expect the more opportunity there is to experiment with leading, the more willing and able the focal individual will be to experiment with various leadership acts. When these leadership acts are met with granting by others, the leader identity will be reinforced. In contexts where experimenting with leadership is not available, the claiming-granting process is interrupted. Thus, it is important that attention be given to the social environments within a group. Groups with norms that encourage personal risk taking, tolerate failure, and view experimentation as learning opportunities seem like particularly fertile ground for the development of leader identities. Beyond these informal cultural influences, organizations might also take explicit steps to give individuals more opportunity to experiment with a leader identity by, for example, redesigning jobs or implementing leadership rotational programs.

In addition to social context factors, features of the claimer and grantor also likely influence the claiming-granting process. For example, a lack of self-awareness may constrain a person's interest in, willingness, or ability to claim a leader identity. Individuals may not know that they actually possess the personal attributes that are viewed by others as prototypical of leadership. Moreover, people may hold a schema of leadership that is so idealized and elevated that they cannot see how the identity of leader could apply to them. In this way, a lack of self-awareness is a constraint on the development of a leader identity. For these individuals, the process of developing a leader identity would likely be initiated by a grant from others (e.g., a promotion, assignment to a supervisory role, or an assignment to head a task force). Organizations, of course, can take steps to reduce this constraint. Organizations can develop training and feedback mechanisms that enhance individuals' self-awareness about what leadership means in a particular context and how the individual is seen along those defined dimensions. For example, one way of building this self-awareness would be to give individuals greater access to effective leader role models.

Thus far, we have presented the granting process as an affirmative response to a person's claim to a leader identity, assuming they enact related behaviors effectively. That is, grants are offered when the individual's personal attributes match the schema for leadership held by others. Although we expect this to be the dominant process associated with developing such an identity, we recognize that there may be things about the grantor or the relationship between the claimer and granter that shape one's willingness or ability to grant a leader identity. For example, there are several reasons why others might grant a leader identity regardless of the outcome of their schema comparison process. The leader identity may be granted to a person not because he or she seems to embody leadership, but because he or she seems to want it. That is, others may do

such granting for affective or political reasons. Affectively, such grants may be offered due to simple liking of the other person. From a political perspective, group members may be more than happy to grant someone else the leader identity to avoid any personal risk stemming from leadership. Likewise, based on theories of social exchange (Homans, 1961; Kelley & Thibaut, 1977; Foa & Foa, 1974), it seems likely that people may grant a leader identity because of that person's ability to provide resources or favors in return at some later point. Conversely, others may not grant a claim for leadership because they do not like the claimer, do not want him or her to reap the rewards of leadership, or because they want to claim it for themselves.

Directions for Future Research

We have put forth a variety of ideas about the process of developing ambiguous personal identities such as leader. In addition to empirical tests of the ideas proposed in this chapter, there are several additional directions for future research that could enhance our understanding of the personal identity development process.

Are there regularities in who tends to claim and not claim a leader identity (and who gets granted the identity)? We have articulated a claiming-granting process that explains how individuals develop a leader identity, but we have done so with little attention to individual differences beyond cognitive schemas and self-awareness. We expect individual differences beyond these will impact the process. For example, do men tend to claim a leader identity more than women, or vice versa, and if so why? Do those who fit the societal norms or "great man" theories of leadership tend to make leader identity claims more often in groups settings than those who do not? As new leadership styles emerge, will new claims be forthcoming? Will these claims be more successful?

To what extent and how does history matter? If one person grants a leader identity to another person in one context, how does this grant shape future claiming and granting processes among the same individuals but in different contexts? Future research that examines how and to what extent claims and grants from one context carryover to different contexts would be particularly helpful extensions of the ideas presented in this chapter.

What does granting imply for the grantor? When one member of a work group grants a leader identity to another person, does this mean that he or she is implicitly (or explicitly) claiming a "follower" identity? Moreover, under what conditions might an individual grant a leader identity to another person and at the same time claim a leader identity for him or herself?

What happens when there are multiple claims? Especially in a new situation or in a situation with no appointed leader, several individuals may be interested in claiming this identity for themselves and having others grant it to them. Current theory, including this chapter, does not speak to what happens when multiple people in a single context (e.g., team) claim a leader identity.

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Figure 1

A Process of Leader Identity Internalization