Situational and Organizational Factors associated with

Leader and Gender Identity Conflict and Facilitation

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Given the increasing recognition that human capital can be a valuable source of competitive advantage, organizations are constantly in a “war for talent.” However, it appears that organizations may not be fully capitalizing on the talent available, as women and racial/ethnic minorities, who may have unique and novel perspectives, continue to be underrepresented in top leadership roles. To elucidate how leaders perceive their leadership role in combination with other valued identities (or aspects of the self), the present proposal focuses on gender as a salient social identity and examine the concepts of leader and gender identity conflict and facilitation. We argue that leaders’ perceptions regarding whether their leader and gender (i.e., man or woman) identities are in conflict or facilitate each other (i.e., operate synergistically) may be systematically affected by situational and organizational factors.

The present study extends previous work on multiple identities by examining the situational and organizational factors that are related to how organizational leaders manage their dual identities as a man/woman and as a leader. Social identities refer to how individuals construe aspects of the self based on membership in key social groups (e.g., men, women; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Historically, social identity research has focused on the impact of each social identity in isolation, despite the fact that individuals are generally members of multiple social groups simultaneously (Chao & Moon, 2005). Recent research has begun to examine how individuals manage multiple identities, finding that perceived conflict between centrally-held identities is negatively related to well-being (e.g., lower self-esteem, life satisfaction, and performance and higher depression and stress; Brook, Garcia, & Fleming, 2008; Settles, 2004).

Based on a review of the literature, it appears that only one prior study has examined conflict between gender and leader identities. In a large sample of women leaders, Karelaia and Guillén (2012) found that perceived conflict between being a woman and being a leader was positively related to stress and social-normative motivation to lead (i.e., I “ought” to lead; feeling a sense of responsibility to lead) and negatively related to life satisfaction and affective motivation to lead (i.e., I “want” to lead; intrinsic satisfaction in leading). Thus, preliminary evidence shows that leader and gender identity conflict is related to key personal and organizational outcomes for female leaders.

Although Karelaia and Guillén (2012) provided critical initial evidence for the existence and importance of leader and gender identity conflict, their study has several limitations. First, Karelaia and Guillén only examined negative relationships between gender and leader identity. However, prior research examining the intersection of multiple identities found that individuals can also experience facilitation between identities (i.e., work and family roles, Frone, 2003; gender and scientist identities, London et al., 2011). Thus, the present study also examines situational and organizational antecedents to leader and gender identity facilitation. Second, Karelaia and Guillén only surveyed women leaders, so it is unclear to what extent leader and gender identity conflict (and facilitation) may be unique to women leaders or whether male leaders also perceive conflict (and facilitation) between their identities.

The present study analyzed qualitative open-ended response from 449 leaders across organizations and industries (This data has already been collected). The sample consisted of approximately equal numbers of men (N = 244) and women (N = 205). The average age was 33.54 (SD = 5.19). The racial breakdown was 81.4% White, 7.2% Black, 5.8% Asian, 4.0% Hispanic, and 1.6% Other. The managerial level breakdown was 69.4% first-line supervisors, 23.8% mid-level managers, and 6.7% top or executive-level managers.

The present study centers around four questions. Two critical incidents were collected; one regarding a time where the leader felt that their gender and leader identity were in conflict and another regarding a time where the leader felt that their gender and leader identity were in harmony. Two qualitative responses were also collected regarding managers’ perceptions of organizational factors that facilitated their gender and leader identity conflict and facilitation.

*Question 1*: Please describe a time or an event where you felt that your dual roles of being a woman/man and being a leader was beneficial, compatible, or demonstrated positive spillover between the two roles.  
*Question 2*: Please describe a time where you felt that your dual roles of being a woman/man and being a leader was in conflict, interfered with each other, or demonstrated negative spillover between the two roles.

*Question 3*: Please list three organizational factors that have contributed to your integration of your dual roles of being a woman/man and being a leader.  
*Question 4*: Please list three organizational factors that have hindered your integration of your dual roles of being a woman/man and being a leader.

Currently coding is underway for these qualitative data. It is anticipated that the results of the present study will include a number of themes for the specific situational and organizational factors that are related to gender and leader identity conflict and facilitation. These factors are currently largely unknown, though Karelaia and Guillén (2012) did examine whether the number of women in the organization was related to leader and gender identity conflict for women leaders. Furthermore, we will also examine whether the situational and organizational factors linked to conflict and facilitation differed for men and women leaders and by managerial level. These findings will provide critical insights regarding the salient organizational and situational factors related to positive identity development and integration in the workplace and potentially serve as the basis of interventions designed to promote gender and leader identity facilitation and minimize gender and leader identity conflict.

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Autobiographical Note

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