

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313064949>

# Identities under scrutiny: How women leaders navigate feeling misidentified at work

Article in *The Leadership Quarterly* · January 2017

DOI: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.01.009

CITATIONS

40

READS

659

3 authors:



Alyson Meister

IMD

17 PUBLICATIONS 133 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



Amanda Sinclair

University of Melbourne

55 PUBLICATIONS 2,753 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



Karen Jehn

University of Melbourne

175 PUBLICATIONS 19,774 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Group Faultlines in Strategic Alliances [View project](#)

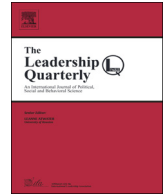


Be:Longing: Navigating Indigenous Arts Leadership [View project](#)



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## The Leadership Quarterly

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/leaqua](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/leaqua)

## Identities under scrutiny: How women leaders navigate feeling misidentified at work

Alyson Meister<sup>a,\*</sup>, Amanda Sinclair<sup>b</sup>, Karen A. Jehn<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Management, The University of Los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia

<sup>b</sup> Melbourne Business School, Carlton, Australia

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 22 April 2016

Received in revised form 20 January 2017

Accepted 21 January 2017

Available online xxxx

#### Keywords:

Identity  
Identity asymmetry  
Gender  
Leadership

### ABSTRACT

The identities of women leaders can fall under intense scrutiny; they are often confronted with other's perceptions of them—perceptions that may not be wholly accurate. Through in-depth qualitative interviews of senior women leaders working in male-dominated industries, we explore how they experience and respond to feeling misidentified (internal identity asymmetry; Meister, Jehn, & Thatcher, 2014) throughout their careers. Employing grounded theory methods, we uncover how women are likely to experience asymmetry, and discover it becomes most salient during personal and professional identity transitions. We build theory with respect to how women leaders navigate feeling misidentified, and find with time and power the experience becomes less salient. Our study draws together and contributes to both the identity and leadership literatures by exploring an important identity challenge facing women leaders in industries that are striving for a greater gender-balance in senior positions.

© 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

*“When you're in the spotlight as a woman, you know you're being judged constantly. I mean, it is just never ending.”*

*[Hillary Clinton, Interview with ABC, 2014]*

### Introduction

In organizations, leaders learn that it matters how those they work with perceive them. From the ever-expanding body of management literature imploring leaders to create, present, and manage their leadership identities (e.g., George, 2003; Goffee & Jones, 2005; Irvine & Reger, 2006; Sinclair, 2013), to the rising use and sophistication of feedback instruments that provide leaders with insight into how others see them (Peiperl, 2001; Zenger, Folkman, & Edinger, 2011), modern leaders are compelled to acknowledge how they are perceived. Further, as recent scholarship highlights how mere appearances can influence how people select and evaluate leaders at work (e.g., Geys, 2014; Little, 2014; Poutvaara, 2014), leaders may become prone to considering and managing how others see them at work.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [al.meister@uniandes.edu.co](mailto:al.meister@uniandes.edu.co) (A. Meister), [asinclair@mbs.edu](mailto:asinclair@mbs.edu) (A. Sinclair), [kjehn@mbs.edu](mailto:kjehn@mbs.edu) (K.A. Jehn).

As our quote above depicts, women in leadership roles can face additional struggles with respect to navigating and managing the perceptions of others. For example, literature shows that while women and men leaders may behave and perform similarly when in comparable leadership roles (Vecchio, 2003), women still tend to be perceived less favorably as potential candidates for leadership roles, and when performing these roles, their behavior is also judged less favorably (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Riggins & Winkel, 2011). This is because leadership is often conceptualized as a stereotypically ‘masculine’ endeavor requiring agentic qualities, bodies and behavior (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Kark & Eagly, 2010; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011; Sinclair, 1998). Women who conform to the behavioral requirements of the role can be seen to be violating the communal ‘warm and kind’ female societal role expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008). These harsher judgments can lead to women leaders being labeled ‘dragon lady’, ‘battle axe’, ‘honorary men’ or ‘flawed women’ (Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, & Uzzi, 2000; Tannen, 1994). Consequently, women may discover that their identities as leaders—particularly those who work as minorities in traditionally male professions—can be subject to intense scrutiny (Bell, Sinclair, Broadbridge, & Broadbridge, 2016; Kanter, 1977; Mavin, Bryans, & Cunningham, 2010; Mavin & Grandy, 2016), and they may be confronted with how others perceive their identities—perceptions that may be inaccurate. They may subsequently feel pressured to invest thought, time and effort into managing other’s perceptions, and to develop coping responses to navigate this experience (Bell et al., 2016; Meister, Jehn, & Thatcher, 2014; Swann, Johnson, & Bosson, 2009). Drawing together the identity, gender and leadership literatures, we thus seek to examine how and when women leaders in male-dominated organizations experience this scrutiny of their identities, and the coping processes in which they engage to navigate the experience.

To accomplish this, through qualitative research we explore women’s experiences of feeling misidentified by their colleagues throughout their careers. Also called ‘internal identity asymmetry’, feeling misidentified at work is experienced when an individual believes that others ascribe incorrect or unwanted identities to him or her, neglecting identities that might be highly salient to him or her (Meister et al., 2014). This is grounded in research that suggests that it is an individual’s perceptions of a phenomenon that ultimately drives their responses (e.g., Burns & Vollmeyer, 1998; Homan, van Knippenberg, Van Kleef, & De Dreu, 2007; Jehn, Rispens, & Thatcher, 2010). We thus suggest that a woman’s belief that asymmetry exists drives her experience at work, despite whether it exists in reality. This perceived misalignment ignites the need to re-negotiate one’s self-identities with oneself or with the other, in order to reduce discrepancies (or dissonance) and move toward congruence (Festinger, 1957; Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003; Swann et al., 2009). The concept of asymmetry captures experienced misalignment between perceptions without predetermining whether the experience is harmful or not—asymmetries may be interpreted as either negative or positive, and this valence assessment may influence differential outcomes (Meister et al., 2014). Further, an asymmetry may be based on any of an individual’s self-identities, which may or may not include experiences of stereotype. For example, while an asymmetry could be based on gender stereotypes, it could also be based on how a woman thinks that others see her professional role at work (e.g., “others see my role incongruently to how I see my role”).

In exploring internal identity asymmetry with women leaders, our article makes several contributions to scholarship. First, we contribute to the identity literature with an in-depth empirical study of internal identity asymmetry with women leaders. While the concept has been identified as theoretically important to individuals at work (e.g., influencing well-being and relationships; Meister et al., 2014), we still have little understanding of *when* it may be most likely to happen, *how* individuals (in our case, women leaders) experience it, and the specific identity negotiation and coping processes they might use to navigate the experience. By exploring this phenomenon qualitatively, we provide empirical depth (Conger, 1998) and build theory regarding how and when women leaders in male dominated industries might be most likely to experience being misidentified. We draw on several bodies of literature to explore the ways they navigate the experience, including the deliberated strategies they volunteer as well as those that are emergent and given meaning retrospectively. In doing so, a richer and more nuanced understanding of the experience of asymmetry emerges, providing a basis for future empirical work.

Second, we answer recent calls in the leadership literature for exploration into how leaders “see and define themselves, as well as understanding the complex ways in which these self-definitions develop, change, and are influenced by leader-follower interactions and contexts” (Epitropaki, Kark, Mainemelis, & Lord, 2016 p. 1). Our research does this by exploring how women leaders’ beliefs that they are misidentified might influence their experience at work. This is important, because despite the many initiatives to support women in corporate leadership in the past decades, there remain comparatively few women who occupy senior leadership roles, particularly in male-dominated industries such as engineering, construction, and finance (Kark & Eagly, 2010). Previous research has identified numerous factors contributing to women’s exclusion from the top, such as work-family issues, discrimination, and organizational barriers to women advancing (e.g., Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ely & Rhode, 2010; Kark & Eagly, 2010; Sinclair, 1998), yet this research suggests women continue to experience invisible yet powerful obstacles in accessing leadership roles and being supported to perform their best (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). A recent study shows, for example, that the often unfriendly and hostile working environment surrounding women engineers drives them to leave engineering all together (Fouad, 2014). By employing in depth interviews, we explore the identity tensions this difficult environment can elicit for senior women including tensions with respect to how they believe their colleagues perceive them, and how these experiences influence them.

Finally, our theory and research makes practical contributions to leadership practice. Our findings suggest that internal identity asymmetry may profoundly influence women leaders in male-dominated industries with the potential to damage success, well-being and longevity in their roles and professions. We find that women may feel more misidentified during times of professional (e.g., the transition to leadership) or personal identity transitions (such as pregnancy) that are unavoidably experienced publicly at work, and we unpack the various strategies they employ in response to this dynamic. Armed with this knowledge, we suggest

how women leaders might devise strategies to pre-empt or deliberately respond to the experience, potentially helping to circumvent the downsides to asymmetry. Further, we suggest that the experience of feeling misidentified may become less potent over time as women mature and gain more formal authority throughout their careers. Organizations will benefit from awareness of the asymmetry that women leaders might experience throughout their careers, in order to provide support and guidance, and to educate other team members about the importance of acknowledging the self-identities of the individual.

### Negotiating identities at work

While the concept and definition of identity varies across bodies of research, we adhere to the definition that understands identity as the subjective knowledge, meanings, and experiences, which together define an individual (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Gecas, 1982; Ramarajan, 2014). For example, an individual may describe his or herself at several levels of self-construal (Brewer & Gardner, 1996): the individual level, with identities based on attributes, traits, or competencies (e.g., intelligent, creative, or outgoing); the relational level, with identities based on interpersonal or social roles (e.g., mother, supervisor cites); or the collective level, with broader social categories or group memberships, such as organizational or professional memberships, or racial and cultural identities. Individuals also typically have desired, provisional, unwanted, metaphorical, future identities, which are also referred to as 'selves' (Ibarra, 1999; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012; Roberts, 2005).

How individuals define themselves and the salience of those identities are mutable, evolving in response to contextual feedback and cues from the surrounding social environment. While most scholars agree that individuals have multiple identities, some suggest that identities are organized in an internal salience hierarchy, with various identities having a different probability of being invoked in a given social situation (Gecas, 1982; Stryker, 1968). Others suggest that selves co-exist in more chaotic, sometimes contradictory collections (Alvesson et al., 2008; Collinson, 2003; Collinson, 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). An individual's self-identity at any point in time is thus "the activated portion of the overall self-concept, that, at that specific time, guides information processing, affect, and behavior" (Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). For example, outside work a woman may define herself as a mother, a yoga enthusiast, and member of an environmental association. At work, she may see herself as leader and engineer. We focus on how women leaders define themselves in the work context, and how they believe that their colleagues define them in return.

While in some respects leaders can subjectively determine who they are at work, constructing a professional identity (or leadership identity) in an organization is a complex process of both claiming identities, and being granted and validated on those identities through social interactions (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Epitropaki et al., 2016; Ibarra, Snook, & Guillén Ramo, 2010). Thus, despite how leaders self-identify, they must contend with identities ascribed to them, for example based on visible or assumed characteristics (e.g., gender, or race, or physical disability), based on roles (e.g., as a leader you *must* be intelligent, decisive, or agentic), or based on organizational expectations. Consequently individuals engage in ongoing external and internal identity negotiation (Collinson, 2003; Sinclair, 2011). Inwardly focused, identity work is how individuals' craft, experiment with, and shape their self-narratives to make sense of who they are (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Snow & Anderson, 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Identity negotiation (Swann, 1987; Swann et al., 2009) and impression management (e.g., Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989; Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 1980) processes are more outwardly focused, influencing how individual's shape their identities in the eyes of others.

### Women leaders and the experience of identity asymmetry

As individuals engage in identity negotiation processes in their organizations, they may confront discrepancies between how they self-identify and how they believe others identify them. This conscious misalignment between their self-views and how they *believe* others see them (despite how others might *actually* see them) is defined as internal identity asymmetry (Meister et al., 2014). An internal identity asymmetry may be with respect to a specific identity (e.g., gender, role), or it may be an overall experience capturing the extent to which individuals believe that a significant other (or 'others' as the case may be) misidentifies them. As individuals prefer to move toward congruence between their self-views and external views (Swann & Read, 1980; Swann et al., 2003) to reduce cognitive dissonance (a discomfort experienced when an individual holds conflicting cognitions; Abelson et al., 1968; Aronson, 1969; Festinger, 1957), asymmetry is thus an uncomfortable or stressful experience. Despite this, some asymmetries might be interpreted as highly negative, while others might be more positive or aspirational (Ibarra, 2015) and this appraisal directs the likely response and outcome (Meister et al., 2014).

While all individuals in organizations can face internal identity asymmetries, women face a unique set of challenges. In a society that has traditionally conceptualized leadership as particularly a masculine endeavor (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Fletcher, 2004; Sinclair, 2011), women aspiring to leadership roles may be disadvantaged before they even embark on leadership positions, due to deeply embedded societal unconscious bias and expectations (Hogue & Lord, 2007; Johnson et al., 2008). Negotiating, claiming, and being granted leadership identities presents a challenge for women leaders (Eagly, 2005; Sinclair, 2013), who are often categorized as women first, and leaders second (Scott & Brown, 2006). Indeed, research shows that minorities (such as women in leadership) may experience that they are not seen as legitimate nor credible members of their profession, causing difficulties with respect to claiming professional identities or roles (Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Clair, Humberd, Caruso, & Roberts, 2012). Despite how a woman might see herself, gender often becomes salient to others around her because of the scarcity of women in such positions and this expectation that leaders will be men (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ely, 1995; Kanter, 1977). Additionally, on a physical level, women in leadership positions often face heightened visibility and scrutiny of their bodies and

physical characteristics as a central part of their identity (Bell et al., 2016; Hall & Donaghue, 2013; Sinclair, 1998, 2005). Thus despite how a woman self-identifies at work, she might not be afforded those identities from those around her, and may consequently be prone to experiencing internal identity asymmetry.

Feeling stereotyped by gender is *one form* of internal identity asymmetry in that a woman believes that others categorize or stereotype her based on gender, while she might not see herself in that way. Previous research highlights the many ways in which women experience stereotyping or exclusion based on their gender and how they resist, challenge, and negotiate their identities amidst these dynamics (e.g., Denissen, 2010; Ely, 1995; Faulkner, 2009; Gill, Mills, Franzway, & Sharp, 2008; Jorgenson, 2002; Kvande, 1999; Miller, 2004; Peterson, 2010; Powell, Bagilhole, & Dainty, 2009; Sinclair, 1998). Stepping back and exploring perceived asymmetries based on a number of subjective work-related identities, we seek to develop an experienced account of how and when women experience feeling misidentified throughout their careers (which, we discover may or may not include asymmetries based on gender stereotypes). Further, we explore the process of responding to and coping with the experience over time. With this aim, we investigate three research questions:

Q1: How do women leaders experience internal identity asymmetries at work?

Q2: When in their career are women leaders most likely to experience internal identity asymmetries?

Q3: How do women leaders respond to internal identity asymmetries?

## Methods

To address these questions, we used an interpretivist, grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis, which is often used to develop insights into new or poorly understood phenomena, or to extend our insight into existing theoretical perspectives (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 2009; O'Reilly & Marx, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). As is common in studies employing grounded theory methods (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006; Vough, Bataille, Noh, & Lee, 2015), we bounded the context for which we could derive findings and theoretical insights by adopting a purposeful sample (see: Neuman, 2002; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Suri, 2011), which in the study of leadership, is when the researcher intentionally selects participants “who can contribute an in-depth, information-rich understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Klenke, 2008p. 211). In our case, we narrowed our focus to senior women leaders working in traditionally male-dominated industries to generate insight into their experiences in this context—one that still faces a significant deficit of women in senior positions. Our research methodology is thus appropriate for this type of exploration, and serves to provide ideas and themes for future more externally valid and widely applicable research.

### Sample and data collection

We conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 21 women leaders across three traditionally male-dominated industries in Australia: construction (6 women), engineering (10 women), and finance (5 women). All of the women interviewed suggested they were a minority as a woman in their industry throughout their varied careers, which became more poignant as time progressed and they became more senior. Twenty identified as Caucasian, and one identified as Asian. To facilitate access to this senior executive women sample (which represents an elite group, often difficult to access), and aiming for a strong response rate, we started by ‘cold-calling’ (drawing on contacts and networks), and then used the snowball sampling technique (Noy, 2008; Cycyota & Harrison, 2006). Specifically, we started by contacting a woman leader who had been named in the press as the CEO of large engineering firm. She agreed to participate, and after the interview recommended several other senior women leaders she thought might also be willing to participate. We contacted her recommendations, and continued this process. Only one of the women contacted refused to participate, as she was about to move internationally.

The women we interviewed fell naturally into two groups, corresponding to organizational seniority: Level 1, typically CEO or Board Level, and Level 2, typically senior leader or director level. Level 1 leaders, of which we interviewed 8, ranged from 45 to 55 years in age, all leading large organizations (>1500 employees). Level 2 leaders, of which we interviewed 13, were typically 32–45 years in age, 2–4 levels beneath the CEO, and leading large teams or divisions. This allowed us to compare and contrast the experiences of more versus less senior women. They were ensured confidentiality, and were given the opportunity to opt-out of the project at any point. Thus, in this article participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms, and any other identifying information has been removed.

Our primary source of data was semi-structured in-depth interviews that were conducted by the first author, which were voice-recorded and professionally transcribed. Ranging from 45 to 120 min, we started the interviews by asking the participants to walk us through their career histories. During this career history, we asked how they believed they are/were perceived by their colleagues, whether they felt others' perceptions (of them) were accurate, and their responses to these experiences. If a misalignment in perceptions was experienced (internal identity asymmetry), we invited the woman to develop a narrative (to tell a detailed story) about it (refer to Appendix A for a summary of the interview protocol). Self-narratives, or reflexive stories, are a way that individuals make sense of and express their own identity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), and walking through life (or, in our case, career) histories is a method often used by qualitative research useful to bring forth such narratives (Chase, 2007; Vough et al., 2015). These interviews provided explicit, spoken data with respect to the experience of internal identity asymmetry, and their responses to it. Shorter interviews reflect that the woman experienced fewer asymmetries,

while in the longer interviews, the woman had likely experienced several. In total, 20 of the 21 women experienced one (or several) experiences of feeling misidentified, totaling just over 60 asymmetry experiences.

As a complementary data source, the researcher conducting the interview collected observational data and recorded extensive field notes of the tone of voice, body-language, or displayed emotion during the interview process. Specifically, the interviewer made note of what time in the interview a woman mentioned an asymmetry, and what emotion, body language or tone of voice accompanied this narrative, so we could later link this to the written content of the interview. For example, if a woman cried, or raised her voice in anger in the retelling of a narrative, this emotion was recorded through interviewer observation. Later, (as we will further detail in the analysis section), the researcher could listen to the interview with the transcript in hand, and make note of the valence (e.g., was the asymmetry a positive or negative experience?). Triangulating the data by using both explicit (spoken) and implicit (unspoken—observational) data, for us, was critical to confirm, challenge, or simply observe what unspoken or unstated emotion might be expressed during the interview.

### *Analysis*

As we wanted to build theory with respect to women leaders' experiences of feeling misidentified, we followed a grounded theory-development approach, moving back and forth between data collection (interviews), coding, thematic analysis, and consulting existing theory and literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001; O'Reilly & Marx, 2012). This method is similar to that used by other qualitative researchers exploring identity and identity work in organizations (e.g., Kreiner et al., 2006; Ladge, Clair, & Greenberg, 2012; Pratt et al., 2006). Providing rigor when both analyzing and presenting our qualitative data, we consulted recommendations and direction from qualitative scholars (Bryman, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; O'Reilly & Marx, 2012; Pratt, 2009) and specifically drew on the Gioia method for building grounded theory (see: Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012). We used this method when seeking answers to our research questions individually, and subsequently built theory by integrating these themes and connections that emerged. The stages of our analysis are generally depicted as follows, yet occurred iteratively as we moved back and forth between data collection and analysis.

#### *Stage 1*

The first stage involved identifying concepts and generating codes for our data (open coding), using informant-centric terms and phrases (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Gioia et al., 2012; Glaser & Strauss, 2009). During this stage, the first author listened to the voice recordings while reading the interview transcripts simultaneously, and attended to any observational data that was recorded throughout the interview to note the potential emotional valence of the asymmetry. The second and third authors each independently analyzed random selections of the transcripts, noting their own codes and potential themes from the written and observational data. We approached our interview data in batches of 3 or 4, after which we met, updated our emerging themes, coding systems, and consulted existent literature. New emerging trends and insights generated would also inform small adjustments to the interview protocol for the next batch of interviews. In these early stages of analysis, we first identified and explored the individual narratives of feeling misidentified. Within each narrative, for example, we coded the valence of the experience (e.g., whether it evoked positive or negative emotion), the types of identity that were affected (e.g., age-related, gender-related, or competence-related), and the emerging strategies women employed for coping with their experiences. This generated over 100 different codes, which were eventually distilled into themes and categories.

#### *Stage 2*

As the interviews progressed, we consolidated our codes and ideas of emerging themes into categories and aggregated 2nd-order dimensions. We noted general themes emerging from our data surrounding what types of asymmetries were experienced, when women felt misidentified during their careers, and the responses and strategies women used to cope with their experiences. Throughout this phase, we continued to consult the existent literature—ranging from the identity negotiation and identity work literatures, stereotype and gender literatures, and the stress and coping literatures, to discover possible explanations for our emerging themes and findings linked to our research questions. We continued to consolidate our themes and search for connections among dimensions. Throughout the process we reconciled differences in ideas and interpretations by the authors by developing consensus about how existing theory and new insights might apply. As all authors come from different epistemological backgrounds, this ensured rigor across several disciplines. After 17 interviews we found that the codes, categories, and themes, arising from new interviews did not generate new insights, and thus we believe that we reached theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; O'Reilly & Marx, 2012). Despite this, we conducted an additional 4 interviews to confirm this saturation, and also because we had already confirmed to interview 4 additional women and wanted to include their experiences.

#### *Stage 3*

Finally, we drew our analyses into data structures (e.g., see Figs. 1 and 2). Drawing on our data structure and emerging themes, we also developed a theoretical model of women's responses to internal identity asymmetry (which is the process of viewing the analysis from a higher-level, theoretical perspective; Gioia et al., 2012). While doing so, we ensured to continue to consult current relevant research and theory (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007) to determine how our insights might further our knowledge of this phenomenon.

Additionally it is important to note that we strengthened our theoretical analysis within each of these steps by following principles of discourse analysis when analyzing the written text. Discourse analysis is a method increasingly adopted in studying

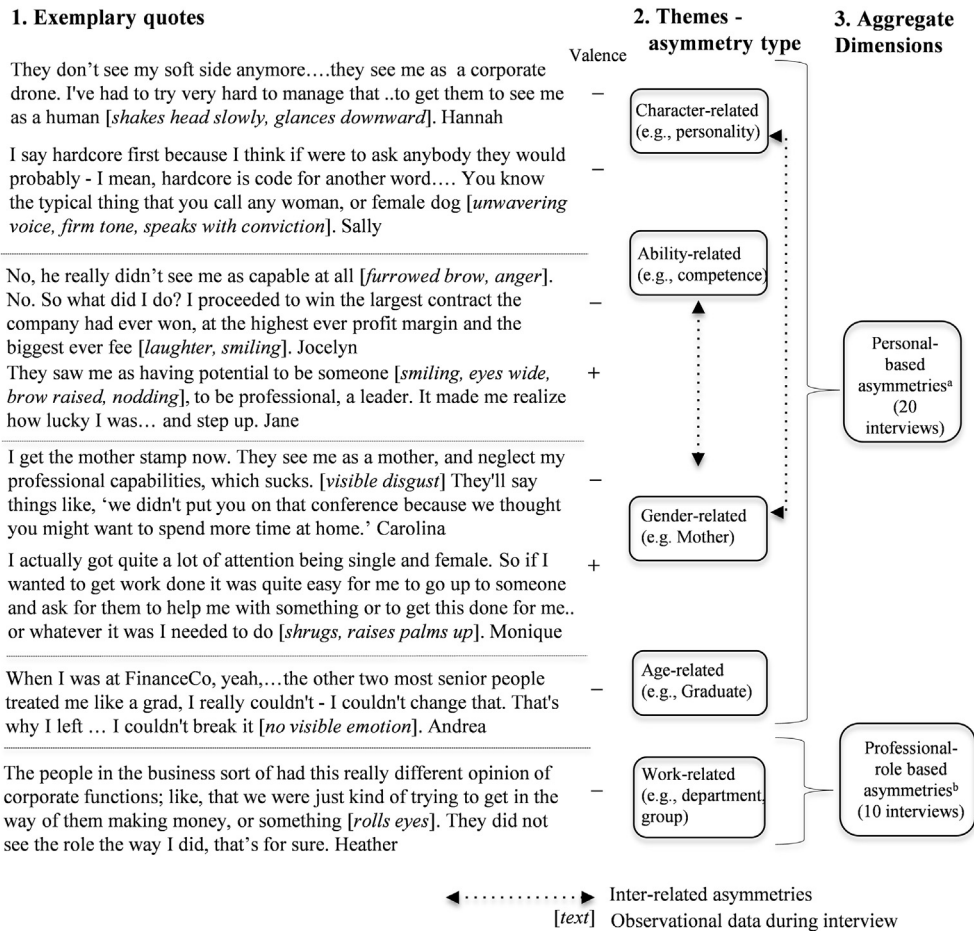


Fig. 1. Categorizing internal identity asymmetries.

managers and leaders, especially where researchers are exploring subjective phenomena such as identity and identity construction (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Davies & Thomas, 2003; Ford, 2006; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). It is based on the view that meaning and sense-making is constructed through discursive practices and language, a process captured in the phrase 'how can I know what I think until I see what I say?' (e.g., Ford, 2006; Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Potter & Wetherell, 1987, 1994; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). This requires, for example, paying attention to the language and shifts of positioning that interviewees' phrasing and words reveals. For example, we attended to colloquial expressions and noted when the language interviewees used shifted from formal to more emotional or direct. Accordingly, through our data collection and analysis method we attended to both the content and the form of what was said during the interviews, and also the emotion that was expressed through body language and tone during the interview (our observational interview data). By examining the language women used in their narratives and stories of feeling misidentified and consulting this literature, we could infer more subtle techniques that women employed to help them understand and navigate potentially distressful experiences—both in the moment of the interview, and retrospectively. For example, remembering and retelling these experiences afforded the option of taking up various identity positions with the benefit of hindsight (Kohler-Riessman, 2000). This may be done unintentionally, as a method of coping with the past, or as a discursive means of positioning or distancing themselves in a difficult social dynamic (Davies & Harré, 1990, 1999). Applying these methods added additional depth and rigor to our analysis.

**Findings**

Below we organize and present our findings related to our specific research questions, and follow this with a discussion of how individuals might use these insights to help them navigate internal identity asymmetries at work. To help demonstrate the potential emotional intensity of the experience and to provide richness to the examples, we have described our observations of the woman's disposition or displayed emotion.

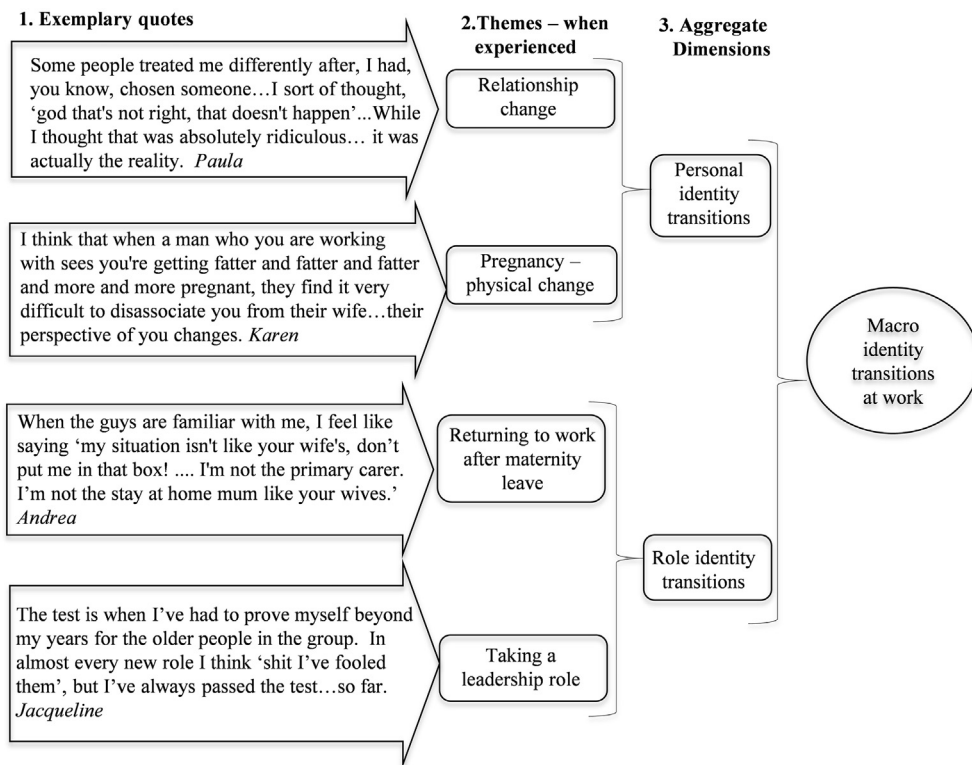


Fig. 2. Experiencing salient personal identity asymmetries during identity transitions.

### Research Question 1: how do women leaders experience identity asymmetries?

We first explored if and how women leaders experience discrepancies between how they self-identify, and how they believe their colleagues at work identify them. This involved not only determining if identity asymmetry was experienced, but what *type* of identity it concerned, and *how* it was experienced (e.g., as a positive or negative; see Fig. 1 for an overview). Regarding the identities on which asymmetries were based, two clear themes emerged through our analysis: asymmetries related to what we call 'personal' identities (e.g., identities that related to the woman herself, such as her gender, competence) and asymmetries related to the woman's work role (e.g., profession, team, or organizational group).

#### Salient asymmetry types: personal or professional

We categorized and labeled asymmetries related to personal identities (relating to personal identities such as one's competence, gender, or character) as "personal-based asymmetries". This type of asymmetry was volunteered in 95% of our interviews (20 of 21 interviews). For example, several women experienced asymmetries that, in some form, related to their gender. Because these women were of a minority status in their organizations, many experienced that others made their gender salient, whereas they felt gender was not paramount to their own self-identity at work. Previous work indeed shows that when women have token status in male-dominated organizations, it can lead both men and women to exaggerate differences (Ely, 1995; Izraeli, 1983; Kanter, 1977). Gender identity asymmetry was often linked with other personal-based asymmetries. Many believed, for example, that when gender was made salient, this prompted others to see them as incompetent or unable to perform a role. In the following quote, engineer Jocelyn echoes the language of her detractors to conjure up how it feels to be thrust into the "chick" identity, despite her 15 years of experience. Frustrated, she raises her voice and argues: "They saw me as a silly chick. A silly little girl. What the hell was a chick doing here? Women had no place on construction sites." Jocelyn, like many others, experienced discrepancies based on age and gender, and gender and competence, which often became inter-related and intertwined. This type of emotional expression through language and word choice, for example, underlines the importance and intensity of this experience for the individual (Doucet & Jehn, 1997; Jehn, 1997).

What we call professional-based asymmetries are discrepancies unrelated to the woman's personal identities at work (e.g., for example, related to how others see their department, organization, or profession as a whole). Of the women we interviewed, 48% (10 of 21 interviews) described stories of professional-based asymmetries. As individuals often identify with their organization or profession (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2008; Kreiner et al., 2006), these were also salient. For example, experiencing an asymmetry relating to how she and others in the organization view her department, one woman fumes, with a slightly raised voice: "I saw my



team [the accounting department] as providing a compliance-based consulting service, while they all saw us as the ‘number police’. Previous research shows that disagreement with respect to how external clients, for example, see one’s profession can lead to a host of negative consequences (Vough, Cardador, Bednar, Dane, & Pratt, 2013), highlighting that perceptive asymmetries related to one’s profession, or in our case department or team at work, can be highly consequential for individuals.

#### *Assessing asymmetry valence*

We also considered whether they understood the asymmetry to be positive or negative. Valence, as it pertains to internal identity asymmetry, refers to whether the individual appraised the asymmetry as being a subjectively negative or positive experience (Meister et al., 2014). Negatively-valenced asymmetries are potential threats containing the possibility for harm or loss (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986) while positively-valenced asymmetries can offer future benefit. Determining valence was not always straightforward. For instance, an asymmetry that appeared positively valenced may have been felt as degrading, or stressful. Thus it was important to listen to tone and language (our secondary, observational and voice data) when interpreting the interview, not only taking an asymmetry at face value. Paula, for example, explains that sometimes being identified as a woman offered ‘positive benefits’. However, her narrative shows her discomfort at being associated with a ‘granddaughter’ just because she is a woman, despite that this afforded her extra help from a senior male colleague:

Even in the case where a guy was helping me out with a project because his granddaughter was studying engineering, I didn’t like to see that as being specific to me just because I was a woman. There was a lot of internal conflict I think when I was younger about what I would take advantage of being a woman.

Approximately 70% of the women we interviewed cited negatively valenced asymmetries, and approximately 30% cited at least one positively valenced asymmetry. This is to be expected because individuals are more likely to remember intense negative emotional events from their past than positive ones (Kanouse & Hanson, 1987; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Highly negative internal identity asymmetries might indeed be one of these important and emotionally intense events and thus these are most easily accessible. Further, being seen in a more positive light (or facing what might be considered to be a low-salience asymmetry) might simply go undetected or be more easily forgotten because it plays into an individual’s self-enhancement motives (Krueger, 1998; Leary, 2007), and desire to construct positive identities while at work (Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, 2007; Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010).

A large part of the stories of positively valenced asymmetries related to the perceptions of one’s abilities or competence in taking up a leadership identity (e.g., “others think I am better than I see myself”). For example, Annie recounts her experience of being offered a Director position in a financial institution: “I remember thinking there’s no way I’m going to get this role. They’ve obviously asked the wrong person and got me confused with somebody else.” Annie believes that others saw her as more competent to perform a new role than she believed she actually was. She also related this experience smiling with enthusiasm, suggesting it was positively valenced. As noted above, some of these seemingly ‘positive’ asymmetries can also be interpreted as negative. Women often see themselves as less qualified than men for key leadership positions such as these (Babcock, Laschever, Gelfand, & Small, 2003), and suffer the ‘imposter syndrome’ (Clance & Imes, 1978; Langford & Clance, 1993) when they do achieve significant roles. That is, they believe that they have ‘fooled’ others into seeing them as intelligent or capable.

Overall, while both personal and professional-based asymmetries were salient, personal-based identity asymmetries were the type most referred to during our interviews (in 95% of cases). Thus, we have narrowed our analysis and theory building in this article to examining and expanding on these personal-related asymmetries (both positive and negatively-valenced experiences). Further, while there are indeed a multitude of ‘types’ of identities on which asymmetries could be based, we have summarized the most common asymmetries common across the women (see Fig. 1).

#### *Research Question 2: when are women leaders most likely to experience internal identity asymmetry?*

While exploring when women were most likely to experience internal identity asymmetry throughout their careers, several themes emerged. First, we found that while gender-related discrepancies (e.g., being labeled as ‘the woman’ at work) were often ongoing, there were critical points in women’s career stories, which made certain experiences of ‘feeling misidentified’ seem more important: during times of personal and professional identity transitions (see Fig. 2). Second, we found that the experience of internal identity asymmetry evolved throughout a woman’s career. Both time-related factors (such as tenure, and a woman’s age) and power-related factors (e.g. formal authority) played important roles—influencing both how women subjectively experienced and responded to internal identity asymmetries.

#### *Personal and professional identity transitions*

An individual’s self-concept is constantly evolving and growing, as one takes on new identities, new possibilities, or leaves old identities behind. A macro identity transition, is when an individual undergoes a significant change with respect to his or her self-identities, such as taking on a substantial new role at work (e.g., Ibarra, 2003; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). For example, when a woman becomes pregnant for the first time, she may begin to incorporate the identity of ‘mother’ into her self-concept (Ladge et al., 2012), essentially altering the way she sees herself. From our research, it emerged that key identity transitions precipitated highly salient asymmetry experiences. These common transitions heightened beliefs that certain identities became more salient to

others, igniting or amplifying the experience of asymmetry. These transitions fell into two types: cross-domain identity transitions, or “transitions that occur when an individual’s established work identity must be adapted to be integrated with a change in a non-work identity” (Ladge et al., 2012: 1449), and within-domain identity transitions, or identity transitions based on change in a work-related identity, such as changes to one’s role or position at work (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Ibarra, 2003; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). For simplicity, we label these important transitions as personal identity transitions, and professional role-identity transitions.

#### *Personal identity transitions*

Many of the women’s salient experiences of identity asymmetry related to times of personal-related identity transitions. Paula, for example, relates how others saw her differently when she went from being single to being in a significant relationship (outside of the office):

Some people treated me differently after I had, you know, chosen someone. An older guy used to say to me that ‘every woman has a fan club in an office and the fan club will either stick with you or leave you behind depending on what happens with your personal status’. He wasn’t being rude about it. He was just saying this is the reality and this is what you need to look out for. I sort of thought, ‘god that’s not right, that doesn’t happen’. But it is what happened. While I thought that was absolutely ridiculous... it was actually the reality.

Paula invokes her male colleague’s matter-of-fact discourse of the “fan club” to convey the arbitrariness of losing support or “fans” as one ceases to be available, as a woman. We also heard a number of anecdotes regarding the transition to, and taking on the identity of ‘mother’. For example, when visibly transitioning to motherhood, some believed that being pregnant began to form a large part of how others saw them, driving changes in how they were treated. In the following quotes, note the shifts in language, as if women have to adopt non-work vocabularies and expressions, in order to adequately convey the experience. Karen describes, with humor and sarcasm, her transition:

I think that when a man who you are working with sees you’re getting fatter and fatter and fatter and more and more pregnant, they find it very difficult to disassociate you from their wife...their perspective of you changes. It does.

When returning from maternity leave and despite how they self-identified upon their return, many women believed that they were given the role of ‘mother’, and were expected to behave accordingly. Wanting to be considered the ‘same’ as before they had a baby, some women felt that they were not ‘allowed’ to be, in the eyes of their peers. For example, Andrea visibly shows her frustration as she explains:

When the guys are familiar with me, I feel like saying ‘my situation isn’t like your wife’s, don’t put me in that box! You don’t know me or my life. I’m not the primary carer. I’m not the stay at home mum like your wives.’

These examples highlight how important transitions in a woman’s status, whether it be objectively ‘related’ to work or not, can drive her experience of feeling misidentified at work.

#### *Professional role identity transitions: taking the lead*

As women moved from junior into more senior positions, this often amplified both their positive and negative experiences of identity asymmetry. When offered leadership positions early in their careers, some viewed this as a positive discrepancy. Transitioning to a leadership role was a critical time when women felt that others might have a ‘better’ view of them than they did of themselves, sometimes due to the imposter syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978; Langford & Clance, 1993), as we have previously mentioned. Most of our positively valenced asymmetries happened during the initial transition to leadership, when women had not yet incorporated this role into their self-concepts yet believed others identified them as leaders. Yet taking up a leadership role was fraught with negative asymmetry as well. Key to internalizing a leadership identity is that it is granted by others (e.g., DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Epitropaki et al., 2016). While many women we interviewed were granted leadership roles in title, they had difficulties bringing others to see them as leader (igniting identity asymmetries). Several women spoke of how in order to be accepted as a leader they had to get over some hurdle, or ‘test’ to be granted this leadership identity. For example, Jacqueline describes her ‘test’, describing her fear of perhaps being ‘found out’ and visible relief of ‘passing’:

The test is when I’ve had to prove myself beyond my years for the older people in the group. In almost every new role I think ‘shit I’ve fooled them’, but I’ve always passed the test...so far. In almost every new role...proving where you stand.

As previously mentioned, a contributing factor to this experience is that ‘leadership’ in Western cultures often comes with a masculine expectation—the prototypical leader is expected to embody and display masculine, heroic qualities (Koenig et al., 2011; Sinclair, 1994, 1998). Thus while a woman may be given a leadership role, she may be unlikely to be equally granted leadership authority by her colleagues (Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007). Furthermore, when an individual goes through an identity change, others become conscious of and focused on this change because it violates the ‘norm’—the identity that they have come to expect (Burgoon, 1978). Indeed, times of transition compel more concentrated identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Thus, there are key points in a woman’s career when she can expect to perceive heightened and salient asymmetries:

during critical personal and professional identity transitions. We now move to build theory with respect to how women navigate these heightened experiences of internal identity asymmetry.

#### *How internal identity asymmetry evolves over time: the influence of time and power*

By exploring differences between our more senior (e.g., CEO) and slightly more junior (e.g., Director or Manager) interviewees, we found that both time-related factors (such as tenure, and a woman's age) and power-related factors (such as formal authority) influenced how women subjectively experienced and responded to internal identity asymmetries. Though discussed separately below, age, experience and formal authority were interrelated and together helped women repudiate and not be bound by experiences of asymmetry.

##### *Time-related factors*

Tenure in the organization served to provide the women with more time to negotiate their identities with colleagues. That is, they were eventually able to resolve the asymmetry before giving up and leaving the organization. Research demonstrates that stereotypes and categorizations of others are heightened at initial contact (e.g., Fiske, Neuberg, Beattie, & Milberg, 1987; Turner, 1987), and that people are generally able to detect how new acquaintances see them (Carlson, Furr, & Vazire, 2010). Thus, individuals who are new to organizations are more likely to experience internal identity asymmetries. Further, when entering new relationships, people are only beginning to negotiate identities so that they know what to expect from, and how to behave with one another (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Swann, 1983). As the time spent together increases, individuals may believe that they have had adequate opportunity to communicate their salient identities, and are more likely to believe they are understood at a deeper level (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). Likewise, as time spent in the organization increased, women had more opportunity to negotiate their identities with others, thereby reducing or resolving identity asymmetries.

A woman's life stage, or age, we found changed her influenced her of internal identity asymmetry. As we will discuss below, this also related to increases in power. The women we interviewed in senior positions (e.g., CEO or board members) were most likely to be in their late 40s to late 50s, married or divorced, with grown children (if they had them). As they aged, they found their sexuality and sexual status became less salient to others, and that others were less likely to see them, for example, as potential sexual-partners, making it easier to negotiate their identities. While aging is also linked to potential negative stereotypes and discrimination for women in organizations (e.g., Trethewey, 2001), we found that many women felt that as they matured they could relax about being seen as a woman. Paula shrugs and explains:

Certainly when I was a young engineer ... I dressed like a guy. I was always in pants and a shirt and I wouldn't dream of wearing a skirt or a dress for a long time. It wasn't until recently, more than a decade later, I think that I've just had the confidence to go 'well I'm a woman and I do like to wear a skirt and a pair of high heels so I will'.

##### *Power*

Being promoted to higher levels in the organization usually comes with increases in several forms of formal authority to make decisions. We found that as women moved through to more senior leadership positions, taking on roles such as CEO, Managing Director, or Board Member, this led to several shifts in the power structure: (a) it decreased the power of others to make decisions for them about their careers, while increasing their own power to influence *others'* careers, (b) it afforded them legitimate and expert power through their title, (c) it decreased the power of others to exclude them from the 'group', or key projects, when being included mattered. These changes in the power structure altered women's experiences and responses.

First, we noted that as they gained power in their careers, the perceived importance allotted to asymmetry decreased. That is, while acknowledging that asymmetry still existed, they no longer cared whether it was resolved. Some stated that all together they stopped worrying about what others thought, for example, Emma relates with a sense of relief, "I've now gone beyond worrying about what everybody thinks. I used to worry what every single person thinks. In fact I used to worry myself into a tizz about what everybody thought about me." While others still thought about how they were perceived, they felt it no longer mattered. For example, being 'the boss', Victoria feels empowered to be herself, "It's certainly a confidence thing that comes from having been the boss, frankly. You actually can affect the mood of the place—the culture of the place. It's okay to be a bit of a dag and speak your mind." The above two quotes also show the role of language in diminishing the potential influence of identity asymmetry on these women: the relief of no longer being worried 'into a tizz' and allowing 'It's OK to be a bit of a dag' (an informal term in Australia referring to someone who is 'entertainingly eccentric').

Second, women's powerlessness in the face of discrepancy diminished. Now that they had 'made it', they felt that issues such as personas, or the need to continually prove one's competence had less importance for their career success and satisfaction. For example, Alison, CEO of an engineering firm, explains how her increase in power allows her to disrupt an old identity narrative where she suppressed personal identities, and allow her to reveal and integrate personal identities:

I used to not reveal any of my personal life because I was in a male dominated environment—they didn't want to hear about anything going on at home. I didn't feel I could bring that part of me to work. They had these wives at home doing all that. They didn't care. I was very good at walking in the door and just not saying anything to anyone. I'm not as protective anymore. If my phone rings and my daughter's ringing me and I'm in a meeting and it's not critical, I just take the call.

Indeed, it seems the powerful encounter fewer stereotypes because “people with power do not have to put up with them” (Fiske, 1993: 623). This is because people pay more attention to those who control their outcomes, and people who have more power need not attend to those with less power (Fiske, 1993). Similarly, we found that as women had more control over their own outcomes, they both experienced less identity asymmetry, and cared less about it.

*Research Question 3: how do women leaders respond to internal identity asymmetry?*

We next explored how these women leaders navigated their experience of internal identity asymmetry. We found that in retelling stories of their experiences with asymmetry, women generally passed through overlapping stages in response, which we labeled as: resolution, endurance, and escape (see Fig. 3 for an overview). In this section we will outline the most commonly described responses and where applicable, we draw on findings from the identity literature (e.g., Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Petriglieri, 2011; Pratt et al., 2006), the impression management literature (e.g., Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007; Jones & Pittman, 1982) and literature regarding how women negotiate their gender identities in male-dominated environments (e.g., Ely, 1995; Jorgenson, 2002; Miller, 2004; Powell et al., 2009; Sinclair, 1998).

*Stage 1 response: (attempting to) resolve the asymmetry*

The first category of response when faced with internal identity asymmetries was to attempt to renegotiate their identities (with themselves or others) to minimize discrepancy. We emphasize internal identity asymmetry is based on an individual’s *belief* that others see her incorrectly, when in reality that may not be the case. Thus, the ideal outcome to alleviate potential stress from the experience, is that women believe it is resolved. According to theory, the positive or negative valence (as well as whether they deem it important) of the asymmetry may dictate whether the woman desires to resolve discrepancy by changing others’ perceptions of her, or changing her self-perceptions to align with external views (Meister et al., 2014). Supporting this, we found that women facing negatively-valenced asymmetries were keen on altering other’s views, while those who faced positive asymmetries attempted to incorporate the positive external identity into their self-concept (we will elaborate with examples below). We identify and elaborate on five categories of such responses which include cognitive, behavioral and more discursive strategies: first, gaining “support from someone senior”, which involved engaging influential others to help negotiate identities; second, “softening my look” or actively managing one’s self-presentation to alter other’s views; third, “overachieving” or excluding certain self-identities from the workplace and becoming highly identified with her role; fourth, “setting them straight” or confronting others and naming the asymmetric identity in play; and fifth, “maybe I actually am good at what I do”, which is internalizing and incorporating the way others see oneself to resolve the asymmetry.

*“Support from someone senior” (finding a sponsor)*

Some women sought to increase their chances of being seen congruently by cultivating opportunities to work closely with senior men, or gain the support of senior influencers who would then become champions or mentors for them in the organization.

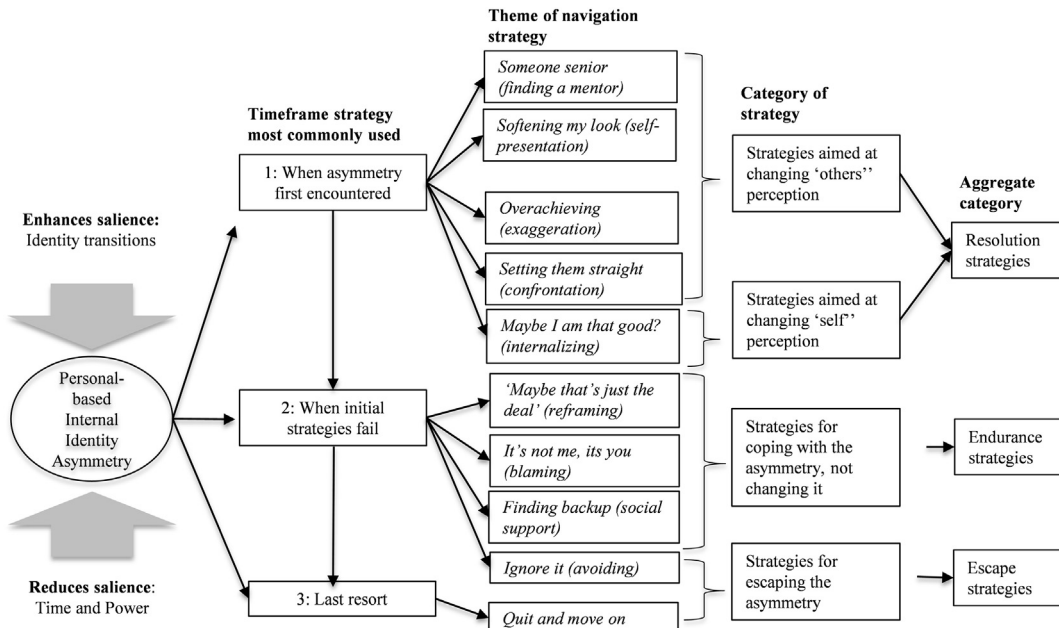


Fig. 3. A model of women leaders experiencing and responding to internal identity asymmetry.

By partnering with someone that had ‘credibility’ and influence with their colleagues, they hoped that others would be open to ‘getting to know’ them and granting them, for example, leadership or competency-based identities. For example, Jacqueline states: “I wanted to be in a delivery role, to do more technical things, but it wasn’t happening. So I had to go over and above my boss to get the ‘right’ people to see my potential”. Ibarra and her colleagues (2013) highlight the importance of what they call ‘sponsors’ in helping women construct and be granted leadership identities in their organizations. In our case, some women found that engaging an influential sponsor could help them negotiate their self-identities with others (over whom the sponsor had influence).

*“Softening my look” (active self-presentation)*

Many women described deliberately and actively managing the way they self-presented in response to asymmetry, such as speaking from the vantage point of “granddaughter or daughter” to senior males or ‘kid sister’ to peers, or attempting (though not always deliberately, as some later recognized) to hide or minimize certain identities. Jocelyn, for example, explains positioning herself as in need of help, which accomplished several things, such as allowing her to feel included as a part of the ‘family’ within the organization, and to not present as a threat or competitor to colleagues (a form of supplication; Jones & Pittman, 1982), and to attempt to induce liking (ingratiation; e.g., Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007). Actively adopting less threatening identities allowed women to believe that they had made themselves less of a ‘threat’, and influenced others to accept them, as Jocelyn describes, ‘as a person’. As also suggested in the gender and identity literature, many women paid special attention to managing impressions of femininity, for example, by dressing conservatively hoping to ward off attention to womanly features or concealing behaviors, identities, or emotions that may be stereotypically associated with women, to make themselves appear as less ‘feminine’ or ‘not like other women’ (e.g., Kvande, 1999; Miller, 2004; Sinclair, 1998, 2005). Petriglieri (2011) recognizes concealment (hiding an indemnity) as a strategy that individuals may employ when faced with identity threat. In our case, women employed this strategy to attempt to change other’s perceptions (which in some cases felt threatening). For example, Linda talks about how she felt she reduced the risks of being labeled “a total bitch”:

I’m trying to speak differently to people or be nicer to people or not be so harsh... I’m definitely trying because I’m in this more senior role...people can’t be like ‘well she’s a total bitch.’ I can’t have them saying that about me. So I’m trying to soften my look, my attitude, and the way I approach people and whatever. But as I said—have they noticed? Not yet.

As reported, one of the identities that women describe feeling thrust upon them, particularly after returning from maternity leave or becoming pregnant, is that of mother: “I just didn’t like the way women got treated as mums and I wasn’t used to being treated like a normal woman...I was used to being different, more important.” In response, some go to extreme lengths to prevent others perceiving them as mothers, as the following quote shows:

I remember being in a session a year ago or so, and someone said for all the parents to put up their hand. I didn’t—and it didn’t even occur to me that I was a parent. I just completely forget about life outside of work when I’m at work. One of the executives asked me last week if I ever speak to my son during the working day. It doesn’t even occur to me that I have a son.

Another troublesome identity that younger women feel attributed to them is that of single woman available for sex. Being seen to enjoy a social life can then lead to the imputation of being a ‘slut’. One woman seeks to make her status as single woman less salient by inventing a partner:

If guys at the office were single they would be out there, having a social life, meeting women. Me, I can’t be that way, that makes me a slut. I can’t have people thinking that about me. So I tell them that I’m dating somebody, or I’m in a serious relationship. People ask ‘what are you doing tonight’, and I say things like ‘oh I’ve got a date’ or ‘watching a movie with my boyfriend’.

*“Overachieving” (exaggeration or overidentification)*

Similarly, we noted that many women responded to asymmetry (such as being seen as pregnant, as a mother, or as a potential partner) by overemphasizing work identities. Becoming highly career-identified (e.g., identifying with their occupation so strongly that it overpowers other identities; e.g., Kreiner et al., 2006), many worked extraordinary hours in a deliberate (or in some cases retrospectively recognized) strategy to encourage others to characterize them by their commitment and track record. Additionally, identity negotiation literature recognizes that if individuals believe they are unsuccessful in negotiating their identity with others, they may behave in a more forceful or extreme manner in order to change other’s views (Swann et al., 2009; Stets & Burke, 2003). Linda, for example, aggressively describes her extreme efforts to gain respect by dedicating her life to results, yet still doubts it earns her belonging:

They’re like ‘wow, why is she still here?’ Every single night at 11 o’clock at night. They really believe ‘she’s hardcore, that girl sleeps in the office, that girl works her arse off.’ It never ends it’s 24/7. My life revolves around getting deals. It’s how they define success in my profession. So yes I’m going to work until I feel like I’ve done my job. Because they’re lazy, they’d show up at 10:30 in the morning, they go out for long lunches, they come back in the afternoon drunk. I am like not even getting to eat lunch. I’ve constantly got stuff on the go. Do I ever get invited out to social events with them? Never. Does it bother me? Of course.

Research confirms that women in leadership sometimes identify more with men and masculinity, prefer the company of men, and share their aspirations (e.g., Ely, 1995; Sinclair, 1998). Indeed, some interviewees distanced themselves in an extreme manner from “other women” and aligned themselves “as one of the boys”. For example, Janine describes herself at work: “I’ll drink with the boys, I’ll punt with the boys, I’ll swear like the boys. None of that bothers me. I think that if you’re a woman that’s more feminine than you’ll probably really struggle with that.” Using masculine language and acting in a more masculine and aggressive way helps to set her apart from other women in her eyes and—she hopes—in the eyes of her male colleagues so that she is not identified as feminine, as a woman.

*“Setting them straight” (confrontation)*

Ashforth et al. (2007) found that when faced with a tainted occupational identity, one strategy that workers used was to directly confront others’ perceptions. In our research, some women actively sought feedback about, and challenged the way they believe they were viewed. In some cases, women realized that their beliefs of how others saw them were not consistent with reality, which resolved the perceived asymmetry. For example, Jane, who described that she felt ‘ashamed’ about being pregnant at work and believed that that was how others primarily identified her, related a conversation she had with one of her male colleagues, and how she was reassured that his views had actually not changed about her, despite her pregnancy:

I spoke with an equivalent manager and he said, ‘you’re very confident and rah, rah, rah’. I said, ‘actually I feel really self-conscious when I’m pregnant’, and we spoke about it and it was really interesting to get his perception. Which made me realize that it was just a non-issue for him.

In challenging other’s views, one woman consistently felt she encountered ‘Asian girl’ stereotypes of being submissive, and responds: “I’m like, ‘well, sorry, didn’t read my bio carefully did you?’ I always speak my mind”. Another who believes she was being “paid as a clerk”, not for her role as a senior manager, describes having...

...far too much to drink one night and marched into the boss’s office the next morning, probably still under the influence and said ‘I want a salary review’. I remember him blushing up his chest, over his face and all the way through his bald head—obviously they were way under paying me.

Carolina explains that when she returned from maternity leave, she was sidelined from opportunities. She now anticipates this: “About the way they see me—I’m so used to it now that I almost assume it’s going to happen and I am more direct about it. I just say ‘look I’m interested in this conference, and if a spot opens I want to be considered.’”

*“Maybe I actually am good at what I do” (internalizing the external identity)*

In some cases women altered their own self-identities to incorporate the way others identified them. We witnessed this strategy primarily in cases where the asymmetry had been appraised in a positive light (e.g., believing that others see her as more competent or able than she sees herself, which is often associated with the imposter syndrome). This type of asymmetry may offer potential for personal growth (e.g., Ibarra, 2015), and the opportunity to construct a more positive self-view at work, something that individuals inherently desire (Dutton et al., 2010). For example, when treated as a leader by others, Annie eventually changed her self-view. She relates her story with enthusiasm, showing her positive reconstruction of an asymmetry:

I worked so hard because I was so fearful of letting them down. It was funny because they saw something in me that I hadn’t. Then I started realizing what my strengths actually were, that I could do it. All of sudden, I went ‘oh my goodness they’re right, I can do this.’ I had to prove it to myself first, whereas other people saw it first.

Drawing together these findings, we see interviewees battling to bring others into alignment with their self-identities, and particularly if the asymmetry was positively valenced—to alter their own self-identities.

*Stage 2 responses: enduring the asymmetry*

If renegotiating her identity was experienced as unsuccessful, or only partially so, the next stage was to employ more internally-oriented cognitive responses aimed at enduring and coping with, rather than altering the experience. We encounter four categories: first, ‘(accept that) maybe that’s just the deal’ or reframing the asymmetry to make it tenable; second, ‘It’s not me, it’s you’, blaming or turning against the violator as a means of self-protection; third, ‘finding backup’ or seeking social support to handle the stress of the situation; and finally, attempting to ignore it (see Fig. 3).

*‘Maybe that’s just the deal’ (reframing)*

Reframing the asymmetry experience is a method of coping used to cognitively recast or reposition the meaning of the asymmetry as less negative, more positive, or simply less important (e.g., Ashforth & Kreiner, 2002). For example, when faced with occupational taint some workers tried to focus on the positive aspects of their position, to refocus on their positive identities (Ashforth et al., 2007). Accordingly, when experiencing that others made a certain identity salient (e.g. youth), some of the women we interviewed attempted to see the upside, or even make light of the asymmetry. For example, Sally states: “I have now started to learn how to use [being seen as a young woman] to my advantage.” Reframing the valence of the asymmetry

could also be accomplished discursively, by taking up identity positions such as “kid sister” that might appear as more positive and palatable, or by attempting to find humor in the situation.

Another way women endured asymmetry was by convincing themselves to accept it, tolerate it, or even justify its occurrence. This response is similar to the findings of Powell et al. (2009), which show that to gain male acceptance, some women deal with gender discrimination by justifying the behavior of their colleagues. Schmitt, Ellemers, and Branscombe (2003) suggest that some women may do so in order to avoid perceptions of reality that might have negative implications for a social identity (such as gender). Thus, if a woman believes a valued identity is not acknowledged, or believes she is incorrectly labeled, she may justify this occurrence to help her endure it. Jacqueline describes that her peers would always label her as ‘young’:

It was like, ‘oh this can’t still be happening. When is this going to stop happening? At what age does this stop happening?’ Then, you realize, ‘well, maybe you are just young for what you’re doing or you look young... maybe that’s just innocent enough.’ You look around and you are the youngest by 10 to 20 years and maybe that’s just the deal. You’ll never be seen as a peer.

#### *“It’s not me, it’s you” (blaming)*

In opposition to those who accepted or justified the asymmetry, another response was turning against or even blaming those who initially incited the asymmetry. This could be done by suggesting that others were the cause of the problem, or what Ashforth et al. (2007) call, ‘condemning the condemners’, which consists of “criticizing those who criticize them, thereby impugning their legitimacy as critics” (p. 159). Visually angry, Linda’s quote highlights this:

*They’re the ones with the problem. After interacting with me for a certain period of time, if you think I’m an idiot then you must be pretty dumb. I used to always feel a victim—like...they’re not being nice to me or I’m not being seen the way I should be and now I just go, wow, that was a really dumb move on your part.*

For women in our research, enacting this strategy accomplished two goals: first, it allowed the woman to redirect her negative emotion toward the culprit, and second, it challenged the legitimacy of the other, which served to reduce the asymmetry’s experienced importance.

#### *Finding backup (social support)*

During periods of prolonged identity asymmetry, women often engaged in strategies to reassure themselves and validate their salient self-identities. For example, when misidentified, many sought out social support to help them rebuff discrepant views of others, and to provide them with an ‘in-group’ (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2007). To do so, women engaged friends, colleagues, family, or others also suffering identity asymmetries in the organization. Sally, for example, found significant social support in a colleague, who she relied on because “he understands...he’s a short, little Sri Lankan man and he has been marginalized his whole life. So he gets it, he really gets it.” Indeed, self-verification research shows that individuals may re-direct their needs for verification elsewhere if one relationship is not providing adequate self-verification (Swann, Polzer, Seyle, & Ko, 2004; Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, & Bartel, 2007), and the stress and coping literature shows that social support is a critical resource for individuals in the face of potentially stressful encounters (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Tomaka, Blascovich, Kelsey, & Leitten, 1993). Additionally, engaging in internal dialogue to reassure themselves of their multiple salient self-identities outside of work made the asymmetry feel less important. For example, Andrea explains:

I’m a person that lives a very balanced life. That makes you have to not think of work all the time as your one identity. I had work, the MBA, I had sport, and a social life... .. I think people take things harder at work when work is a bigger part of their lives.

#### *Ignore it (avoiding)*

Attempting to ignore the asymmetry provides protection against the potentially negative emotions and stress that may be associated with asymmetries. For example, during our interview with Karen, she provides multiple salient experiences of internal identity asymmetry she has experienced throughout her career. When asked how she copes with it, in firm and factual tone, she states, “I just ignore it. It doesn’t impact me because I ignore it. I never felt I had anything to prove.” Avoiding the experience is a commonly used tactic when faced with occupational stigma (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2007). The potential to ignore the asymmetry, we found, became easier and more common as women became more senior in the organization.

#### *Stage 3 response: escape the asymmetry*

Finally, despite some women’s attempts to endure the asymmetry, they simply removed themselves from the environment completely—mentally or physically. Kvande (1999) and Fouad (2014) suggest that withdrawal or escape is a common strategy for women engineers who face problems related specifically to gender discrimination in their work environments. We found similarly that, after trying to alter or enduring a negatively-valenced internal identity asymmetry (whether it be related to gender or any other identity) for some time, many women simply decide that the underlying stress of the situation is no longer ‘worth it’ and leave the organization entirely, or mentally withdraw from their jobs or the relationship. For example, Jocelyn, explains that for the last time, she attempted to shift the company’s views on “women” (and thus on herself) as a potential future leadership candidate. When she was invited to a leadership meeting she was introduced, for the first time, to the CEO. She challenged him

directly, “when are you going to put some women on the board and have some balance at the top in this organization?” His response to her, looking her directly in the eye in front of a large group of her peers, was “the only way a woman will ever have anything to do with the board is on her back, on the table, with her legs spread”. At that moment, Jocelyn gave up her hopes that the business might change: “that night I decided I was leaving the company... because why would you stay there if that was the attitude from the top?” She believed there was little more she could do to influence perceptions. Andrea describes a similar feeling: “There was nothing I could do, no matter how hard I worked or how good I was at my job. 8 years later they saw me as a grad. Really. You just had to leave.”

## Discussion

In this study, we have explored internal identity asymmetry as experienced by women leaders in male-dominated industries. We chose women leaders because of the intense scrutiny they face in positions of leadership and because extensive evidence shows that leadership is defined as masculine (Bell et al., 2016; Hall & Donaghue, 2013; Sinclair, 1998), creating conflict in most organizational settings between the identity of ‘leader’ and that of ‘woman’ (Eagly & Carli, 2007). We made several discoveries through this research. First, our research confirmed that women in engineering, financial and construction industries experience and navigate multiple asymmetries throughout their careers. Their subjective experiences, as they relayed them to us, convey that they believe these markers of identity were highly salient to others and often contaminated their efforts to internalize and project confidence and capability in their role, or to be just recognized as doing the job. While salient experiences of internal identity asymmetry were predominately negative, we also found that some women relayed stories of positively valenced asymmetries, which helped them to incorporate new positive work identities (e.g., internalizing leadership roles).

Second, we also discovered that internal identity asymmetries are more likely to occur during personal (e.g., pregnancy, relationship status change) and professional (e.g., taking on a leadership role) transition points in a woman’s career. This is important, because it helps us to predict when the experience might become more salient and impactful. We also find that the experience evolves over time. Factors such as age, tenure and formal authority at work may influence the experience of asymmetry, helping to make the experience less troublesome. Uncovering this helps women in leadership prepare and plan for the potentially stressful experience of having their identities scrutinized, and having unwanted identities allocated to them.

Third, drawing together several literatures, we develop a process model of responses that women employ when faced with an important internal identity asymmetry. These include deliberate and planned cognitive and behavioral responses, as well as less deliberate cognitive, discursive responses, which we suggest are loosely organized in three stages: resolving or reducing the identity asymmetry by influencing others or adapting self; enduring the asymmetry; and escaping the asymmetry all together.

Our findings make several contributions to existent research, especially the growing body of literature exploring and calling for more work examining the experience of women in leadership (Hoobler, Masterson, Nkomo, & Michel, 2016; Ibarra et al., 2013; Kark & Eagly, 2010). While women have increased their numbers in the corporate world in the last two decades, there are few women in top leadership roles, particularly in male-dominated industries. We still need research-based understandings about the covert and often-invisible factors, such as identity-related obstacles, which undermine women’s capacities to aspire to and achieve success in senior roles. We identify identity asymmetry as an important phenomenon that women in leadership may experience, help them uncover when they are likely to face it, and how they might respond to and manage the experience.

We also contribute to the identity and self-verification literature (Swann, 2011; Swann et al., 2009) by qualitatively studying, with women leaders in male-dominated professions, the experience of being misidentified by one’s colleagues. While internal identity asymmetry has been theoretically defined (Meister et al., 2014), there is a need for empirical research to highlight how it is experienced, when it is experienced, and what people might do to cope with, or negotiate it. We offer an empirical examination of these questions, and develop a framework for organizing how women respond to, cope with, and navigate asymmetries; including their more deliberate impression management strategies, and the often non-deliberate coping responses and discursive practices.

Our work also provides support for emerging research that argues we should not ignore the physical and bodily aspects of leadership (Bell et al., 2016; Ladkin & Taylor, 2014). Our study indeed reinforces research that shows that the bodies and physicality of leaders, managers and their followers are ever-present, if not acknowledged (e.g., Hall & Donaghue, 2013; Sinclair, 2005; Sinclair, 2014; Swan, 2005). For example, during times of visible identity transition (e.g., during pregnancy) a woman may experience others’ perceptions of her dramatically alter, regardless of her own self-perceptions. As we saw from our data, this can elicit distress and tactics to try to control these visible transitions. On the positive side, there is evidence that as women mature and acquire power she may experience less asymmetry, including less pressure to ‘manage’ how she looks and acts physically (Bell & Sinclair, 2014; Sinclair, 2013). As Victoria describes:

...whereas now—really from the first meeting which most people realise that I’m an unmitigated dag with a really warped sense of humour. I’ve now got to the point, ‘well stuff it’, you know? If they think I’m just a really embarrassing person to be spending time with, well that’s their problem because my life is too short not to be able to have humour.

A methodological strength is that we combine methods used for qualitative research in the identity literature (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2007; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Kreiner et al., 2006) and methods used in discursive approaches to qualitative research (e.g., Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Potter & Wetherell, 1987, 1994; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). Because identity is subjectively constructed, it is critical to recognize the role that language and discursive structures play in retrospective sense-making, narrative formulation



and in-the-moment identity work. While we have not undertaken a comprehensive discourse analysis, we have sought to show how interviewees' shifts of language and discourses reflect and reproduce sense-making about identity asymmetries. For example, included in our analysis are examples of women adopting narrative, sense-making and discursive strategies to understand and deal with identity asymmetry (e.g., they intersperse their stories with the words, observations and advice of colleagues). They revert to colloquial, more emotional language and family metaphors to convey the very real threat and difficulty they feel about being labeled 'just a mum', 'a silly little girl' or 'a slut'. 'Identity work' could thus be seen to be happening in the process of women talking about their experiences of asymmetry. Our data gathering thus involved simultaneously recording, observing and participating in the fluid and complex identity negotiations of interviewees (Ford, 2006; Thomas & Davies, 2005).

*Future work*

Our study provides several avenues for fruitful future work. For example, future studies might build on this first qualitative study by designing a quantitative examination of the more causal relationships between the experience of internal identity asymmetry, potential moderators (such as role, age or years of experience, gender, types of coping strategy, or salience of the affected identity) and both positive and negative outcomes at work. This type of study would allow us to examine trends and differences between women at different stages in their careers, different industries, or to look at potential comparisons between women and men leaders. Further, other studies might look at other factors that heighten and mitigate internal identity asymmetries for individuals. For example, one factor could be organizational cultures that put pressure on leaders to 'look' and behave in a certain way—to produce and embody an 'authentic' leadership identity or a 'brand' (George, 2003; Goffee & Jones, 2005; Irvine & Reger, 2006; Sinclair, 2013). This need to perform and 'look like a leader' we suggest may heighten internal identity asymmetries, especially perhaps for those leaders who may look or feel different to the majority.

Future work may consider if and how men in organizations face internal identity asymmetries. Male leaders are often required to embody and display heroism and toughness, which are in turn evidenced through embodied norms of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity (e.g., Sinclair, 2005). However, what happens when men do not identify in this way? What type of asymmetries do they experience, and at which transition points? Does the experience evolve similarly over time? While women may take on alternate (often gendered) identities such as "kid sister", "daughter", or "wife" to cope with perceived misidentification, what options do men have? Further, an important area for follow-up research is exploring how organizations can educate senior managers about identity pressures, including how to be open to hearing and proactively responding to them.

Identity asymmetries are a source of tension for women aspiring to leadership and they are likely to become most salient during times of personal and professional transition. However, this research is not only applicable to women. Everyone in organizations should be encouraged to reflect on how they perceive, define or label colleagues. Individuals could be encouraged to communicate their own salient multiple identities, and be open to learning about others so that negative impacts of asymmetries can be lessened. Our research can inform leadership development programs that seek to help women leaders understand some of the challenges they may face in their careers, and how they can cope with it. It is important that coaches, mentors, and women themselves in organizations become aware of these identity dynamics so that they might anticipate and develop ways of challenging them before they become untenable, resulting in loss of female talent. By anticipating scrutiny of one's identity and potential identity asymmetries, women can equip themselves with coping strategies and engage social support to help with associated stresses. Subjective identities are multi-layered and fluid. Yet understanding how they are experienced and constructed with

Category	Example questions	Example follow-up questions
(a) Personal and career history	1. Could you walk me through the key milestones (for example, key positions) throughout your career that led you to where you are today?	1a. How long were you with that organization? 1b. Were you happy there? 1c. Could you tell me a bit about the work environment? Your team? Your supervisor?
(b) Experiences and interpretations of internal identity asymmetry	2. During ( <i>the time identified in section a</i> ), how would you describe yourself? OR: If I were to describe you as a 'pie chart', consisting of several pieces, what would made up who you were then? 3. In your career ( <i>or at specific timeframe identified</i> ), did you ever feel that there were times when your colleagues (or supervisor, or clients) saw you different than you saw yourself?	2a. Did your colleagues see you in that same way? Why or why not? How do you think they would describe who you were at the time? 3a. Could you share specific experiences/stories of these times? 3b. Would you consider that to be a positive or a negative experience? Why so?
(c) Coping with/responding to asymmetry	4. During ( <i>the experience of asymmetry identified in section b</i> ), how did you cope with it?	4a. Could you walk me through what went through your head at the time? 4b. Could you tell me what you did about it? 4c. What happened next? 4d. Did you feel you could cope with it well? Or did you struggle? Why so?
(d) Perceived outcomes	5. What impact did ( <i>the asymmetry experience identified in section b</i> ) have on you at work?	5a. Did it impact your ability to do your job? If so, could you elaborate on specific examples? 5b. Did it impact how you felt about the other person? About yourself?

Please cite this article as: Meister, A., et al., Identities under scrutiny: How women leaders navigate feeling misidentified at work, *The Leadership Quarterly* (2017), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.01.009>

others can mitigate the negative impacts of asymmetry and help leaders express valued aspects of themselves, thus feeling more fulfilled and effective in their workplaces.

## Appendix A. Selected questions from the interview protocol

## References

- Abelson, R. P., Aronsen, E., McGuire, W. J., Newcomb, T. M., Rosenberg, M. J., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1968). *Theories of cognitive consistency: A sourcebook*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2007). Constructing mystery: Empirical matters in theory development. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), 1265–1281.
- Alvesson, M., Ashcraft, L., & Thomas, R. (2008). Identity matters: Reflections on the construction of identity scholarship in organization studies. *Organization*, 15(1), 5.
- Aronson, E. (1969). The theory of cognitive dissonance: A current perspective. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 4, 1–34.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Johnson, S. A. (2001). Which hat to wear? The relative salience of multiple identities in organizational contexts. In M. A. Hogg, & D. J. Terry (Eds.), *Social identity processes in organizational contexts*. Vol. 31. (pp. 31–48). Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Kreiner, G. E. (1999). "How can you do it?": Dirty work and the challenge of constructing a positive identity. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(3), 413–434.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Kreiner, G. E. (2002). Normalizing emotion in organizations: Making the extraordinary seem ordinary. *Human Resource Management Review*, 12(2), 215–235.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Schinoff, B. S. (2016). Identity under construction: How individuals come to define themselves in organizations. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 3, 111–137.
- Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., Clark, M. A., & Fugate, M. (2007). Normalizing dirty work: Managerial tactics for countering occupational taint. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 149–174.
- Ashforth, B. E., Harrison, S., & Corley, K. (2008). Identification in organizations: An examination of four fundamental questions. *Journal of Management*, 34(3), 325–374.
- Babcock, L., Laschever, S., Gelfand, M., & Small, D. (2003). Nice girls don't ask. *Harvard Business Review*, 81(10), 14–16.
- Bartel, C., & Dutton, J. (2001). Ambiguous organizational memberships: Constructing organizational identities. In M. A. Hogg (Ed.), *Social identity processes in organizational contexts* (pp. 115).
- Bell, E., & Sinclair, A. (2014). Reclaiming eroticism in the academy. *Organization*, 21(2), 268–280.
- Bell, E., Sinclair, A., Broadbridge, A., & Broadbridge, A. (2016). Bodies, sexualities and women leaders in popular culture: From spectacle to metapicture. *Gender Management: An International Journal*, 31(5/6).
- Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. (1996). Who is this "we"? Levels of collective identity and self representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(1), 83–93.
- Bryman, A. (2004). Qualitative research on leadership: A critical but appreciative review. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(6), 729–769.
- Burgoon, J. K. (1978). A communication model of personal space violations: Explication and an initial test. *Human Communication Research*, 4(2), 129–142.
- Burns, B. D., & Vollmeyer, R. (1998). Modeling the adversary and success in competition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(3), 711–718.
- Carlson, E. N., Furr, R. M., & Vazire, S. (2010). Do we know the first impressions we make? Evidence for idiographic meta-accuracy and calibration of first impressions. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 1(1), 94–98.
- Carroll, B., & Levy, L. (2010). Leadership development as identity construction. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 24(2), 211–231.
- Chase, S. E. (2007). Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. 57(3). (pp. 651–679).
- Cialdini, R. B., & Richardson, K. D. (1980). Two indirect tactics of image management: Basking and blasting. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39(3), 406–415.
- Clair, J. A., Hummer, B. K., Caruso, H. M., & Roberts, L. M. (2012). Marginal memberships: Psychological effects of identity ambiguity on professionals who are demographically different from the majority. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 2(1), 71–93.
- Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 15(3), 241–247.
- Collinson, D. (2003). *Identities and insecurities: Selves at work organization*, 10(3). (pp. 527–547).
- Collinson, D. (2006). Rethinking followership: A post-structuralist analysis of follower identities. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(2), 179–189.
- Conger, J. A. (1998). Qualitative research as the cornerstone methodology for understanding leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 9(1), 107–121.
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Corley, K. G., & Gioia, D. A. (2004). Identity ambiguity and change in the wake of a corporate spin-off. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 49(2), 173–208.
- Cycyota, C. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2006). What (not) to expect when surveying executives a meta-analysis of top manager response rates and techniques over time. *Organizational Research Methods*, 9, 133–160.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20(1), 43–63.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1999). Positioning and personhood. In R. Harré, & V. Langenhove (Eds.), *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action* (pp. 32–52). Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.
- Davies, A., & Thomas, R. (2003). Talking cop: Discourses of change and policing identities. *Public Administration*, 81(4), 681–699.
- Denissen, A. M. (2010). The right tools for the job: Constructing gender meanings and identities in the male-dominated building trades. *Human Relations*, 63(7), 1051–1069.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- DeRue, D. S., & Ashford, S. J. (2010). Who will lead and who will follow? A social process of leadership identity construction in organizations. *The Academy of Management Review*, 35(4), 627–647.
- Doucet, L., & Jehn, K. A. (1997). Analyzing harsh words in a sensitive setting: American expatriates in communist China. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 18(S1), 559–582.
- Dutton, J. E., Roberts, L. M., & Bednar, J. (2010). Pathways for positive identity construction at work: Four types of positive identity and the building of social resources. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(2), 265–293.
- Eagly, A. H. (2005). Achieving relational authenticity in leadership: Does gender matter? *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 459–474.
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). Women and the labyrinth of leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(9), 62.
- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573–598.
- Ely, R. J. (1995). The power in demography: Women's social constructions of gender identity at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(3), 589–634.
- Ely, R., & Rhode, D. L. (2010). Women and Leadership: Defining the challenges. In N. Nitin, & R. Khurana (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership theory and practice: An HBS centennial colloquium on advancing leadership* (pp. 3–25). Harvard Business Press.
- Epitropaki, O., Kark, R., Mainemelis, C., & Lord, R. G. (2016). Leadership and followership identity processes: A multilevel review. *The Leadership Quarterly*.
- Etzkowitz, H., Kemelgor, C., & Uzzi, B. (2000). *Athena unbound: The advancement of women in science and technology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Faulkner, W. (2009). Doing gender in engineering workplace cultures. I. Observations from the field. *Engineering Studies*, 1(1), 3–18.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson.
- Fiske, S. T. (1993). Controlling other people: The impact of power on stereotyping. *American Psychologist*, 48(6), 621.
- Fiske, S. T., Neuberg, S. L., Beattie, A. E., & Milberg, S. J. (1987). Category-based and attribute-based reactions to others: Some informational conditions of stereotyping and individuating processes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 23(5), 399–427.

- Fletcher, J. K. (2004). The paradox of postheroic leadership: An essay on gender, power, and transformational change. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(5), 647–661.
- Folkman, S., Lazarus, R. S., Gruen, R. J., & DeLongis, A. (1986). Appraisal, coping, health status, and psychological symptoms. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50(3), 571–579.
- Ford, J. (2006). Discourses of leadership: Gender, identity and contradiction in a UK public sector organisation. *Leadership*, 2(1), 77–99.
- Fouad, N. A. (2014). Leaning in, but getting pushed back (and out). *American Psychological Association's 122nd Annual Convention*. Washington, DC.
- Gecas, V. (1982). The self-concept. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 8, 1–33.
- George, B. (2003). *Authentic leadership: Rediscovering the secrets to creating lasting value*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Geys, B. (2014). Better not look too nice? Employees' preferences towards (un)likeable managers. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25(5), 875–884.
- Giacalone, R. A., & Rosenfeld, P. (1989). *Impression management in the organization*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Gill, J., Mills, J., Franzway, S., & Sharp, R. (2008). 'Oh you must be very clever!' High-achieving women, professional power and the ongoing negotiation of workplace identity. *Gender and Education*, 20(3), 223–236.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2012). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15–31.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine-Athesthor.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (2009). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Transaction Publishers.
- Goffee, R., & Jones, G. (2005). Managing authenticity. *Harvard Business Review*, 83(12), 85–94.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Doubleday.
- Guadagno, R. E., & Cialdini, R. B. (2007). Gender differences in impression management in organizations: A qualitative review. *Sex Roles*, 56(7), 483–494.
- Hall, L. J., & Donaghue, N. (2013). 'Nice girls don't carry knives': Constructions of ambition in media coverage of Australia's first female prime minister. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 52(4), 631–647.
- Harrison, D. A., Price, K. H., & Bell, M. P. (1998). Beyond relational demography: Time and the effects of surface-and deep-level diversity on work group cohesion. *Academy of Management Journal*, 41(1), 96–107.
- Heilman, M. E., & Parks-Stamm, E. J. (2007). Gender stereotypes in the workplace: Obstacles to women's career progress. *Advances in Group Processes*, 24, 47–77.
- Heilman, M. E., Wallen, A. S., Fuchs, D., & Tamkins, M. M. (2004). Penalties for success: Reactions to women who succeed at male gender-typed tasks. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(3), 416–427.
- Hogue, M., & Lord, R. G. (2007). A multilevel, complexity theory approach to understanding gender bias in leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18(4), 370–390.
- Homan, A. C., van Knippenberg, D., Van Kleef, G. A., & De Dreu, C. K. W. (2007). Bridging faultlines by valuing diversity: The effects of diversity beliefs on information elaboration and performance in diverse work groups. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92, 1189–1199.
- Hoobler, J. M., Masterson, C. R., Nkomo, S. M., & Michel, E. J. (2016). The business case for women leaders meta-analysis, research critique, and path forward. *Journal of Management*.
- Ibarra, H. (1999). Provisional selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44, 764–791.
- Ibarra, H. (2003). *Working identity: Unconventional strategies for reinventing your career*. Harvard Business Press.
- Ibarra, H. (2015). The authenticity paradox. *Harvard Business Review*, 93(1/2), 53–59.
- Ibarra, H., & Barbulescu, R. (2010). Identity as narrative: Prevalence, effectiveness, and consequences of narrative identity work in macro work role transitions. *The Academy of Management Review*, 35(1), 135–154.
- Ibarra, H., & Petriglieri, J. (2010). Identity work and play. *Management*, 23(1), 10–25.
- Ibarra, H., Snook, S., & Guillén Ramo, L. (2010). Identity-based leader development. *Handbook of leadership theory and practice* (pp. 657–678).
- Ibarra, H., Ely, R., & Kolb, D. (2013). Women rising: The unseen barriers. *Harvard Business Review*, 91(9), 60–66.
- Irvine, D., & Reger, J. (2006). *The authentic leader*. Sanford, FL: DC Press.
- Izraeli, D. N. (1983). Sex effects or structural effects? An empirical test of Kanter's theory of proportions. *Social Forces*, 62(1), 153–165.
- Jehn, K. A. (1997). A qualitative analysis of conflict types and dimensions in organizational groups. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 42(3), 530–557.
- Jehn, K. A., Rispens, S., & Thatcher, S. M. B. (2010). The effects of conflict asymmetry on work group and individual outcomes. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(3), 596–616.
- Johnson, S. K., Murphy, S. E., Zewdie, S., & Reichard, R. J. (2008). The strong, sensitive type: Effects of gender stereotypes and leadership prototypes on the evaluation of male and female leaders. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 106(1), 39–60.
- Jones, E. E., & Pittman, T. S. (1982). Toward a general theory of strategic self-presentation. *Psychological perspectives on the self*. 1. (pp. 231–262).
- Jorgenson, J. (2002). Engineering selves: Negotiating gender and identity in technical work. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 15(3), 350–380.
- Kanouse, D. E., & Hanson, R. L., Jr. (1987). Negativity in evaluations. In E. Edward, D. E. Kanouse, H. H. Kelley, R. Nisbett, S. Valins, & B. Weiner (Eds.), *Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior* (pp. 47–62). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kark, R., & Eagly, A. H. (2010). Gender and leadership: Negotiating the labyrinth. *Handbook of gender research in psychology* (pp. 443–468). Springer.
- Klenke, K. (2008). *Qualitative research in the study of leadership: Emerald group publishing*.
- Koenig, A. M., Eagly, A. H., Mitchell, A. A., & Ristikari, T. (2011). Are leader stereotypes masculine? A meta-analysis of three research paradigms. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(4), 616.
- Kohler-Riessman, C. (2000). Analysis of personal narratives. In A. E. Fortune, W. Reid, & R. Miller Jr. (Eds.), *Qualitative research in social work* (pp. 168–191). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kreiner, G., Hollensbe, E., & Sheep, M. (2006). Where is the "me" among the "we"? Identity work and the search for optimal balance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(5), 1031–1057.
- Krueger, J. (1998). Enhancement bias in descriptions of self and others. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24(5), 505–516.
- Kvande, E. (1999). In the belly of the beast: Constructing femininities in engineering organizations. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 6(3), 305–328.
- Ladge, J., Clair, J., & Greenberg, D. (2012). Cross-domain identity transition during liminal periods: Constructing multiple selves as "professional and mother" during pregnancy. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55, 1449–1471.
- Ladkin, D., & Taylor, S. S. (2014). The physicality of leadership: Gesture, entanglement, taboo, possibilities. In F. Walumbwa (Ed.), *Monographs in leadership and management*. Vol. 6: i. Emerald Publishing Group.
- Langford, J., & Clance, P. R. (1993). The imposter phenomenon: Recent research findings regarding dynamics, personality and family patterns and their implications for treatment. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 30(3), 495–501.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Leary, M. R. (2007). Motivational and emotional aspects of the self. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 317–344.
- Leary, M. R., & Kowalski, R. M. (1990). Impression management: A literature review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(1), 34–47.
- Little, A. C. (2014). Facial appearance and leader choice in different contexts: Evidence for task contingent selection based on implicit and learned face-behaviour/face-ability associations. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25(5), 865–874.
- Locke, K. (2001). *Grounded theory in management research*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Mavin, S., & Grandy, G. (2016). A theory of abject appearance: Women elite leaders' intra-gender 'management' of bodies and appearance. *Human Relations*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0018726715609107>.
- Mavin, S., Bryans, P., & Cunningham, R. (2010). Fed-up with Blair's babes, Gordon's gals, Cameron's cuties, Nick's nymphets: Challenging gendered media representations of women political leaders. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(7), 550–569.
- Meister, A., Jehn, K. A., & Thatcher, S. M. B. (2014). Feeling misidentified: The consequences of internal identity asymmetries for individuals at work. *Academy of Management Review*, 39(4), 488–512.
- Miller, G. E. (2004). Frontier masculinity in the oil industry: The experience of women engineers. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 11(1), 47–73.
- Neuman, L. W. (2002). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*.

- Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11, 327–344.
- Nyberg, D., & Sveningsson, S. (2014). Paradoxes of authentic leadership: Leader identity struggles. *Leadership*, 10(4), 437–455.
- O'Reilly, K., & Marx, S. (2012). Demystifying grounded theory for business research. *Organizational Research Methods*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1094428111434559>.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications.
- Peiperl, M. (2001). Getting 360 degree feedback right. *Harvard Business Review*, 79(1), 142–147.
- Peterson, H. (2010). The gendered construction of technical self-confidence: Women's negotiated positions in male-dominated, technical work settings. *International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology*, 2(1).
- Petriglieri, J. (2011). Under threat: Responses to the consequences of threats to individual's identities. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(4), 641–662.
- Petriglieri, G., & Stein, M. (2012). The unwanted self: Projective identification in leaders' identity work. *Organization Studies*, 33(9), 1217–1235.
- Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction*. Sage Publications.
- Potter, J., & Hepburn, A. (2005). Qualitative interviews in psychology: Problems and possibilities. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2(4), 281–307.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. Sage.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1994). Analyzing discourse. In A. Bryman, & R. Burgess (Eds.), *Analyzing qualitative data* (pp. 47–66). London: Routledge.
- Poutvaara, P. (2014). Facial appearance and leadership: An overview and challenges for new research. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25(5), 801–804.
- Powell, A., Bagilhole, B., & Dainty, A. (2009). How women engineers do and undo gender: Consequences for gender equality. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 16(4), 411–428.
- Pratt, M. G. (2009). From the editors: For the lack of a boilerplate: Tips on writing up (and reviewing) qualitative research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(5), 856–862.
- Pratt, M. G., Rockmann, K. W., & Kaufmann, J. B. (2006). Constructing professional identity: The role of work and identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(2), 235–262.
- Putnam, L. L., & Fairhurst, G. T. (2001). Discourse analysis in organizations. In F. M. Jablin, & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The new handbook of organizational communication* (pp. 78–136). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Ragins, B. R., & Winkel, D. E. (2011). Gender, emotion and power in work relationships. *Human Resource Management Review*, 21(4), 377–393.
- Ramarajan, L. (2014). Past, present and future research on multiple identities: Towards an intrapersonal network approach. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 8(1), 1–88.
- Roberts, L. M. (2005). Changing faces: Professional image construction in diverse organizational settings. *Academy of Management Review*, 30(4), 685–711.
- Rozin, P., & Royzman, E. B. (2001). Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5(4), 296–320.
- Schlenker, B. R. (1980). *Impression management: The self-concept, social identity, and interpersonal relations*. Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co.
- Schmitt, M. T., Ellemers, N., & Branscombe, N. R. (2003). Perceiving and responding to gender discrimination in organizations. In S. A. Haslam, D. van Knippenberg, M. J. Platow, & N. Ellemers (Eds.), *Social identity at work: Developing theory for organizational practice* (pp. 277–292). New York: Psychology Press.
- Scott, K. A., & Brown, D. J. (2006). Female first, leader second? Gender bias in the encoding of leadership behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 101(2), 230–242.
- Sinclair, A. (1994). *Trials at the top: Chief executives talk about men, women and the Australian executive culture*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne, Australian Centre.
- Sinclair, A. (1998). *Doing leadership differently: Gender, power and sexuality in a changing business culture* (1st ed.). Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing.
- Sinclair, A. (2005). Body possibilities in leadership. *Leadership*, 1(4), 387–406.
- Sinclair, A. (2011). Being leaders: Identities and identity work in leadership. In A. Bryman, D. Collinson, K. Grint, B. Jackson, & M. Uhl-Bien (Eds.), *The sage handbook of leadership* (pp. 508–517). London: Sage.
- Sinclair, A. (2013). Can I really be me? The challenges for women leaders constructing authenticity. In D. Ladkin, & C. Spiller (Eds.), *Authentic leadership: Concepts, co-alescences and clashes* (pp. 239–251). Cheltenham, United Kingdom: Edward Elgar.
- Sinclair, A. (2014). On knees, breasts, and being fully human in leadership. In D. Ladkin, & M. S. Taylor (Eds.), *The physicality of leadership: Gesture, entanglement, taboo, possibilities*. Vol. 6. (pp. 175–195). Emerald Group Publishing.
- Snow, D. A., & Anderson, L. (1987). Identity work among the homeless: The verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(6), 1336–1371.
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2003). A sociological approach to self and identity. In M. R. Leary, & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of self and identity* (pp. 128–152). New York: Guilford.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). *Grounded theory methodology: An overview*. Sage Publications.
- Stryker, S. (1968). Identity salience and role performance: The relevance of symbolic interaction theory for family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 30(4), 558–564.
- Suri, H. (2011). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 11(2), 63–75.
- Sveningsson, S., & Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing managerial identities: Organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. *Human Relations*, 56(10), 1163–1193.
- Swann, E. (2005). On bodies, rhinestones, and pleasures women teaching managers. *Management Learning*, 36(3), 317–333.
- Swann, W. B., Jr. (1983). Self-verification: Bringing social reality into harmony with the self. *Psychological perspectives on the self*. 2. (pp. 33–66).
- Swann, W. B., Jr. (1987). Identity negotiation: Where two roads meet. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(6), 1038–1051.
- Swann, W. B., Jr. (2011). Self-verification theory. *Handbook of theories of social psychology*. 2. (pp. 23–42).
- Swann, W. B., Jr., & Read, S. J. (1980). *Self-verification processes: How we sustain our self-conceptions*. University of Texas at Austin: University Press.
- Swann, W. B., Jr., Rentfrow, P. J., & Guinn, J. S. (2003). Self-verification: The search for coherence. In M. R. Leary, & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of self and identity* (pp. 367–383). New York: Guilford Press.
- Swann, W. B., Jr., Polzer, J. T., Seyle, D. C., & Ko, S. J. (2004). Finding value in diversity: Verification of personal and social self-views in diverse groups. *The Academy of Management Review*, 29(1), 9–27.
- Swann, W. B., Jr., Johnson, R. E., & Bosson, J. K. (2009). Identity negotiation at work. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 29, 81–109.
- Tannen, D. (1994). *Gender and discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Thomas, R., & Davies, A. (2005). Theorizing the micro-politics of resistance: New public management and managerial identities in the UK public services. *Organization Studies*, 26(5), 683–706.
- Tomaka, J., Blascovich, J., Kelsey, R. M., & Leitten, C. L. (1993). Subjective, physiological, and behavioral effects of threat and challenge appraisal. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65(2), 248–260.
- Trethewey, A. (2001). Reproducing and resisting the master narrative of decline midlife professional women's experiences of aging. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 15(2), 183–226.
- Turner, J. C. (1987). A self-categorization theory. In J. C. Turner, M. A. Hogg, P. J. Oakes, & S. Reicher (Eds.), *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Vol. 42. (pp. 42–67). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Van Knippenberg, D., Van Knippenberg, B., De Cremer, D., & Hogg, M. (2004). Leadership, self, and identity: A review and research agenda. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(6), 825–856.
- Vecchio, R. P. (2003). In search of gender advantage. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14(6), 835–850.
- Vough, H., Cardador, T., Bednar, J., Dane, E., & Pratt, M. (2013). What clients don't get about my profession: A model of perceived role-based image discrepancies. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56(4), 1050–1080.
- Vough, H. C., Bataille, C. D., Noh, S. C., & Lee, M. D. (2015). Going off script: How managers make sense of the ending of their careers. *Journal of Management Studies*, 52(3), 414–440.
- Wiesenfeld, B. M., Swann, W. B., Brockner, J., & Bartel, C. A. (2007). Is more fairness always preferred? Self-esteem moderates reactions to procedural justice. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(5), 1235–1253.