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The Development of Leader Identities
in Female Leaders

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Abstract

This thesis uses identity research as a lens to investigate the development of leader identities in female leaders. Specifically, research from identity theory, narrative theory, and narrative research is used as all three areas are well researched but not yet integrated into a full framework for identity development. Leader identity development as one work identity does provide more integrated models yet only recently a model has been developed that includes four different leader identity approaches rather than one "traditional" perspective. This novel framework serves as a starting point for investigating the career trajectories of female leaders. To characterise them in the data, practical conceptions have been collected from prior theory and studies done on female leader identities before. Data was collected from 18 semi-structured interviews with female managers from East Germany. In the findings of this work, three different career narratives are explored in detail across three career stages. What becomes apparent is that the trajectories differ in terms of how social and internal sensemaking for identity formation. While all leaders eventually do reach alignment for their identity, some females face higher hurdles. The aim to better understand identity formation processes is met by this work with the final finding that research needs to focus on internal reflection processes and narrative perspectives more in the future.

List of Abbreviations

SME   **-**   **Small and Mid-size Enterprises**

TMT   **-**   **Top Management Team**

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1. Researching Leader Identities in Females

"2021 Is Set To Be The Year Of Female Leadership", titles Forbes (2021) in February 2021. The magazine's claim can be supported by the recent work by Eckl (2020). who found that more and more females take on leadership positions. But what does the journey of taking on such a position today mean for those females? While female leadership serves as a buzzword for headlines such as the one above, relatively little is known about the personal growth trajectories and hurdles female leaders face when they start building their careers as leaders. It should be in the interest of companies, aspiring female leaders but also society, on the whole, to understand female leadership journeys in times where issues can no longer be solved by a single 'messiah'-like leader but demand larger-scale cooperation. Granting such leadership an equal label of approval would help advance equality practices for females but also alleviate the restrictive corset currently demanded from leaders for both genders (Fox-Kirk et al., 2017).

Understanding leadership is a challenge academia has been seeking for several decades (Fox-Kirk et al., 2017). Having a sense of what it means to self-apply the label of "leader" or any self-definition is described as possessing an "identity" (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). While the research around identities goes back as far as the 1930s, leader identities have been of interest since the millennium (Ibarra, 1999; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This research aims thus to answer the following research question: "How do female leader identities develop over time?".

The relative broadness of the research question is not only the result of a manifold societal problem but also that of a research landscape marked by breath, not depth. Neither leadership, nor identity, nor the combined female leadership are finitely defined terms in academia (Brown, 2015; Fox-Kirk et al., 2017; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Leave alone in very recent years, at least two reviews have tried to bring order to the field of identity research and its multitude of theoretical approaches (Atewologun et al., 2017; Caza et al., 2018). Two schools of thought exist: One that believes external experiences in social settings shape identity formation and one that regards inner sensemaking as the main trigger (Petriglieri & Stein, 2012; Stryker et al., 2000). The academic scene gets more complicated by the concept of "identity work" which tries to trace dynamic developments of identity without concretely addressing either foundational theory (Caza et al., 2018). It would be farfetched to try and find an integration for all these concepts in just one study, but the researcher aims to add a layer of understanding to the interplay of all three identity development factors.

To make progress with this aim, the researcher relies on existing concepts of integrated identity formation. For the past decade, the most used conception here was provided by seminal work Lord and Hall (2005) who addressed a three-stage model that leaders go through when developing their identity. The model depicts a very linear picture that arguably represents the route of "traditional, male" leadership. A major step forward in this has been taken recently through a leader identity study conducted by Zheng, Meister and Caza (2020). The authors uncover that people of both genders who develop leader identities fulfill them differently depending on their background. While most of their male participants link leadership to performance, females have a broader spectrum of origins from which they build their identities. What the study does not do is to investigate the details of each trajectory to leadership identity. This paper tries to close this gap for the leadership in females by using the provided framework as a starting point to categorizing data sets. To further support the necessity of such a more granular concept for investigating female leaders, the author also decided to explore findings on female leader identities. Having terms and conceptions at hand for the behavior of certain sub-groups will support the validity of this work in a greater academic context.

To address all the aims of this research the author chose a narrative methodology through semi-structured interviewing. The research is carried out with a sample of females who have progressed through several career steps in east German SMEs. While this is not a perfect process, the researcher has addressed females who while they would possibly not describe themselves as leaders, do have the traditional characteristics of a leader in an organization meaning seniority in terms of expertise or personnel to manage (Fox-Kirk et al., 2017). Working with SMEs rather than corporations were motivated by the empirical finding that while corporations invest larger sums into talent management of females, SMEs succeed more at putting women in senior positions women (Festing et al., 2013). While this is a paradox, it provides a great research environment where likely women are not especially primed yet successful enough to reflect on their pathways to leadership. East Germany was chosen because in this German area over proportionally many women are promoted to senior positions compared to the rest of the country (Eckl, 2020). After gathering the data the researcher used thematic analysis (Riessmann, 2005) as a qualitative data analysis tool to create a storyline for the different origin stories of the females. In a narrative report, the findings are summarized to give insights into the development of the leader identities over time. In a final summary, comparisons between the different journeys will be drawn.

In the final report, the author describes career narratives for three out of four framework groups. By looking at each story across a timeline of different career stages, it is possible to understand when female leaders are affected by or behave in ways that have been found out in prior

studies. By looking at their internal sensemaking and social interactions guided by these and general leader behaviors it can be reported when different leaders face alignment or misalignment for their leader identities. All interviewed female leaders do at a certain point reach aligned, yet the strategies and points in time to arrive at this differ between the groups. From this, the conclusion is drawn that particularly narrative inner sensemaking processes have a high impact on identity formation and should be integrated and regarded closer in theory. Besides theoretical insights, this work produces practical insights. The overarching narratives could create more (self-) awareness in females and companies. Understanding in what frame and at what stage one finds themselves with their leader identity could likely support further development. In the future, the findings of this work could help to understand the full life stories of both female and male leaders better and thus create new "less traditional" leadership ideals.

2. Identity Research

To investigate how specifically a 'leader identity' is developing in an organizational context, it is pertinent to first create a theoretic understanding of what is known about the identity formation of individuals in organizations.

The following chapter aims to give an overview of how identity research has developed with a focus on the two theory strands of identity theory and narrative theory. Also, the concept of identity work as a way to operationalize identity formation is explained.

2.1 Identity Definition

The field of identity research is incoherent and very fragmented as it covers multiple disciplines and perspectives (Brown, 2015, p. 23; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1166). When defining the term identity, it is necessary to differentiate between group identities and personal identities (R. Stryker et al., 2020, p. 12). Group identities refer to identification with a collective or social group, where there are in- and out-groups so people can position themselves in relation to others (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 10, 2008, p. 13; Stryker et al., 2000, p. 285). This work will be focusing on personal identities to understand the specific personal accounts of females rather than the much investigated "females as a minority" perspective often found in political debates (Neuerer & Heide, 2018; Pausder, 2020; Scarborough, 2018).

Personal identity definitions can be regarded as a spectrum between externally motivated self-association and internal meaning-making.

On the one end of the spectrum, through a sociological heuristic identity is often considered to be a 'conceptual bridge' between the individual and society ((Brown, 2015, p. 23; Ybema et al., 2009, p. 300). In this view, individuals base their interpretations of who they are on meanings attached by themselves or others to socio-demographic characteristics, roles, or group memberships (Caza et al., 2018; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Some scholars go as far as fully integrating culture with (self-)identity, which goes contrary to the agentic view of psychologists (Stryker et al., 2000, p. 285).

On the psychological side, Brown (2015, p. 21) unifies the work of prior authors in defining the term identity as referring to "the meanings that individuals attach reflexively to their selves as they seek to answer questions such as: 'How shall I relate to others?' 'What shall I strive to become?' and 'How will I make the basic decisions required to guide my life?'". Such a definition is in line with the work of Ashford, Harrison, and Corley (2008) or Cerulo (1997) for whom self-identity addresses the question of 'Who am I?'. Giddens (1991, p. 53) disintegrates

these approaches further into the self as "reflexively understood by the person" and self-identity as the "reflexive interpretations by the agent". The 'self' uses internalized and evolving stories across time to build a 'self-identity' (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

While there is no finite definition, academia does in large parts acknowledge that there are social and cognitive interpretations at play when identities are developed. On an individual level, this duality is translated into two theoretic strands: identity theory and narrative theory. While both theories have strong academic support today, it was identity theory that emerged first. In the following sections both theories will be introduced.

2.2 Personal Identity Theories

2.2.1 Identity Theory

Identity theory traces its roots to the seminal writings on symbolic interactionism of George Herbert Mead as well as those by American pragmatic philosophers such as William James or John Dewey (Stryker et al., 2000; S. Stryker & Serpe, 1982). One of the base ideas of symbolic interactionism is that self-meanings develop in the context of roles (Stryker et al., 2000, p. 288). Roles can be external and linked to social positions or internal consisting of internalized expectations, yet they are always socially negotiated (Caza et al., 2018, p. 897; Järventie-Thesleff & Tienari, 2016, p. 239).

The role concept has been contested early on as being too static. In their seminal work, Stryker and Serpe (1982) pointed out that no situation is typically "pure" and that individuals do not automatically fully integrate any socially negotiated role expectation in their identities. The authors state there is inconsistency between how people move from one situation to the next, how much resistance they show in the process, and how they explain certain behavioural choices (ibid.). Over time, this line of thinking led to the concept of roles being "dropped off the lexicon" in theory on identities in organizations (Järventie-Thesleff & Tienari, 2016, p. 237) for a while. Only in the late 2000s, authors revive the concept by locating it in-between actors (Järventie-Thesleff & Tienari, 2016; Simpson & Carroll, 2008). Rather than static positions in a social system, they regard roles to be containers that actors fill with meanings that emerge from overlapping social worlds of the individuals partaking in the role-making process (Järventie-Thesleff & Tienari, 2016, p. 240). Whereas Ibarra (1999, p. 764) had stated that individuals who fail to comply with the standards attached their roles would risk losing the right

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to enact said role, identities attached to certain roles have become as Beech (2008, p. 962) puts it "movable targets" that get renegotiated constantly.

Identity theory is still valid for its understanding that 'no man's an island' and identities cannot be developed without taking social context into account. Yet, the way the academic debate has evolved, makes it clear that the cognitive layer of how individuals process social perceptions must be studied on its own which led to the birth of narrative theory.

2.2.2 Narrative Theory

In the 1970s scholars had first moved away from the understanding that identities and their development are connected to extra-personal roles and role changes (Markus, 1977). Instead, cognitive social psychology provided a new understanding where identities were seen as frameworks for interpretation and internal meaning-making of information collected through experiences (Stryker et al., 2000, p. 287). This new thinking manifests in narrative theory which addresses the question of 'who we are' not through social processes but internal reflections (Caza et al., 2018, p. 897). The base assumption is that individuals construct stories from their experiences (Caza et al., 2018; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Watson, 2008).

Psychologically storytelling provides a means of creating the desired state of psychological safety (Caza et al., 2018, p. 899). Individuals tend to create stories in a way that will make their 'life narrative' seem coherent at any point in time (Brown, 2015, p. 27). However, in reality, this can mean both sense-making and sense-breaking (Kira & Balkin, 2014, p. 132). In sensemaking, individuals aim to keep their identities the same over time (Caza et al., 2018, p. 899). While narrative theory heavily builds on internal processes, any individual narrative is embedded in overarching social narratives, cultural norms, and archetypal characters (Brown, 2015; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). This reflects in the act of sense-making where experiences are perceived by the individual as external factors, that need active integrating with their identity to keep up a coherent internal story of an 'on-going' self (Brown, 2015, p. 32). Sense-breaking on the contrary postulates that individuals seek alternative narratives particularly when their current perceived stories are unsuccessful (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). In an agentic way, individuals express and constitute their identities dynamically by leaving coherent stories at certain points (Brown, 2017). Research has not finitely decided on the way agency and coherence interrelate in how stories are developed from lived experiences.
What is clear, is that such self-narratives make a point about the narrator and their future selves and need to be taken into account when identity formation is investigated (Caza et al., 2018; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

2.3 Identity Work

Now that both approaches to individual identity development theory have been introduced it becomes clear that they overlap and differ in certain ways. In their early understanding, identity theory was a rather static concept of identity formation which eventually triggered the emergence of a more dynamic approach through narrative theory (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003, p. 1188; Ibarra 1999, p. 766). However, with identity theory moving towards a more dynamic understanding of roles, the theories recently have converged. What remains unclear are concrete factors and triggers – be it through outside forces or cognitive sensemaking – that impact the emergence of any identity. To solve this problem, identity research from both theory strands has been trying to operationalize their respective understanding of identity development in what is called "identity work". The following chapter will create a base understanding of what has been uncovered about practical identity formation.

"The process by which identity evolves remains underexplained", Ibarra (1999, p. 765) complained in her early works, which years later was reiterated by Brown (2015, p. 31) who states that there still is "a lack of understanding of how, why and with what implications people engage in identity work". In their review on identity work, Brown recently sums up the current research landscape around identity formation as follows:

> "Identities arise in a continuing dialectic of 'structure' and 'agency', and are most reasonably described as 'improvised' or 'crafted' through identity work processes that are sometimes calculative and pragmatic, often emotionally charged, and generally social." (Brown 2015, p. 26)

It becomes clear, that identity work to this day is no more clearly defined than terms used in prior chapters. The definitions most often used are those by Snow and Anderson (1987, p. 1338) who describe identity work as "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" Alternatively, Sveningsson and Alvessons' (2003, p. 1165) seminal definition of identity work referring to "people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" is quoted widely.

Wording such as "crafted", "sustain" or "revising" across these definitions points to a unifying timely aspect. Identities do not simply erupt out of nowhere in their final form. However,

there is a differing view of the path of such a timeline of identity formation. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) originally regarded identity work as potentially continuous and ongoing. Several years later they add that any kind of conscious identity work is grounded in at least a minimal amount of self-doubt which usually will occur in complex situations (Alvesson et al. 2008, p. 15). Later scholars have connected identity work to significant role transitions or very demanding, intensive, or surprising situations (Brown 2015, p. 25; Caza et al. 2018, p. 897). Independent of the force of trigger events, scholars hence agree that any identity will be developing and "growing" over time.

Such discussions of temporality at least in connection to transitions hint towards identity work and therefore any identity reaching an end-state eventually. Such outcomes of said processes have not been common objects of theorizing though (Kira and Balkin 2014, p. 132; Caza et al. 2018, p. 899). Caza et al. (2018, p. 900) see a resolution of identity tension as the most common identity work outcome. Individuals have to reconcile who they were with who they have become which can lead to an integration of identities (Caza et al. 2018, p. 900).

It can thus be summarized that identity formation happens across some sort of individual timeline with certain trigger events with an unknown but somehow more evolved end-state. To better understand how any individual moves along said timeline, identity, and narrative theory scholars have been trying to operationalize their theory into concrete actions.

From an identity theory point of view, where social interaction is an integral part of identity formation scholars describe 'dramaturgical actions' as identity work tactics. This can mean actions such as managing information disclosure, acknowledgment of skill, influence, or networks. Other tactics relate to discursive occurrences of identity work through e.g. negotiating, resisting, legitimacy contesting, experimentation, or reflection (Caza et al. 2018, p. 895). Even more explicit examples of outwardly visible tactics can include physical appearance (Brown 2015, p. 24), office decor (Ibarra and Barbulescu 2010), or other commodities (Cerulo 1997).

Working within the realms of narrative theory, identity work can also be more inward-facing through different cognitive processes such as selective social comparison, experimenting with possible selves, or different rhetorical devices to create accounts and stories for re-framing or re-constructing one's identity (Ibarra and Barbulescu 2010; Caza et al. 2018). In addition to this, emotions have been more and more recognized to play an impactful role in identity work (Caza et al. 2018).

Much like the general discussion on identity theory and narrative theory, the overlap between both paradigms becomes clear. For example, acknowledgment of skills will likely occur related to an internal action of social comparison. Experimenting with possible selves might have a change in physical appearance consequently. General identity work research lacks operationalizations that manage to distill down either theory strand into an actionable framework that serves as the base for investigation. This issue is rooted in the fact that identity research crosses a variety of research fields and disciplines, and explanations need to be broad enough to fit any kind of identity context. Yet, the father of identity theory Herbert Mead is famous for his quote 'a parliament of selves' exists in each person (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003, p. 1165), meaning that any individual has several identities that come out context-dependent. Since this work tries to investigate female leader identities, it will thus be pertinent to leave the realms of general identity research and turn to theories and operationalizations particularly relating to leader identities.

Already in 2004, Mintzberg stated that while leader roles are often associated with managerial positions, there can also be a disconnect between the two (Zheng et al. 2020). A leader's identity can be relevant across a multitude of domains and be independent of formal roles (Hammond et al. 2017). However, if they are embodied by the same person, such ambiguous approaches do not make it easier to investigate one distinct from the other identity (Carroll and Levy 2008, p. 76). The following chapter will explore the concept of a distinct leader identity in detail. Questions such as "What defines a leader identity?" and "What is known about its development?" help to build a foundation that can later be expanded to understand the intricacies of leader identities in females.

3. Leadership Identity Research

Anyone trying to examine leader identities will quickly realize that issues from general identity research do extend to this particular identity when it comes to defining terms and concepts. Leadership itself, though extremely popular both as a research topic and in organisational strategy, is an abstract concept (DeRue & Myers, 2014). Besides defining and exploring the term itself, which will be done in the subsequent chapter, leader identities in organisational research are part of the larger group of work identities. Distinguishing between the "parliament" or set of identities individuals express at work alone, has been keeping scholars engaged for decades now.

3.1 Leader Identity as one Work Identity

Scholars have found that organizations offer individuals many outlets for a variety of identities through e.g. workgroups or occupations (Miscenko & Day, 2016, p. 233). Miscenko and Day (2016, p. 233) find that work identities vary across different identifications and integration levels. Shortly after, Atewogoloun, Kutzer, Doldor, and Anderson (2017, p. 277) review the same literature and manage to create a categorization of identity foci active in work-related situations that includes ten different work identities. They distinguish these identities between organizationally situated foci, occupation-based foci, and general work-related foci. The leader identity is therein categorized as organizationally situated along with identities such as manager, follower, team, and organization. The implications of Atewogoloun et al.'s investigation for this specific research are twofold. On the one hand, it disconnects concepts such as profession or career from 'leadership'. On the other hand, it makes clear that there is also a distinction between manager and leader in an organizational context which needs to be addressed in terms of definitions.

The distinction between manager identities and leader identities is not new in scholarly debates. Already in 2004, Mintzberg (2004) stated that while leader roles are often associated with managerial positions, there can also be a disconnect between the two. Recently, Carroll and Levy have tried to build a better understanding of what management and leadership are. For them "leadership and management draw from different personal and positional resources or are occupied on a different spectrum of activities and concerns" (Carroll & Levy, 2008, p. 78). Management with its relatively clear-cut tasks will likely provide an environment where individuals develop a sometimes unwanted but comfortable identity in. Leadership with its lack of pragmatism is all the more desirable for the aspirational aspect that is attached to it in organizational culture (Carroll & Levy, 2008, p. 93). While both are subject to such a 'heroically-

oriented' culture, Caroll and Levy (2008, p. 92) speculate that with its wider and inclusive spectrum of social and personal life leadership can pose both a challenge and a "new frontier of competitive advantage" to any organizational culture. Building on this argument, investigating leader identities in females, and looking for an alternative to the 'hero's journey' becomes a very promising avenue of research.

When the understanding of leadership is reshaped in a way that will innately fit with the stereotype of being "more relational oriented" applied to females, they will no longer be the anti-story and minority. While this is a promising prospect for future research and female careers, leadership and therefore the characteristics and development of any leader identity is "nebulous" at best as Caroll and Levy (2008, p. 93) put it. The following section will thus explore the definitional possibilities found for leader identities in academia.

3.2 Definition Leader Identity

In prior chapters, it has been clear that defining the term "identity" in "leader identity" is a challenge. Unfortunately, dealing with the former part of the term "leader" is no less of a conundrum when it comes to finding a finite academic definition. It was only recently that DeRue and Myers distinguished the term "leader" from its cousin "leadership". A leader for them describes individuals who possess the "capacity to participate in leading-following processes" (DeRue & Myers, 2014). Leadership on the other hand is described as "the capacity of collectives to engage in the leadership process" (DeRue & Myers, 2014). It becomes clear that for this work on personal identities, the term leadership must be excluded from definitional issues.

DeRue and Meyer's definition of any "leader" is symptomatic of the deflection from traditional descriptions of leaders such as idealized, grandiose, elusive, or rhetorical in recent research (Carroll & Levy, 2008, p. 77; DeRue & Ashforth, 2010, p. 628). There is no finite consensus on a definition of the word, which is why the researcher tuned back to the original problem of defining "leader identity" as a whole. The definitional debate surrounding this term is ongoing but has been birthing some interesting insights rather recently.

Epistropaki et al. define it as:

> "…a sub-component of one's working self-concept that includes leadership schemas, leadership experiences and future representations of oneself as a leader" (2017, p. 107).

Similarly, Atewogoloun et al. present their definitions as follows:

> "Leader identity is the individual's understanding of oneself as someone who can guide others' work; leadership identity includes having that sense, and receiving acknowledgment of that ability from those one guides, as well as the organization" (2017, p. 276).

The latest definition comes from Wallace, Torres, and Zaccaro who summarised other authors' approaches as follows:

> "Leader identity refers to the self-conceptualization of oneself as a leader. It reflects a complex amalgam of experiences, leader conceptions, and self-conceptions that drive leader cognitions, affective reactions, and behavioral choices across a variety of situations. Those who self-identify as leaders are likely to take on leadership roles, perceive the leadership demands and affordances of situations, and develop appropriate mental models of the leadership networks around them" (2021, p. 8).

The definitions by Epistrokas et al. (2017) and Atewogoloun et al. (2017) make clear the impacts from both internal and external forces on leader identities. Wallace et al. (2021) definition introduces the important timely element from general identity research to leader identities.

All three definitions help understand the dynamic nature of leader identity. What they lack is a concrete concept of the developmental steps an individual goes through when forming said identity. Agreeing with this gap in the literature, Wallace et al. (2021, p. 2) in their paper state that an older statement from their colleagues Hogan and Warrenfeltz holds which indicates that the field of leader (identity) maturation is underdeveloped. Since this work aims to add to this research gap, the insights that do exist need to be reviewed next.

3.3 Models of Leader Identity Development

An approach to understanding how leader identities emerge was proposed in the seminal work by Lord and Hall. For them, leadership skills and alongside that leader identity emerges across **stages from novice to intermediate to experienced leader**. Novice leaders actively observe others' behaviors to build provisional selves off of (2005, p. 598). When a novice goes on to become an intermediate leader they will likely start building a portfolio of such provisional selves and thus enact more than one identity depending on the situation (2005, p. 602). At this level, outside knowledge integrates with self-views that have developed from attempting

leadership (2005, p. 601). A leader is considered an expert when they can define environments and problems in terms of underlying principles. Here the authors are less clear about the cognitive process of leader identity development. An overarching theme that they give, however, is that with emerging experience leaders will shift from self-identity to a more collective view. This will come into play when the most senior participants of this study will be interviewed.

Figure 1 shows what distinguishes the three stages further in terms of tasks, emotional and social behavior, and cognitive processes. The overview will help inform the analysis of the interviews.

Skill Domains	Novice	Intermediate	Expert
Task	Technical and task skills Generic decision-making and problem-solving skills	Domain-specific task skills; Meta-monitoring capacity	Principled understanding of task and self-regulation
Emotional	Expression	Empathy and understanding of others Domain-specific emotional regulation techniques	Formal principles of emotional regulation Principles specifying the effects of situational labeling, change, and social justice on emotions Understanding the synthesis of cognitions and emotions
Social	Fit with implicit leadership theories Understanding of agentic behaviors and social influence tactics	Integration with dyad or group Communal behaviors Self-monitoring skill	Capacity to develop others Authentic, principle-based leadership
Identity Level	Individual identity as leader differentiates self from others	Relational or collective identity includes others or group	Value-based identity grounded in abstract principles
Meta-monitoring	Largely based on social reactions and task progress; focused within one's own emotional and motivational orientation	Integrated with identities; greater adjustment to others; flexibility in emotional and motivational orientations	Based on formal principles relating identities to value structures Principled understanding of positive and negative emotions/motivation
Value orientation	Value orientation learned and applied implicitly	Integration of identities and values	Principled understanding of value structures and their relation to authentic leadership

Figure 1: Overview of the three-stage model on identity formation
by Lord and Hall (2005, p. 605)

The concept proposed by Lord and Hall still is certainly very useful when researchers are trying to map the development of leader identities. Yet, in the time since its publication, other conceptions have been explored as well. Day, Harrison, and Halpin (2009) proposed an alternative concept called leader identity-development spirals which are fueled upward by positive leader experiences and downward by negative ones. Hammond, Clapp-Smith, and Palanski (2017) built on this work and created a process model of leader development across multiple domains. The model segregates leadership experiences into the activities of noticing, interpreting, authoring and enacting. Across all these sensemaking activities leaders will create

narratives that are in line with their changing interpretations and meanings attached to themselves and their leader identity (Hammond et al., 2017).

Whether leadership is regarded as a process of steps where the only option is progress, spirals that can go both forward and backward or a conception of a broadening cycle – all these concepts build on the base assumption that whatever experience or event happens to an individual, its positive or negative consequence is inevitable. There is no room in these concepts for the individuality of the subject that is developing their leader identity before the backdrop of cultural and personal impacts. Females who often innately excel in relationship management would immediately be characterized as intermediate leaders in Lord and Halls model, which technically means a shorter way to expert status. Yet, we do not see this reflected in management teams today. A conception of spirals certainly describes some aspects of any females' career with lots of setbacks, yet some female managers in top positions do exist despite these obstacles. A general model of leader development thus does neither effectively describe identity formation, nor does it help those who are being described necessarily.

A very recent study by Zheng, Meister, and Caza (2020) changes the approach used to investigate leader identity development. Their study aims to better understand the sensemaking process behind becoming a leader by examining the origin and enactment stories of leadership (Zheng et al., 2020, p. 2). Origin stories are narrations given by interviewees of how they "make sense, claim and support their leader identities" (Zheng et al., 2020, p. 3). Enactment stories consequently narrate the "doing" of leading that derives from any one origin story. The authors believe that there is no one path to leadership and that understanding the innate positioning of the subject will be pertinent to trace their path toward a leader identity (ibid.) Zheng et al. (2020) were able to put forward a four-part framework using in-depth interviewing. Each frame consists of an origin and connected enactment story as shown in figure 2 (ibid.). The researchers labeled the frames "being", "engaging", "performing" and "accepting" (Zheng et al., 2020, p. 10).
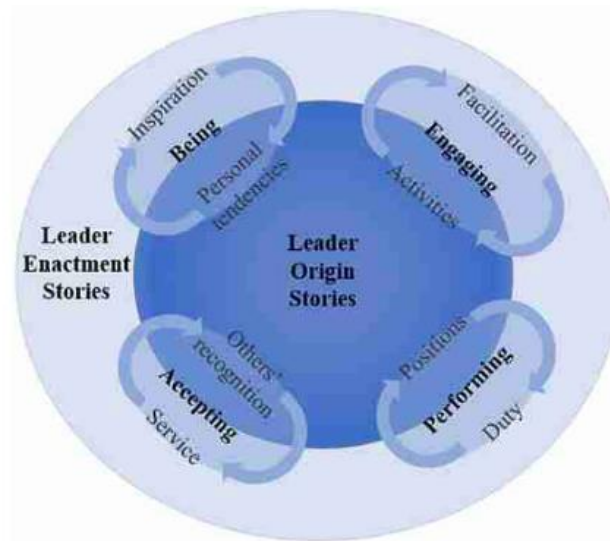
Figure 2: Origin and enactment story framework
By Zheng, Meister and Caza (2020, 21)

Subjects falling into the "being" category would feel their leadership to be part of their innate being, expressed at all stages of life through a "take-charge personality" (Zheng et al., 2020). Those in the "engaging" category subjects would feel as leaders once they engaged with activities associated with it (Zheng et al., 2020, p. 14). The third group of "performers" consists of those who live leadership through assigned roles and fulfilled responsibilities (ibid., p. 15). Lastly, the frame "accepting" grouped subjects that were less agentic and only took on a leader identity after being "seen by others as such" (ibid., p. 17). The study was conducted with both males and females. The distribution of frames among the genders will be important for this research. The numbers of men and women assigned into the "being" and "accepting" groups were equal. More than three times as many men as women fell into the "performing" frame and counteractively twice as many females as men were found to fit the "engaging" frame (ibid, p. 18). The insights gained from this framework study help to build a further understanding of how individuals deal with the social discourse around leader identities. A "positive distinctiveness" of leader identities can be unearthed that while possibly straying from traditional leader stories legitimizes the identity for a person (ibid, p. 23).

This research will explore the future research avenue of how engaging stories develop over time and how they impact or are impacted by origin stories as pointed out by Zheng et al. at the end of their work (2020, p. 25). The researcher will further lean into the appreciation the study's authors have built for a multitude of leader behaviors which is particularly helpful to represent female leaders. To have guideposts along which developing leader behaviors can be followed and described, Zheng et al. (ibid.) have already turned to identity theory. To create an even better toolbox of operationalizations, the subsequent section will explore what is

known about the identity work of leaders and in particular female leaders. A distinction will be made between studies that take the lens of identity theory and those using narrative theory as their approach.

3.4 Practical Conceptions of Leader Identity Development in Females

3.4.1 Identity theory for leader identity development

When the development of leader identities was regarded from an identity theory point of view, the traditionally used concept was that of prototypes. Leader prototypes are used to compare one's own identity against and can be generated or invoked as early as in childhood (Fox-Kirk et al., 2017). The same happens on the collective level, where "how prototypical" someone is, determines how they are perceived in their leader role (DeRue & Ashforth, 2010, p. 638). As Petriglieri and Stein put it: "those aspiring to lead have little choice in positioning themselves vis-a-vis the identities valued by their potential followers — they must embrace them. (Petriglieri & Stein, 2012, p. 1220). Interestingly, under conditions of high social identification the standard for perceiving someone as a leader shifts towards how prototypical of a leader an individual is in their respective local group (DeRue & Ashforth, 2010, p. 638).

While prototyping is helpful to find links between what an individual experienced and their internalization of it, it also only provided a very narrow framework to investigate leader identities.

Research stepped away from a mere copy-paste understanding of identity formation eventually, with one major catalyst being the seminal work by DeRue and Ashford who introduced the concept of **claiming and granting** (DeRue & Ashforth, 2010, p. 630). 'Claiming' refers to "the actions people take to assert their identity as either a leader or follower" (DeRue & Ashforth, 2010, p. 632), whereas 'granting' refers to the actions that a person takes to bestow a leader or follower identity onto another person. (DeRue & Ashforth, 2010, p. 632). Neither is necessarily connected to a formal leader role. While this conception was very helpful to move the scholarly debate forward, concerns have been raised around its universal applicability. Fox-Kirk, Campbell, and Egan (2017, p. 18) posit that "although these identities may be available to anyone, they are not equally available to everyone". They suggest claims are less likely to be granted when the individual asking is not being perceived as fitting a certain prototype or when they are generally new to the track of leading (ibid.). Either one of these situations can apply to females and thus the claiming – granting cycle can potentially work against them when developing their leader identity. Yet, the base concept helps categorize certain behaviors and the reaction they are triggering.

Several articles have been published consequently that explore what the concept of claiming and granting means for female leaders particularly. In her study "Claiming authority, How women explain their ascent to top business leadership positions", Bowles (2012) investigates the strategies females have used over time to reach top positions. Building on the work by DeRue and Ashford, Bowles' (2012) findings distinguish between two major narratives namely pioneering and navigating one's career. Both narratives include the processes of claiming and being granted legitimacy. In navigating narratives, the females adjust to institutionalized social structures and advocate with gatekeepers. In a pioneering narrative, females seemingly have more agency in their strategies as they build their own networks and self-identity as leaders. The (psychological) outcomes of both strategies are then unsurprising yet worrying. Females who navigate will seek or see validation more likely in an external sense and thus frame a failed attempt at leadership as a social downfall. Pioneering females showcase more 'traditionally male' characteristics – when being granted authority they attribute it to their own work and failed claiming attempts are rather put on others than one's capabilities. The study re-iterates the paradigm that depreciates the relational skillset of females yet also poignantly supports notions found by Zheng et al. (2020) on origin stories and their enactment. Looking for navigating or pioneering behaviour likely will help to sort interviewees into their leader frame. In the analysis, it will be of interest how such behaviours play out over time.

In the years following Bowles' (2012) study, other researchers made efforts to investigate female leaders in situations where their relational skillset is rather a support system than a challenge. In the study titled "Women's leadership as narrative practice - Identifying "tent-making", 'dancing' and 'orchestrating' in UK Early Years services" by Robson (2013), the author conducted a narrative study of female leaders working in early childhood service where there is an interesting collision between a feminine leadership paradigm and a broader leadership culture (2013, p. 339). The author finds three narrative practises women in the sample use that contrast with "masculine" leadership practises. There is "tent-making" which described the creation of space to discuss issues in a safe environment. "(skilled) dancing", referring to improvising, and remembering with others as well as "orchestration" meaning reflexive attuning. The women developed these sophisticated leader practises while the official "code" they were working under was still traditionally oriented. Instead of picturing the sample as weak and not fitting to the demands of their work environment, the study manages to shed more detailed light on the multitude of practises developed by females. These practises are not reviewed as less in value but rather as counterparts to traditional leadership practises that deserve research on their own both for theoretical and practical interests. While the study does not directly refer to the claiming and granting cycle, it points to more of a variety of what e.g. a claiming action by females could look like.

Several years later, in the study "Leadership Role Identity Construction in Women's Leadership Development Programs", Brue and Brue (2018) present a qualitative interview study following a program called 'women's only leadership development'. The researchers were able to extract five topics that females found helpful throughout the program to develop their leader identities. Participants reported a sense of *'nested' validation* when connecting with other emerging female leaders and felt their individual leadership resonated with the group in a way that made them feel they belong. This relating to others led them to get to know themselves better and move both into their new roles and identities more easily. This was made possible because throughout the program participants learned to see leadership as a multiverse that does give room for their understanding and enactment of it. Lastly, participants positively noted that the reflection process of the program supported their development. When females find themselves in "safe" environments where their innate abilities are appreciated, they seem to no longer see themselves as "lesser leaders". The implications of Brue and Brue's study for this work are twofold. On the one hand, it will be of interest what difference can be found between female leaders who start their careers with differing levels of self-esteem. Additionally, the impact of leader programs on the different females over time and how they can claim and be granted their leadership practises with or without leader programs.

The landscape of studies approaching female leader identity formation with an identity theory approach is relatively scarce. Some studies of females have built on prior identity research directly to expose and coin particular social negotiation behaviours in women who become leaders. Seemingly, to succeed as a female leader a certain degree of "carving out one's own space" is needed. In the following, studies done on female leader identities through narrative theory lens will be examined to see what research has to offer on the internal sensemaking of such behaviours.

3.4.2   Narrative theory for leader identity development

Examining leader identity development through the lens of narrative theory is less well explored in academia than identity theory approaches to the subject. Early conceptions started by concerning themselves with the question of why some people want to lead. For example, McClelland and Burnham (2003) argued that people with a high need for power will claim leadership to derive intrinsic satisfaction from fulfilling that need.

Instead of an 'innate' desire to lead, scholars now see such power-related motivations stem from role models embodied in individuals that a developing leader encountered at different stages in their lives and who they identified with (Guillén et al., 2015, p. 816; Zheng et al., 2020). From such role models, **wanted and unwanted selves** are then derived

(Petriglieri & Stein, 2012, p. 1221). Wanted selves can reflect what is valued by members of the respective organization or personal experience (ibid.). Unwanted selves on the other hand represent a reservoir of the self that the individual does not wish to become (ibid.). Petriglieri and Stein (2012, p. 1229) argue that the internalization and enactment of a leader identity can generate inner conflicts between the features experienced as requisite of the wanted leader identity and aspects of one's history and behavior. The main challenge raised with this approach is the implicitness of both selves. In her study, Driver (2013, p. 417) found that when individuals were asked to properly describe (their) leadership and thus wanted self, the emerging narrative where more of a fantasy or as one participant puts 'a connection to something bigger'. Navigating between these poles through sensemaking and sense-breaking already proves difficult for those, who pursue "traditional leader qualities". For females, these activities likely prove more difficult though as they do not only have to go through the process of moving towards a wanted self and away from an unwanted one – they have to figure out first what those even comprise of in the first place for their leadership to feel authentic.

Investigating this complicated process of sensemaking on both base paradigms and everyday actions simultaneously have been long neglected by research. There are very few studies that deal with the internal processing of experiences of female leaders. One of the earliest studies, conducted by Karelaia and Guillén (2014) titled "Me, a woman and a leader: Positive social identity and identity conflict", dealt with interrelations of holding both the identities of being a female and being a leader. The authors hypothesized that the more positive of a gender identity perception and leader identity perception females have, the less likely it is that identity conflicts arise. Instead, with more positive perceptions of both identities, females will possibly have an easier time blending both identities and performing their professional roles more authentically. The overarching finding across three different study set-ups was that a positive gender identity will lead to decreases in identity conflict between gender and leader identity and an increase in well-being. Leading will be perceived as a goal rather than a duty by these females. A positive leader identity on the other hand will likely increase the motivation lead, however, it does not decrease identity conflict or increase well-being. These findings make it very clear, that when interrogating female leaders, it is necessary to collect data on how they feel about being female to uncover the impacts this has on the wanted (or unwanted) selves they are pursuing.

Two consequent studies have already taken on the exploration of this "otherness" and how it impacts how females make sense of their own identity as a leader. Interestingly, depending on the set-up of the study (and likely culture and sample choice factors) this can lead to very different findings.

One study done by Bullock (2019) used a narrative interview method and unearthed rather depressing narratives of seasoned female leaders. Titled "Driving new narratives: women-leader identities in the automotive industry", the interviewer used semi-structured to elicit personal storytelling which was modeled into stories that impacted the leader identity development of the females in the sample. The study's findings are divided up into four layers of identity. On a personal level, the females describe a feeling of otherness, but also a sense of pride for "doing more" than their male counterparts. On a relational level, females experienced social isolation, privileging of male-to-male connections, and male knowledge. Yet also, there were examples of meaningful connection through shared social experiences (e.g. being divorced) and sponsorship. Stories from the level of enacted identities included examples of anti-girl behaviour or certain strategies for communication such as dropping your voice. A more balanced view on things is found on the level of communal experiences. Some women reported feeling their organisations are stuck in backward times while others reported hopeful feelings about more females advancing successfully in the future. Overall, the study paints a very bleak picture of female leaders who seemingly are always on the run from an unwanted "traditional" leadership self which they neither can nor want to take on.

A second study, published in the same year, titled "The barriers and enablers to career and leadership development - An exploration of women's stories in two work cultures" by Mate, McDonald, and Truc (2019) shows a very different perspective. The researcher collected insights from female academics from Vietnam and Australia. To allow for comparison with other samples such as that by Bullock (2019), the insights from Australian female leaders who a culturally embedded in a western country are of interest. Australian females attain agency over their careers through actively building professional relationships through mentoring, collaborations, and networking as well as seeing value in their formal education. They believe in their ability to make the best of opportunities and choices. When it comes to barriers, they raise similar concerns as the females interviewed by Bullock (2019) - narratives around lacking knowledge and being 'in' on professional groups, being hindered by competing demands and "sacrifices" they are not willing to make. Being raised in a western society today thus actually provide female leaders with ideas about the wanted self they are pursuing. The study does not negate the massive impact and drawbacks of dealing with an unwanted self, yet it opens the door to investigating positive outcomes in as much depth as negative ones.

After reviewing to what extend female leaders have been investigated through the lens of narrative theory, it becomes clear that females are often reduced to "just their gender". This mirrors the need to take a trajectory away from mainstream social situations that was described in identity theory studies of the field. While the issue of being female in the intricacies of navigating between implicit (anti) role model poles is majorly important, it is not the only issue

that likely impacts what females think about when pursuing sensemaking of their leadership. This work will aim to dive deeper into the motivators and processing of becoming a leader. To arrive at this goal, the researcher had to choose a method that allowed for a broad spectrum of personal, qualitative insights from those who live the "leader identity" stories today. The following method section will explore all aspects of data collection and analysis.

4. Narrative Research Approach

4.1 Determining a Research Approach

It has been highlighted in the theoretical part of this work that females as leaders are more often talked about than talked to. The methodological solution to this problem seems to be clear – conduct a qualitative interview study. Before diving into the ins and outs of such a process however, Lichtmann (2017a, p. 3) advises reflecting on underlying viewpoints of the research and researcher. A general research design, research approach, or methodology as defined by Scott-Jones and Watts can encompass "theoretical, ethical, political and philosophical orientations of the researcher" (2010, p. 14) which in qualitative research will have an impact on the analyzed data. The actual method of the research then describes how the study itself is conducted (Lichtman, 2017a, p. 2). There is no final consensus on such research approaches both in theory and practice. While some authors such as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) include up to eleven different methodological approaches, some researchers chose to not specifically choose one at all when conducting empirical studies (Lichtman, 2017a, p. 11). Lichtman herself lists five approaches including ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, case studies, and a narrative approach. Both phenomenology, which focuses on determining the essence of lived experiences, and narrative approaches that explore individual stories and epiphanies can be found in prior studies on female leaders as shown in chapter 3.

When thinking about the presented research case both approaches could hold value as they use interviews as their database and help to gain an understanding of other peoples' experiences through conversations. However, phenomenology is heavily rooted in philosophical thought and to this day there are no finite manuals on what it is or how it is used (Lichtman, 2017b, p. 17). Additionally, in an article titled "Who am I? Narration and its contribution to self and identity" Bamberg (2011) makes a compelling case for using a narrative approach when trying to understand identity development.

For Bamberg (2011, p. 7) the value of using narration to investigate identities lies in the fact that when individuals are asked to reflect on past events, they will likely compress their experiences to a more fixed demarcation of what happened, their agency in it and the transformation of any one identity. By talking about their identity the interviewees can step back and describe a certain identity as a "human good" (Bamberg, 2011, p. 7). Such accounts will give insight into how the participant's identity has emerged over time, how it is different from that of others, and how they see themselves as a responsible agent in this process

(Bamberg, 2011, p. 14). These aspects connect well to the aim of this research and thus a narrative approach was chosen as a research approach or methodology.

With choosing 'narrative theory' and a 'narrative approach' as imperatives for this work, it already becomes clear that the term narrative is used across different domains. While in the theory part narrative relates to an understanding of internal sensemaking processes, as a research approach it combines several methods of inquiry that all focus on spoken words and personal storytelling (Lichtman, 2017b, p. 29). The idea is to identify and interpret key narratives in the stories that participants tell (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011; Lichtman, 2017b; Phoenix, 2013, p. 76). A narrative here is concretely defined as a "textual actualization of a story at a specific time and context, and (told) to a specific audience" (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011, p. 3). It is a recollection of events and emotions as experienced by an individual in their own life that can be covering certain time periods or their whole life span (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011, p. 4). Phoenix describes three advantages of working with narratives. Firstly, narratives focus on local practices and thus provide insights into particular places and times (Phoenix, 2013, p. 73). Later in this chapter, the specific sampling will be discussed but it can already be said that with the study of identity being rather delicate and sometimes hard to pin down, it is very helpful to tie findings to a very specific setting.

It is also a benefit that narratives are told occasioned and only somewhat bound to chronology, which leaves room to analyze whether there are holes, parallels, or inconsistencies in the stories told (Phoenix, 2013, p. 73). While this research generally inquires in a chronological sense about the careers of the participants, as advised by Creswell (2007, p. 55) it is the 'reading between the lines' that is important for investigating the general structure of the narratives of the females under investigation. This links to the last asset narrative inquiry provides, in that "it foregrounds the context in which the narrative is produced" (Phoenix, 2013, p. 74).

Females are not talked to enough and if so, as proven by studies described in chapter 3 researchers tend to focus on negative career aspects. In framing this study as an inquiry into already successful careers, a broader variety of narratives about both successes and setbacks can be produced. As stated above, narrative approaches use different modes of inquiry to collect and work with data. This research will use a cross-over between expert and narrative interviewing for this. The detail f this approach are discussed in the next section.

4.2 Narrative Interviews

The general objective of any interview study or more generally of any qualitative study is to better understand the perspective of any one interviewee and how they developed it (Cassell, 2006, p. 11). When using interviews to reach this understanding there is a variety of qualitative interview methods that can be used such as semi-structured interviews, conversational, biographical, or narrative interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 13). While this categorization distinguishes by way of how interviewees are questioned, there is also the approach of expert interviews that is common in the field. This conceptualization builds on the assumption that interviewees in their position as 'experts' can help reconstruct social processes (Bogner et al., 2009, p. 10; Glaeser & Laudel, 2009, p. 117).

In line with prior chapters, this research will focus on narrative interviewing which "stimulates an interviewee to tell a story about some significant event in their life and social context" (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 4) throughout the active interview process. Insights from expert interviews literature will be used to determine the sample. Setting up said sample is a challenge in itself that needs to be discussed next.

4.2.1 Sample

When building a sample to understand a social situation or social phenomenon better, it is crucial to find respondents who are able and willing to reflect on their experiences – who are thus 'experts' in a certain setting (Glaeser & Laudel, 2009, p. 117). However as Glaeser and Laudel (2009, p. 129) point out, it is the participants who presumably possess the specific knowledge and the researcher who cannot know ex-ante if they are able to convey important information in a useful fashion. It is because of this paradox that choosing 'experts' to interview is more complex than just going by profession, training, or employment (ibid.). Glaeser and Laudel (2009, p. 118) categorize these 'trained' experts as "experts as interviewees" who are less often interviewed to understand social processes but rather to gain an understanding of specific reflections of certain contexts and to relate this to the researcher's theory. Alternatively, it is also possible to approach the interview with "interviewees as experts". In such a sample the respondents are not qualified experts of a profession but have extensive experience with a social situation and can thus give insight into how a 'predefined' process takes place in a real-world setting. A third option is to find respondents who fall into both categories and can inform the researcher about a certain social reality as a whole (Glaeser & Laudel, 2009, p. 118).

When planning and building the sample for this study the researcher chose to use the third option when looking for participants, as two challenges needed to be dealt with at once. Firstly, as it became clear in the chapter on leadership identities, it is not trivial to decide who is a leader and who is not, since in modern leader definitions mere hierarchical positioning is not enough. Participants had to self-identify as leaders somehow to qualify for this study.

But who to reach out to in the first place? The researcher decided to use prior studies (described in chapter 3) as the hallmark. Respondents had to be females, who work in a managerial position which can either mean being a team leader or having significant expert responsibilities for a business aspect (Fox-Kirk et al., 2017). The latter is often connected to reporting directly to top management. The researcher decided against interviewing people who would qualify as professionals which specifically excluded (business) lawyers or engineers. This decision is based in the work of Atewogolun et al. (2017) as well as that by Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006) who make a distinction between managerial, leader and professional identities. The goal was to focus only on the prior two identities and not have certain ethical aspects impact the interviews, such as practicing law. Top management team (TMT) members were also excluded. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p. 1169) advise on this, as the TMT members likely have a more abstract view on the firm and their own identity within it than middle managers who are very much involved in daily operations and team related personal issues that will impact their self-perception.

The researcher then also made another decision to work exclusively with participants who work for SMEs rather than corporations. This was motivated by the empirical finding that while corporations invest larger sums into the talent management of females, SMEs succeed more at putting women in senior positions (Eckl, 2020; Festing et al., 2013). While this is a paradox, it provides a great research environment where likely women are not especially primed yet successful enough to reflect on their pathways to leadership. East Germany was chosen because in this part of the country over proportionally many women are promoted to senior positions compared to the rest of the country (Eckl, 2020).

Taken together these aspects lead to the following criteria for picking the interviewees:
- Female
- Between the ages of 29 and 60
- More than one career step taken to ensure management experience
- Employed in an SME
- Employed in East Germany
- Self-identifies as "leader"

Outreach to find women who would fall into these categories was conducted via the Social Networking Platform XING which is more commonly used by SME employees in Germany than its competitor LinkedIn (Hermann, 2017). The researcher used a recent report by the federal bank "LBBW" which listed the 100 biggest SMEs in Thuringia, Saxony-Anhalt, and Saxony by annual net profit (Institut für Mittelstandsforschung, 2020) to identify the companies where respondents could be employed. Initially, this was only supposed to be a starting point, however, the response rate was so high that companies residing in other East German federal states were not included. The researcher used the search function on XING to list all registered employees of a company and then sorted them further by using the keyword "manager" in the "position" tab if there were too many profiles available. Potential candidates were selected, and the researcher sent a short message asking about their willingness to partake in a leadership study for female managers in East Germany. More information on the project was send out when a potential candidate provided interest and an E-Mail address.

There is no finite recommendation as to how many participants should partake in qualitative studies (Graneheim et al., 2017, p. 33), whoever some authors advise on a sample of a minimum of ten and ideally between 20-30 participants to cover enough perspectives and anomalies (Cassell, 2006, p. 257). The researcher contacted 121 employees across 56 companies and was able thus able to recruit 18 final participants. Edwards and Holland (2013, p. 76) believe that the main condition for a proper qualitative interview sample is that eventually throughout the interview process the interviewer will not hear anything 'new' anymore. In this vein, the researcher stopped after initially acquiring those 18 participants and started interviewing to see whether this sample size would provide enough data already.

The interviews were conducted through recorded video chat or telephone calls. In qualitative research face-to-face interviewing was seen as the way to go in the past and digitally supported interview situations have not been methodically explored as much (Holt, 2010, p. 114). Yet, with the steady rise of technology, some researchers have pointed to the benefits of such an environment. Holt (2010, p. 115) posits that with the absence of visual cues (or at least the full scope of body language in video chats), the researcher has more of a need but also a chance to direct the conversation. On the other side of the conversation the interviewees have more control over the social space they are in for the given situation which likely will lead to more comfort and thus openness (Holt, 2010, p. 116; Stephens, 2007). The greatest benefit however that technology offers is the availability of a far larger sampling pool as distance, travelling, and fitting in a schedule does not interfere much with the willingness to be interviewed. As this research is carried out in spring 2021 when due to the COVID-19 crisis most participants were working from home this effect was even stronger and likely led to such a high response rate and sample.

Since the study builds on a narrative approach, the participants talked in-depth about their experiences, and with more than 20 hours of interview material, the researcher saw the sample to fitting both in breadth and depth with no need to acquire more participants subsequently. The following section will explain how the interviews were prepared by setting up an interview guide.

4.2.2 Questionnaire

Approaching qualitative research with a narrative methodology often means diving into the biography (re-)construction of the research subjects. By reflecting on past, current or anticipated events which are all linked up temporally or thematically, the researcher is able to deduct patterns (Rosenthal, 1993, p. 4). Narrative interviews conceptually step away from a question-answer scheme (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 4), and instead participants are encouraged to talk freely and openly, as few or no hypotheses are being tested (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011, p. 8).

Yet, to even recruit an interviewee, let alone bring them to share about their life experience does require some sort of structure and triggers. In qualitative research, an interview guide serves this function. It contains topics that should be covered, rather than set questions in a fixed order. It gives prompts for further reflection and leaves room to delve into details whenever a participant tells a particularly engrossing story (Cassell, 2006, p. 15; Meuser, 2009, p. 31). The guide will overall establish a storyline that connects certain experiences or periods the interviewee lived through (Rosenthal, 1993, p. 6). In this research, the interviewees were informed that the author will inquire about their experiences with leadership and becoming a leader across the span of their professional (as in managerial) careers.

There are no finite guidelines as to how an interview guide is built for narrative interviews, however, Jovchelovitch and Martin (2000, p. 6) advise on diving into the topic at hand by making preliminary inquiries, reading documents, and listening to informal accounts. From this, the researcher should abstract topics that are 'experimental' to the interviewee to spark their interest and reflection. To reach this state of interest, all topics in questions should have 1) some sort of personal significance, 2) should be broad enough to connect to a variety of lived experiences and 3) informal enough in their terminology to translate easily to the participants' lingo (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 6).

The initial research topic of how females develop their leader identities stemmed from a personal interest of the researcher and their lived experience and prior academic touch points with the subjects. It would turn out later, that participants themselves stated a similarly innate interest in the topic. Yet, leadership and leader identities are not easy concepts to grasp neither

on an academic nor practical level, which is why the researcher decided to take Jovchelovitch and Martin's approach further and dive deep into the theoretical work done on the subject before interviewing. Through understanding concepts such as the distinction between identity theory and narrative theory in relation to identity building, the research question took further shape. Also, it was helpful to understand the limits of current research such as those regarding identity work where further inquiry would be helpful. Mirroring the theory chapter of this work the following initial topic questions emerged:

1) How do externally related experiences shape the interviewees' leader identity (identity theory)
2) How does personal reflection shape the interviewees' leader identity? (narrative theory)
3) What does identity work look like in this process?
4) What are particularities for females regarding this process?

Throughout the research process, specific questions were collected from research papers that related to the topics. After finishing the theory chapter, the researcher took time to reflect on aspects that were highlighted for this work and translated those into questions which were then sorted into four topics. This led to a questionnaire with almost 50 individual questions. This version was then heavily condensed to extract only those questions that were both relating to the theory yet broad enough to elicit individual responses. The questionnaire can be found in appendix 2. With this version, the author felt ready to dive into the interview situation. The subsequent section will describe the interview process where the interview guide was put to practice and the challenges this research step held.

4.2.3   Interview Process

While these questions provided a good understanding of what it is the researcher wants to inquire about, the questionnaire lacked structure that would help interviewees along the timelines of their stories. Holt (2010, p. 118) points out that participants even in open interviews expect a structure from the interviewer, ideally started by a kick-off question. The latter issue was solved by starting each interview with the general question, "Do you have a leader identity, and could you shortly describe it, please?". This way, without being further primed on the researcher's agenda, the participants had to reflect directly on the overarching topic at hand. The questions served simultaneously at validating the sample as well as opening room for interpretation whenever a participant who initially consented to the interview would now not directly state that she indeed has a leader identity.

To give the remaining questions some structure, the researcher turned back to the roots of narrative interviewing. Shamir and Eilam (2005, p. 410) explain that a guided life review

process can commence by asking interviewees to draw a lifeline along major events and turning points relating to the topic at hand. Initially, this lifeline allows to create an understanding of how and when the respondent has already reflected on the questions at hand. Now that the participant has their experience before them "as a whole", broadening and questioning the self-concept can be done throughout the interview (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 411). The researcher followed this approach and after the kick-off question asked each interviewee to give a short account of their career since finishing their vocational training. They were also asked to highlight where leadership had played a particular role for them. Because no career can be summarized in only a few sentences the participants immediately got into a mode of monologuing while the researcher could take notes.

Once the lifeline was established through note-taking by the researcher, it served as a structural frame for the rest of the interview. Each major career step was used as a start to cover the topic questions mentioned above. By staying closer to the experiences and talking flow of the participant each interview could take on its own dynamic and reveal individual accounts relating to the initial questions. To further support the monologuing of the informant, the interviewer restricted themselves to as much active listening as possible and openly formulated questions to elicit more stories and examples that were only remembered during the reflection process (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 5).

After collecting more than 20 hours of research material from the 18 participants, the author deemed the recordings to be sufficient for arriving at an insightful analysis. The road to this end goal could be described as "rocky" though – qualitative research and particularly the analysis part inherently cannot follow a pre-determine path in the way quantitative studies can. The authors of this work had to piece together an analysis approach from several sources. This process is described in the following to create an understanding of how the results were produced.

4.3 Qualitative Content Analysis

4.3.1 Narrative Analysis

In line with the methodology of this work, the researcher used a form of narrative analysis as the method to analyze and create the final narratives from the data. According to Riessmann (2005, p. 1), narrative analysis refers to a family of approaches of analyzing text which all have in common that they aim for a storied form. Through e.g. narrative interviewing the researcher collects initial stories from participants and then uses plot lines or narrative structures to report narratives in their findings (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). Creating these narratives is an

active process of interpreting empirical data by describing actions, events, or happenings in such a way that a comprehensive story emerges (ibid.). As Riessmann puts it – "narratives (here: stories from participants) do not speak for themselves … they require interpretation when used as data" (2005, p. 2).

To arrive at such valuable data interpretation, the researcher is generally advised to do a lot of interpretive writing themselves throughout the research process (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011, p. 9). Beyond such advice though, there are few conclusive insights into how to conduct narrative analysis. Riessmann (2005) is often quoted for introducing four models of narrative analysis that serve as starting points to structuring the analysis process. The first model is called thematic analysis. In this conception, emphasis is laid on content or "what is said" rather than how it is said (Riessmann, 2005, p. 2). In its counterpart structural analysis, the focus is on the "form" of the story and the "way it is told" (Riessmann, 2005, p. 3). The other two models are interactional analysis and performative analysis which focus on the interaction between the storyteller and listener (Riessmann, 2005, p. 4).

As the aim of this work is to understand what issues the interviewed females have encountered in their careers relating to their leader identities, the researcher decided to use Riessmann's model of thematic analysis when analyzing the data. In thematic analysis, stories are collected and conceptual groupings (themes) are created from the data to then be compressed into narratives (ibid.). This is done by examining empirical data for themes that are integrated into meaningful stories or in a way where patterns are sought out across cases and then deducted into narratives (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011, p. 10).

It is worth pointing out however, that thematic and structural analysis can and will bleed into each other in the analysis process. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2011, p. 10), structural analysis can be used to categorize narratives according to their elements to create "categories of stories", which is similar to the latter approach to thematic analysis.

4.3.2   Thematic analysis

While it is helpful to have thematic analysis as a starting point when working with the interview data, Riessmann (2005) does not give any concrete steps as to how such an analysis is conducted. This lack of instruction has also been identified by Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 57) who created a six-step process to fill this gap. Before going through those steps, they also describe how thematic analysis can be useful for both inductive and deductive approaches of connecting theory. The inductive or bottom-up approach described by Clarke and Braun (2012, p. 58) works in a way that codes and themes are derived from the content of the data. 'Codes' here refers to the process of attaching labels to sections of text to index them as relating to

certain topics or themes that are part of the research interest (King, 2006, p. 257). Working with thematic analysis in a deductive way or "top-down" approach according to the researchers would entail the researcher already bringing concepts or ideas to the process to build their coding on (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 58). In line with what other authors have pointed out before, the distinction between both approaches cannot always be made completely clear as e.g. in inductive coding it is likely not possible for the researcher to completely erase all pre-read concepts from their minds when coding.

As mentioned above, Braun and Clarke describe six steps to be part of any thematic analysis. The initial step or phase is called "familiarizing yourself with the data" and entails that the researcher actively and critically re-reads any data that has been recorded and transcribed (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 61). In phase two initial codes are created. These codes do not have to be categorized yet should have the "potential" to fit with some topic or idea under investigation in the research. The authors advise that material that was coded early should be re-investigated at the end of this round of coding to ensure that codes that have come up later or morphed over this period are represented properly across all data (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 63). In a third step, themes are created. These themes should be related to the research question and ideally represent some kind of pattern in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 63). At this stage, it is important to point out that any theme creation is an active and constructive process by the researcher and not an act of merely discovering (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 63). The author already starts considering how to tell the overall story about the data at this point. (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 65). This relates to step four where themes are reviewed for their fit with current research and certain themes or codes will be excluded (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 65). In step five themes are named and defined to address the research question and clearly distinguish themselves from each other (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 66). In a final sixth step, the final report is produced with turns the themes into convincing, clear, and compelling narrative(s) that make an argument to answer a question from a scholarly field (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 69).

Braun and Clarke's approach to the coding process towards a qualitative narrative report is very helpful to deal with the mass of data the researcher can encounter after narratively interviewing. However, particularly the sixth step of report writing is not considered in enough detail to provide a proper framework for this work. This is in line with the findings by Eriksson and Kovalainen that "many researchers find it difficult to formulate the practical implications of their narrative findings" (2011, p. 3). As stated before, the researcher is required to do a lot of intuitive note-taking and creating patterns, rather than finding them. To operationalize the process of narrative analysis further, the thematic analysis coding process could be embedded into more process steps. Rosenthal (1993, pp. 7–8) gave a framework that includes thematic analysis to arrive at the reconstruction of life stories which will help

inform this research. Before diving into thematic analysis, the biographical data of each interview is reviewed and after the thematic analysis in terms of coding is finished the author advises on using micro-segments of texts to create life histories that might go beyond the told story.

The next section details the practical application of the method described above that the author used for this work.

4.3.3 Analysis Process

After the sample of participants was found and invited for meetings, the researcher followed the advice by Rosenthal (1993) and created a spreadsheet that included all known biographical data about the participants including their name, current company of employment, age bracket, and position. Using the coding software ATLAS.ai, the researcher started their thematic analysis with an initial round of coding for three interviews. The researcher tried to use a more inductive and intuitive coding method here to get a first feel for the data. However, there likely were deductive elements in this process already as the researcher had largely covered the theory field before the analysis already. Since codes emerged relatively easily across the first three interviews with codes recurring frequently, the researcher decided to keep coding all 18 interviews in this way. This step two of the analysis led to a list of 155 codes after the first interviews were re-coded to fit with the final list of codes as advised by Braun and Clarke (2012).

Moving to step three of Braun and Clarke's step approach thus was relatively fluid as certain themes were already covered as blocks in the interview such as the crossroads of being female and a leader. Yet, for the other themes, the researcher found it to be a helpful thematic divider to group the codes by who was addressed in said segment or what aspect of leadership was talked about. Initially, codes were grouped into thematic blocks as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Thematic Bocks of Coding

Characters	Leadership Attributes	Female Leaders Attributes	Other
Colleagues	Leader Position	Female	Identity Work
Employees	Leadership Reflection	Formal Qualification	Role Models
Supervisor	Leadership Style	Gender	Spill-over Effects
Personal			

Each block had between two (e.g. Spill-over effects) and 22 codes (e.g. Personal) to them. It was very interesting to already start seeing how certain issues would come up across an interview in different gestalts. As an example, certain participants talked about responsibility both when referring to their employees but in other segments also as a personal burden or motivator. Each codes segment was also coded with a timeframe in this round depending on whether the participant was referring to their early career (career step 1) before having their first leadership position, the positions when they first took on leader responsibilities (career step 2), or to times when they were an experienced leader with two or more positions of leadership on their vita (career step 3). This distinction would later serve to create an understanding of how their perspective on leadership has shaped over time.

The researcher carried out step four of cleaning up their coding by redefining and collapsing some codes within the domains of Characters, Leadership attributes, and Pre-defined Blocks. It became apparent that particularly the blocks classified under "Other" would not necessarily be the most helpful in creating overarching narratives later on, which lead to their exclusion from the analysis. This exclusion is particularly interesting for the block on identity work as this supports the theoretic notion that identifying identity work is a difficult concept. The three remaining thematic blocks would now serve to answer the following sub-question to the larger research question:

1. Characters – How does the leader identity of females develop over time through social interactions?
2. Leadership Attributes – How do sensemaking processes impact the development of the leader identity of females over time?
3. Female Leader Attributes – How do the experiences of females from different origin stories relate to what is known about female leaders in general?

The last sub-question already points towards the set-up for the final report of the analysis. The author decided to use the framework provided by Zheng et al. (2020) to categorize the interviews. Through summarizing the texts and main motives that participants talked about, it became clear which of the four frames of "being", "accepting", "performing" or "engaging" would describe the career trajectory of any one participant best. Like Zheng et al. (2020, p. 18) with their mixed sample, the author quickly realized that "performing" was not a frame that motivated any of the participants in this all-female sample. Thus, only three out of four frameworks were of interest. Using these frames and practical conceptions from identity theory and narrative theory as a basis, the author was able to derive narratives of how females would develop their leader identity across three different stages of their careers.

In the following part of the final analysis, all three career narratives are described in detail. Drawing a comparison between the three will lead to theoretical and practical insights. Lastly, while the method was researched in detail, no study is without flaws and so limitations and future research will be discussed that in part is related to the method chapter of this work.

5. Analysis

This work aimed to create a better understanding of how a leader's identity evolves in female leaders over time and what identity-creating factors play major roles along this way. To create these insights from very personal in-depth accounts, interview material was used to create three narratives of female leader identity development.

In the theory part of this work, light was shed on the vast research landscape of identity research. The distinction between group identities and personal identities was explained. Since this research concerns itself with personal identities only, there was further explanation of how such an identity is impacted both through societal exchanges and psychological meaning-making. The two approaches are academically described as identity theory and narrative theory. Either theory is supplemented by (somewhat ill-defined) identity work tactics that help to build said identity.

Any identity-building theory builds on the assumption that one person holds multiple identities with a leader identity possibly being one of them. It proved somewhat difficult to properly define this identity, yet there is quite an amassment of literature on its dynamic development. While traditionally, prototyping was a line of thought often used to describe how people develop their leader identities, the work on claiming and granting by DeRue and Ashford (2010) has gained traction in the past years. In terms of narrative identity studies, the focus lies on so-called wanted and unwanted selves that serve as guideposts to building internal stories around leadership. Both external and internal developments are related to identity work. In their seminal work, Lord and Hall (2005) described different stages of leader identity over time. The recent work by Zheng et al. (2020) understands the development of leader identities connected to different origin and enactment stories across four frames. This is where the main interest of this work originates – if leaders have different origin stories, how do those affect particularly female leaders' careers over time. Three out of the four frames by Zheng et al. were investigated since the fourth one "performing" did not occur to fit well for females in Zheng's or this study.

Using the collected interview data and the framework provided by Zheng et al. (2020), the researcher created narratives of how females with different origin stories possibly progress through their careers. The narratives are divided into periods of early careers before leader positions, mid-careers when the participants took over their first leadership positions, and the time when they had collected experience as leaders. For each career step, both the practical conceptions from identity theory and narrative theory were used to understand identity development processes. In this chapter, the narratives are established with quotes and links

to theory. The narratives will then be summarized to present more general findings that will support the theoretical and practical implications in the concluding chapter.

5.1 The Being Narrative

Stories of participants that were grouped into the narrative of "being" in this research are overall marked by notions of self-confidence and strategic career advancement in or towards leadership positions. They are described by Zheng et al. (2020, p. 10) as the framework where members would express and portray their enduring personal attributes over time since they see leadership as a part of themselves.

Early Career

Females who were grouped into the being framework, bring "being" a leader into their work life in a very innate way that for some starts as early as choosing what to study against their families will, as one participant describes it: *"… I told myself, I'll be doing that differently ... to not do things in the way one's family might think is best, but to find your way".* With their well intact self-confidence these females **claim space and boundaries** at a young age as another group member recalled the beginnings of her career:

"Coming from a full-time study program... I took away a lot from my (first) job… I decided for myself that I would not be dealt with in a certain manner. With my level of education and experience, I don't have to let myself be treated by someone in a bad way".

While in their early career stages the participants didn't talk about employees yet, the general claiming behaviours used to make space for themselves reflects also in how they approach dealing with supervisors. Several group members reported **claiming their first work projects on their own.** One participant remembers a specific incident:

"*Every consultant had to do certain publications at some point and so I moved into that track .. wrote one of those publications which positively surprised the managing director because he didn't know (such engagement) up to this point"*

It becomes apparent that the eagerness in pursuing their career is related to a certain **wanted sel.** One group member recalled her view on leadership before stepping in her first position as such: "*I had more of an ideal idea before… I was much more emotionally charged and extremely upset when things didn't go as I wanted"*

Summarizing the first career steps of being members in relation to studies done on female leaders mainly shows a connection to the work by Mate et al. (2019) and Bowles (2012). When choosing projects, they seemingly gravitate towards those where they can **show pioneering efforts** as described by Bowles (2012). One example proving both studies was given by one of the females about her very first job:

"I came into a relatively young company that didn't have a proper HR department... and I created that department with staff files, feedback sessions, and recruiting management following my understanding".

Much like the western-influenced participants in Mate et al. (2019) study, they **trust in their education and have self-confidence instilled in them through their upbringing** they do not shy away from challenging work.

Mid-Career

Members of the being framework progress into their first own leadership position(s) relatively easily. Throughout their mid-careers, their inner drive is reflected in **continuous claiming behaviors**. One participant recounted how she eventually progressed into a completely different department:

"*In HR I had reached the point where there weren't any new opportunities … so, an option opened up in a different department which in retrospect I found to be very formative".*

Similar to their first projects, efforts to make their way are recognized by their supervisors, to the point of **being granted official sponsoring** as one participant quoted a former superior:

"Yes ... Mrs (Name) ... I'm seeing her there, she could, she has the tendencies, she wants to do it. And so, I'm going to put her up for this leadership team."

While the females seem to have no issues being seen and recognized, being granted validation in their leadership role by employees and colleagues seems to be a more difficult hurdle. One interviewee said that she, "*didn't understand why my employees weren't as engaged at work as me".* It seems to be a learning process for these females to build empathy for the motives of others and adjust to their surroundings rather than bending things to their own will. Yet, once they made the realization that this kind of adjustment work is necessary, they actively engage with it to to find solutions. One participant described stepping up in one of the first conflict-laden situations of her career where she **needed to be granted acceptance** by her employees and colleagues:

"I was a very young branch leader and then I was told you are doing the company meeting for your team of 80 people… I didn't want to do it .. my supervisor told me I had to … and then I did, what always works, I prepared myself well. Asking what I would expect from the presenter … if things get uncomfortable how will I deal with that?"

While in their early careers the being members have a somewhat steadfast idea and ideal of themselves as leaders, situations like the one described above seem to shake these convictions. The participants start to intensely reflect on their **unwanted selves**. One participant described how the fear of losing control over her teams affected her during COVID-19 lockdowns:

"For me, that was a real problem because suddenly I couldn't detect anymore what the atmosphere was currently like in my team … how do you make sure that subjects get worked on properly as before? (How do you) make sure that peoples' mood doesn't affect work in a way that you'd need to call them every three minutes?"

Such reflections on the perception of others lead some participants to question the assertiveness that characterized their leadership so far. One participant recounted that she used to be "*a dominant leader ... (who) wanted to know everything ... (who) wanted to be involved in everything".* This changed when she learned to accept that she could not do everything herself. Another participant described a similar process of **creating a new version of her wanted self**:

"Every day shows that I can take away something good ... that I don't have to bend and that I can just be me ... that I'm allowed to say, please channel these topics and we'll talk them through together tomorrow".

In line with the work by Brue and Brue (2018), where females found **leadership programs to be particularly helpful** to address inner conflicts in a safe space, almost all females in the "being" group have taken part in programs throughout their mid-career. Most of them went through more general leadership programs to help them step into their first positions. One participant though was able to also partake in gender training and remembers that as a pivotal point in her career much like the participants in Brue and Brue's (2018) sample:

This helped me a lot ... this gender training and additionally the workshop for leadership personalities. Where one got confronted what it is that you embody".

For some members of this group **issues surrounding being female** at work come out at this career stage. Realizing their otherness, however, is not seen as an issue since they have comfortably reached their positions. Supporting the work by Karelaia and Guillén (2014), one interviewee puts it:

"I think men are good at this .. carrying a shield in front of them. Presenting outwardly as something they aren't. I'm always asking myself why this happens. Why can I not be the person who I am?".

Late Career

In their later careers, members of the being framework seem to find their way **back to old self-confident claiming behaviors.** While they still reach out for new opportunities – "*Standing still is not for me*", one participant phrased it – they only do so within boundaries they feel comfortable in. These boundaries protect them, their time, and their legacy as authentic leaders as on female describes it:

As a leader you must protect yourself ... you can't take everything home and it's important to say, yes you gave your best … but there are only so many hours in your contract. Giving my best is important, but sometimes for some things, it's just got to be a no".

Efforts from prior years pay off in the later career years of these females. While in the middle of their careers they had to work for being granted a certain kind of respect, now they can both do and delegate their work with little effort. One participant described the **trust she got granted** as beneficial for all sides:

"I'm just more relaxed ... that's a lot about trust ... we grew tighter as a team and I know everyone's strengths and weaknesses … often there's no need for words anymore, sometimes the nod of a head is enough…"

Claiming and granting behaviors find a balance at this career stage. With long-standing relationships in place, they can claim leadership without needing to push beyond their boundaries. One female illustrates this by saying that: "*When I have a task that I can't fulfill, I'll just have to find someone who does".* Yet, this invitation for input and help does not counteract the fact that they have established themselves as leaders.

After taking part in impactful leadership programs in their mid-careers, the being members still take time to continuously reflect on their leadership. However, they seem to **step away from mere personal reflections on wanted or unwanted selves** and rather think strategically of

how to solve situations. One participant explains that when dealing with difficult situations she actively looks for "*experience and exchanges with other leaders or with private contacts. Consciously looking for help in others* ".

An interesting dichotomy develops from such behaviors the participants see the most value in their leadership when they can stay authentic to themselves, yet they will not shy away from 'rougher' behaviors that support their goals and needs, as one female describes it:

"Depending on the situation I sometimes have to choose the representative track to bring across certain issues. Usually, I'm an empathic conversation partner. But you have to check who you are dealing with and act accordingly... sometimes put on a poker face and just pull through"

The issue of being female as a leader came up again in a relatively dire light towards the late careers of "being" females. Curiously, a lot of the participants approached the topic through their perceptions of other females over time by using wording such as "*having shrill voices*", "*not being real*" or "*being harsh bosses".* When they did talk about themselves, one female puts it this way: "*There is no way to defend me from it, I am a female ... I don't even want to detach myself from that … (but) I don't think I'm the most feminine type".* Stereotyping thus clearly impacts the females and lets them put forward **anti-girl behaviours** such as those found in the work by Bullock (2019). While on a personal level it does not deter these females from feeling comfortable in their leadership, the members of the being framework do not seem to be able to fully integrate their learned empathic behaviors towards e.g. employees into their larger perspective on leadership and females. It could be argued that towards their later careers members of the being framework turn to **navigation** behaviors (Bowles, 2012) to reach their own goals while turning away more and more from meta-level issues.

Summary

Table 2: Theoretical insights for "being" females

	Early Career	**Mid-Career**	**Late Career**
Identity Theory	**Claiming** behaviours	**Granting** others the allowance to give input	Balancing between **claiming and granting**
Referenced Female Leader Studies	Bowles (2012) - *Pioneering Behaviour*	Brue and Brue (2018) - *Reflecting in Leadership programs*	Bowles (2012) - *Navigation Behaviour*
Narrative Theory	**Wanted self** well established	Recreating of **wanted self**	Detachment from **wanted / unwanted self**
Referenced Female Leader Studies	Mate et al. (2019) - *High self-confidence*	Karelaia and Guillén (2014) - *Dealing with femininity initially*	Bullock (2019) – *Anti-Girl Behaviors*

Females who were classified as members of the "being" frame in their origins and enactment stories were relatively easy to identify as the way this frame was described by Zheng et al. (2020) reflects throughout most of their career choices and perspectives. The females provided ample insights into how they build their identities through identity work tactics both from social interaction and inner sensemaking.

These self-confident females succeed in pursuing leadership positions and table 1 tracke the path of how they arrive at their objective. What this study uncovers, is how early they start using the claiming–granting cycle for their benefit. These women actively look for and even create work projects for themselves. The work by Bowles is very helpful to characterize this type of identity work as pioneering behaviors. Claiming with a certain self-confidence comes from a wanted self that is often already in place when starting their careers. Much like their counterparts in Bowles' (2012) study, these females received a good education and perceived their environment as generally encouraging which frees them from having do to extensive identity work at this stage.

Starting their careers with such strong-willed behaviors propels them forward quickly on their own – sometimes too quickly for them to realize that the responsibility they initially to on over projects they could handle alone would soon include being responsible for other people as well. Being rather rational than empathic beings, these women outwardly deal with the

challenge of meeting different people's expectations by allowing e.g. supervisors to give them insight. They use the reversed claiming-granting cycle and grant certain mostly higher-level individuals their trust to have valuable insights. Be it with colleagues or employees, "being" females often see their surroundings as resources that can be used deliberately to build their careers and therefore identity as leaders.

An interesting anomaly from this is the way these leaders use leader programs. Most of the group are heavy users for any kind of ongoing training and reflection opportunities. Completely contrary to their usual disconnect with most same-level or lower-level individuals, they can lower their guard and open up to doing reflective identity work.

Their self-sufficient wanted self gets shaken in this process. However, by looking for help from outside, they manage to reestablish a wanted self that includes being a successful project leader but also a "good" people leader. Interestingly, the findings by Karelaia and Guillén (2014) - are particularly insightful here, since these have to deal with their femininity (which prior was often ignored) to reach this point and do some active work of integrating this side of their identity.

Their success in eventually finding a balance of claiming new opportunities and granting more and more people their trust is a potent combination to gain prestigious positions and social capital. These females find themselves in the comfortable positions they actively pursued for years and merely navigate (Bowles, 2012) their work-life now – which means a decrease in identity work. The downside to this relatively straight tangent to both a leader position and leader identity is the narrowness of reflection. "Being" females start and to an extend end their careers with relatively self-centered views on identity and success which are hardly ever challenged since they do not often face major obstacles. This leads them however to see their way as "the only" and superior way to "stereotypical female behaviors". Instead of fully using their power to tackle larger issues, these females (often unconsciously) perpetuate the discrimination against females in leadership positions (Bullock, 2019). After they found "meta-principles" that support them in dealing with the variety of challenges leadership holds, they fail to understand that the empathy component in leadership – which is so often critiqued to be lacking in their male counterparts – is not something they can engineer into such an overarching principle.

5.2 The Accepting Narrative

The second-largest group of participants from the general sample was categorized into the frame of "accepting" which is described by Zheng et al. (2020, p. 17) as "other-focused". This means that they would internalize their leader identity mainly because others bestowed it onto them. These leaders often stumble into their leader identities somewhat unexpectedly. Through serving others when they seek advice or direction, they eventually realize or get formally put into positions of leadership.

Early Career

The women in the accepting group did not start their careers with great aspirations towards leadership positions. However, all of them brought a very solid work ethos into their first positions. One participant described that she used to "*always check what was on their (superior's) desk … and take on certain tasks, where I would do prep work and show it to them*". This eagerness and taking responsibility are met with early **grants of trust in the abilities** of these females by their supervisors and also colleagues.

Still, while the females are appreciated by others in their early careers, they can also feel overlooked because they **do not inherently show any kind of claiming behaviors** towards cementing their abilities into a formal position. One female recounted that her supervisor supported her from the beginning of her career but still chose a different hire when a leading position opened within the team:

"That for me was like … are they just having this out between the two of them now? (While I'm like …) Hello … I am right here. The problem for your solution is sitting right here! Why does he get to step up as deputy team lead?".

It seems to be **negative experiences** like this that propels the otherwise very collegial and rational *accepting* females **towards claiming behaviors in leadership.** Before that, they do reflect on what good leadership can look like, but more from an outsider perspective as one participant explained her views in the first year on the job:

"(Leadership) for myself, no … Through the leadership of my supervisor, yes. You'd always think about whether they were doing a good job or a bad one ... do I want to be treated like this or not... but me coming into this position in my first year was no concern for me".

Similarly, it is **others that motivate the developments of both wanted or unwanted selves** in these females' inner narratives. One female remembered how some clients she dealt with gave her encouraging feedback:

"It was reflected by several clients that working with me is fruitful because of my integrative thinking … the feedback was that I can lead, that it is nice to work with me … nice in the sense of constructive".

While such feedback helps to accept oneself as a leader, the implicit demands of always being constructive and integrative put a lot of pressure on the already very responsible "accepting" females. **Fear of falling into an unwanted self**, led one female to turn down a job opportunity because she felt *"it was a great challenge … but I was not feeling ready, I was just not feeling like I could handle it from a point of knowledge and experience".*

The behaviors accepting frame members show generally make their ascent to leadership positions a little 'slower' than those of "being" females. Instead of reaching out for novel projects or niches they can establish themselves in, they rather **navigate their way into positions**. This strategy as described by Bowles (2012) can be successful in the long run, but holds the challenge of being repeatedly overrun as one participant described her situation:

"That colleague left the company two years after I started, and things developed subsequently from there. I used to be her deputy, then took over the position as an interim contract until a new colleague came to take it".

Even more extreme than just being overlooked, females in the "accepting" frame seem to be particularly prone to be exposed to misogynistic behaviors by male colleagues. One female was told to her face she looks like a child, while another remembers being touched and treated "*like a feeble female*" in their first position. Being shown this early that their gender might be a disadvantage in their careers, these females might see **leading more as a draining "duty" than a goal** as Karelaia and Guillén (2014) had put it before when finding dissonances between gender and leader identity.

Mid-Career

Despite some challenges and with some externally inflicted mindset changes, the accepting females eventually start moving towards formal leadership if **reluctant to claim positions** themselves. One female reported that she had been signaled that a leader position in the department was an option for her but she "*tried to stay out of the quarreling around the position… (and) tried to take on a neutral stance".*

At this somewhat advanced stage of their career females in the accepting frame are often asked (on multiple occasions even) to step up into leadership. These **grants can both be given out by supervisors and colleagues** who have built trusting relationships with the females. One participant recounts that her supervisor repeatedly gave her credit for being able "*to give a different perspective and calm manners when presenting an issue*" before her promotion. This was further supported by colleagues who told the same participant that she should go for a higher position because "(*she) taught herself everything and knows things no one else does*".

Once they decide to take on such positions, several of the accepting females soon started to **claim their leadership**. They start to see the value others have recognized beforehand themselves and build self-confidence off the fact that they claim their authentic leader self despite what "societal norms" ask of them:

"I'm the listener in the department. I like to listen in and sometimes take people to the side to hear their struggles... I'm (also) leading my shifts and every time we finish a successful shift, and my team goes great home content – that's great. It's not the classic leadership, it's more daily operations, their success, and dealing with the consequences".

The in-depth **reflections on leadership and therefore wanted and unwanted selves** from the early career stages of the accepting frame females **carry on in even more ferocity** when they become leaders. Participants describe this stage of internal sensemaking as a phase of questioning. "*What does this (being a leader) mean to me? What do the decisions I'm making in these 8-9 hours mean? Am I ready to deal with that*?", one female would ask herself over and over. Another participant had similar concerns such as, "*...what is leadership anyway? What do I have to look out for? How do I get people to follow me?*". The **empathy and goal orientation seem to be hard to integrate with any leader self – wanted or unwanted**. One woman was eventually made aware of overworking herself by a coach in a *"Mother Theresa way".*

What helps them to overcome this chasm are **reflections in coaching or leader programs**. Much as the benefits of such environments found by Brue and Brue (2018), the "accepting" females recall „*being shown the theory book and seeing .. ah yes, this is what I'm doing right already and here I could do things differently*". Besides gaining confidence in spaces such as these, the females state that they "*get my self-confidence from my subject matter knowledge. That was a parallel development (to being coached)".* With this knowledge in place, they seem

to see more and more chances for their career trajectories as leaders at this stage, much like the participants from the sample by Mate et al. (2019).

Late Career

After several years in their respective leader positions, members of the "accepting" framework still felt very much like a part of their team rather than a secluded position. One participant said since becoming a leader she's still making an effort to still "*grab a rag in the kitchen, make coffee and take out the trash*". In this way, several participants reported having reached "*a state of comfort*" in their position. The way there was and is not always easy and "*an ongoing learning process*" as one participant describes it. Yet, with more experience, these females are able **to claim authority when needed** without compromising their whole self-perception as one example shows:

"Today it's more that I go into confrontation mode, and I can actually stand it. For a long time that was not possible. I took a lot of it home, did a lot of overthinking".

Another novel behavior in this stage of their career is that the accepting females **actively claim input and feedback to their leadership** from both supervisors and employees. The initial lack of self-confidence vanishes over time and rather than feeling imposter syndrome, they want to continuously strategize to "*avoid stewing in their own juice*". Besides e.g. regular feedback sessions with their employees, one female talked about how a former supervisor and she have built a mutually beneficial mentoring relationship over the years:

"Yes, like every 2 months we sat down together, and he told me about his objectives and things on his mind. He sometimes asked for advice. He's 20 years older than me and liked to reflect on things from my perspective. And vice versa I brought in my topics".

The internal processes in their late careers as leaders of accepting frame females are heavily impacted by responsibilities bestowed upon them as well. **The wanted self of these females will always be strongly correlated to being socially accepted** and liked, which cannot under all circumstances be fulfilled. Sacrificing relationships by putting forward assertiveness is not an option for these participants. One participant recounted a fitting example of this when talking about having to let go of an employee:

"Having someone you simply cannot get to work with properly and with whom you have to have many conflict conversations until you have to let them go … that was an experience I wish I could have saved myself".

The accepting females **continue using leader programs and coaching as described by Brue and Brue (2018) to their advance**. They understand that leadership is not static but will always be newly challenged and thus needs constant attention as the example of one participant illustrates:

„…there are always new situations coming up and the more experience you have with other situations the more you can draw from your backlog .. but you never know exactly how the other person is going to react".

There is a major shift in how these females see themselves in their role as female leaders at this career stage. While some of the participants do not make much of a difference between attributing strengths to the genders, some participants turn towards perspective found in the study by Bullock (2019). **They attribute a lack of powerful connection to females who "do not possess the gen"** that make them pursue this. They feel the need to push harder to be taken seriously grappling with the fact that their rational discussions style is inferior to "male" assertiveness in debates.

Summary

Table 3: Theoretical insights for "accepting" females

	Early Career	**Mid-Career**	**Late Career**
Identity Theory	**Grants from others e.g.** supervisors in them	Slowly **claiming** "their" leadership style	**Claiming** authority and input from others when needed
Referenced Female Leader Studies	Bowles (2012) - *Navigating Behaviour*	Brue and Brue (2018) - *Reflecting in Leadership programs*	Brue and Brue (2018) – *Using safe spaces*
Narrative Theory	Reflection on what **wanted / unwanted** self looks like	Struggling to integrate **wanted and unwanted self**	Struggling to match their **wanted self**
Referenced Female Leader Studies	Karelaia and Guillén (2014) – *Realizing gender as hurdle*	Mate et al. (2019) – *Gaining self-confidence from acquired knowledge*	Bullock (2019) – *Acknowledgment of females' "otherness"*

Females that could be classified as those of the "accepting" frame, too, were relatively simple to identify. On the one hand, their first leadership position was likely given to them in a granting than in a claiming process. On the other hand, they shared very similar concerns particularly in the early and mid-stages of their career about being "enough" for their roles. Table 3 gives an overview of the career trajectory of "accepting" females which will be discussed in detail in the following.

When "accepting" females start their careers, few of them know that they want or will take on leadership positions at any point in their career. They are more concerned with navigating (Bowles, 2012) tasks and building strong mutual relationships with their colleagues and supervisors. This leads to their supervisors taking note of these hard-working individuals and in consequence granting them opportunities for responsibility taking. These females get taken advantage of in times of need while being overlooked when the time comes to give out proper promotions. Sometimes referring to their young selves as "shy", they learn from their experiences and at some point start to make claims for leadership in areas where they feel they bring both knowledge and relations. These cautious advances can be described as navigating as well (Bowles, 2012). This contrasts with a constant identification of the good and the bad in leaders around them and seeing that certain traditional leadership does not align

with their empathy and femininity they struggle to create a coherent wanted or unwanted leader self (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014). The conflict between inner and outer experiences leads to increased reflection and identity work and the struggle to find "their own" leadership is what marks the careers of females in this frame.

After they are being given leadership positions as a grant, they spend quite some time working out how to deal with their teams. Working in an environment where they feel comfortable socially is crucial for these individuals. This, on top of their technical responsibilities, can lead them to feel like they are in a sandwich position of reconciling too many needs and wants. Over time they learn to stay true to themselves while building some healthy boundaries with others. This development is heavily supported by leader programs that these females take part in very willingly as they are always looking for some external guidance, knowledge, and validation. Partly in such programs, partly in real-life situations, "accepting" females reflect on their empathic personalities and how that might affect them in their careers at this point (Brue & Brue, 2018). What they find is that their skills are not ubiquitously met with affirmation in terms of leadership acceptance. This makes it hard for these females to find inner congruence on what their wanted leader self should be like or whether they are wrong to disobey a traditional but to them unwanted (because unauthentic) leader self. Yet again, they have to engage in identity work to figure out how their leadership will look like (Mate et al., 2019),

It is only towards the late stages of their careers when the "accepting" females feel relatively comfortable in their positions. They reach a point where after receiving many grants over the years, they also display claiming behaviors both in terms of conflicts and everyday routines. After having taken away a lot of knowledge from leader programs in their mid-careers, these females still pursue the environment of safe spaces to reflect on their leader identity (Brue & Brue, 2018). Yet, no matter how far the "accepting" females have gone in their career, they never seem to reach a point of "being enough" to fulfill a wanted self. They were never able to solidify any ideas of their own with what is expected of them as leaders and in their late-career stages. They seem to hit a point of resignation where they feel comfortable in the space they made for themselves but see very clearly the hurdles placed for female leaders in general career trajectories (Bullock, 2019).

5.3 The Engaging Narrative

The third group that participants in this research were assigned is called "engaging". In Zheng et al.'s (2020, p. 14) framework, this group of leaders builds their leader identities based on engaging with leader activities. Rather than a fixed formal position, for them being a leader means stepping up, taking leader-like actions, and solving problems for a larger group or unit. They do this by coordinating and facilitating people around them.

Early Career

Becoming a leader through engagement rather than positioning is an attribute found in all stories of the "engaging" members of this group. These efforts usually did not go unrecognized as one female described a memorable situation:

"He (a colleague) told me, one day you'll be the CEO here and I laughed… I later told this to my colleagues during a break outside and they said, yes we think so, too. And I laughed some more. But yes, my supervisor, too, at the time told me I have a leader personality".

In all their innate abilities and action-taking, however, **elements of concrete claiming or granting** are missing in these early years. Several participants described how they build great relationships with their supervisors who were lived examples of the kind of leveled leadership the "engaging" females were looking for. However, this seems to lead to constellations where the participants potentially saw too much overlap too early between themselves and their supervisor. One participant remembers a certain former boss to be "*very much like myself*". With such close relationships to both same- level and higher-level individuals there seemingly is no need to properly claim or be granted any leadership position.

Possibly because of their close relations with supervisors, "engaging" members can describe leadership quite specifically early on as one example shows:

"The company newspaper that was my first touchpoint with leadership. There were many essential questions such as: What's supposed to go in there? What is important for the employees of this company? Can everyone find a topic that's important to them in there? And that I believe to be leadership … communication, making sure everyone feels like their being seen and taken along, to listen to them".

The same female early on started connecting "*values, emotional topics (and) certain soft skills*" to all be aspects of good leadership which points towards **a very complex wanted self** that is connected to a multitude of ideals.

The participants talked little about the way being female impacted their first career steps. It will be interesting how the idealistic leadership narratives play out in terms of pioneering or navigating. Several participants attribute their value-orientation to their childhood and upbringing, and it will be interesting to see if like the "being" females, they can firmly hold on to their beliefs throughout their career.

Mid-Career

Females in the "engaging" frame are interested in solving problems, ideally on a larger scale. Contrary to the "being" frame members who often take on niche projects, "engaging" females **express claiming behaviors across the entire organization** through intense interest and responsibility taking. "*I learned a lot since I was also working with the R&D team. It was really interesting to also learn in-depth about the technical issues*", one female reported on a project where technically she was already doing all the marketing work from the ground up as well as some sales activities. Another participant took on a position where she was not "*just doing PR, but also structuring, re-structuring … setting up teams (and) taking care of internal communication processes*". It becomes clear that these females do not only engage with leadership, but they also tend to over-engage in their work in general.

Their strong involvement builds on the understanding that "*teamwork is a form of leadership*" as one female put it. To fulfill these demands, they **sometimes overstep the boundaries of their assigned positions in their claiming attempts**. One participant recounted an incident where she stepped in for a colleague who was being mistreated during a presentation, calling out the behavior of another group of (male) colleagues as "*impossible*". The devoted support they offer is **not met with equal granting of power by others**. Females from the group describe the leadership they held at this point in their career as *"leading from the bottom up"*, meaning they have an impact on e.g. supervisors and therefore the organization as a whole but few decision-making powers as the following example shows:

"I asked (my supervisor) – do you think we have room for this or not? And bringing across to the employee afterward that no we don't, it doesn't work right now… but it's the role of leadership ... not my personal feeling about it. This is why I'm finding it so important to have an organizational perspective on things. Because from that perspective I can understand the decision …"

Instead of letting themselves foster resentment about such limitations, these females **keep referring to the challenge in light of a positive wanted self** with the underlying belief that they have the capabilities of leadership in them as one female explains:

"You have to be able to fill out the position ... when you take on projects like this ... you are creating something within them … and that demands you to meet certain demands".

Regarding the mid-career points of the "engaging" frame females from the perspective of female leadership ideas, it is **more navigating than pioneering** (Bowles, 2012) can be found. While these women are very engaged in their work, they focus on solving issues already at hand. Interestingly, since their efforts are not always directly rewarded with merit, they **seem to turn to the orchestrating behavior** described in the work by Robson (2013). Instead of focusing on an upward trajectory in own their career, these females will always try to make things work for "the greater good" as one participant illustrates:

"What topics do we want to advance right now? How can the individual add to this in their topic area? How do we distribute work in the team? In principle, taking into action my learnings from other positions and departments…".

The issue of being seen but not recognized takes its most prominent form when these females are being questioned about what being a woman meant for their careers in their first leadership positions. All participants of this group like those investigated by Mate et al. (2019) describe that this **"being the exception" also means being somewhat of an outcast** in a male-dominated world. Stereotypical issues such as being under "*scrutiny for their (technical) background*", needing to "*actively decide for making the split (between family and job life)*" or implicitly realizing one's otherness because "*males behave differently when they are alone*" were all mentioned by these females.

Late Career

Females who fall into the "being" or "accepting" frames will usually have found their place in their late careers. A different picture is found for the "engaging" females who are still willing and interested in pursuing new projects that might not fall directly into their expertise. "*The possibility to impact and create*" is valued highly by these participants which is why they also find themselves "*on greenfields*" time and time again in their careers. This hunger for deep diving into new topics seems to turn them into janes of all trades, instead of masters of one which leads one participant to express doubts about her leadership at this point in her career:

"But where did you go until now? You are not CEO even though you've been working for over a decade – you are not even (strictly speaking) the boss of anyone right now…"

Sooner or later realizations like this will push the "engaging" females **to claim their expert status as something valuable** and not available to just anyone. One female describes that she learned that "*sometimes people want to load off responsibility that they are not willing to take*".

Despite such disillusionment, the "engager" females seem **to hold on to their idealistic wanted selves**. One participant phrased this by saying that she "*wants to add value … and (have) a purpose…*". It's a challenge for them to bring together their drive for this purpose and their innate task-orientation with enough boundaries to not be taken advantage of. One female described her struggle to reconcile her empathic and strategic abilities:

"The most difficult is building a gut feeling for … do I have to make this decision in this form? Even if it negatively affects certain people? Or can I change it still? When you keep bringing in this emotional component you are not getting anywhere".

Such dissonances eventually do affect the self-perception of the engaging females as somehow "not enough". Relatively late in their careers, **they start to feel the need for nested reflection in safe spaces** (e.g. leader programs) such as those found in Brue and Brue's (2018) study. While they generally believe that "*it's not about gender, but more about openness and attitude*", as one female puts it, the same participant **agrees with findings by Mate et al. (2019) on the hurdles females face despite their engagement**:

"Men are often more comfortable in these situations. Because women have to make a compromise, have to make a trade-off when they want to become a leader. Wanting a job that fulfills me but also my demands to have a private (family) life…".

Summary

Table 4: Theoretical insights for "engaging" females

	Early Career	**Mid-Career**	**Late Career**
Identity Theory	No concrete **claiming / granting**	**Claiming** beyond their position but **grants** are not always returned	**Claiming** their expert status with exclusivity
Referenced Female Leader Studies	-	Robson (2013) - *Orchestrating outside of hierarchies*	Brue and Brue (2018) - *Need for reflection*
Narrative Theory	A very idealistic and complex **wanted self**	Positive **wanted self** as a guidepost	Positive **wanted self** as a guidepost
Referenced Female Leader Studies	-	Bullock (2019) – *Acknowledgment of females' "otherness"*	Mate et al. (2019) – *Hurdles for females realized*

The "engaging" frame in Zheng et al.'s (2020) study had the highest proportion of females. In this research, however, only a fraction of the group fell into the "engaging" frame. While they held leadership positions throughout their career, none of them reached the prestigious positions of e.g. chief department manager or site manager like their "being" or "accepting" peers. While it is thus harder to identify these individuals by their rank, they readily identify as leaders themselves – more so even than their peers.

The career arch for this group is portrayed in table 4. In their early career females of the "engaging" classification can be hard to tell apart from their "being" peers as they are mutually active and self-confident at work. Yet, unlike the "being" group they focus mainly on doing the tasks they are assigned rather than claiming projects of their own. Instead of "doing" leadership as e.g. the "accepting" females, these individuals think about leadership a lot. They bring or develop complex value structures around what leadership means to them. Empathy is a big part of these values, and they are outwardly focused on building good relations with their supervisors and colleagues, The positive experiences they can collect through their social openness and willingness to work hard get integrated into this idealistic wanted self. Much like the "being" females, these individuals do not immediately run into problems with being a female leader, yet since their engagement is also not "outside the box" they reflect even less on the topic at this stage.

The "engaging" females usually do succeed at making it into leader positions by climbing the ladder in their respective companies. Yet, instead of pursuing the projects and responsibilities that come with the new step in the hierarchy, they tend to express claiming behaviors far beyond their respective departments. Often coming from a personal interest in the topic and a desire to think about the bigger picture, these females overstep their assigned roles and are often not met with grants of leadership when doing so in return. This claiming can also be described as navigating (Bowles, 2012) since their strong social skills lead them to deal and build relations with a wide variety of people. Since they are not being granted upward possibilities but still believe in making an impact with their actions for the greater good, they find ways to orchestrate people around them to reach their objectives in terms of work tasks (Robson, 2013). At this point in their career, they can still defend this extended effort with the idealistic way they think about leadership. For them, doing leadership by bringing together people and solutions in a selfless way is enough to make up for the fact that they are being overlooked for promotions. Still, as time wears on they realize that their behaviors which could be described as a form of "mothering" steer them into stereotypical issues around female leadership as has found the participants in Bullock's (2019) sample.

The developments from their mid-careers lead to learnings that the "engaging" females deploy in their late careers. Instead of getting involved and claiming space in all adjacent areas to their assigned tasks, they focus more on their actual work. To avoid being taken advantage of leader programs, mentoring, and findings safe spaces where they are appreciated for their willingness to be active help them to realize where they might be overshooting in their daily work (Brue & Brue, 2018). Surprisingly, even though their careers often do not end up in high-ranked positions with lots of leader prestige, they keep up a very positive self-image and wanted self. They still believe in their capability and agency, which had been raised as benefactors to female careers by Mate et al. (2019), even though reality is painting a different picture.

Table 5: Comparison of the three narratives

	Career Step 1			Career Step 2			Career Step 3		
Frame	Social Interaction	*	Inner Sensemaking	Social Interaction	*	Inner Sensemaking	Social Interaction	*	Inner Sensemaking
Being	Active pursuing of project opportunities with communication towards supervisors	=	Conviction of wanting to be a leader eventually and believing in one's capability	Feeling of overwhelm when taking on team due to lack of empathy and understanding for others work motivations	/	Not measuring up to their own expectations in terms of productivity	Reaching a stage of having principals to apply across dealing with various groups such as supervisors or employees	=	Feeling comfortable in their position and detaching from certain projects to draw personal boundaries
Identity Work	- Finding ways to deploy capabilities for acknowledgement[1]			- Actively reaching out for input from supervisors and peers - Re-calibrating their sense of success in terms of productivity (more team focus)			- Solidifying their conviction of having been successful by framing female leader issues as "manageable"		
Accepting	Very open to building relationships with others by fulfilling expectations	/	Insecure of themselves, how they are being perceived and their career aspirations	Starting to put down boundaries and claim certain decisions powers	/	Always measuring themselves against both good and bad examples of leadership they have seen in others before	Creating safe spaces for their team where "comfortable" work environment is possible	=	Accepting that their leadership is not "traditional" and embracing their empathy
Identity Work	- Deeply reflecting on both positive and negative leadership examples - Realizing early that their "female" traits (lack of assertiveness) might lead to being overlooked			- Accepting opportunities for reflection such as leadership programs			- Deploying what they learned in leader programs and embracing safe spaces in their daily work / team set-up		
Engaging	Very social and reaching out to a variety of same or upper level people	=	Appraisal for their active work attitude let's them feel like their aremoving towards leadership	Communicating across all company levels and taking on very heavy workload (sometimes for others)	/	Starting to feel the strain between wanting to reach their own ideals of productivity and "mothering" others	Cutting down on responsibilities taken on for other people	= /	Not wanting to be taken advantage off any longer and focus on career progression
Identity Work	- Creating leadership ideals for themselves that address both empathy and progress goals			- Need to reconcile the fact that they are not moving forward as much with the load of work they are taking on, can lead to changing company			- Focusing in on specific skillset (in term of trade) - Possibly changing company again for new start		

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[1] Fields coloured in blue refer to outward identity work, fields coloured grey to inner identity work

5.4 Comparison between the Narratives

After the narratives of all three frames are explored in-depth, it becomes clear that depending on the origin story of a person they will likely take very different routes to leadership. Both social interactions and inner sensemaking do have an impact on these developments. By collapsing the narratives down to their essence, as done in table 5, it is possible to show how the alignment between external and internal processing affects the identity development of leaders. It is also possible to give some idea of what kind of identity work is done at which career steps.

It is worth pointing out first, that members of all three groups eventually can reach a state of alignment for their leader identity in terms of inner and outer experiences. However, not all groups feel such alignment equally throughout their career paths. Women from the "being" category start their careers already with a sense of alignment since their natural confidence is often met with opportunities and trust. In their mid-careers, they encounter a sense of misalignment when they have to reconcile their individual aspirations and what is possible with more than one person being involved in a project. Still, these females seem to solve these issues without too much impact on their natural self-confidence. They manage to regain alignment in their later careers. What is different between early and later alignment is the personal attachment to their work. Older "being" females tend to use their experience to steer their projects in a manner that is effective yet not too taxing personally for them.

Going from the most aligned to the least aligned group, there are the "accepting" females. The fact that they are not inherently interested in leadership and often reluctant to take on such positions, reflects in their misalignment for both their early and mid-careers. As very collegial and social people, they are perceptive to both good and bad examples of leadership. Almost as if they are trying these examples on for size, they absorb so much information on what leadership entails, they feel they could never match up to such expectations themselves. It is only through the heavy encouragement of others that they take on leadership roles nonetheless. Eventually, they do reach alignment in their late careers and feel comfortable in their leader identity. It should be pointed out though, that "accepting" leaders seem to retreat to their comfort zones at this point. Their leadership is rarely loud or very much visible across company levels.

The females in the "engaging" group fit between the other two groups in terms of alignment. Starting with similar confidence as their "being" peers, they also run into misalignment issues in their mid-career though of a different kind. While they have no problem working with a team, they overstretch their leadership and tend to tackle every issue coming

their way without proper compensation. While the notion to cut taking responsibilities and standing up for their expert status seems common across this group, not all females feel they can fully engage with their leader identity this way. The initial ideals they had, sometimes do live on. While they all agree that they see themselves as leaders, not all participants ever reached a state of comfort for this identity.

Across the different career stages of all females, identity work is used to deal with varying situations of alignment. "Being" females often use more outward tactics to solidify an identity that they seem to have fewer issues taking on anyway. Be it by taking on their first projects or reaching out to peers for input when they deal with difficult situations, they make rational choices that will gain them higher positions and recognition. Since this assertiveness is never challenged, they do not see the need to turn inward and assess what their leadership might look like. Quite the opposite is found in "accepting" females, who show a high tendency for inner identity work. They constantly re-evaluate what their leader identity would entail and eventually reach a stage where they enact leadership in a way that is authentic to them. Their leadership strays from traditional ideas of assertiveness and rather places the focus on creating safe spaces. While this type of leadership might not be recognized as much as its 'louder' being peer, the intense identity work done by "accepting" females is highly interesting when new leadership models are needed. Lastly, there is the group of "engaging" females who seem to be doing their identity work counterclockwise to the "being" females. With their high social aptitude, they do a lot of inner work early on, yet unlike the "accepting" females who carve out spaces in their respective companies, they rather re-start their efforts in different environments. The identity work of "engaging" females seems to be triggered more often than other females' by a change in employer. This outwardly aimed identity work lets them broader their identities very much, yet it makes it more difficult to fit in with traditional hierarchical structures that demand fitting in or fighting through.

Overall it can be summarized that leader identity development processes are highly complex and individualistic. Informing this work with a framework that was already more granular than prior development models was very helpful as it made room for detailed narrative structures. The study was able to trace the paths of three different leader groups and uncover what factors impact their development processes, to what extent they feel aligned internally and externally in their leader identity as well as what that means for their identity work. In the following chapter, theoretical and practical implications will be drawn from the findings.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Theoretical Implications

The three narratives created in this work serve to answer the research question of "How do the leader identities of females develop over the course of their career?". They give insight into the different paths taken towards leader identities and help to build an understanding of leadership that is not merely "the heroic story". This research addressed the landscape of personal leader identity development and thus dealt with a variety of sometimes ill-defined concepts. In the following chapter, theoretical implications are drawn from the narratives. First, it will be discussed how this work differs from prior studies done on female leader identities and what the findings of other authors fit into this study's context. Then implications will be discussed for general leadership identity development as this is the main area this research contributes to. Afterward, the practical concepts of identity theory and narrative theory will be evaluated with some conclusions for the general theory developments.

Female leaders fall on a relational spectrum and will actively move towards less relational involvement over time

Female leaders have provided insights for alternative leadership in the past and this research aimed to understand how what is known already relates to different females' stories and how helpful these concepts are across careers. Studies on female leader identities coming from the perspective of identity theory have been uncovering different behaviors such as pioneering, navigating (Bowles, 2012), orchestrating, or dancing in female leaders (Robson, 2013) as well as a preference for building their leadership in safe spaces such as leadership programs (Brue & Brue, 2018). Bowles' study had found that pioneering was a strategy mainly used by entrepreneurs, though in this work it also comes out very prominent in the group of the "being" females. It could be validated though that navigation as a strategy was more often found across different career paths of females in general. The study of Robson (2013) connects well to this latter finding as navigation could be regarded as a lighter form of behaviours such as orchestrating which is only found in "engaging" females. It seems that there is a spectrum of how much relational work female leaders do – from very little in pioneers to very much in orchestrators. Here the paradox for female leaders comes full circle. While females are generally demanded to be very communal, being on the latter end of this spectrum does seem to impede their leadership claims. It is pioneers or "being" females only, the ones closest to "male" leadership, that seemingly are able to build their identities with little issue coming from

social interactions. Yet, even "being" females throughout their career move along the spectrum towards the "accepting" females and their heightened empathy but also heightened self-doubt. Unimportant of the background, leadership in females seems to eventually face the issue of leading others and expectations society has for females in such interactions. In this light, it is unsurprising Brue and Brue (2018) were able to find many benefits of leader programs for female leaders that were also heavily resonating with the womans' experiences in this study. In an environment where they cannot escape the societal norms asked of females, safe spaces are necessary resonance rooms for female leaders. Reflecting to them, where they place on the relational spectrum, the programs give the possibility to make active decisions about moving to a different point.

The impacts of the relational placement of females are well mirrored in how the findings of narrative theory studies on female leaders connect to different points of career trajectories. The studies have highlighted what drivers and challenges impact females' career perceptions (Mate et al., 2019), how being female is one of those impact factors (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014), and that it often is in a hindering way (Bullock, 2019). Looking at when the particular issues came up, it seems that it is problematic social interaction that seems to trigger dealing with the downside to being female found in prior works. When females realize where they are on the relational spectrum internally, a cascade of pushing back seems to be unleashed across all groups. "Being" females who are already less prone to being over-engaged in social bargaining cement their views even further to the point where they could be regarded as moving "off the scale" on the pioneering side in their late careers. "Accepting" females eventually realize that their empathy is a strength and they move to "pioneering" their leadership a little more. Finally, even the group of "engaging" females who are often prime orchestrators, eventually begin to protect themselves better against being taken advantage of for their relational strengths.

In summary, most but not all females follow their career trajectories with a level of relational strength that likely will work against them at some point. However, over time all participants become more agentic as leaders, realize the issue and actively work against it. Some females manage to preserve a communal leadership where inner and outer experiences align, however, the majority of female leaders will either move away from it or face misalignment indefinitely. More theorizing about a concept such as a relational spectrum could potentially uncover more points of such (mis)alignments in the future.

Developing a leader identity relies on finding alignment between inner and social experiences

It has become apparent throughout this work that leader identity research or for that matter any research addressing leadership deals with what Caroll and Levy (2008, p. 93) called a

"nebulous" concept. As Driver (2013) found in her study, the concept of being a leader dissolves the more informants talk about it. The findings of this work show that leadership theory should possibly move away from trying to answer this question of "What kind of leader are you?" to solve this riddle. Instead, it seems the question "When do you feel like a leader?" seems to be more interesting to trace paths to this ominous identity. By looking at when stories of alignment between inner sensemaking and social interactions match up in female leaders, the importance of misalignment for true identity formation becomes clear.

This study manages to add potential layers of understanding to the models of leadership identity development currently in place. So far, models have either been linear with several stages (Lord & Hall, 2005) or cyclical (D. Day, 2011; Pratt et al., 2006). The model by Lord and Hall (2005) does not serve female leaders well as characteristics such as empathy, emotional regulation, or an understanding of collective identity are ascribed to intermediate and expert leaders here. Females though often innately bring these characteristics to any one of their positions. This mismatching of how characteristics are developed is partly due to the linear nature of the model as it assumes there is only one way towards a "complete" leader identity. The model is missing a dynamic component that allows the leader to go back and forth between stages. Also, there is no explanation of what triggers moving along the model stages either. Other authors such as Day (2011) and Pratt et al. (2006) have tried closing that by regarding leadership development as going through cycles with positive and negative experiences. While the idea is that different experiences impact leader identity developments, the models are difficult to apply in an empirical setting. They lack an end-point that identities are moving to and there is no clear distinction between different impact factors such as external and internal experiences. The practical element that is missing here, can be found in the study by Zheng et al. (2020) who identify starting- and "end-points" to leader development through origin and enactment stories.

The findings of this study manage to connect ideas from all current models. Female leaders are observed under the assumption that they have different backgrounds, yet they all found their leadership identity today. On the way towards it, they went through a variety of experiences that might have given them feelings of moving forward, getting stuck, or even feeling out of place. Being open about how different journeys have progressed, the author was able to uncover the importance of alignment between inner and outer experiences as a leader. It takes a certain kind of alignment to feel comfortable in one's identity as a leader, however, real development of identity was mainly found when the females of this study felt misalignment. Going back to the study by Driver (2013) whose sample was more male-oriented, it is unsurprising the participants felt less sure how to identify their leadership. Those who do not face misalignment between what they are and what are told they should be might feel like they have a leader identity when they solely adopted societal ideas and ideals of it. The implications

for research are twofold. Research should move away from sampling leaders who fall merely into the societal standards originating from the past centuries still. Additionally, theories should focus not only on the dynamic development of said identities but particularly on the times when leaders do not feel comfortable in them.

Self-reflection cycles from narrative theory should be integrated into identity theory processes to reflect points of (mis)alignment throughout the identity formation process

To arrive at the findings of this work, identity theory and narrative theory were used to create a base understanding of identity development. Identity theory provided the concept of claiming and granting that would characterize actions taken towards building one's leader identity. Narrative theory on the other hand provided an understanding of identity formation alongside desired wanted and unwanted selves. Both concepts were traceable in the data and helped to inform what narrative would fall into what frame. It was found that both concepts continuously impact each other and that both impact the alignment discussed above.

The claiming and granting cycle developed by DeRue and Ashford (2010) was reflected well in the stories told by participants. The "being" females were giving insights into how they claimed from an early stage and were granted possibilities. DeRue and Ashford (2010, p. 639) had also already addressed the possibility of an inversed cycle where grants would be given before an individual claimed their leadership. This was found for the "accepting" females. What the concept lacks is an understanding of the consequences after a failed attempt at either claiming or being granted. Particularly the "engaging" females recount numerous stories of being turned down, yet they still self-identify as leaders. This is where wanted (and sometimes unwanted) selves come in as described by Petriglieri and Stein (2012). Having ideals and in-depth reflections into leadership seems to be enough to overcome a lack of appreciation from the outside for the "engaging" females and points to the importance of the theory approach. While identity research initially perceived social interaction to be the main driver for identity formation, the importance of the recent convergence with narrative theory can be underscored through the findings of this work.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to offer an integrated theory conception, the author would support the advancement of DeRue and Ashford's (2010) cycle by implementing a self-reflection cycle relating to narrative theory of inner sensemaking before, during, and after any claiming or granting attempt. Having such personal reflection moments built into the model would make room to pin down more specific moments of identity work and their nature. In this study the author went on to define the identity work that was triggered in these moments as

inward and outward identity work (relating to the two theory strands). It would have been interesting to see if a clear pattern of e.g. a self-reflection cycle always leads to inward identity work or vice versa. However, such a clear pattern did not emerge. An explanation could be that personal disposition and the specific situation can be too manifold to see a pattern in such a relatively small sample. Yet, for theory on identity work, this is interesting as in prior theory, identity work was often connected to concrete triggers from outside experiences and the author of this study was able to show that inner reflection can be equally as powerful. The findings of this work point towards an ongoing process that is upheld by both inner reflection and outside happenings with no clear weight on either side.

After discussing the theoretical implications of this study for identity research and leader identities, the following section will shed light on how the findings could potentially have positive impacts on the personal lives of female leaders and the business world.

6.2 Practical Implications

Having created an understanding of how different origins and enactment stories impact the development of leader identities over time is valuable to individuals, to companies, and possibly to those setting up leadership programs. The following chapter will discuss practical implications for all three parties.

Self-awareness in female leaders helps to inform active strategy and discussions

On an individual level, the findings of this work could potentially help females in all career stages to create more self-awareness of who and where they are in their journey towards leadership. A detailed understanding of different trajectories could also guide reflections on how to think about others and their respective leader identities and what that means for interacting with one another.

Being female impacts the careers of women in leadership positions of all origins. Thus, raising the issue in ways that speaks to the differing backgrounds could create more fruitful discussions at work. "Being" females could feel reassured in their self-confidence while also being made aware early of the challenges that come with going from one-person projects to managing larger teams. Insights like the findings of this work might also help them to not turn against other females who do not follow their assertive approach to leadership. The "being" females face the fewest hurdles when trying to attain their goals, yet currently, they do not manage to facilitate change to lower hurdles for other females. These other females such as the "accepting" females would likely profit from a climate where their task- and people-

orientation is valued more. Having the insight that their way of doing things has a very good chance of attaining leader grants by others would possibly help them feel surer of themselves. The group that might be benefitting the most from this work are the females in the "engaging" category. While they are valued early in their careers for the meta-view and all-encompassing interest they bring to work, eventually, they often get taken advantage of for this lack of boundaries. Creating awareness around the fact that a certain level of specialization or better guarding of their expert status could save them from getting stuck in their careers.

Besides many beneficial outcomes, some issues should be raised concerning how the findings of this work might impact individuals negatively. While knowledge can be power, it also gives more means of reflection than is already in place. Particularly females who already lean towards patterns of overthinking such as the "accepting" group might feel less secure. On a very practical level, it is also difficult for an individual to place themselves into just one group. This could lead to an individual being so aware of the challenges of each group that they feel overwhelmed and step away from pursuing leadership at all. Lastly, this work did not cover the group of performers. While it is the group with the least female percentage in Zheng et al.'s work (2020), it cannot be denied that sparing a group leads to an incomplete picture and might in practice leave some females feeling like they are being left out.

Knowing a female leaders origin helps companies support them properly

The findings of this work can be beneficial for companies as much as their employees. Enterprises should have an interest in fostering a more varied perspective on leadership. By understanding and introducing different types of leadership into an organization, the hiring process could potentially be impacted in a way that allows females to progress more authentically without being "just there for the quota". Albeit it is not only females who profit, males too could profit from measuring their leadership against some of the standards set by females which could lead to greater satisfaction in leaders overall. Employer branding and offerings for personal development could be positively affected by such efforts for companies of any size.

On an operative level, awareness around different types of leadership should not only be created among the affected individuals directly but also in those supervising teams. Having worked with someone on your team for a while, it should be relatively easy for a supervisor to categorize their respective employee in terms of their leader identity. It then is important to understand how and when to intervene to maximize their potential. "Being" females would be identified the easiest and likely go a similar route with or without special support. However, identifying them early could open the possibility to not mentor them but let them mentor others. Even before or alongside a junior manager position this could teach them more empathy, more

collective thinking and thus benefit their leadership and the company in turn. Females of the "accepting" category would become leaders less by chance. Their work could be put in more perspective from the beginning, which might spark dormant aspirations. It is also important for this group to be recognized early because they most often make use of leadership programs. Companies could save resources when the "accepting" females go through programs that are tailored to them, ideally addressing leadership as something more than "just assertiveness". Lastly, the "engaging" females could be protected by their employer in ways they are not able to guard themselves. Recognizing that an employee leans towards overshooting in their work and reflecting on this in a manner that is still appreciative might be made possible by the findings of this work.

Leadership programs for female leaders need room for reflection rather than input

Another party that can benefit from the findings of this work in a very practical manner is those who run the leadership programs in or with companies. The research makes it clear that addressing the topic of female leadership holds more than just hurdles and challenges and that people- and goal orientation are equally valuable to a company's prowess as pure performance orientation. Teaching about the different identity developments can be very hands-on and applies directly to the participants. What has also become apparent in this work is the importance of leadership programs as resonance rooms where debate and reflection are possible outside of regular work routines. Across all groups of females, there was an appreciation for gaining reassurance through "safe spaces". Ideally, the findings of this work would not only be taught and discussed but also implemented directly into how the program itself works. Program facilitators need to make sure that "accepting" females get enough room to express themselves, while for "being" females the need to address female leadership needs to be made clear in the first place. "Engagers" should be able to address some of the more difficult personal decisions such a program might lead them to.

The extensive discussion of theoretical and practical findings shows that through its qualitative nature this work can raise several news issues and questions. However, as with any qualitative study and in particular with qualitative work that is carried out by one author only, the study does have limitations both in its methodological approach and in terms of analytical results. Without invalidating what was found, it is pertinent to critically assess what limitations this study faces. This will be done in the following section.

6.3 Limitations

The findings of this work were developed with a qualitative narrative research approach in a field of research that is still in the process of creating consensus around certain base concepts – hence limitations need to be discussed for this study.

Starting with identity research as the base theoretical approach to the work, the main concern that needs to be addressed is the lack of finite definitions for identities. Theorizing has been done since the 1930s and yet there is no one way to describe what any particular identity is as it is very much an individual construct. Personal identities can only be pinned insofar as they are impacted by different factors such as social interaction and personal interpretation. While the concepts stemming from these understandings – namely identity theory and later narrative theory have taken very different routes in their development, research lately seems to merge them more and more. Findings such as this work might help later theorizing on an integrated theory. At this point, however, integrating the different schools of thinking is rather tentative and does not follow a clear-cut concept yet. This has an impact on the concreteness of this analysis as findings cannot go beyond narrative storytelling that will support later theorizing.

Diving deeper into the theoretical constructs and studies used in this work, it becomes apparent that a certain lack of definition and bleeding into other research lanes cannot be foregone. Leader identities, much like any identity, are difficult to define for academia and even more so for those "owning" them. Research has made strides to differentiate leader identities from other work identities which is helpful when building a sample (by e.g. excluding certain professionals) and setting up questionnaires particularly for those who are both managers and self-selected leaders simultaneously. Yet, this distinction raises more consequent issues. For one, the translation of "leadership" to German does not make the same distinction between being a manager and being a leader as in English. While this is an issue that was addressed in practice in the interview process, it still stands when drawing theoretical conclusions about any one of the two identities. Additionally, the current lack of a finite definition of the term "leader identity" makes it hard to finitely coin the outcomes of this work as relating to this identity only. It could be argued that the trajectories described in the analysis of this work relate equally to the participants' identities as managers simply because there is no concrete distinction to be taken from academic sources currently.

Since this work concerned itself with the development of identities – however nebulous they might be – a framework was needed to put experiences and their impact in perspective. It has already been argued in the analysis of this work that concepts either from general identity work

research or from more specialized leader identity work for a long time did not fit identity formation processes in female leaders without making them a minority and "other". The four-frame concept used for this work has been created very recently and thus cannot yet be regarded as having stood the test of time in academia. This is a particularly important point as other conceptions such as that of leadership spirals for example seemingly did not get picked up very much in academia after their publication. Still, since the framework of origins and enactment stories is new and significantly differs from prior concepts, the authors decided it is worth building a qualitative study on it to possibly uncover future research avenues for the identity research landscape. The framework did serve this work well. One critical issue that came up was the categorization of interviewees into groups. The analysis provided by Zheng et al. (2020) does not give concrete insights into how to go about this when working with the framework and most people will fall into more than one category anyway. This issue cannot be fully resolved, but the author believes that the framework distinguishes the groups enough to make a case for why certain participants of this study would be classified into any one frame by seeing parallels in behaviors, used wording, and the outcome of certain career decisions. Another limitation that needs to be discussed after concerns around the theoretical constructs have been raised, is the practical application of theory concepts. Identity theory with its claiming and granting cycle and narrative theory with the understanding of wanted and unwanted selves give starting points as to what to look for throughout the coding and analysis process. Yet, few other studies on female leaders have been conducted and an even smaller fraction has used either approach. Instead, researchers have added concepts such as navigating and pioneering or created open narrative structures to describe certain situations. This work was only able to take input from all of the concepts as starting points as well and arrive at similar outputs as other authors have before with narratives. Much like an integrated theory, an integration of practical concepts would likely have led to more robust outcomes. Yet, this study does something uncommon in trying to include a broad variety of issues raised in recent research around female leaders and is thus able to possibly add to an integration later.

Besides issues stemming from the theoretical starting point of the work, methodological issues should be discussed. While interviews are a widely used technique to gather qualitative insights, Bengtsson (2016, p. 11) points out that the researcher can never be certain that the collected data is an accurate representation of the real perception of the informants. Individuals have the capacity to modify their self-views in such a reflexive context which might impact how they tell certain stories (Rosenthal, 1993, p. 2; Zheng et al., 2020). The interviewee will make assumptions about what the interviewer wants to hear or presume what they already know and adjust their storytelling accordingly (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 5). This so-called co-authoring can be helpful when participants are properly guided to make self-discoveries in the

interview process. Yet, it can also be harmful when during the interview certain aspect are left out of stories or obtruded due to perceived social conformism (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011, p. 8). Some authors see this issue as a quixotic fight against metaphorical windmills which cannot be decimated in the real world of conversations (Rosenthal, 1993, p. 5). King (2009, p. 32) advises reflection on how well the interviewer could and should be informed when going into the interview. Being informed about processes and statutes of the interviewee's world gives credibility and can help to cut right to individual experiences. In the theoretical fieldwork, the researcher had to be very much well informed to uncover nuances that prior research had not addressed. To counterbalance this, the researcher did not gather extensive information on each company the participants worked at to let them tell the story of their work environments.

After the data collection, the researcher used the collected insights to create a narrative report to conceptualize and present their findings. Such a qualitative account can only make limited claims and generalizations (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 13) as the most "unreliable" part of the work is the categorization and scaling of text as Krippendorf (2010) puts it. Polkinhorne (2007, p. 477) makes the point that narrative researchers should not argue for certainty and generally keep their claims to what can directly be concluded from the collected evidence. Still, certain claims have to be made and a certain level of validity needs to be reached. Riessmann (2005) advises on four criteria for this. The study needs to be persuasive and coherent enough. The author needs to ask themselves whether readers will support the claims as strong enough (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 476). In this work, the author tried to meet this expectation by going through iterative processes of note-taking in the analysis process which is advised by Bengtsson (2016, p. 11), and by building all parts of the report with support from quotes from the interview transcripts (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 477). Riessmann's third criteria of correspondence meaning that participants were asked to review the findings could not be fulfilled directly as this went beyond their time allowances. The researcher did take the time though to discuss the findings with both their supervisor and peers. Lastly, Riessmann advises that narrative research should have a pragmatic use to be valid. This is fulfilled by the practical implications section of this chapter.

Some of the concerns raised around the methodological approach are mirrored in the analysis part of this study. In designing the narrative structures for each frame the researcher was faced with the issue of subjectivity as well as space issues when it came to inserting quotes. It is not possible to give the full array of accounts on each issue in each career step for all three frame perspectives. Only very prominent phrasing of certain issues could be used which likely leads to a picture that not every participant of the respective group would wholly agree with (for their situation). This however is the nature of narrative research and findings of this work will likely

still resonate with certain experiences of each participant. Similarly to this, the study does not claim to model any new theory, however by connecting standing concepts some findings could be unearthed that can serve as starting points for further research. Questions that could be explored in later studies will be addressed in the last part of this chapter.

6.4 Future Research

Similar to most studies in the identity research realm this work opens many avenues for future research. Throughout the discussion chapter, it has become clear that a more integrated understanding of identity development theories would help understand this human experience better from a research point of view. Alongside this, the concept of identity work still needs to be explored for more general theory findings and generalized practical conceptions. Having a more meta-understanding of all these factors could potentially support the notion of creating more perspectives in specific identity research such as that on work identities. When "traditional" perspectives aren't the only ones that theories are built on anymore, more groups such as females or others can potentially be understood and researched better. Since such a top-down approach hasn't been possible to agree on in academia for the past decades, another approach to adding to this research could be by integrating a females-only leadership theory from a variety of studies such as the one at hand.

Turning towards the analysis of this work, several insights could be interesting to follow up on. The three groups under investigation each bring up questions about their motives, development, and how they could be influenced. It could be interesting to see just how early the self-confidence of "being" females arises – are they really born to be leaders? Connecting leader identities with childhood and teenage experiences could help to understand what exactly these females experienced that so positively impacted their career years. More insight could also be found in how these females perceive leadership and specifically gendered leadership training. In a very practical sense, it would be helpful to understand exactly what leads them to hold comparatively low opinions of their female peers. Raising the motivation to understand and possibly mentor others instead could positively impact female leadership practices overall in organizations and academia as well. The group of "accepting" females could serve as a blueprint for social leadership both in everyday life and gender-related issues. They take part eagerly in leadership programs and take away very profound insights such as deepened empathy. It could potentially help to understand the full (sometimes implicit) value-propositions of leadership programs when participants are viewed for their origin stories and thus enactment of leadership in said training. Apart from programs, understanding when and how exactly "accepting" females build enough social capital to overcome their adversity

towards leader position remains unclear as of now and could also be investigated. The last and potentially most interesting group is that of the "engaging" females. While they make up the smallest portion of the sample in this study, this type is more often found in females than in males. The hurdles for female leaders are mirrored perfectly in the over-engagement on their part and underestimation by others in this group. Much like the "being" females, it could be of interest to investigate the youth of the women closer. Why does one sort of self-confidence lead to setting healthy boundaries and progressing, while the other leads to overworking and still getting stuck? On a more positive note, "engaging" females like their "accepting" peers could help build the groundwork for more social leadership perspectives that try to codify the value brought to companies through facilitating relationships within and across teams.

While the individual groups provide ample possibilities for future research other research avenues can be explored. The study did not include the in-depth study of "performing" females who in fact do exist and have perspectives that could be of interest. With the focus being on female leadership this study also categorically excluded the male gender. The insights into origins and enactment of leadership across different groups however could also be applied to males. It would be interesting to understand how benefactors and issues of falling into any one group impact male leaders. Particularly those in the more social accepting and engaging group – because these males also do exist. Lastly, while this work concerns itself mainly with individual identity building the findings could be taken further to an organizational and social identity level. Exploring what leadership identity group is found where in an organization and how that impact the enterprise in return on an economic and social level could be a potential research interest.

Female leadership is a complex construct that is impacted by individual stories and larger societal issues. The development of leader identities in females still offers many possibilities for further inquiry. Findings such as those in this work will likely benefit these academic endeavors as well as the careers of women how would like to find purpose and comfort in their personal leadership style.

7. **References**

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8. Appendix

Appendix 1: Code Tree

ATLAS.ti-Report

Analysis

Codes grouped by Codegroup

Report by Tabea Brandt (28.10.2021)

COLLEAGUES

10 Kodes:

○ COLLEAGUES

Kommentar:

What issues participants bring up in regards to same level colleagues

○ Colleagues: Chimney effect

○ Colleagues: Communication

○ Colleagues: Cooperation

○ Colleagues: Dealing with senior Cs

○ Colleagues: Difficult colleagues

○ Colleagues: Learning opportunity

○ Colleagues: Teaching others

○ Colleagues: Trust

○ Colleagues: Underestimation

COMPANY CULTURE

3 Kodes:

○ COMPANY CULTURE

○ Company culture: demands

○ Company culture: identification

EMPLOYEES

17 Kodes:

○ EMPLOYEES

Kommentar:

Feelings the participants described they want to harbour in their employees

● Employees: demands

● Employees: disconnect

● Employees: Educator

● Employees: Enabling

● Employees: Focus Team achievement

- Employees: Giving Freedom
- Employees: Know the individual
- Employees: Listening
- Employees: openess abt knowledge

Kommentar:

The participant is transparent about the things she can / cant do with her expertise and asks openely for support and collaboration

- Employees: relationship building
- Employees: Reliability
- Employees: seeing potential
- Employees: sharing personal
- Employees: Transparence
- Employees: Trust
- Employees: well being

FEMALE

8 Kodes:

○ FEMALE

Kommentar:

Points made in regards to being female / other females directly

○ Female: exception

○ Female: experience other females

○ Female: Fight to progess

○ Female: inclusive thinking

○ Female: Self-perception

○ Female: Uncomfortable Situations

○ Female: Will to push

FORMAL QUAL

7 Kodes:

○ FORMAL QUAL

Kommentar:

What formal qualification did the participants go through AFTER starting their job life

○ Formal Qual: Coaching

○ Formal Qual: experience

○ Formal Qual: Knowledge

○ Formal Qual: Leadership Programm

○ Formal Qual: official backing

○ Formal Qual: takeover pos.

GENDER

6 Kodes:

○ GENDER

Kommentar:

Points brought up in regards to male / female treatment, interaction or else concerning both genders

○ Gender: Balance Genders

○ Gender: Differences

○ Gender: Discussion Culture

○ Gender: Male Domination

○ Gender: Quota

LEADER POSITION

10 Kodes:

○ LEADER POSITION

Kommentar:

What issues are coming up with being in a leader position on a company level??

○ Leader Position: Challenges

○ Leader Position: Chances

○ Leader Position: Consillator

○ Leader Position: Expert

○ Leader Position: Indirect

○ Leader Position: Mittelmanagement

○ Leader Position: Networker

○ Leader Position: No Aspiration

○ Leader Position: Objectives

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

10 Kodes:

○ LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

Kommentar:

Ways the participants actively used reflection and what emotions came up

○ Leadership Reflection: Active Reflection

● Leadership reflection: deliberate strategy

○ Leadership Reflection: External Opinion

○ Leadership Reflection: Feeling Responsible

● Leadership reflection: hurt

○ Leadership reflection: identity

○ Leadership reflection: Lack of reflection

● Leadership Reflection: Taking on Role

○ Leadership reflections: ideals

LEADERSHIP STYLE

10 Kodes:

○ LEADERSHIP STYLE

Kommentar:

How do participants describe their leadership style

○ Leadership Style: Advise / Motivation

○ Leadership Style: assertive

○ Leadership Style: Coach

○ Leadership Style: emotional

○ Leadership Style: fact oriented

○ Leadership Style: female

○ Leadership Style: informal

○ leadership style: more relaxed

○ Leadership Style: Planning

PERSONAL

23 Kodes:

○ PERSONAL

Kommentar:

Personal issues participants talk about (related directly to own persona NOT only leadership)

● Personal. Claiming Leadership

● Personal: Authenticity

● Personal: Balance Private / Job

● Personal: boredom

● Personal: Boundaries

● Personal: Comfort Zone

● Personal: Create something

● Personal: cultures around mistakes

● Personal: Dealing with conflict

● Personal: do things different

● Personal: Empathy

● Personal: Engaged at work

- Personal: Intuition
- Personal: Lack of Self-Confidence
- Personal: Negociation
- Personal: Priorities
- Personal: Private Challenges
- Personal: Pushing forward
- Personal: Risk
- Personal: Self-Confidence
- Personal: Self-Reflection
- Personal: Vulnerability

SUPERIOR

12 Kodes:

○ SUPERIOR

Kommentar:

Eamples and issues talked about in regards to a direct superior / boss

○ Superior: Being pushed

○ Superior: Developm. Relationship

○ Superior: Leading Superior

○ Superior: Learned from

○ Superior: Mentorship

○ Superior: Negative exp

○ Superior: Perception

Kommentar:

How one is perceived BY superior

○ Superior: Role Model

○ Superior: Sponsor

○ Superior: Taking over decisions

○ Supervisor: being overlooked

No Codegroup

22 Kodes:

○ # Leadership Personality

Kommentar:

Answers to Q1

○ / career step: 0

Kommentar:

Beginning of career insights

○ / career step: 1

Kommentar:

First step upwards in career (not neccesarily leading)

○ / career step: 2

Kommentar:

First leader position

○ / career step: 3

Kommentar:

Senior Leader

○ IDENTITY WORK

○ Identity work: external

○ Identity Work: Not consciously

○ REACH POSITION

Kommentar:

Explicit recounts of how they transitions throughout their careers

○ Reach Position: Claimed > granted

○ Reach Position: Claimed > not granted

○ Reach Position: Coincident

○ Reach Position: Granted > Claimed

○ Reach Position: Granted > not claimed

○ Reach position: Stagnation

○ Reach position: unexpected

○ ROLE MODEL

Kommentar:

Talking about Role models

○ Role Model: Family

○ Role Model: Others

○ SPILL OVER EFFECTS

○ Spill over effects: Private life pos. profess.

○ Spill over effects: Prof. > Private

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

This interview guide served the interviewer as a rough draft to make sure all major points of interest where covered. Questions were mostly asked in response to the narrative of the respective interviewee. The questions in the guide were resorted to when the interviewee did not actively address a topic themselves.

Introduction

Thank you for signing up for this interview. I would like to record this and would ask you to agree to this once the tapes are turned on.

You have been provided with an information leaflet beforehand, do you have any questions about that?

You know this is about leadership, since we have no German translation I would like to make clear that I'm talking about leadership not merely in terms of managerial positions but more personal and team decision making powers.

This interview will be structured with open questions, do not feel any need to cut yourself short at any point. If we go off topic that is fine, I do not have clear questions I'm adhering to. I might further inquire about certain situations and topic clusters.

Start (These were standard questions used to open every interview)
1. Would you say of yourself you have a distinct leader identity?
2. Could you please give me a short description of your current positions at work? Do you lead a team or have an accredited position?
3. Could you give me an overview of your career stations since your first full-time employment?
4. have you taken part in a leadership program? what kind of leadership identity were you introduced to? (Miscenko et al., 2017, p. 607)
5. Going back to your first position, what would you say your thoughts were on leadership back then? Did you actively think about the concept at the time?
6. Did you ever want to become a leader?
7. At what point in your career did leadership play a role?

Social Expectations

ROLE

Do you think others expectations of your leadership role / position have shaped how you fill it out and see it yourself?

Was there ever a moment when you felt you actively went against cultural norms in your work as a leader?

SKILLS

How do you feel your aquired skills were perceived by others and how did you feel about them in turn as you moved upward? (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010)

ASKING

Where there ever situation where you asked for recognition / opportunity and werent give it?

Career Path reflection

EMOTION

Can you talk about negative / positive emotions that came up with you moving into a higher / leading positions?

What was your mental state at the time?

EXPEREINCE

Did you feel like you had the personal background when moving into these positions?

What experiences did you build on?

AGENCY

To what extend do you feel had agency over your leadership at the time?

Have you ever perceived being a leader as risky?

MENTAL MODEL

Have your ideas of what a leader is changed over time?

Identity Work

How has how you **deal with (new) tasks changed** over the course of your career and how does that connect to leadership?

Do you ever **manage communication / information** different since becoming a leader?

How has how **you deal with your emotions changed** over the course of your career and how does that connect to leadership?

➔ Can you explain the mental process taking place here?

Salience of identity

What place does your leader identity have in yourself?

➜ Does a certain identity even emerge?

➜ How do you distinguish your management identity from your leader identity?

Do you ever feel conflict with another part of your identity? Which one?

Do you have ways to switch between identities?

Gender Questions

Do you ever feel a paradox in your leadership as opposed to your male counterparts?

Does "female leadership" play a role for you?

How do you feel the situation around you developed in terms of females climbing to the top?

how do you feel about that?

Outro

Thank you for taking this time

Finally, after all this reflection I'd like to ask again, do you feel like a leader and how?

Do you have anything else to add? Any Questions?

Appendix 3: Interview Transcriptions

Due to the scope of the interview transcription material, all transcripts can be found in the external document titled "InterviewTranscripts_TB21". The document will be provided to those examining this work.

Declaration of Authenticity

I declare that I completed the Master thesis independently and used only materials that are listed. All materials used, from published as well as unpublished sources, whether directly quoted or paraphrased, are duly reported.

Furthermore, I declare that the Master thesis, or any abridgment of it, was not used for any other degree-seeking purpose.

Calvoerde, 11.01.2022   2591472

_____   _____   _____

Place, Date   Tabea Brandt, Author   Student ID