



# The relational nature of leadership identity construction: How and when it influences perceived leadership and decision-making

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 7 May 2014

Received in revised form 16 June 2015

Accepted 29 June 2015

Available online 28 August 2015

Handling Editor: William Gardner

### Keywords:

Leadership identity

Relational

Gender

Competence

Avatars

## ABSTRACT

This paper empirically tests leadership identity construction theory (DeRue & Ashford, 2010), conceptually framing claiming and granting leadership as a negotiated process that influences leadership perceptions and decision-making in interdependent contexts. In Study 1a, an avatar video-based experimental vignette (replicated in Study 1b with a non-video scenario), we found that when a team member accepted an actor's leadership claim, observers' leadership ratings of the actor increased, whereas when the team member rejected the claim, observers' leadership ratings of the fellow team member increased. However, when an actor granted leadership, the fellow team member's response did not influence leadership ratings. Study 2 extended the conceptual model by identifying *how* claiming and granting influence leadership perceptions – through perceived competence – and when claiming and granting exert greatest influence, finding that women observers vary more in their responses to claiming and granting. The negotiated relational leader identity process ultimately influenced observer decision-making.

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## Introduction

Despite long-standing recognition of leadership as an interpersonal, relational process (e.g., Hollander, 1958, 1964; Parker, 1984), academics and practitioners often persist in conceptualizing leadership as a formal, top-down construct (Bedeian & Hunt, 2006). However, scholars are increasingly acknowledging leadership as a relational construct (Foldy & Ospina, 2012). This perspective deemphasizes leadership as merely a formal, high-status role conferred by position, instead characterizing leadership as a phenomenon socially constructed between workgroup members (Bass & Bass, 2008; Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2006; Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012). More recently, this relational perspective has been brought to bear in leadership identity construction theory, which conceptualizes a process by which individuals come to be seen (by themselves and by others) as leaders (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Based on this theory, leadership can be defined as a process of mutual influence that unfolds across time and situations as individuals claim and grant leader and follower roles. Leadership in organizations emerges as a result of individuals claiming (for themselves) and granting (to others) leader identities, which we frame as a negotiated process of relational identity construction (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Gefand, Major, Raver, Nishii, & O'Brien, 2006; Kopelman, 2014; Kopelman, Chen, & Shoshana, 2009). Repeated claiming and granting of these identities establish and reinforce patterns of leadership in the organization, influencing not only perceptions of leadership, but also decision-making.

The present paper contributes to this nascent literature on leadership identity construction, enhancing the field's understanding of leadership emergence by theoretically elaborating and empirically examining psychological factors that influence the relational

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dynamics of leadership identity construction and their impact on decision-making. DeRue and Ashford's (2010) theory of leadership identity construction provides the theoretical underpinnings for understanding this relational leadership emergence process; however, several aspects of their model merit further development. The present study thus seeks to validate and elaborate aspects of the model of leadership claiming and granting offered, specifically attending to the role of leadership claiming and granting in shaping perceptions of leadership. Specifically, we extend DeRue and Ashford's (2010) model by identifying and testing perceived competence as an underlying psychological mechanism that explains *how* leadership claiming and granting influence others' perceptions of leadership. According to the stereotype content model, competence is a central component of evaluations of individuals (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), posing implications for judgments of leadership and influence (Cuddy, Glick, & Beninger, 2011; Ho, Shih, & Walters, 2012). The present study applies this model to leadership identity construction theory in order to test competence as a likely mechanism through which the negotiated process of leadership claiming and granting influences leadership perceptions.

We further elaborate leadership identity construction theory by examining *who* might be most attuned to and influenced by this social process of leadership claiming and granting. Specifically, we propose observer gender as a key moderator of the effects of leadership claiming and granting. The psychological literature has demonstrated gender to be an influential individual difference in shaping perceptions and behavior in relational contexts, with women weighing interpersonal dynamics more heavily than men (e.g., Cross & Madson, 1997). However, observer gender has received little attention within the emerging literature on individual differences in leadership perceptions (Antonakis, Day, & Schyns, 2012). Examining observer gender in the present study thus advances research on individual differences in leadership judgments, as well as knowledge of who is most attuned to relational leadership identity construction.

This paper also provides the first empirical investigation of behavioral implications of the leadership construction process, examining whether the dynamics of leadership claiming and granting shape not only perceived competence and leadership, but also influence decision-making.

## Relational leadership identity construction

Formal leadership roles contribute to the credibility of an individual as a leader; however, hierarchical status alone is insufficient to explain how and when organizational members perceive others as leaders. Recognizing that leadership reflects more than formal status and role-definitions, theories of leadership have evolved from predominantly top-down, hierarchical perspectives toward relationally-centered models (Day et al., 2006; Denies et al., 2012; Lord & Dinh, 2014; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Indeed, relational leadership theory is an emerging perspective that underscores the socially constructed nature of leadership through interpersonal processes (Uhl-Bien, 2006), seeing leadership as emerging from complex interpersonal dynamics among members of organizations (Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012).

Embedded within these broader relational perspectives of leadership, leadership identity construction theory focuses on the dynamics by which leadership emerges, as well as on leadership processes as they unfold among all organizational members, rather than only concerning formal leaders (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Through this lens, *leader* can be conceptualized as a positive identity that is socially constructed through a process of leadership claiming and granting. Individuals claim an identity as a leader (through their words or actions) and these claims are met either by others' corresponding grants of a leader identity to the individual, or by others' counter-claims of a leader identity for themselves. According to this view, leadership is less a matter of formal position, but rather emerges as individuals claim and grant leader identities through a social interaction process that involves individuals' own internalization of an identity, as well as broader recognition and endorsement of that identity from others in the organization (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Thus, a leadership identity is not merely an intra-individual, personal identity, but is recognized by other organizational members as a socially constructed (DeRue et al., 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2003) and negotiated relationship.

Leadership identity construction theory (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) builds on research on leadership emergence by explicating the interactive, social process through which individuals come to be seen as leaders. Whereas leadership emergence research has traditionally focused on traits (e.g., personality, cognitive capacity, emotional intelligence; Foti & Hauenstein, 2007; Taggar, Hackett, & Saha, 1999; Wolff, Pescosolido, & Druskat, 2002) and discrete behaviors (e.g., task-focused behaviors; Bales, 1950; Lord, 1977; Taggar et al., 1999) that predict leader emergence, leadership identity construction theory offers propositions about how relational dynamics between group members predict leader emergence. That is, this theory centers not only on the behavior of the individual who eventually emerges as a leader but also on the behavior and reactions of fellow group members.

## Claiming and granting leadership

At the heart of DeRue and Ashford's (2010) model of leadership identity construction is the inherently social process of leadership claiming and granting. While a person's identity as a leader may be more likely to emerge in the presence of a formal title or position of authority, leader identities fundamentally emerge from explicit or implicit leadership claiming and granting. Through leadership claiming, a person (whom we term the *actor*) explicitly or implicitly negotiates (Kopelman, 2014) a leadership role for him/herself. The actor may claim a leadership role by explicitly negotiating during a conversation — proclaiming that s/he will take the lead in a meeting or project, for instance. Another actor might instead rely on implicit negotiations, communicating indirectly to accomplish

similar claiming, for example by sitting at the head of the table in a meeting. Claims serve to establish oneself as a leader within a particular group at a particular time.

Conversely, leadership granting occurs when an actor acknowledges another as a leader. Granting too may be genuinely negotiated explicitly or implicitly (Kopelman, 2014), for instance through verbal acknowledgment or simply nodding one's head. The act of granting a leader identity can precede a claim (e.g., "would you like to take the lead on this project?") or may arise in response to another's claim (e.g., "yes, I agree that you should take the lead on this project"). Any member of the organization can participate in the claiming and granting processes, and as more individuals offer acceptance and support for a given claim or grant of leadership, the identified leader's identity is further strengthened (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

Claims and grants of leadership do not occur in a vacuum, and as noted above, typically occur in sequence as individuals respond to others' claims or grants (e.g., accepting another person's claim of leadership by offering a corresponding grant; DeRue & Ashford, 2010). In the current paper, we examine this relational process by not only considering the influence of an actor's claims or grants on perceived leadership but also how others' responses to such claiming and granting behaviors shape perceived leadership. Specifically, another person (whom we term the *respondent*) can accept or reject the actor's claiming/granting behavior.<sup>1</sup> A respondent may accept an actor's claim, reinforcing the notion that the actor should lead, or a respondent may reject or invalidate another's leadership claim, depriving the person of recognition as a leader. Rejection of an actor's leadership claim may stem from a lack of faith in the actor's competence or perhaps from a respondent's desire to counter-claim leadership for him/herself. Likewise, actors offering grants of leadership to others may have their grants accepted or rejected by respondents as part of this social process of leadership identity construction.

Though much theorizing on leader identity construction has focused on an individual's perception of his or her own leadership (or followership) stemming from participation in a claiming/granting interaction, the emergence of leadership involves not only actors (who claim/grant) and respondents (who accept/reject these claims/grants), but also others who observe these interactions between the actor and respondent and subsequently endorse the leadership being constructed in the interaction (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). These observers may include fellow team members watching interactions between actors and respondents, as well as individuals outside the formal group context (e.g., audience members viewing a political meeting). Though fundamentally dyadic, claiming/granting interactions occur in the broader social context (i.e., in the presence of others), thereby influencing numerous others' perceptions of the actor and respondent as leaders. In this way, leadership claiming and granting (and respondents' reactions) not only shape actors' and respondents' evaluations of themselves and their own leadership but also influence observers' perceptions of who holds leadership — potentially shaping observers' behavior (e.g., influencing whose opinions or plans they are more likely to follow). Individuals regularly face scenarios at work in which they must select the suggestion, proposal, or stance of one team member over another; in these situations, it becomes important to understand how team members influence others' (i.e., observers') attitudes and behavior through leadership claiming and granting. This notion is rooted in theories of managerial power and influence tactics (Yukl, 1994; Yukl, Kim, & Falbe, 1996), although we conceptualize leadership influence as a negotiated behavior any organizational member can enact (as opposed to these theories' foci on formal leaders, such as managers). Indeed, although the leadership role can be shared within teams (e.g., Pearce & Conger, 2004), the relative influence of each person can shift between situations and over time such that team members, even under conditions of shared leadership, typically do not wield identical influence. Rather, observers often must support one party over another based on each party's differential leadership and influence within the group, team, or organization.

The goal of this paper is thus to understand how the interaction between actor claiming/granting and respondent acceptance/rejection influences observers' perceptions of the actor and respondent, and how this interaction drives observers' subsequent decision-making. To do so, we first develop hypotheses regarding the effects of the claiming/granting interaction on observers' perceptions of leadership. We then turn attention to perceived competence as a mediating mechanism and to observer gender as a moderator of these leadership perceptions. Finally, consistent with the above discussion of leadership and influence, we consider the downstream behavioral effects of these leadership perceptions on observer decision-making.

## Effects of leadership claiming and granting on perceived leadership

Consistent with leadership identity construction theory (DeRue & Ashford, 2010), we posit that actors' leadership claiming/granting and respondents' acceptance/rejection of it cue observers about who holds leadership. In terms of leadership claiming, the categorization theory of leadership suggests that leadership classifications depend on the extent to which one's behavior and traits match a leader prototype (Cronshaw & Lord, 1987; Lord, Foti, & deVader, 1984). Leadership claiming is proposed to be a form of prototypical leader behavior, and so it should enhance perceptions of leadership (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Palich & Hom, 1992). Leadership claiming may also signal that one is high in prototypical leader traits, such as active participation (Epitropaki et al., 2013), further explaining why a "claimer" is likely to match observers' schemas of leadership. Claiming may be particularly effective at conveying confidence, a trait that virtually every review identifies as central to leadership emergence (see Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002). Therefore, leadership claiming may heighten leadership ratings by signaling that the claimer has both leader-like behavior and traits.

<sup>1</sup> Note that a respondent's acceptance or rejection of an actor's leadership behavior is also a form of leadership claiming or granting. For instance, a respondent's acceptance of an actor's leadership claim constitutes a grant, while acceptance of an actor's leadership grant constitutes a claim. For the sake of clarity, we refer to the respondent's behavior as either acceptance or rejection to differentiate it from the actor's claiming/granting behavior.

However, a leader claim in isolation provides observers insufficient information to determine leadership influence; observers also need information about the legitimacy and appropriateness of an actor's claim (Kopelman, 2009; Weber, Kopelman, & Messick, 2004), which respondents' reactions provide. When a respondent accepts an actor's leadership claim, this acceptance communicates that the claim is appropriate and warranted. This agreement between multiple parties about who holds leadership subsequently clarifies and strengthens one's leadership identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Therefore, when an actor's leadership claim is reinforced through respondent acceptance (vs. rejection), perceptions of the *actor* as a leader should be higher, as the actor's leadership influence is reinforced by both actor and respondent behaviors.

In contrast to leadership claiming, granting indicates that one does not want to lead and is adopting a follower identity. Granting may signal a lack of confidence in one's ideas or ability to lead, or it may convey disinterest in active group participation; any of these possibilities would weaken the match between granting behavior and a prototypical leader according to the categorization theory of leadership (Lord et al., 1984). Yet, as with claiming, respondent reactions provide additional information with which observers can judge the appropriateness of the granting behavior. When a respondent accepts a leadership grant, s/he signals that this behavior is appropriate and perhaps justified (Kopelman, 2009; Weber et al., 2004). Both the actor and respondent acknowledge the respondent as leader and the actor as follower in this scenario, which clarifies and strengthens these identities (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Because this dynamic establishes the actor as a follower, it should lower perceptions of the actor as a leader, compared to when the respondent rejects a leadership grant.

When a respondent rejects a leadership grant, it becomes unclear who the leader and follower are. Based on leadership identity construction theory, rejection of an actor's behavior – whether a leadership claim or grant – results in “failed construction” of a leader identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Although the actor relinquished leadership through granting, the leader role was not passed to the respondent due to his or her rejection of it; therefore, the actor is still a contender for the leadership identity. Comparing instances in which an actor's leadership grant is accepted versus rejected, perceptions of the actor as a leader will thus likely be higher when his or her grant is rejected, due to the ambiguity presented by a rejected grant. The leader identity is not yet established, as it is when the respondent accepts a leadership grant (DeRue & Ashford, 2010), so the actor could still assume the leader identity.

Considering these four scenarios (acceptance or rejection of a leadership claim or grant), we hypothesize the following with regard to their effects on ratings of the *actor* as a leader:

**Hypothesis 1.** Actor leadership claiming/granting and respondent acceptance/rejection interact in predicting observer ratings of the *actor* as a leader, such that ratings of actor leadership are (a) higher when the respondent accepts, rather than rejects, an actor's claim of leadership, and (b) lower when the respondent accepts, rather than rejects, an actor's grant of leadership.

Similarly, building on DeRue and Ashford's (2010) model, we propose that observer perceptions of the *respondent's* leadership are influenced by the interaction of actor and respondent behaviors. In particular, we expect that leadership perceptions of the respondent will be lower when the respondent accepts (rather than rejects) an actor's leadership claim. In this case, the respondent adopts a follower role, forgoing a leader role. The actor and respondent agree on their relative positions, thereby strengthening them (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Framed differently, we expect leadership ratings of the respondent to be higher when s/he rejects an actor's claim. In this scenario, challenging the actor's leadership not only weakens observers' leadership perceptions of the actor by flagging his/her claim as inappropriate (Kopelman, 2009; Weber et al., 2004), but likely also indicates that the respondent is willing and capable to lead. Rejecting an actor's claim of leadership communicates power and confidence, and this leader-like behavior could enhance the schematic match between the respondent and a prototypical leader based on the categorization theory of leadership (Lord et al., 1984).

At the same time, we expect that perceptions of respondent leadership will be higher when the respondent accepts (rather than rejects) an actor's *grant* of leadership. Here, the respondent assumes a greater leadership identity for him/herself at the expense of the actor's leadership. Once again, the respondent behavior indicates willingness and confidence to lead, increasing the schematic match between the respondent and a prototypical leader (Lord et al., 1984). Both parties also acknowledge the respondent as a leader through their complementary granting and accepting (i.e., claiming) behavior, resulting in enhanced leadership perceptions of the respondent (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

In terms of the effects of this interaction between actors' claiming/granting and respondents' acceptance/rejection on perceptions of the *respondent* as a leader, we thus hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 2.** Actor leadership claiming/granting and respondent acceptance/rejection interact in predicting observer ratings of the *respondent* as a leader, such that ratings of respondent leadership are (a) lower when the respondent accepts, rather than rejects, an actor's claim of leadership, and (b) higher when the respondent accepts, rather than rejects, an actor's grant of leadership.

### How leadership claiming and granting influence perceptions of leadership

Beyond exploring how patterns of actor leadership claiming/granting, in conjunction with respondent acceptance/rejection, influence observers' leadership ratings of both the actor and the respondent, we next address the psychological mechanisms through which these interactions influence observers' determinations of leadership influence. According to the stereotype content model (Fiske et al., 2002), judgments (i.e., stereotypes, classifications) of individuals can best be explained as varying along two dimensions: competence (i.e., agency) and warmth (i.e., communality). Competence, in particular, is a key component of leadership judgments, as mental models of leaders typically encompass agentic traits, including competence (Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002). Individuals

believed to be high in competence are afforded higher status and influence (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Cuddy et al., 2011; Fiske et al., 2002; Hollander, 1961), and recent research suggests that they are also more likely to emerge as leaders (Ho et al., 2012).

Drawing on this empirical literature and the stereotype content model, we propose that leadership *claims* – especially those reinforced through respondent acceptance – signal greater competence. Claiming is apt to convey traits (e.g., confidence, initiative) associated with greater competence, particularly when claiming is reinforced through agreement between the parties (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). We thus hypothesize that when respondents accept (rather than reject) an actor's leadership claim, observers will attribute greater competence to the actor (Martinko, Harvey, & Douglas, 2007).

At the same time, we expect that actors will be rated higher in competence when their *grants* of leadership are rejected (rather than accepted). A respondent who rejects an actor's grant (in essence, turning down the opportunity to lead and "returning" a grant of leadership to the actor) signals his or her belief that the actor would be more effective as a leader, cueing to an observer that the actor may have greater expertise or aptitude for a particular task. Considering the inverse situation, we expect that observers' perceptions of an actor's competence will be lower when the actor's leadership grant is accepted (rather than rejected), as the grant may cue an actor's lack of competence for leading the task. When the respondent accepts a grant, s/he becomes the leader, shifting perceptions of leadership (and corresponding perceptions of highest competence) to him/her. The parties agree that the respondent is best suited to lead (and the actor is best suited to follow), thereby decreasing perceptions of the actor's competence compared to when the actor is still a contender to lead.

**Hypothesis 3.** Actor leadership claiming/granting and respondent acceptance/rejection interact in predicting observer ratings of actor competence, such that ratings of actor competence are higher (lower) when the respondent accepts, rather than rejects, an actor's claim (grant) of leadership.

Likewise, we expect that stronger competence perceptions are afforded to *respondents* when they assert themselves by rejecting an actor's leadership claim. Rejections not only communicate respondent confidence and greater ability but also provide observers with information about the (in)appropriateness (Kopelman, 2009; Weber et al., 2004) of an actor's leader claim (similar to attributions of poorer performance; Martinko et al., 2007), together increasing perceived competence of the respondent. Correspondingly, we expect that perceptions of respondent competence will be lower when respondents accept (rather than reject) an actor's claim of leadership. In this case, the respondent accepts a follower identity and agrees that the actor should lead, communicating confidence in (and presumably greater perceived competence of) the actor. We further expect that respondents will be rated as more competent when they accept (vs. reject) an actor's leadership *grant*, as this acceptance signals that the respondent intends to lead the group, conveying leader-like traits such as competence (Lord et al., 1984). Multiple parties also acknowledge the respondent as a competent leader in this case. The interaction between claiming/granting and acceptance/rejection will therefore also influence perceptions of the respondent's competence:

**Hypothesis 4.** Actor leadership claiming/granting and respondent acceptance/rejection interact in predicting observer ratings of respondent competence, such that ratings of respondent competence are lower (higher) when the respondent accepts, rather than rejects, an actor's claim (grant) of leadership.

Finally, given the role of competence judgments in leadership (as described earlier; Powell et al., 2002; Ho et al., 2012), we expect that perceptions of actor and respondent competence in turn drive leadership ratings. Specifically, we expect that perceptions of actor and respondent competence positively relate to leadership ratings of the actor and respondent, respectively, but negatively relate to leadership ratings of the other party (i.e., of the respondent and actor, respectively). Thus, we hypothesize that competence perceptions mediate (positively for each person's own competence, and negatively for the other person's competence) the relationships between the actor/respondent leadership interaction and leadership ratings. Specifically:

**Hypothesis 5a.** Perceptions of actor competence positively (negatively) predict ratings of the actor's (respondent's) leadership.

**Hypothesis 5b.** Perceptions of respondent competence positively (negatively) predict ratings of the respondent's (actor's) leadership.

**Hypothesis 6.** Perceptions of competence mediate the interactive effects of actor claiming/granting and respondent acceptance/rejection on perceived leadership of (a) the actor and (b) the respondent.

### **When leadership claiming and granting exert influence: the role of observer gender**

Thus far, we have stressed the crucial role of leadership claiming/granting and accepting/rejecting behavior in informing individuals' perceptions of actor and respondent competence and leadership – but the extent to which individuals attend to and integrate this leadership claiming and granting into their impression formation is likely not uniform across all people. Rather, we expect that particular individual differences among observers will amplify or attenuate these perceptions, as they do in other leadership processes (Antonakis et al., 2012; Hall & Lord, 1995; Schyns & Sanders, 2007). Gender, in particular, has repeatedly been shown within the psychological literature to be an important variable that molds perceptions of, and reactions to, others in relational contexts. However, this work has received less attention in the organizational literature. Considering observer gender thus allows leadership scholars to better understand the characteristics of observers that shape their perceptions of leadership, in line with the increasing research focus on individual differences and leadership perceptions.

Based on social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 1991), sex-based differences in upbringing, others' expectations, and division of labor lead to enactment of stereotypical, sex-consistent roles. Women are socialized and encouraged to specialize in interdependence from an early age (Cross & Madson, 1997; Josephs, Markus, & Tafarodi, 1992). The heightened relational self-construals that result (Cross & Madson, 1997) may, in part, explain women's greater attention to and consideration of social cues. Women are generally effective at transmitting and receiving nonverbal communications (Deaux, 1985; Hall, 1978, 1984; Schmid, Mast, Bombari, & Mast, 2011; Tannen, 1994), empathizing with others (Bekker & van Assen, 2008; Eagly & Wood, 1991; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983), and encoding relational information (Ross & Holmberg, 1992). They may also be more readily influenced by others than men (Eagly, 1983). These gender differences in relational attentiveness and response appear to develop at an early age, as girls as young as two years demonstrate greater concern for others' distress, compared to boys (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992). In formal leadership positions, women exhibit greater transformational and participative leadership, thereby engaging in more individualized consideration (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

Applied to relational leadership identity construction, gender is likely to influence the extent to which observers draw upon the relational context (i.e., the actor and respondent interactions) when judging the competence of actors and respondents. As Fletcher (2004) emphasizes, emerging relational models of leadership, such as the one discussed here, are not gender neutral, but rather, are rooted in longstanding gender – and informal power – dynamics. Examining the moderating role of observer gender offers a more nuanced understanding of when the interpersonal context will be more or less integrated into observers' perceptions of the competence of potential leaders. Female observers likely afford greater consideration to respondents' reactions to the actor (i.e., to the interpersonal dynamic) when judging how competent each person is as a potential leader. Male observers, on the other hand, may respond primarily to an actor's leadership behavior, heeding less consideration to the respondent's reaction (i.e., the social context in which the leadership behavior is embedded). Therefore, consistent with social role theory and related empirical findings, we expect that female (more than male) observers will incorporate the interaction between the actor and respondent into their judgments of competence, amplifying the effects outlined in Hypotheses 3 and 4:

**Hypothesis 7.** Observer gender moderates the interactive effects of actor claiming/granting and respondent acceptance/rejection on (a) actor competence and (b) respondent competence, such that the effects are amplified for female (vs. male) observers.

### Behavioral implications of leadership perceptions

Beyond predicting observers' perceptions, leadership claiming/granting and accepting/rejecting behaviors likely also influence observers' behavior. That is, leadership perceptions resulting from leadership identity construction interactions shape how individuals process information and make decisions in groups, teams, or organizations. Substantial literature supports the significant influence leaders (and perceived leaders) have on others' actions and decision-making. As Hogg (2001) succinctly states: “[Leadership] involves actively influencing other people” (p. 189). Stronger leadership evaluations – and their association with greater competence – signal effectiveness, warranting follower support (Cuddy et al., 2011; Hogg, 2001), and leaders are often afforded positive characteristics (e.g., prestige, heroism) that boost their influence on others (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985). Building on these findings, we expect that greater perceptions of actor (or respondent) leadership will increase the likelihood that observers will adopt the actor's (or respondent's) stated preferences or plan. Specifically, we propose that in interdependent decision-making settings, when an actor and respondent advocate different proposals, observers are more likely to support the proposal of the person whom they deem more leader-like.

**Hypothesis 8.** More positive leadership ratings of the actor (respondent) positively (negatively) predict observers' adoption of the actor's proposal.

### Study Overview

The overall conceptual model advanced in our hypotheses is displayed in Fig. 1. To test this conceptual model, we conduct three experimental studies with working adults and MBA student participants. Across studies, experimental design with random assignment to conditions holds constant the numerous additional factors (e.g., past performance, friendship) that might influence

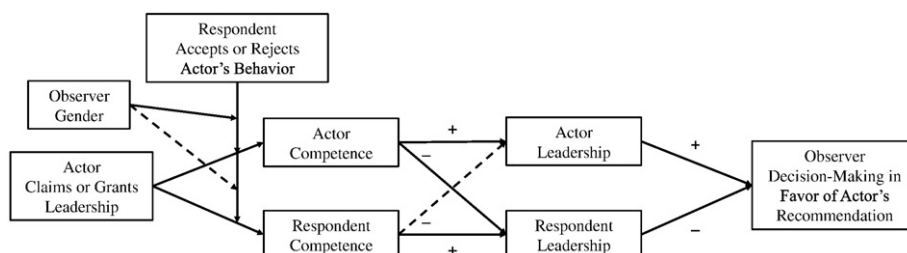


Fig. 1. Relationships in Hypotheses 1–8. Solid lines represent pathways significant at  $p < .05$ ; dotted lines represent non-significant pathways.

perceptions of leadership and decision-making, thereby enabling us to test whether our focal variables predict the hypothesized effects. In Studies 1a and 1b, we test whether the leadership interaction between an actor and respondent predicts perceptions of leadership, constructively replicating our predicted effects across two different manifestations of leadership identity construction interactions. Study 2 identifies how and when actor claiming/granting and respondent acceptance/rejection impact perceptions of leadership, as well as observer decision-making.

## Study 1a methods

### *Participants and procedure*

Through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk; see Barger, Behrend, Sharek, & Sinar, 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012, and Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011 for descriptions; see Landers & Behrend, 2015 for advantages of online sampling),<sup>2</sup> U.S. working adults completed an avatar video-based study about team decision-making within a large, multinational firm. We excluded 13 participants who provided incomplete responses or failed attention checks, resulting in  $N = 200$  (52% women). Ages ranged from 18 to 64 years ( $M = 34$  years;  $SD = 11.77$  years), and participants averaged 12.1 years ( $SD = 10.7$  years) of work experience.

Before beginning the study, participants were asked to ensure that they could view and hear a video on their computers. They then read the following: "Imagine that you work for a multinational water pipeline company called Water Main Pipeline Corporation. You are the vice president for the North American division of the company. You will be attending a meeting between the vice presidents of different divisions who are collaborating to develop a large-scale water project." Members of the meeting all held equal status. Participants learned that the meeting's purpose was to determine which of two contractors to select for the project. They were told they would watch a video of the meeting in which team members would speak about their preferred contractors.

When ready, participants pressed play to watch the video, which they could replay and return to as many times as they wished. Professional computer programmers developed the videos in which four male avatars sat at a table in a conference room, simulating a negotiated decision-making context. The same voiceovers were used in all videos, so that inflections did not vary by condition. The voiceovers were real voices, not created using text-to-speech software. In the videos, two members engaged in leadership identity construction, enacting leadership claiming/granting and acceptance/rejection. In doing so, each offered a different opinion about which contractor should be selected, providing a rationale for his position. An advantage of using videos of avatars, compared to written vignettes, is that they increase experimental realism, thereby increasing participant engagement and authenticity of reactions (Ahn, Fox, & Bailenson, 2012; de Melo, Gratch, & Carnevale, 2014; Hughes & Huby, 2002; Pierce & Aguinis, 1997). Ultimately, this method increases external validity, a frequent limitation of experimental designs (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014).

### *Manipulation*

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (actor claiming or granting leadership)  $\times$  2 (respondent acceptance or rejection of the actor's behavior) between-subjects design. In the *claiming leadership* conditions, the actor stood and claimed leadership by saying, "Let's get started. I was planning to take the lead in this meeting, okay? I'll present what I'm thinking and then we can discuss other alternatives" (see Appendix). The respondent did one of two things. In the *accept* condition, he said, "That sounds good to me," and the actor proceeded to make a case for why team members should select his preferred contractor. Afterward, the respondent discussed why team members should select his preferred contractor. In the *reject* condition, the respondent said, "Actually, I've been thinking about this project a lot and would like to present my ideas first." The actor sat down, and the respondent stood to explain why the team members should select his preferred contractor. Afterward, the actor discussed why team members should select his preferred contractor instead.

In the *granting leadership* conditions, the actor granted leadership to the respondent by saying, "I was planning to follow your lead in this meeting, okay? You can present your thoughts to us, and then we can discuss other alternatives." The respondent either accepted the grant, standing up and making a case for his contractor first, or rejected the grant, telling the actor to discuss his contractor first. Participant distribution by condition was: accept leader claiming ( $N = 47$ ); reject leader claiming ( $N = 53$ ); accept leader granting ( $N = 49$ ); and reject leader granting ( $N = 51$ ).

### *Measurement*

We checked the manipulations by asking participants to assess the extent to which they perceived the actor and respondent as claiming or granting a leadership role from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Specifically, to assess perceived claiming, we asked, "To

<sup>2</sup> MTurk workers are employed across a diverse range of occupations and industries (Barger et al., 2011). Compared to undergraduate student samples, MTurk workers are older and have more work experience, better matching the U.S. population (Behrend, Sharek, Meade, & Wiebe, 2011; Paolacci et al., 2010). Several scholars recommend MTurk, compared to other sample sources, when studying organizational research (Barger et al., 2011), and many studies have demonstrated that MTurk data quality is as good as other sources (e.g., applicant populations; Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004; Paolacci et al., 2010; Mason & Suri, 2012), if not better (e.g., compared to undergraduate student samples; Behrend et al., 2011; Buhrmester et al., 2011). Experiments conducted via MTurk may in fact contain higher internal validity than experiments conducted in-person (Paolacci et al., 2010). To recruit MTurk workers, we made each study available to U.S. workers with approval rates of 95% or higher (i.e., having successfully completed 95% of previous tasks). We screened for insufficient effort responding, consistent with accepted guidelines (Huang, Liu, & Bowling, 2014).

what extent do you believe this person [whose photo appeared above the statement] was trying to become a leader during the meeting?" (in contrast to the evaluation of *actual* leadership in which respondents rated the extent to which the actor/respondent was a leader during the meeting). To assess perceived granting, we asked, "To what extent do you believe this person was trying to make someone else a leader during the meeting?" Consistent with our manipulations, participants rated the actor as engaging in significantly more claiming behavior in the "leader claiming" conditions ( $M_{\text{Leader Claiming}} = 6.27$  and  $M_{\text{Leader Granting}} = 5.33$ ,  $F(1,196) = 19.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and engaging in significantly more granting behavior in the "leader granting" conditions ( $M_{\text{Leader Claiming}} = 1.93$  and  $M_{\text{Leader Granting}} = 3.39$ ,  $F(1,196) = 40.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Ratings of the respondent also followed our manipulated conditions, such that participants rated the respondent as engaging in more claiming behavior when he rejected the actor's claim (which may constitute a counter-claim) or accepted the actor's grant (a method of leadership claiming, as noted earlier), compared to when he rejected the grant or accepted the claim ( $M_{\text{Claim Accepted}} = 3.87$ ,  $M_{\text{Claim Rejected}} = 5.63$ ,  $M_{\text{Grant Accepted}} = 4.64$ ,  $M_{\text{Grant Rejected}} = 3.36$ ;  $F(1,194) = 40.72$ ,  $p < .001$  for the interaction). Likewise, ratings of the respondent's granting behaviors followed our expected pattern ( $M_{\text{Claim Accepted}} = 3.53$ ,  $M_{\text{Claim Rejected}} = 2.21$ ,  $M_{\text{Grant Accepted}} = 2.79$ ,  $M_{\text{Grant Rejected}} = 4.24$ ,  $F(1,194) = 34.24$ ,  $p < .001$  for the interaction), suggesting that our manipulations functioned effectively.<sup>3</sup>

The dependent variables, leadership ratings, were assessed by asking participants to rate the extent to which they perceived each team member as a leader from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a very large extent*) after the meeting. The analysis focused on leadership ratings of the actor and respondent.

### Study 1a results and discussion

Univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant interaction between the actor's leadership claim/grant and the respondent's reaction (accept/reject) in predicting leadership ratings of the actor ( $F(1,196) = 4.42$ ,  $p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ). Specifically, when the respondent accepted (vs. rejected) the actor's leadership claim, participants rated the actor significantly higher as a leader ( $M_{\text{Claim Accepted}} = 4.45$ ,  $M_{\text{Claim Rejected}} = 3.98$ ;  $F(1,196) = 7.03$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1a. However, leadership ratings of the actor did not vary based on respondent acceptance (vs. rejection) when the actor granted leadership ( $M_{\text{Grant Accepted}} = 4.06$ ,  $M_{\text{Grant Rejected}} = 4.12$ , n.s.). Thus, Hypothesis 1b was not supported. Leadership evaluations of the actor were dependent on respondent reactions only when the actor claimed but not granted leadership (see Fig. 2). We address this pattern of results further in our general discussion.

There was also a significant interaction between actor claiming/granting and the respondent's reaction in predicting leader ratings of the respondent ( $F(1,196) = 19.64$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ ). When the respondent rejected (vs. accepted) the actor's leadership claim, participants rated the respondent higher on leadership ( $M_{\text{Claim Accepted}} = 2.81$ ,  $M_{\text{Claim Rejected}} = 3.49$ ;  $F(1,196) = 12.64$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .06$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2a. As expected, participants also rated the respondent higher on leadership when he accepted (vs. rejected) a leadership grant ( $M_{\text{Grant Accepted}} = 3.24$ ,  $M_{\text{Grant Rejected}} = 2.73$ ;  $F(1,196) = 7.35$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2b. These results are consistent with the notion that a respondent's reaction to an actor's leadership behavior not only influences perceptions of the actor but also of the respondent as a leader.

The results of Study 1a thus supported Hypotheses 1a, 2a, and 2b, with the actor's claiming behavior (and the respondent's reaction to it) driving the effects for Hypothesis 1. Support for these hypotheses was strengthened by the use of an experimental video vignette methodology. Specifically, the experimental design allowed for causal inferences to be made regarding the effects of leadership claiming and granting interactions, while the realistic and immersive experience afforded by the use of a video-based scenario with real voices and human avatars increased the external validity and generalizability of the findings (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014).

Despite the noted strengths of our avatar-based experimental video approach, one potential concern with this design is whether characteristics of the avatars (e.g., appearance, attractiveness, and height) influenced participants' beliefs and attitudes (see Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003 and Little, Burriss, Jones, & Roberts, 2007 for discussions of the effects of appearance). Although the appearance of each avatar did not vary across our randomly assigned experimental conditions, and thus pose minimal threat to the validity our findings, we nonetheless sought to further rule out possible confounding effects through constructive replication (Eden, 2002; Neuliep & Crandall, 1993). In Study 1b, we replicated our hypothesized effects using both a different medium (text vs. video) and scenario (without avatars) to confirm that leadership claiming and granting interactions are responsible for observed differences in leadership perceptions.

### Study 1b methods

#### Participants and procedure

Working adults ( $N = 254$ ; 49% women) from the U.S. were recruited through Amazon MTurk to complete the study. We carefully screened data for incomplete responses, insufficient effort responding (Huang et al., 2015), and an attention check (i.e., which contractor each team member advocated). Participant ages ranged from 20 to 69 years ( $M = 36.73$  years;  $SD = 10.61$  years), and they averaged 15.74 years ( $SD = 8.17$  years) of work experience. The task used in this study was functionally equivalent to that of Study 1a, and participants were presented with the same introductory materials describing their role in the water pipeline corporation and the need to make a decision between two potential contractors for an upcoming project. However, unlike Study 1a,

<sup>3</sup> Interactions are reported for our manipulation checks pertaining to the respondent, because unlike the actor's behavior (claiming or granting), the respondent's behavior (acceptance or rejection) is dependent upon the actor's behavior and so cannot be analyzed in isolation.



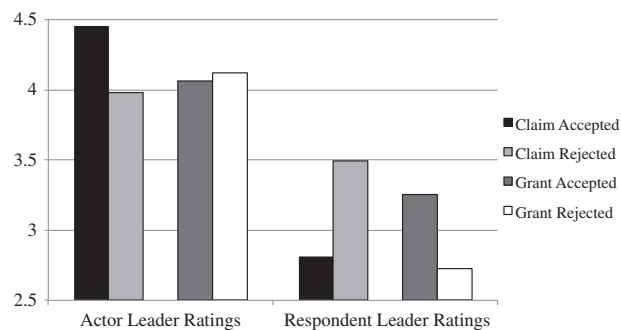


Fig. 2. Study 1a effects of the interpersonal leadership dynamic on observer ratings of actor and respondent leadership.

participants were exposed to the behavior of meeting participants through a series of images in which four faceless figures (three-dimensional “stick figure”-like cartoons devoid of any facial characteristics or other distinguishing appearance) were seated at a table. The Study 1a dialogue was transcribed and presented as a written “speech bubble” emanating from the speaking figure in each image (with each image presenting one line of dialogue before participants scrolled to the next image for subsequent dialogue). Participants then completed measures of their perceptions of each team member in the scenario.

As in Study 1a, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (actor claiming or granting leadership)  $\times$  2 (respondent acceptance or rejection of the actor's behavior) between-subjects design. The content of each manipulation was the same as in Study 1a, except that it was delivered in written (vs. verbal) form with faceless actors and respondents. Participant distribution by condition was: accept leader claiming ( $N = 62$ ); reject leader claiming ( $N = 67$ ); accept leader granting ( $N = 57$ ); and reject leader granting ( $N = 68$ ). The dependent variables, leader ratings of the actor and respondent, were again assessed by asking participants to rate the extent to which they perceived each team member as a leader from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a very large extent*) after the meeting.

### Study 1b results and discussion

Using ANOVA, the data from Study 1b reinforced the findings of Study 1a, revealing a significant interaction between actor and respondent behaviors in predicting participants' leader ratings of both the actor ( $F(1,250) = 4.51, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ) and respondent ( $F(1,250) = 30.31, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .11$ ). Replicating the pattern of results in Study 1a, participants rated the actor as more leader-like when the respondent accepted versus rejected the actor's leadership claim ( $M_{\text{Claim Accepted}} = 4.34$ ,  $M_{\text{Claim Rejected}} = 3.82$ ;  $F(1,250) = 9.87, p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ ), supporting [Hypothesis 1a](#). However respondent reactions again did not influence leadership ratings of the actor when he granted leadership ( $M_{\text{Grant Accepted}} = 3.47$ ,  $M_{\text{Grant Rejected}} = 3.46$ , n.s.), leaving [Hypothesis 1b](#) unsupported. Likewise, participants rated the respondent higher on leadership when he rejected versus accepted the actor's leader claim ( $M_{\text{Claim Accepted}} = 3.08$ ,  $M_{\text{Claim Rejected}} = 4.15$ ;  $F(1,250) = 35.55, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .12$ ) in support of [Hypothesis 2a](#). Participants were also marginally more likely to rate the respondent higher on leadership when he accepted versus rejected an actor's grant of leadership ( $M_{\text{Grant Accepted}} = 3.65$ ,  $M_{\text{Grant Rejected}} = 3.31$ ;  $F(1,250) = 3.47, p = .06$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ), providing some support for the proposition advanced in [Hypothesis 2b](#).

The results of Study 1b thus provide a constructive replication of the Study 1a findings, further supporting our hypothesized leader claiming/granting and responding behaviors as drivers of the observed effects (and again suggesting the stronger effects of claiming over granting, which we discuss further in the general discussion), rather than any particular features of the context or characters in the avatar videos influencing results.

Given this replication, we use the richer, more realistic video vignette as the stimuli for Study 2 (based on [Aguinis & Bradley, 2014](#)), where we expand upon our prior findings to explore the role of perceived competence as a mediating mechanism for the differential leader ratings observed in Studies 1a and 1b. We also examine who is most influenced by these leadership interactions by studying gender as a moderator, and examine a behavioral consequence (decision-making) of differences in leadership ratings. In addition to expanding upon the conceptual model examined in our prior studies, Study 2 further extends the generalizability and external validity of the hypothesized findings by utilizing a sample of both working adults (recruited online) and part-time MBA students (who also worked full-time).

### Study 2 methods

#### Participants and procedure

A total of 520 participants (47.5% women), recruited via Amazon MTurk ( $n = 360$ ; screened for incomplete responses and failed attention checks) and through participation in an elective part-time MBA negotiation course assignment at a large U.S. university

( $n = 160$ ), completed the same video study as Study 1 about team decision-making. Including a dummy variable to control for the two sources of data did not alter results for any of our hypothesized effects, nor was the variable statistically significant in any of the models. Overall, ages ranged from 18 to 74 years ( $M = 31$  years;  $SD = 9.32$  years). Participants averaged 8.8 years ( $SD = 8.53$  years) of full-time work experience. The procedures were identical to Study 1a, but included additional perceptual and behavioral measures (e.g., asking participants to select one of the two contractors debated during the video). Participants were randomly assigned to the same conditions in a 2 (actor claims or grants leadership)  $\times$  2 (respondent accepts or rejects the actor's behavior) between-subjects design. Participant distribution by condition was: accept leader claiming ( $N = 125$ ;  $n = 60$  women); reject leader claiming ( $N = 138$ ;  $n = 79$  women); accept leader granting ( $N = 130$ ;  $n = 53$  women); and reject leader granting ( $N = 127$ ;  $n = 55$  women).

### Measurement

Demographic questions, including observer gender, appeared at the end of the study so as not to prime social identities.

### Leader rating

Participants rated the extent to which they perceived both the actor and respondent as leaders (order randomized) on scales from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a very large extent*).

### Influence on decision-making

Participants selected one of the two contractors (order randomized) debated during the meeting. This measure assessed which of the two team members (actor or respondent) more strongly influenced participant decision-making. Responses were coded 0 if participants selected the respondent's desired candidate and 1 if they selected the actor's desired candidate.

### Competence

Participants rated the extent to which they perceived the actor and respondent (order randomized) as competent by answering five competence items (e.g., competent, intelligent) from work on the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002) from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). These items demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

## Study 2 results and discussion

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables appear in Table 1. We used hierarchical linear regression and the PROCESS subroutine (Hayes, 2013) in SPSS 20 to test our hypotheses. As shown in Table 2 (Models 3 and 5), we first replicated the pattern of results observed in Studies 1a and 1b; the interaction between the actor's claim (vs. grant) of leadership and the respondent's acceptance (vs. rejection) significantly predicted observers' leader ratings of both the actor ( $b = .37$ ,  $t = 2.50$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ) and the respondent ( $b = -1.24$ ,  $t = -7.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .09$ ), providing further support for Hypotheses 1 and 2.

### The mediating role of competence and moderating role of participant gender

We next used the PROCESS subroutine (Model 13) to generate an omnibus test of the mediating role of competence, moderated by observer gender, in explaining the effect of actor leadership behavior and respondent reactions on leadership ratings

**Table 1**

Study 2 variable means, standard deviations, and inter-item correlations.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Observer gender	.48	.50							
2. Actor claims/grants	.51	.50	.11**						
3. Respondent accepts/rejects	.49	.50	-.06	-.03					
4. Actor competence	5.79	.87	.16***	.14**	.01				
5. Respondent competence	5.45	1.04	.12**	.18***	-.11**	.31***			
6. Actor leader rating	4.10	.86	.03	.06	.14**	.46***	.07		
7. Respondent leader rating	3.39	1.01	.01	.05	-.13**	.02	.53***	-.02	
8. Decision-making	.46	.50	-.10*	-.01	-.07†	-.07	-.02	.07	-.02

Note. Observer gender: 0 = man and 1 = woman. Actor behavior: 0 = grant and 1 = claim. Respondent behavior: 0 = reject and 1 = accept. Decision-making: 0 = respondent's recommendation and 1 = actor's recommendation.

$n = 520$ .

†  $p \leq .10$ .

\*  $p \leq .05$ .

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

**Table 2**  
Study 2 regression results predicting competence, leadership, and observer decision-making.

Variables	Actor competence		Respondent competence		Actor leadership		Respondent leadership		Observer decision-making
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7		
Constant	5.52***	5.02***	4.02***	1.57***	3.17***	1.40***	.58		
Actor claims/grants	.30*	.82***	-.07	-.10	.69***	.26*	.34***		
Respondent accepts/rejects	.08	.35*	.05	.10	.36**	.18†	.10		
Actor behavior × respondent behavior	-.17	-1.05***	.37**	.25†	-1.24***	-.66***	-.49***		
Observer gender	.43**	.18					-.02		
Actor behavior × observer gender	-.37†	.07					-.20		
Respondent behavior × observer gender	-.32	-.04					.03		
Actor behavior × respondent behavior × observer gender	.75**	-.01					.05		
Actor competence				.46***		-.15***	-.07*		
Respondent competence				-.04		.52***	.01		
Actor leadership							.10***		
Respondent leadership							-.06*		
R <sup>2</sup>	.06***	.12***	.04**	.24***	.11***	.34***	.09***		

Note. Reported values are unstandardized regression coefficients (unstandardized binary logistic regression coefficients, where applicable). Actor behavior: 0 = grant and 1 = claim. Respondent behavior: 0 = reject and 1 = accept. Observer gender: 0 = man and 1 = woman. Observer decision-making: 0 = respondent's recommendation and 1 = actor's recommendation.

†  $p \leq .10$ .

\*  $p \leq .05$ .

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

(Hypotheses 3–7). The results of these moderated mediation analyses (coefficients shown in Table 2) revealed a significant three-way interaction between an actor's claim (vs. grant) of leadership, the respondent's response (acceptance or rejection), and participant gender on participants' ratings of the actor's competence ( $b = .75$ ,  $t = 2.50$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ). Specifically, the pattern revealed that the actor was viewed as more competent when the respondent accepted the actor's leadership claim, consistent with Hypothesis 3, but that this interaction only predicted competence ratings among female participants ( $b = .59$ ,  $t = 2.70$ ,  $p = .01$ ), but not among male participants ( $b = -.17$ , n.s.), supporting Hypothesis 7a. There were no significant effects for actor competence related to granting, regardless of observer gender, consistent with previous results pertaining to Hypothesis 1 (for perceptions of actor leadership).

The interaction between actor claiming/granting and respondent acceptance/rejection significantly predicted perceived respondent competence (in the hypothesized directions for both claiming and granting;  $b = -1.05$ ,  $t = -4.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .07$ ), supporting Hypothesis 4. However, the three-way interaction including observer gender did not significantly predict ratings of respondent competence ( $b = -.01$ , n.s.), failing to support Hypothesis 7b. Thus, relational leadership identity construction predicted ratings of respondent competence similarly for both male and female observers.

### Leadership ratings

Our results further revealed that actor and respondent competence ratings significantly related to participants' leadership ratings, together explaining an additional 20% of the variance in actor leadership ratings ( $\Delta R^2 = .20$ ) and an additional 23% of the variance in respondent leadership ratings ( $\Delta R^2 = .23$ ). More specifically, perceptions of the actor's competence positively related to ratings of the actor's leadership ( $b = .46$ ,  $t = 11.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and negatively related to ratings of the respondent's leadership ( $b = -.15$ ,  $t = -3.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 5a. Perceptions of the respondent's competence positively related to ratings of the respondent's leadership ( $b = .52$ ,  $t = 13.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but did not relate to ratings of the actor's leadership ( $b = -.04$ , n.s.), partially supporting Hypothesis 5b. Consistent with these results, our omnibus PROCESS model supported the presence of a three-way conditional indirect effect of actor and respondent behaviors, moderated by participant gender, on ratings of the actor's leadership through perceived actor (but not respondent) competence. Specifically, 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (drawn from 10,000 bootstrap samples) for the conditional indirect effect of an accepted claim on actor leadership through ratings of actor competence crossed zero for male observers  $[-.07, .20]$ , but excluded zero for female observers  $[.08, .41]$  (correspondingly, the intervals for the effect of an accepted grant mirrored this pattern but in opposite sign;  $[-.20, .07]$  for male observers and  $[-.41, -.08]$  for female observers). Results also supported the presence of significant three-way conditional indirect effects of actor and respondent behaviors, moderated by gender, on respondent leadership ratings through actor competence, such that 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effect of an accepted claim through actor competence crossed zero for male observers  $[-.08, .02]$ , but excluded zero for female observers  $[-.19, -.02]$  (with results for an accepted grant again following the same pattern, but in opposite sign;  $[-.02, .08]$  for male observers and  $[.02, .19]$  for female observers). Finally, the results revealed significant conditional indirect effects of actor and respondent behaviors on respondent leadership ratings through respondent competence, but in the same direction for both male and female observers (i.e., no three-way moderation by gender), such that 95% confidence intervals excluded zero for

both male [.26, .61] and female [.30, .65] observers when the respondent rejected the actor's leadership claim (and correspondingly when the respondent rejected the actor's grant of leadership; [–.61, –.26] for male observers and [–.65, –.30] for female observers). All other indirect effect intervals included zero. In light of these results, [Hypothesis 6a](#) pertaining to leadership ratings of the actor was partially supported (supporting mediation by actor but not respondent competence) and [Hypothesis 6b](#) pertaining to leadership ratings of the respondent was fully supported (supporting mediation by both actor and respondent competence). However, the effects of actor competence were contingent on observer gender, consistent with [Hypothesis 7a](#).

### Decision-making

Finally, binary logistic regression results (controlling for ratings of actor and respondent competence, as well as actor and respondent behaviors, participant gender, and their interactions) revealed that participants' perceptions of both actor and respondent leadership significantly influenced their decision-making, explaining an additional 3% of the variation in selecting a contractor candidate ( $\Delta R^2 = .03$ ). Leadership ratings of the actor positively predicted ( $b = .10, p < .001$ ), while leadership ratings of the respondent negatively predicted ( $b = -.06, p = .03$ ), adoption of the actor's (vs. the respondent's) desired candidate, thereby supporting [Hypothesis 8](#).

Summarizing these results in light of our hypothesized effects, our model was supported overall, although interestingly, leadership granting was less predictive of competence and leadership ratings than leadership claiming, and observer gender did not influence perceptions of the respondent (only the actor). These results are represented by the solid and dotted lines in [Fig. 1](#), and we discuss their implications below.

### General discussion

The present set of studies contributes to the relational perspective of leadership ([Uhl-Bien, 2006](#)) by theoretically extending and providing empirical support for leadership identity construction theory ([DeRue & Ashford, 2010](#)), in which leadership is conceptualized as a mutually-recognized role that emerges through a relational process of leadership claiming and granting. Our studies reveal leadership identity construction as a relational, negotiated process ([Dutton et al., 2010](#); [Gelfand et al., 2006](#); [Kopelman, 2014](#); [Kopelman et al., 2009](#)) and empirically address why, how, and when relational leadership identity construction matters.

Across all studies, leadership claiming heightened perceptions of the actor's leadership when a responding team member reinforced (i.e., accepted) – rather than rejected – the claim. Thus, claiming is not sufficient in and of itself to fully explain perceptions of leadership; others' acceptance (or rejection) of the claims also shape judgments of leadership in groups. This notion is consistent with a *logic of appropriateness* ([Kopelman, 2009](#); [Weber et al., 2004](#)), conceptualized as a metaphoric question: “What does a person like me [or him/her] (identity) do (rules) in a situation like this (recognition) given this culture (group)?” ([Kopelman, 2009, p. 161](#)). In this way, respondents' reactions to leadership claiming inform others about the appropriateness of those claims. However, respondents' reactions (i.e., acceptance or rejection) did not influence perceptions of the actor's leadership when the actor granted leadership. In other words, the actor was perceived equally as leader-like after he granted, regardless of the respondent's response. Respondent reactions may thus be more influential in shaping leadership perceptions during claiming, rather than granting, because the actor is forgoing leadership during granting, which may lessen the importance of evaluating his/her leadership. Though unexpected, these results have an intuitive logic; if the actor opts out of a leadership role via granting, observers may be less concerned with gathering and integrating additional information in order to assess the actor's leadership. Alternatively, granting leadership may be consistently interpreted as an act of leadership, irrespective to the response, because empowering the respondent via a grant of leadership signals that the actor has power. When the actor claims leadership though, observers rely on respondents to help determine whether such leadership claims are appropriate and warranted.

The interaction between an actor and respondent not only influenced leadership perceptions of the actor, but also of the respondent. Specifically, ratings of the respondent's leadership increased when he rejected an actor's leadership claim, as well as when he accepted an actor's leadership grant. In the former condition, the respondent challenged the actor's claim, potentially communicating greater skill, power, and/or knowledge about how to lead the group. In the latter condition, the respondent assumed a granted leadership role, confirming that he was competent and eager enough to take the lead. Thus, respondent reactions to another's leadership claiming and granting are important in shaping leadership perceptions of both parties involved in the leadership identity construction process. Interestingly, these leadership identity construction interactions more strongly shaped leadership perceptions of the respondent relative to perceptions of the actor (as evident in the consistently larger effect sizes for respondent leadership ratings across our three studies). This difference may be due to our manipulation – in which the actor always stood and spoke first (initiating the interaction) – which may have resulted in greater leadership perceptions of the actor across conditions (e.g., even when granting), potentially dampening the effects of leadership claiming/granting and acceptance/rejection on perceptions of the actor. Indeed, initiating a meeting or interaction may itself be seen as a claim of leadership, and as discussed below, exploring different manifestations of these claiming and granting behaviors would help future research further elucidate the effects of this identity construction process on both actors and respondents.

These results suggest important implications for the development of both informal and formal leadership in groups and organizations. As actors and respondents informally claim and grant leadership over time, leader and follower identities will strengthen, likely resulting in particular individuals eventually attaining formal leadership roles ([DeRue & Ashford, 2010](#)). For instance, individuals repeatedly recognized informally as leaders within groups may be promoted to higher-ranking positions

or formally assigned to lead team meetings. Thus, leadership construction processes (i.e., claiming/granting interactions) within discrete interactions (e.g., specific meetings) can serve as important building blocks that provide a foundation for longer-term leadership development.

Further, our results conceptually contribute to the leadership emergence literature, as our findings revealed perceived competence as a key mechanism through which relational leadership identity construction drives leadership perceptions. Perceived competence increases when individuals claim leadership for themselves *and* when a second person reinforces their claims, thereby enhancing judgments of the claimant's leadership. In contrast, when one's leadership claim is met with rejection from another, observers perceive the claimant as lower in competence and leadership – while perceiving the party who rejected the leadership claim as more competent and leader-like.

However, observer gender plays a role in this process. Consistent with social role theory and empirical findings (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 1991), perceptions of and reactions to others in relational contexts often vary by observer gender; leadership perceptions during relational leadership identity construction are no exception. The present model incorporates observer gender as a moderator to explain differences in the extent to which respondents' reactions to leadership claiming/granting influence observer perceptions. We found that reactions to (i.e., acceptance or rejection of) an actor's leadership claims more strongly influenced female observers' judgments of the actor's competence, while male observers' perceptions of the actor's competence increased regardless of whether a second person accepted or rejected the claim. These findings support our prediction that female observers attend to and integrate the leadership interactions into their impression formation to a greater extent than male observers. Contrary to our hypotheses, gender differences did not emerge for ratings of the respondent's competence. This may be because when assessing leader claimants, observers may, but are not necessarily required to, incorporate respondents' reactions; however when evaluating respondents, all observers must consider both the claimant's and respondent's behavior given that the respondent's behavior is inherently a reaction to the claimant's behavior. This explanation represents merely an initial speculation and foray into these interesting results, and future research is certainly warranted to explore this finding in greater depth. Indeed, the results for both actor and respondent competence ratings highlight the need for greater consideration of the role of gender in the study of individual differences as predictors of leadership perceptions (Antonakis et al., 2012) and leadership identity construction.

Finally, our findings reveal that relational leadership identity construction and its effects on perceived leadership have important implications for observer decision-making. Observers are more likely to adopt the proposals of claimants or respondents whom they deem more leader-like following leadership claiming and granting. Thus, leadership identity construction not only influences observer perceptions, but also their behavior in interdependent negotiated decision settings, which abound in today's interconnected, team-based workplaces.

#### *Future research directions and practical implications*

Scholars can build on the present studies in a number of ways to further illuminate leadership perceptions and decision-making. First, we focused in our studies on the effects of *overt* actor and respondent leadership behaviors (i.e., explicitly stating that one desires to lead a meeting; verbally accepting or rejecting the leadership claim). Future research might investigate whether similar effects emerge when the actor informally or implicitly claims (or grants) leadership (i.e., engages in nonverbal leadership behaviors, such as sitting at the head of the table) and when the respondent informally accepts (or rejects) the actor's behavior (e.g., nodding or shaking his/her head). We anticipate that the present results would replicate in these conditions, although a greater number of informal behaviors (as opposed to the stronger cues of overt behaviors) may be required to elicit our observed reactions. Additionally, context may play a greater role when studying covert leadership claiming and granting. Observers may be more attuned to and influenced by subtle leadership behaviors in certain cultures (e.g., collectivistic, high-context cultures; Fu & Yukl, 2000), industries (e.g., those emphasizing communication), or organizational structures (e.g., flatter structures; Greenbaum, Holden, & Spataro, 1983). Similarly, our observed gender effects could be amplified under covert leadership conditions, such that female observers may be even more likely than male observers to attend to subtle social cues of leadership and influence. This type of research would inform recommendations about the use of overt versus subtle behaviors during relational leadership identity construction.

A related opportunity for future research, building on the limitations of the present study, lies in the consideration of different socialization practices related to leader behaviors and leadership expectations. For instance, although including a dummy variable to control for the source of data in Study 2 (MTurk vs. MBA student samples) did not significantly alter the magnitude or direction of our effects (as noted earlier), supplemental analyses of each sample in isolation revealed that MBA student participants provided higher leadership ratings of the actor across all conditions, compared to MTurk participants ( $M_{MBA} = 4.22$ ;  $M_{MTurk} = 4.04$ ;  $F(1,518) = 3.37$ ,  $p = .03$ ). This difference may stem from the enacted context and socialization of MBA students, and in particular, exposure to norms of interaction in the negotiation course from which the sample was drawn. In this context (a MBA negotiation course), taking the first action – as the actor did in each condition – may have been viewed more favorably (i.e., as an “anchoring” or “first move” advantage) and amplified leadership ratings of the actor. Exploring leader identity construction dynamics in a broader variety of contexts and industry settings (with different levels of socialization, such as “strong” work cultures) would meaningfully extend the present findings and help establish the generalizability and boundary conditions of these interactions.

Beyond this choice of particular sample contexts, our studies used videos of avatars and written vignettes of characters interacting according to a script, rather than interactions between real people. Although these designs enabled us to demonstrate causality and

control for facets of the interaction other than the variables of interest (e.g., past performance, friendship), future research could build on this work by examining these effects in real-world business or political settings and by exploring additional facets of leadership identity construction that influence leadership perceptions and decision-making. For example, field research would be conducive to studying leadership construction over time and across multiple meetings and events. Research could also incorporate multiple administrations of our manipulation to explore the long-term effect of these social interactions on formal and informal leadership emergence.

Additionally, the videos and vignettes used in this study included all male actors in order to reduce complexity and control for additional factors. Future research should also study observers' perceptions of leadership claiming/granting in all female and mixed-sex teams. These designs would uncover whether competence ratings, leadership perceptions, and decision-making differ based on the gender of the actor and/or respondent (adding to our findings related to observer gender). Based on gender role (Eagly, 1987) and culturally attuned appropriateness theories (Kopelman, 2009), female actors who claim leadership may be perceived more negatively than male claimers if this behavior is believed to be incongruent with the female gender role. Respondents' reactions to female claimers may be especially influential in signaling the appropriateness of the woman's leadership behavior, thereby amplifying the patterns found in the present studies. This line of research would have implications for women's career ascendance, uncovering not only the effects of women's informal leadership claiming/granting behavior but also others' reactions to it. Furthermore, future research could examine priming men with a relational framework to reduce gender differences in observer perceptions of leadership claimants. Such priming may increase the extent to which men attend to the interpersonal context when evaluating claimants, thereby increasing consideration of other people's voices during the leadership construction process.

Finally, scholars could investigate the moderating roles of other observer individual differences and contextual variables to further explain variance in the extent to which observers attend to the interpersonal context of leadership identity construction. In this paper, we investigated the role of observer gender; however, additional observer individual differences are worthy of investigation. For instance, observer personality traits, such as openness and agreeableness, may play a role in one's consideration and perception of the social context (Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004; Schyns & Sanders, 2007). Consistent with confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998), observers' relationships with actors and responders likely also impact the degree to which observers are attuned to each party's stance (see also work on social referents and influence; e.g., Ho & Levesque, 2005). Scholars could draw on social network research (e.g., Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004) to study the ways in which observers' positions in organizational networks (i.e., information, task, or social networks) influence their perceptions of and reactions to leadership claiming and granting. For instance, observer expertise in the domain being discussed might influence the consideration given to each party, such that colleagues believed to be less informed about the topic at hand will have weaker leadership influence on the observer.

The present research has important practical implications for people interested in being perceived as leaders and having influence in organizational settings. Our findings suggest that irrespective of one's own hierarchical status in the organization, explicit leader-like behaviors (e.g., standing up and directing the conversation) will increase a person's leadership standing in the eyes of fellow team members. However, it is not as simple as assuming a leader identity through one's own words and actions. The reactions of others (e.g., another team member) to one's leadership behavior influence whether these words and actions will translate into leadership. When one's claims of leadership are met with acceptance and reinforcement by a fellow team member, others are also more likely to interpret them as conveying leadership. However, if one's leadership claims are met with rejection or competing claims, perceptions of competence and leadership will be significantly lower. Therefore, being mindful of who is present and might endorse leadership behavior is key to being viewed as a competent leader; and in competitive environments in which multiple people are contending for leadership roles, it may be difficult for any one person to receive a substantially high leadership rating. These dynamics are further influenced by who else is in the group – not all observers internalize leadership claiming and granting dynamics equivalently, and our results suggest that perceptions of leadership may depend on the gender of others in the setting.

Thus, articulating one's leader identity, as a key component of developing as a leader (DeRue & Myers, 2014) and ultimately influencing others' decision making, reflects a complex, socially interactive genuine negotiation process (Kopelman, 2014); a process that requires being mindful not only of one's own actions, but also others' reactions and the interpersonal characteristics of the leadership setting (e.g., the gender composition of the group).

## Conclusion

This paper provides a broader conceptual framework of relational leadership identity construction, building on recent literature to empirically demonstrate why, how, and when leadership claiming and granting influence observers' perceptions of leadership and subsequent decision-making. In contrast to individual-centric models of leadership emergence, our three studies affirm the importance of respondents' reactions to individuals' claims or grants of leadership, demonstrating how this interpersonal interaction influences others' judgments of competence and leadership. At the same time, we extend prior theorizing to recognize the ways women and men differentially interpret and act on these leadership claiming and granting interactions. In doing so, the results of this study provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for the study and practice of negotiated leadership identity construction dynamics in organizations.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Keith Knudsen and Michael van Lent from Soar Technology Inc. for help developing the avatar videos we used in this research project. We would also like to thank Sue Ashford and Scott DeRue, as well as the *Leadership Quarterly* reviewers and editor, William Gardner, for providing constructive feedback. Finally, we are grateful to have received financial support for this research project from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Organizational Studies (ICOS) at the University of Michigan.

## Appendix

Script for claiming and granting in Studies 1a, 1b, and 2.

	Respondent accepts claim/grant	Respondent rejects claim/grant
Actor claims leadership	<i>Actor:</i> (stands) Let's get started. I was planning to take the lead in this meeting, OK? I'll present what I'm thinking, and then we can discuss other alternatives. <i>Respondent:</i> That sounds good to me. Actor presents a case for his preferred contractor first, followed by the Respondent.	<i>Actor:</i> (stands) Let's get started. I was planning to take the lead in this meeting, OK? I will present what I'm thinking, and then we can discuss other alternatives. <i>Respondent:</i> (stands, Actor sits) Actually, I've been thinking about this project a lot and would like to present my ideas first. Respondent presents a case for his preferred contractor first, followed by the Actor.
Actor grants leadership	<i>Actor:</i> Let's get started. I was planning to follow your lead in this meeting, OK? You can present your thoughts to us, and then we can discuss other alternatives. <i>Respondent:</i> (stands) That sounds good to me. Respondent presents a case for his preferred contractor first, followed by the Actor.	<i>Actor:</i> Let's get started. I was planning to follow your lead in this meeting, OK? You can present your thoughts to us, and then we can discuss other alternatives. <i>Respondent:</i> Actually, I was hoping to follow your lead on this, and I'd like to hear your ideas first. Actor stands and presents a case for his preferred contractor first, followed by the Respondent.

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