

# Leadership identity development, meaning-making and the intersection of marginalized social identities: a scoping review

LID meaning-making and social identity

Jonathan Orsini

*Teaching and Technology, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA, and*

Hannah M. Sunderman

*Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia, USA*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The current paper is part of a larger scoping review project investigating the intersection of leader(ship) identity development and meaning-making. In this review, we analyzed 100 articles to determine the current extent of literature that covers the intersection of leader(ship) identity development, meaning-making and marginalized social identities.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A review of the extant literature is included, and a conceptual model is suggested for further exploration into this critical and under-researched domain.

**Findings** – More research is needed at the intersection of leadership identity development, meaning-making and marginalized social identities.

**Originality/value** – As this area of study has expanded, scholars have noted an absence of research on the effect of multiple social identities, especially marginalized identities, on meaning-making and leadership identity construction.

**Keywords** Social identity, Meaning-making, Leadership pedagogy, Leadership identity development, Leader identity development

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Identity theory has been an important area of study in the field of leadership development since the turn of the century (Vogel, Reichard, Batistič, & Černe, 2021). Lord and Hall (2005) suggested that a leader's self-identity was essential to leadership development because it (1) was an essential structure for organizing knowledge, (2) motivated leaders to engage in leadership situations and (3) provided cognitive resources, such as stories or core values, for leaders to engage potential followers. Day and Harrison (2007) described leader(ship) identity as the subcomponent of one's identity related to "how one thinks of oneself as a leader" and maintained that it was critically important in the "ongoing and continuous development of a leader" (p. 365). Within the field of leadership education, understanding leader(ship) identity development has been identified as one of the most critical aspects of student leadership development (Komives *et al.*, 2009).

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Before proceeding further, it is necessary to note the distinction between a leader and a leadership identity. Several critical works in the leadership literature have distinguished these terms (Day, 2000; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Miscenko, Guenter, & Day, 2017). Leader identity involves how one thinks of oneself as a leader. An individual's self-definition of leadership identity is established through a personal narrative that creates meaning over time (Miscenko *et al.*, 2017). In contrast, leadership identity is a dynamic process that involves shifting identities following social interactions. While leader identity focuses on the individual's cognitive internalizations regarding experiences, leadership identity also emphasizes the relational recognition of leadership roles and collective endorsement of leadership activity (Day, 2000; DeRue & Ashford, 2010). The current study aimed to investigate the connection between meaning-making and all forms of leader(ship) identity development, regardless of operationalization distinctions. Therefore, we employ the term "leader(ship) identity development" to represent the inclusion of both leader identity development and leadership identity development in this study.

Research has shown that leader(ship) identity development is an outcome of meaning making (sense-making) or how people make meaning of their experiences (Lord & Hall, 2005; Hammond, Clapp-Smith, & Polanski, 2017; Zaar, Van Den Bossche, & Gijssels, 2020). In the meaning-making process, identity is critically important because it serves as the primary mechanism through which meanings take form and inform identity work (Hammond *et al.*, 2017; Weick, 1995). In leadership education, meaning-making has been noted as imperative to student development and shown to be reciprocally linked to the development of a leader(ship) identity (Day & Dragoni, 2015; McCain & Matkin, 2019; Miscenko *et al.*, 2017). The broader scoping review referenced in this paper is being conducted in response to the importance of meaning-making to the leader(ship) identity development process and the call for more integrative theorizing regarding leadership and identity literature (Sunderman & Orsini, In Press; DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

However, research into leader(ship) identity development typically has only addressed a single dimension of identity and not intersecting social identities such as race or gender. (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; McCain & Matkin, 2019; Renn, 2007). Social identities shape individuals' self-concept as individuals derive meaning from their membership in a social group based on the perceived emotional significance or value attached to that group membership (Tajfel, 1982; Workman, Hull, Hartsell, & Weimann, 2020). Consequently, social identities impact how individuals see themselves and are seen by others. The effect of social identities is imperative for developing leader(ship) identity because individuals' sense of self can change depending on the context in which they are leading. For example, several authors (Abes, 2012; Duran, 2021, etc.) have noted how perceptions of power differential in higher education can influence identity perceptions, how individuals make meaning of the relationships among multiple identities and overall student development for students with marginalized social identities. Given that, leadership scholars must acknowledge intersectionality of social identities to understand the role of privilege and power on leader(ship) identity development (Duran, 2021; Jones, 2016; Workman *et al.*, 2020).

In response to the importance of identity theory to meaning-making and leader(ship) identity development scholarship, the current research sought to explore the literature at the intersection of leader(ship) identity development and meaning-making with a specific emphasis on marginalized social identities. The objectives of this project were to (1) explore literature found within the broader scoping review on leader(ship) identity development and meaning making that discusses marginalized social identities and (2) identify key characteristics of scholarship at the intersection of leader(ship) identity development, meaning-making and intersectionality of marginalized social identities. We seek to contribute to the existing literature by synthesizing the relevant articles published in this space and offering a conceptual model for future research that incorporates all three critical components

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of leadership development. We hope that the synthesized findings contribute to increased clarity around the role of meaning-making and social identities in leader(ship) identity development and provide specific implications for scholars and practitioners, helping to develop future research directions.

LID meaning-making and social identity

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## Methods

### *Scoping review*

The current study analyzed articles selected through a scoping review methodology. The articles were identified for a project investigating the intersection of leader(ship) identity development and meaning making (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Sunderman & Orsini, *In Press*; Munn *et al.*, 2018). Scoping reviews aim to articulate key concepts of a research area and are used when the topic is complex and needs to be comprehensively reviewed (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Munn *et al.* (2018) present six indicators for the appropriateness of a scoping review: (1) to identify the types of available evidence in a given field, (2) to clarify key concepts, (3) to examine how research has been conducted, (4) to identify essential characteristics, (5) as a precursor to a systemic review and (6) to identify and analyze knowledge gaps. For the current study, the primary goals were to examine how research has been conducted, identify key characteristics and analyze knowledge gaps, particularly around the intersectionality of social identities in leader(ship) identity development.

*Identification of sources.* As with the broader scoping review on exclusively leader(ship) identity development and meaning-making, we conducted the search process for the current scoping review using four search strings with no date-range limitations. The search phrases were a combination of four terms: ["leadership identity development" AND "meaning making"] AND ["leadership identity development" AND "sense-making"] AND ["leader identity development" AND "meaning making"] AND ["leader identity development" AND "sense-making"]. Searches were conducted between December 27, 2020 and January 8, 2021, on Google Scholar and EBSCO Academic Search Premier. Google Scholar covers a wide array of information, and EBSCO Academic Search Premier (ASP) has returned more scholarly chapters than other academic databases (Vinson & Welsh, 2014). We organized the search to look for search terms anywhere in the text, which resulted in 119 total documents, of which 100 were found to be peer-reviewed journal articles that were retained for the study.

*Coding process to produce articles from broader scoping review.* The articles in the broader scoping review were analyzed and coded by a two-person research team. First, the articles were read, analyzed and coded independently. The research team held several meetings to review the coding and used peer debriefing to confirm the validity of the coding by consensus. Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, and Walker (2014) suggest that "validity based on consensus is...agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation and thematics are correct" (p. 532). We compiled the results in a Microsoft Excel file containing the article's (1) title, (2) author, (3) year published, (4) knowledge contribution, (5) summary, (6) research codes (i.e. 1. "leader identity development" in general; 2. "meaning making" in general; 3. the importance of leader(ship) identity development; 4. the importance of meaning making and 5. the explicit connection between leader identity development and meaning-making), (7) central theories related to development and (8) central theories related to identity, learning, leader(ship) identity development and meaning-making. We used these codes because we wanted to differentiate between those articles that only generally discussed LID or meaning-making from those that more deeply elaborated their importance and associated outcomes and also from those that explicitly discussed the intersection of the two concepts. Once we completed the initial coding, the research team went back through the articles to determine which fulfilled the following two requirements: (1) coded as having an explicit connection between leader(ship) identity development and meaning-making and (2)

referenced the intersectionality of marginalized social identities with leader(ship) identity. Three tables were constructed to (1) share the specific titles that were selected and their associated codes; (2) identify the central theories behind conceptual models promoting the connection between leader(ship) identity development, meaning-making and marginalized social identities and (3) identify the primary methodology used in these articles.

Findings

Of the 100 articles in the broader scoping review, 30 included marginalized identities as a variable. Of those 30 articles, only 12 included an explicit connection between leader(ship) identity development and meaning-making, which were requirements for inclusion in the current study. The 12 article titles, year of publication, authors and coding from the scoping review can be seen in Table 1. The articles were published in ten journals, with only the *Journal of Leadership Education* and the *Journal of College Student Development* having more than one (two each). The marginalized identities investigated in these papers included gender (9), race/ethnicity (7), sexual orientation (2) and nationality (1).

Seven of the 12 papers specifically addressed multiple marginalized identities and how the intersectionality of those identities influenced leader(ship) identity development and meaning-making. All but two of the papers were published since 2014 (2007–2008), with six published since 2019, suggesting that researchers are beginning to focus more on the intersection of leadership identity, meaning-making and marginalized social identities.

Title	Author	Year	Coding
How business students think about leadership: A qualitative study on leader identity and meaning making	Zaar, Van Den Bossche and Gijssels	(2020)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Emerging adults leadership identity development through family storytelling: A narrative approach	McCain and Matkin	(2019)	1, 3, 5
Transformational learning and role of self-authorship in developing women leaders	Colley and Cooper	(2008)	2, 4, 5
Leadership development: An outcome-oriented review based on time and levels of analyses	Day and Dragoni	(2015)	1, 3, 5
La líder: Developing a leadership identity as a Hispanic woman at a Hispanic-serving institution	Onorato and Musoba	(2015)	1, 3, 5
Developing leadership identity through critical reflection: voice, knowledge and advocacy	Colley	(2014)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
LGBT student leaders and queer activists: Identities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-identified college student leaders and activists	Renn	(2007)	1, 3, 4, 5
Queer student leaders of color: Leadership as authentic, collaborative, culturally competent	Miller and Vaccaro	(2016)	2, 3, 4, 5
Elevating Latina voices of leadership: Latina student leaders' beliefs, approaches, and influences to leadership	Haber-Curran and Tapia-Fuselier	(2020)	1, 3, 5
A chilly climate: Experiences of women student government association presidents	Workman, Hull, Hartsell and Weimann	(2020)	2, 3, 4, 5
Defining ourselves: Exploring our leader and activist identities as Asian American women doctoral students	Leigh, Pak and Phuong	(2021)	1, 2, 5
Overcoming risk for women in leader identity development	Ryan, Hammond, MacCurtain and Cross	(2020)	1, 3, 5

Table 1. Articles from scoping review that include connections between meaning-making, leader(ship) identity development and marginalized social identities

**Note(s):** Coding: (1) “leader identity development” in general; (2) “meaning making” in general; (3) the importance of leader(ship) identity development; (4) the importance of meaning making and (5) the explicit connection between leader identity development and meaning-making)  
**Source(s):** Table provided by authors Sunderman and Orsini (in press)

### *Analysis of methodology*

None of the reviewed articles included quantitative methodology. One article was a conceptual paper and the other was a literature review. The ten remaining articles used qualitative methods. Of the papers using qualitative methodology, four used a case study approach, and two used a phenomenological approach. Narrative inquiry, collaborative autoethnography, content analysis and grounded theory were each utilized in one article. The largest sample size was the content analysis, which included 510 participants, with the others ranging from one to 35. Five papers included longitudinal studies, each lasting at least one year, with the longest being conducted over two years. The most common study participants were undergraduate students (6) and teachers (2), while healthcare professionals and doctoral students were studied once each.

There were several data collection strategies. Personal interviews were the most common data collection technique and were used in seven studies. Three studies used multiple interviews, two of which also used focus groups. The next most common technique was guided written reflection, which was utilized in three studies. Open-ended survey questions were used in one study. The one collaborative autoethnography study used document analysis, self-written narratives and group meaning-making sessions. Notably, seven of the studies used either multiple data collection techniques or multiple time points for collecting data. One of the advantages of qualitative methodologies when investigating the complex intersection of leader(ship) identity development, meaning-making and marginalized social identities are that humans often understand who they are by creating stories of the self (McAdams, 1993). These stories of the self change over time and in different groups as social identities become more or less salient, suggesting that identity development is constantly reconstructed via narration throughout an adult's life (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1998). Given the flux in identity development, methodologies that allow for written or verbal critical reflection, primarily through storytelling, can be extremely valuable in dissecting the complicated intersection of leader(ship) identity, meaning-making and marginalized social identities.

### *Primary theories and articles cited to support conceptual models*

Three primary research areas served as the theoretical support for the articles in the current scoping review, including leader and leadership identity development, learning and meaning-making and identity and developmental models.

*Leadership and leader(ship) identity development theories.* The most-cited theory in the current study was the leadership identity development (LID) theory and model proposed by Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005, 2006, 2009). The research team that developed the LID model produced several articles on this topic, and the 2005 theory and 2006 model were each cited in six papers (eight times total). Other theories of leader(ship) identity development that were often discussed include the following, which were each cited three times: (1) DeRue and Ashford's (2010) theory of leadership identity construction; (2) Day, Harrison, and Halpin (2008) and Day and Harrison (2007) integrative multilevel identity-based approach to leadership development and (3) Lord and Hall's (2005) theory of the influence of learning and expertise on leadership development. Kezar and Moriarty's (2000) study on leadership development in the context of gender and ethnic identity was also heavily cited in three of the articles. For example, Onorato and Musoba (2015) used Kezar and Moriarty (2000) to demonstrate how gender and ethnicity affect the development of leadership skills because leadership is socially constructed. Other articles cited at least two times include the following: (1) Epitropaki, Kark, Mainemelis, and Lord's (2017) review of leadership and followership identity processes; (2) Hogg's (2001) social identity theory of leadership; (3) Zheng and Muir's (2015) multifaceted model of leader identity development; (4) Onorato and Musoba's (2015) paper on Hispanic women leadership identity development; (5) Renn and Bilodeau's (2005a, b) work on queer and LGBT student leadership identity development and (6) Van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, and Hogg's (2004) review on leadership, self and identity.

Beyond leader(ship) identity development theories, other works in the leadership space that were cited in at least three different papers in this study included (1) [Arminio et al.'s \(2000\)](#) leadership experiences of students of color, (2) [Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb's \(2011\)](#) work on accounting for gender in the development of leadership programs and (3) [Day's \(2000\)](#) review of leadership development. Several leadership studies were cited in at least two papers, most notably [Dugan and Komives's \(2007\)](#) work on developing leadership capacity in college students, [Dugan, Komives, and Segar's \(2008\)](#) paper on college student capacity for socially responsible leadership and several papers on transformational leadership (cited seven times) or implicit leadership theory (cited three times). For example, [Leigh et al. \(2021\)](#) cited transformational and implicit leadership theories to differentiate between activism and leadership by contrasting the incremental sanctioned change paradigm of leadership with the “in your face” actions of activism, which can lead individuals to reject personal activist identities.

*Learning and meaning making.* While the phrases “learning” and “meaning making” can be used interchangeably, it is important to note that they are distinct processes. While meaning-making focuses on individual interpretation, learning centers on knowledge acquisition. According to [Zittoun and Brinkman \(2012\)](#), learning theories are related to acquiring knowledge and skills that allow learners to act, think and feel in ways individuals identify as important. Meaning-making theories, however, are “the process by which people interpret situations, events, objects or discourses in light of their previous knowledge and experience” ([Zittoun & Brinkmann, 2012, p. 1](#)).

The most common learning theory cited in the current scoping review was transformative learning theory, which was included in three articles. Several authors were cited in this space, including [Brooks \(2000, three times\)](#), [Kegan \(2000; two times\)](#), [Brown \(2004; two times\)](#) and several authors, most notably [Mezirow \(2009\)](#), were cited one time. Although experiential learning theory was one of the most frequently cited learning theories in the broader scoping review, we were surprised to discover that it was not discussed in any of the articles in the current scoping review ([Sunderman & Orsini, In Press](#)). Notably, experience in a learning context was only discussed as a part of the meaning-making process of transformation. For example, [Collay and Cooper \(2008\)](#) connected transformational learning with [Magolda's \(1998\)](#) theory of self-authorship to demonstrate that women do not often participate in transformational learning in graduate education because they require a narrative process in which they can share stories in a safe context to claim their leadership voice.

In the current study, conceptual support for meaning-making came from a diverse group of articles. The most often referenced work was [Kegan \(1982, 1994\)](#), which was referenced in five different articles. Kegan's theory of the evolution of consciousness is often viewed as both a meaning-making and a developmental theory; however, these articles used it to describe how people make meaning of their experiences. [Abes and Jones \(2004\)](#) and [Abes et al. \(2007\)](#) were each referenced in two articles as models of meaning-making and identity. [Petriglieri and Petriglieri's \(2010, 2011\)](#) articles on identity work and [Koenig Kellas and Kranstuber Horstman's \(2015\)](#) and [Koenig Kellas's \(2017\)](#) model of narrative sense-making were cited in two articles. For example, one article used communicated narrative sense-making (CNSM) as a unique method for understanding how identity is created through family storytelling and how this influences leader(ship) identity development ([Koenig Kellas and Kranstuber Horstman, 2015; McCain & Matkin, 2019](#)). Finally, [Magolda \(1998, 2004, 2008, 2009\)](#) has several articles published on the concept of self-authorship and meaning-making that were included in two papers as well.

*Identity and developmental models.* Several identity and development theories were referenced in the 12 articles in the current scoping review. [Tajfel \(1982\)](#), the original theoretician of social identity theory, was only cited once, although the concept of social identity theory was referenced through other citations in a total of five articles ([Hogg, 2001; Jenkins, 2014; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003](#)). The next most-cited



identity and developmental model across multiple articles was the model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes *et al.*, 2007; Jones, 1997), which was referenced in three articles as an identity development model and a meaning-making model. For example, Miller and Vaccaro (2016) referenced MMIDI to demonstrate that a person's identity is dynamic and shaped by multiple identities that influence how queer students of color make meaning of their campus leadership experiences.

Adult development models were the least cited in the 12 articles. Although Kegan's work (1982–1994) was referenced in five papers, it was used predominantly as a meaning-making model. Magolda's (2004, 2008) theory of self-authorship and McCauley, Drath, Palus, O'Connor, and Baker's (2006) constructive developmental theory were referenced in two articles. For example, Workman *et al.* (2020) used Magolda's work to demonstrate how women rely on narratives and storytelling to make meaning of their experiences. Arnett's (2000, 2001) theory of emerging adulthood, D'Augelli's (1994) life span model of sexual orientation identity development and Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory of psychosocial development were each cited in one article.

## Discussion

The objective of the current scoping review was to analyze the overlap between meaning making, leader(ship) identity development and marginalized identities in the literature. Our search found only 12 articles, half published since 2019, suggesting an emerging focus on the intersection of meaning-making, marginalized identities and leader(ship) identity development. Interestingly, Komives *et al.* (2009) wrote the following over a decade ago:

In applying the LID model, leadership educators must also acknowledge the ways leadership identity intersects with other dimensions of identity, such as race, culture, sexual orientation, gender, disability, religion and social class. A challenge in using the LID model is recognizing this intersectionality (Collins, 1998) and how students' multiple identities shift in relative salience depending on context and relationships (Abes *et al.*, 2007). If, as social constructionist approaches to identity development posit, identity is socially, historically, politically and culturally constructed (Weber, 2001), these factors must be considered in LID application and research (p. 13).

Given this call for action and the heavily cited LID theory and model (Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2006), it is surprising that only in the last few years have many of the articles at the intersection of leader(ship) identity development, meaning-making and marginalized identities been published. As scholars and practitioners, we must not examine leadership identity without considering other dynamic social identities and how they influence meaning-making. An individual's social identities are continually changing, particularly among young adults and often include multiple subidentities related to different social roles that vary depending on the centrality of that particular identity over time (Day & Harrison, 2007; Markus & Kunda, 1986). The connection of social identities to leadership identity has a significant impact on leader(ship) identity development research because identity "is the primary site where meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity and action" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). Given that the development of leader(ship) identity is grounded in meaning-making and social identities are central to our self-narratives, researchers must include the social identity lens when exploring the development of leader(ship) identity, particularly among developing adults (Leigh *et al.*, 2021). Given these findings, we have three recommendations for leadership scholars moving forward:

### *Recommendation 1*

We recommend that leadership scholars continue to employ longitudinal, qualitative methodologies in analyzing the intersection of marginalized social identities, meaning-making

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and leader(ship) identity development that employ multiple data collection techniques. One primary suggestion would be to conduct studies with larger sample sizes that collect multiple types of qualitative data. For example, [Zaar et al. \(2020\)](#) collected open-ended survey questions from 510 undergraduate students. Although their responses provided strong support for the role of meaning-making in developing leader identity among college-age students, researchers were only able to address the internal cognitive schema of students at one point in time. Without longitudinal data, the researchers could not consider how social interactions with peers may have changed or influenced participant responses in a setting like a focus group.

Understanding the connection between multiple identities, how social interactions influence those identities over time and, finally, how students make meaning of those leadership experiences is an important and understudied area of research in leadership education. For example, [DeRue and Ashford \(2010\)](#), in their highly influential study on leadership identity construction, suggested that because leadership involves groups of people engaged in mutual influence, scholars must integrate individual internalization, relational recognition and collective endorsement to fully capture the leader(ship) identity process.

### *Recommendation 2*

Despite the influential work of [Hogg \(2001\)](#) and the emergence of social identity theory as a critical aspect of leadership development scholarship, the social identity theory of leadership and similar identity theories received very little attention in the current review. [Hogg \(2001\)](#) suggested the following:

The central prediction from the social identity theory of leadership is that as people identify more strongly with a group, the basis for leadership perceptions, evaluations, and endorsement becomes increasingly influenced by prototypicality. As a result, prototypical members are more likely to emerge as leaders, and more prototypical leaders will be perceived to be more effective (p. 191).

This hypothesis, supported by [Hogg's \(2001\)](#) review of prior work, has gone largely unchallenged and untested in the context of multiple intersecting or marginalized identities. Despite not having a direct connection to leadership theory, [Abes and Jones's \(2004\)](#) proposed the MMID, which indicated that college students make meaning of contextual factors that then influence their perceptions of sexual orientation and its relationship with other identities, which could include leadership identity. Participants in the MMID with more advanced meaning-making capacity were able to filter contextual influences, such as social norms and stereotypes (e.g. prototypicality) and determine how the context was influencing their identity ([Abes et al., 2007](#)). We suggest that leadership scholars employ theories like MMID and identity complexity theory as conceptual frames to better understand how multiple and overlapping identities influence meaning-making during group interactions (e.g. classrooms) and how meaning making influences leader(ship) identity development. For example, [Roccas and Brewer \(2002\)](#) posit:

The actual complexity of multiple, partially overlapping group memberships may or may not be reflected in the individual's subjective representation of his or her multiple identities...When an individual acknowledges and accepts the non-overlapping memberships of multiple ingroups, their subjective identity structure is more inclusive and complex (p. 89).

Understanding how individuals make meaning of their multiple marginalized identities and how they influence leader(ship) identity development requires an investigation into their views on leadership (e.g. the relational and collective claiming and granting of leadership by their group) and an understanding of their meaning-making capacity ([Abes et al., 2007](#); [Hogg, 2001](#); [King & Baxter Magolda, 2005](#); [Kegan, 1994](#); [Roccas & Brewer, 2002](#)).



### Recommendation 3

Several articles analyzed in this review call for leadership scholars to address issues of intersectionality in leadership research. Intersectionality is a concept derived from Black feminist thought that recognizes how interlocking systems of oppression influence an individual's social identities and beliefs about their experience of race, gender and other marginalized identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Shields, 2008). Shields (2008) states, "The specific definition of intersectionality varies by research context, but a consistent thread across definitions is that social identities which serve as organizing features of social relations, mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalize one another" (p. 301). In other words, intersectionality recognizes how interlocking systems (e.g. sexism or racism) influence groups of people (Crenshaw, 1989; Shields, 2008). For example, Leigh *et al.* (2021) explains that "intersectionality connects the experiences of Black women as different than the experiences of both white women and Black men due to specific ways that racism and sexism shape the Black woman experience" (p. 177). Intersectional analyses reject treating social identities as separate and instead emphasize the mutual reinforcement and links between social identities and systems of oppression (Leigh *et al.*, 2021). Collins (1990, 2000) and others have indicated that understanding individuals' social location and the context of power relations embedded in social identities is critical to "transform and advance empirically-based research in psychology and allied disciplines, especially through using conventional empirical strategies in innovative ways to investigate intersectionality" (Shields, 2008, p. 302).

A recent review of intersectionality in public leadership research found that only 14 articles applied some form of intersectional analysis, and only three of those 14 articles applied intersectionality to their conceptual framework (Breslin, Pandey, & Riccucci, 2017). Some hesitancy to use intersectionality as a conceptual lens stems from the complexity involved when "the subject of analysis belongs to multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis" (McCall, 2005, p. 1772). Given this difficulty, we recommend that leadership scholars engage in the following research methodologies, originally recommended by Breslin (2017), to explore intersectionality in leader(ship) identity research:

- (1) *Anti-categorical approach*: The anti-categorical approach can include ethnography, genealogy and deconstruction as research methodologies. Sutherland (2018) noted that positivist methodology has historically dominated leadership research, and there is a need for new approaches to leadership scholarship. Anti-categorical methodologies emphasize the value of the power dynamics that allow socially dominant groups to define social categories and give them meaning (Breslin *et al.*, 2017).
- (2) *Intra-categorical approach*: Methodologies used by researchers who adopt this approach include personal narratives, single-group studies and case studies, which are currently common in leadership research (Breslin *et al.*, 2017). The broader scoping review on leader(ship) identity development and meaning-making also supported the need for more narrative work in leader(ship) identity development (Sunderman & Orsini, In Press).
- (3) *Inter-categorical approach*: This approach differs from the previous two because the research focuses on multiple groups, generally using (but not always) comparative quantitative data. Several challenges are associated with this approach, the largest being the struggle to find adequate sample sizes so that statistical methods can detect significant effects and issues regarding a lack of variability in the sample population (McCall, 2005). However, at the time of the review on intersectionality in public leadership (Sutherland, 2018), scholars had yet to attempt an inter-categorical approach to investigating intersectionality in a leadership context (Breslin *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, leadership scholars have an opportunity to expand our

understanding of leader(ship) identity development and meaning-making in the context of marginalized identities using quantitative data, allowing this work to expand into the most respected mainstream psychology journals (Shields, 2008).

Including perspectives of intersectionality in this context is urgent because “it gets researchers to go beyond the individually informed perspective that we each inevitably bring to our scholarship and science” (Shields, 2008, p. 309). Research undertaken from this perspective can help to inform public policy and discourse and prepare future leaders for enacting positive social change (Shields, 2008).

Conceptual model and directions for future research

Finally, we suggest that leadership scholars consider a conceptual model, a combination of several different theories central to this scoping review, as a basis for beginning to unravel the complexities of marginalized social identities, multiple overlapping identities, meaning-making and leader(ship) identity development (see Figure 1). This conceptual model has several parts:

- (1) Moving from left to right, the first section of this model represents a person’s lived experiences within the group context in which they are currently operating. Several leadership scholars as well as scholars in teamwork and team learning behavior, have pointed out that group context heavily influences human learning and decision-making (Hogg, 2001; Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003).
- (2) The model also includes a meaning-making lens. Meaning-making is essential to consider because a person’s meaning-making capacity makes it possible for them to perceive relationships among varied social identities and how individuals make meaning of those identities in different contexts (Abes et al., 2007). It is important to note that our meaning-making capacity is highly impacted by stages of human and cognitive development and our salient social identities (Abes et al., 2007; Kegan, 1982).
- (3) The next part of the model includes intersecting circles, first proposed by Jones and McEwen (2000). The circles intersect to demonstrate that the identity dimensions are dynamic and interconnected. The closer the black circle on the ring is to the central personal identity of an individual, the more salient the identity is to the person in that context or at that time (Jones & McEwen, 2000).
- (4) The last section is adapted from DeRue and Ashford’s (2010) leadership identity construction process. In this process, people co-create “reciprocal and mutually

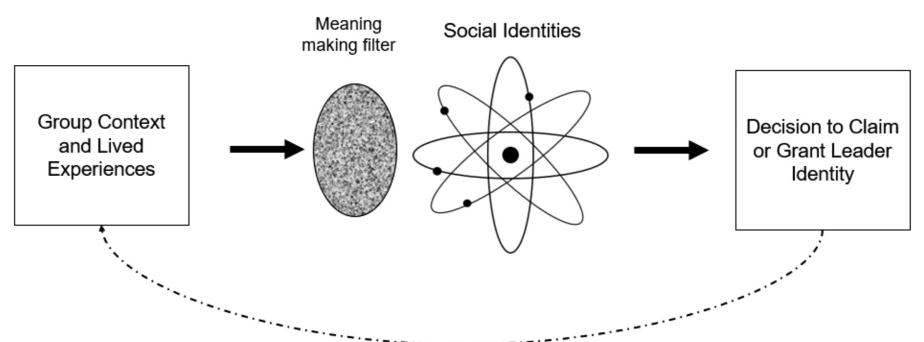


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model for exploring the intersection of leader(ship) identity development, meaning-making and multiple marginalized social identities

Source(s): Figure courtesy of Sunderman and Orsini (in press)

reinforcing identities as leaders through a claiming and granting process” (DeRue & Ashford, p. 628). A person’s internalization, relational recognition, and collective endorsement are all influenced by individual meaning-making and the saliency or prototypicality of identities in the group. It is important to note that the claiming and granting process influences the group context. Therefore, this is a temporal model where claiming and granting leader identity is both an output and an input to future meaning-making processes. We encourage scholars who use or adapt the proposed model to utilize methods that collect data at multiple points because elements of group processes, such as cohesion and psychological safety, will also influence how this process develops.

## Limitations

The primary limitation of the current project is that leader(ship) identity development, meaning-making and marginalized identities have many different names and descriptions used in the literature. For example, DeRue and Ashford’s (2010) pivotal article uses the term leadership identity construction, so it was not included in the complete list of the scoping review. A systematic literature review on the full spectrum of all leadership identity literature may still be necessary to capture the breadth of this large and diverse area of research.

## Conclusion

Numerous studies have demonstrated that individuals with marginalized identities make meaning of their leadership experiences and identify leadership differently than individuals with more prototypical identities (Collay & Cooper, 2008; Leigh *et al.*, 2021; Haber-Curran & Sulpizio, 2017; Ryan *et al.*, 2020; Zaar *et al.*, 2020). Despite this understanding, few publications have investigated the intersection of leader(ship) identity development, meaning-making and marginalized social identities. Given the increase in diversity among college students and the fact that middle-class white men dominate leadership scholarship, leadership scholars must place more emphasis on understanding leader(ship) identity development and meaning-making in the context of marginalized social identities (Chen, 2017; Dugan, 2017; Leigh *et al.*, 2021; Wilson & Johnson, 2015). In that context, this paper contributes to the national leadership education research agenda, priority five, which specifically calls for the centering of social identity in leadership research. The inclusion of social identities in leader(ship) identity development research is especially critical for leadership educators, as they utilize inclusive practices to teach graduate and undergraduate students, many of whom will have at least one marginalized social identity (Chunoo, Beatty, & Gruver, 2019; Jenkins & Owen, 2016). The results of the current scoping review argue for the criticality of including marginalized social identities when discussing leader(ship) identity development and meaning making in both scholarship and practice.

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### Corresponding author

Jonathan Orsini can be contacted at: [jorsini@ufl.edu](mailto:jorsini@ufl.edu)