

How the relationship between leader categorization and openness to leader influence is mediated by followers' identification with the leader when followers feel self-determined and respected

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Leaders are considered effective when they succeed in influencing their followers. This logic of influence involves at least two parties: a leader who tries to exert influence, and a follower who at best is voluntarily open to the leader's influence and does not have to be forced or coerced to comply. Follower-centric research on leadership suggests that followers use a cognitive representation of an ideal leader prototype as a benchmark for their openness to their actual leader's influence. In the present study, we link this follower-centric perspective on leadership effectiveness with identity-based approaches to the same. Particularly, we propose that the relationship between leader categorization and subordinates' openness towards leadership is partially mediated by followers' personal identification with their leaders. Findings of two cross-sectional studies (N1 = 244, N2 = 645) among employees support our prediction. Furthermore, in the second study, we integrate the notion of self-determination and show that the mediation of identification is stronger (a) the more subordinates feel self-determined in the relationship with their leaders and (b) the more they feel respected by their leaders. Theoretical and practical implications of this moderated mediation model are discussed along the lines of unifying different perspectives on leadership and power.