



Letting go before being let go

The Glass Cliff as an introduction to a social identity model of retirement

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The glass cliff



November 2003

FTSE 100 Cranfield Index

Ranks companies in terms of the number of women on their board (high rank = more women)

- 3 of the top 5 companies on Cranfield Index are under-performing
- All of the bottom 5 are over-performing

The glass cliff



'So much for smashing the glass ceiling and using their unique skills to enhance the performance of Britain's biggest companies. The triumphant march of women into the country's boardrooms has instead wreaked havoc on companies' performance'

*The Times,
Nov.11, 2003, p.21*

Conclusion

'Corporate Britain would be better off without women on the board.'

The glass cliff



SMASHING
THROUGH
THE GLASS
CEILING

- There **is** a relationship between company performance and number of women on the board
- But is the analysis correct?
- Could the causal sequence be **reversed**?

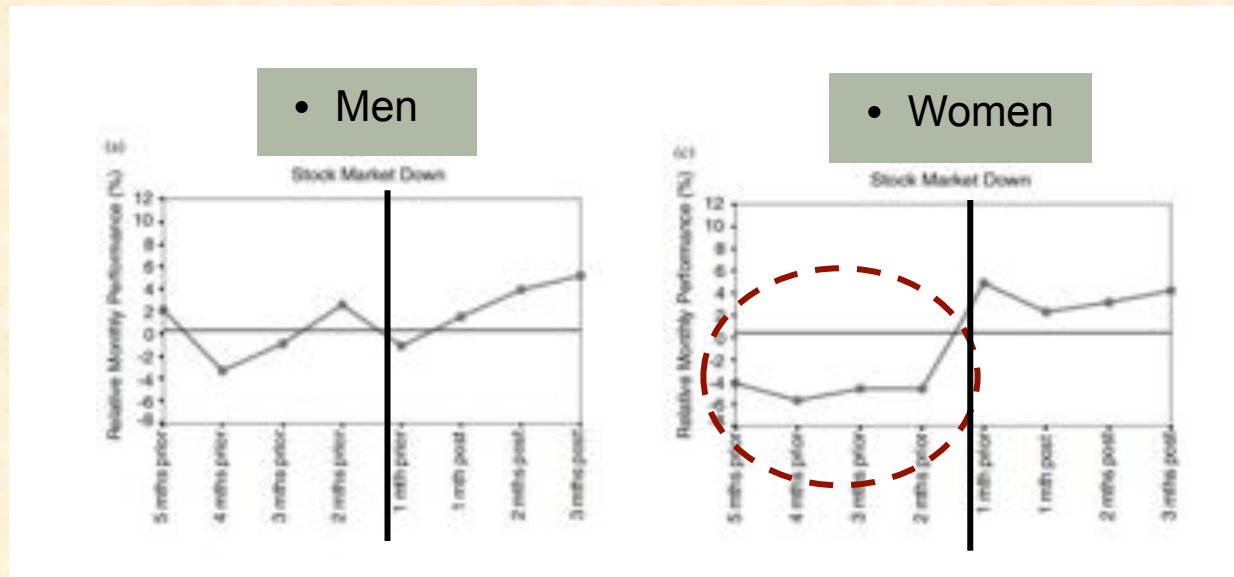
Perhaps women only get given senior positions when companies are doing poorly.

Women on board:
help or hindrance?

The glass cliff

Ryan & Haslam (2005) *BJM*

- Detailed archival examination of FTSE 100 companies in 2003 provided support for this alternative interpretation:



- Period prior to women's appointment to company boards is characterized by poor company performance.

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- We dubbed this (unseen) tendency to appoint women to precarious leadership positions **The Glass Cliff**

glass cliff n. A senior job or important project, particularly one given to a woman, with a high risk of failure (cf. glass ceiling).

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Example Citations:



"Stepping on the edge of the Glass Cliff," *Wired's* L.A., September 21, 2006

The glass cliff

- **Does it matter?**
- To the extent that women are placed on glass cliffs
 - (a) they are more likely to be ‘in the spotlight’
 - (b) there is a differential likelihood that they will fail, and
 - (c) it is likely they will be blamed for negative outcomes that are not their fault (*“the romance of leadership”*) (Meindl, 1993).
- Indeed this may help explain why women’s tenure of senior leadership positions is typically much shorter than men’s — e.g., US CEOs 8.2 vs 4.8 years (Blanton, 2005).

‘[I was] promoted to manager at a time when failure of the company was inevitable. In my estimation I needed 6 months to put new practices in place and put the company on an even keel — I was made redundant after three and a half months.’

Female Professional, 35

Corroboration



Demonstrated across a **range of methodologies**:

- Archival studies (Ryan & Haslam, *BJM*, 2005; Haslam et al, *BJM*, 2011)
- Experiments (Haslam & Ryan, *LQ*, 2010; Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010, *BJSP*; Ryan et al., *JAP*, 2010)

Demonstrated with **multiple countries**:

- UK (Kulich et al., *PRQ*, in press)
- USA (Brescoll et al., *Psych Science*, 2010)
- Netherlands (Rink et al, *Psych Science*, 2010)



Demonstrated with **multiple domains**:

- Business (Broadbent et al., *AAA*, 2006)
- Law (Ashby et al., *WMLJ*, 2006)
- Politics (Ryan et al., *PWQ*, 2010)



- All had precarious leadership positions (of one form or another)
- All 'retired' early

'The only time to run a woman, is when things look so bad that your only option is to do something dramatic.'

John Bailey, Chair, National Democratic Party Committee (Burrell, 1993)



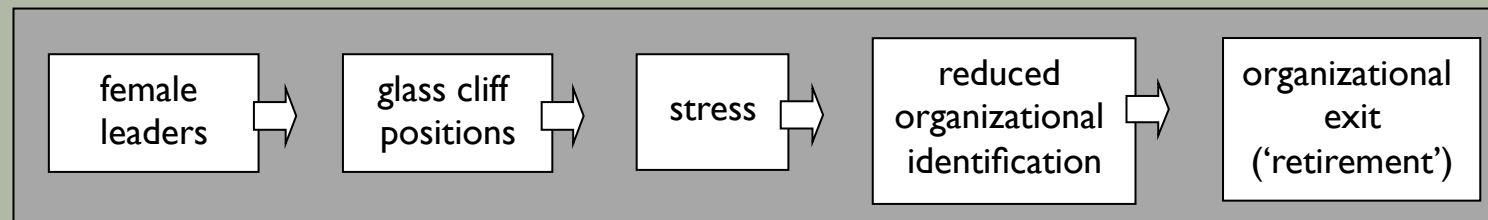
Implications for organizational identification

- A body of evidence suggests that men and women's leadership experiences and **trajectories are very different** (Ryan & Haslam, 2007, *AMR*).
- In particular, women are given
 - different 'opportunities' (riskier, more precarious)
 - different rewards (fewer, less contingent on performance)
 - different reception (their arrival is greeted with skepticism, and seen as a signal of decline)
 - different exit pathways (paper parachutes).
- These are likely to be a source of **stress** and **disidentification**.

Implications for 'retirement'

'As I started to realize how stressful all this was, I started to have serious doubts about whether I was in the right place. I mean, what's the point of it all?'

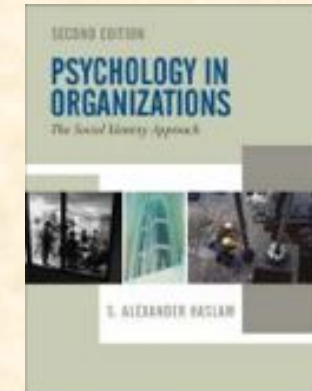
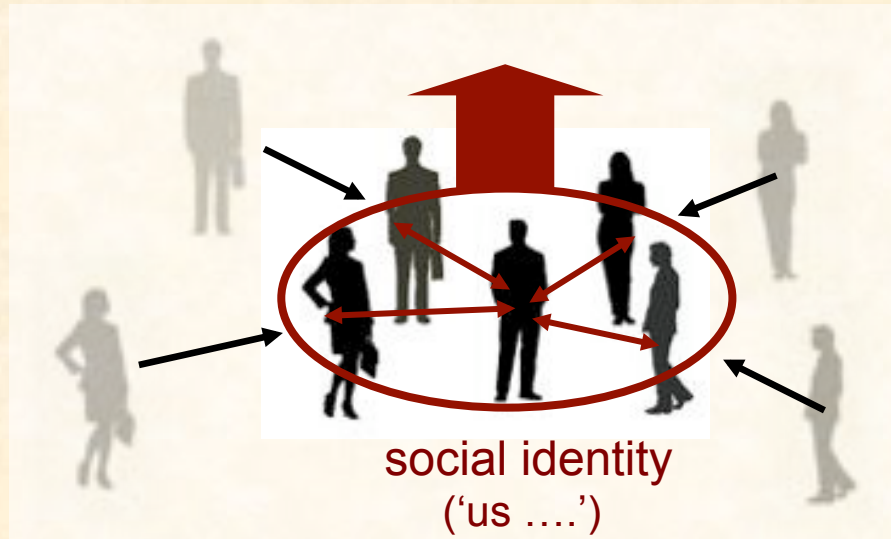
Female Professional, 52



The gender-stress-disidentification (GSD) model

(Ryan, Haslam, Hersby & Kulich, APA, 2009)

Why should we care about social identity?



- When a sense of shared social identity (e.g., ‘us members of group X’) becomes salient, this has important implications for social and organizational behaviour (Haslam, 2004; Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2013).
- In particular, those who share this identity are more likely to:
 - perceive themselves as **similar** to each other and as having **more in common**
 - engage in **mutual influence** (because they perceive themselves to have a common perspective on reality)
 - work to **co-ordinate** their behaviour with reference to emergent group norms
 - **work collaboratively** to advance the interests of the group as a whole — e.g., by providing valued forms of **social support**.

Why should we care about social identity?

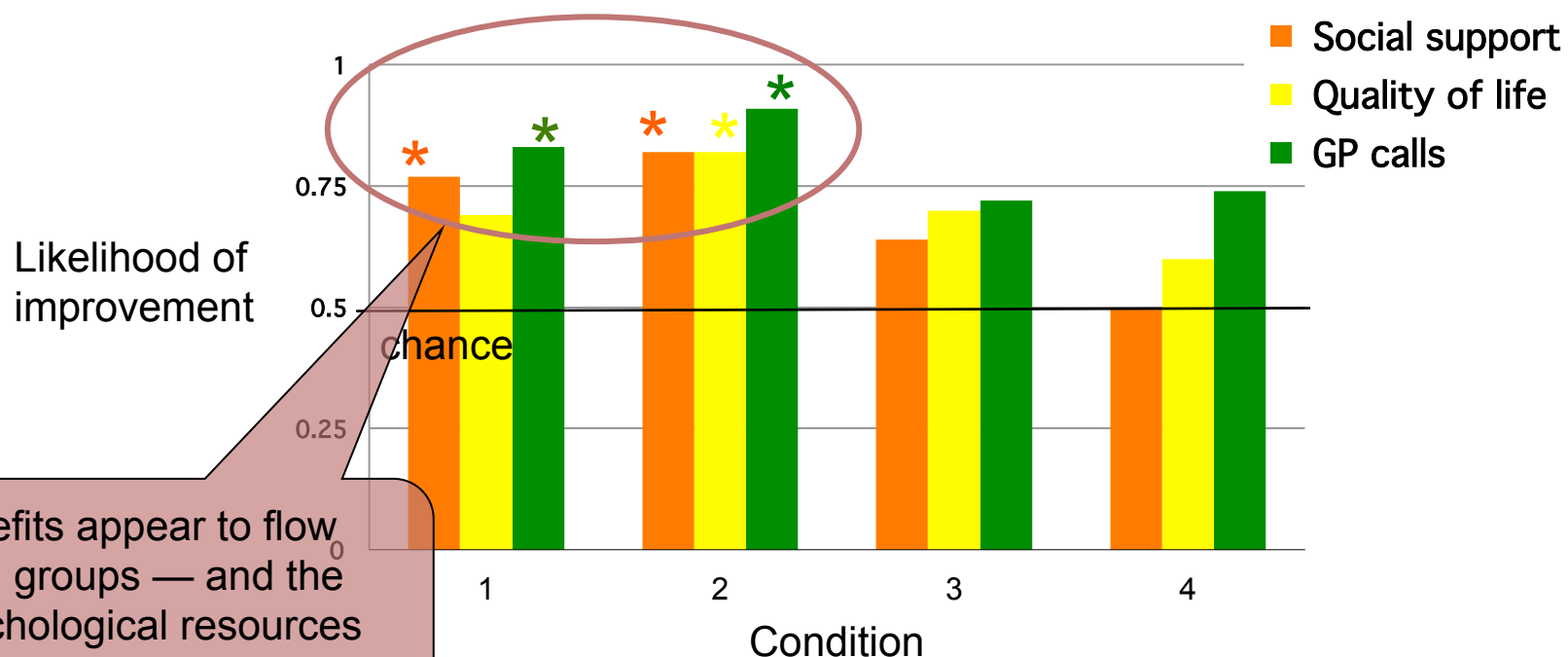
A. Social identity is life-enhancing

(Gleibs et al., 2011, *P&H*)

Design

Older adults in care, randomly assigned to one of four conditions:

1. Water solo.
2. Water club.
3. News solo.
4. News club.



benefits appear to flow from groups — and the psychological resources they provide — not the tap

Why should we care about social identity?

B. Social identity promotes cognitive health

(C. Haslam et al., *BJP*, in press)

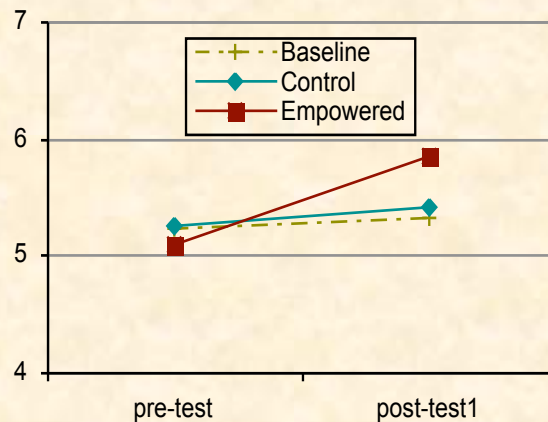
Design

Older adults in care, randomly assigned to one of three conditions:

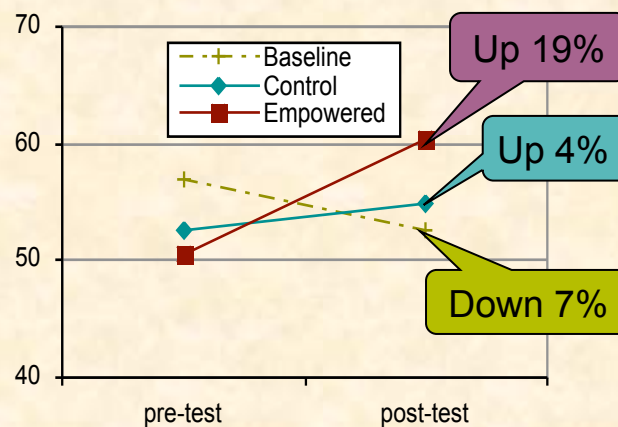
1. Involved, *as a group*, in decisions about new décor.
2. Not involved in these decisions (control).
3. No redecoration (baseline).



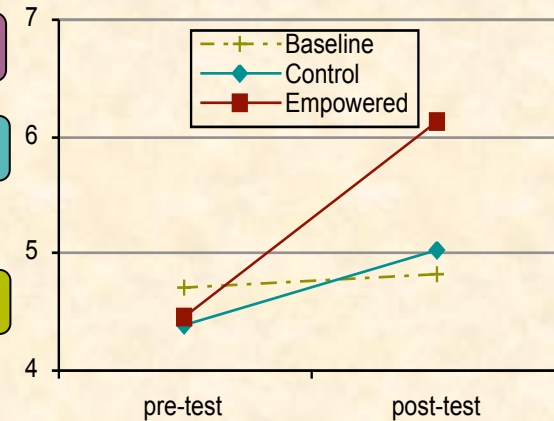
social identification



cognitive functioning



life satisfaction



Creating meaningful social groups builds a sense of shared identity. This promotes intellectual engagement, and hence well-being

Why should we care about social identity?

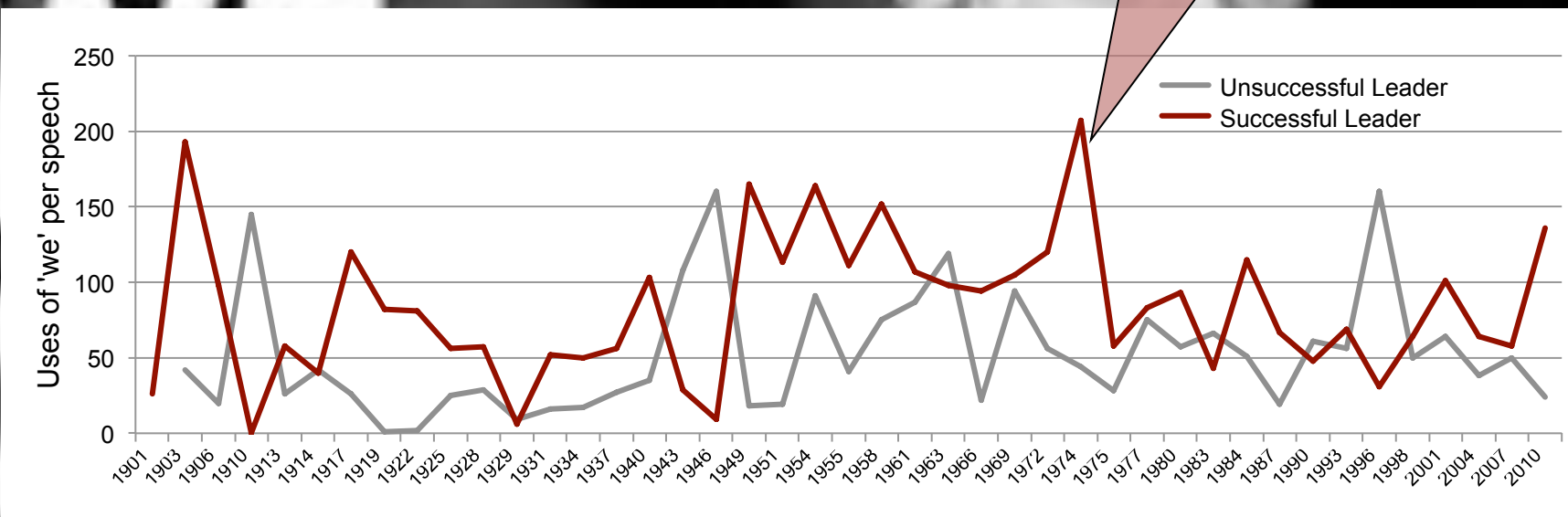
D. Social identities make leadership possible

(Steffens & Haslam, under review)

Speaking for 'us' is not just something successful leaders do, it is part of what makes them successful

Design

- Content analysis of official campaign speeches in all Australian elections

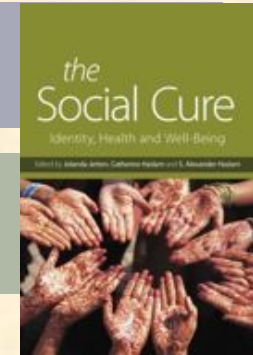


- Winners make 62% more references to “us” and “we” than losers (once every 122 words vs. every 182 words for losers).
- Victors use more collective pronouns than their unsuccessful opponents in 33 of 42 elections (79%).

A social identity model of retirement

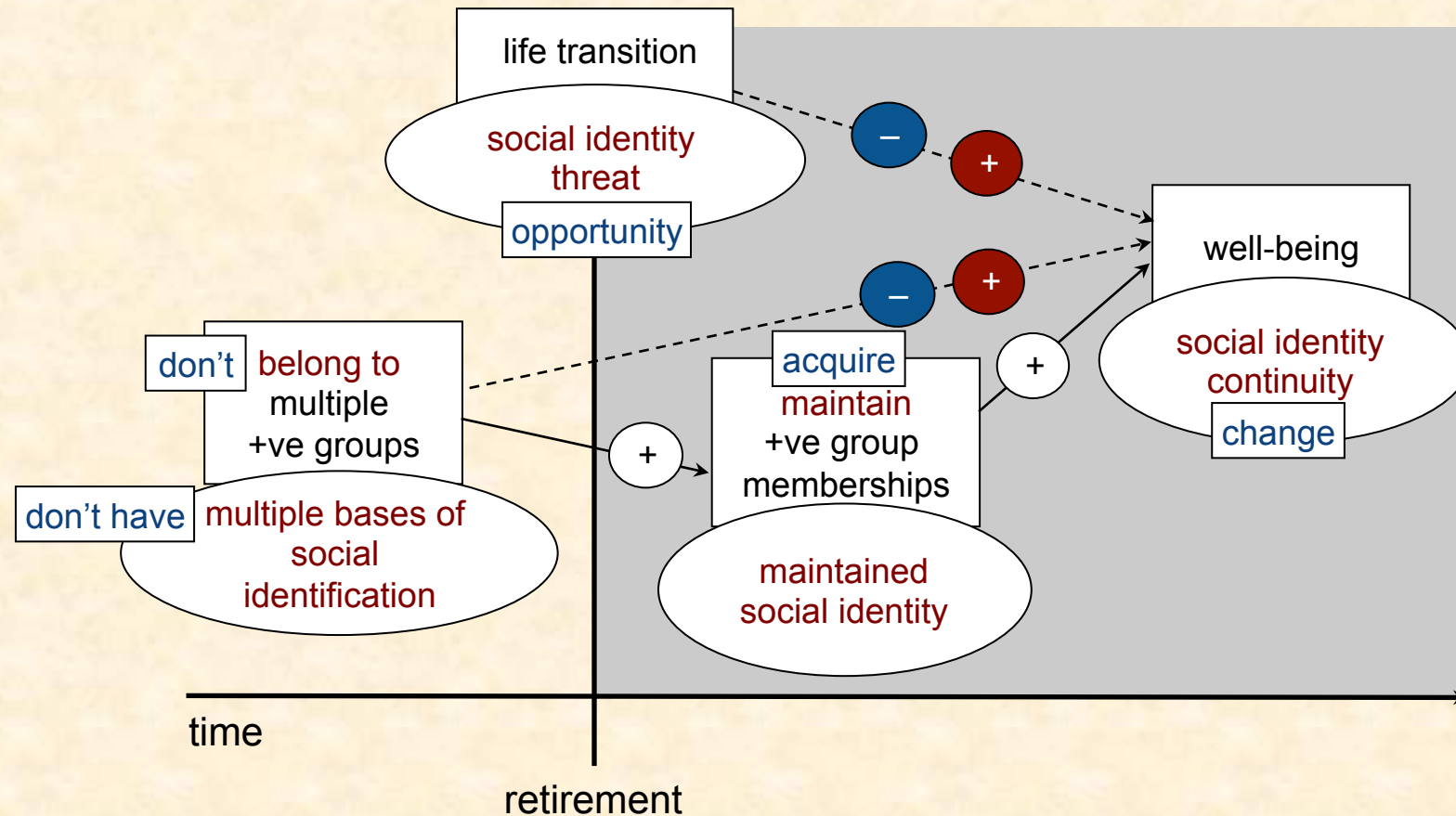
Social identity model of identity change (SIMIC)

(C. Haslam et al., 2008; Jetten & Pachana, 2011; Jetten, A. Haslam, Iyer & C. Haslam, 2010)



For high organizational identifiers (with +ve work-based social identities)

For low organizational identifiers (with -ve work-based social identities)



Conclusions

- Retirement (like other life transitions) can be usefully thought of as a process of social identity transition.
- Whether retirement is a curse or a blessing (Wang, 2007) depends on whether it is experienced as a **social identity threat** (associated with losing +ve social identity) or a **social identity opportunity** (associated with losing -ve social identity).
- Which of these it is will also determine whether pathways to well-being involve the **maintenance** of old social identities or the **acquisition** of new ones.
- In this way, the social identity approach provides an integrated framework not only for theorizing about retirement but also managing its causes and consequences — both positive and negative.