"Levi core", Diederich-Fornaess index, and D'Angelo forms

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We introduce the notion of "Levi core" of a CR manifold M of hypersurface type, and prove that, whenever M is the boundary of a smoothly bounded pseudoconvex domain Ω, the Diederich-Fornaess index of Ω equals a numerical invariant of the Levi core. This line of research is connected and extends recent results of B. Liu, M. Adachi, and J. Yum.