

THE JOURNEY OF MALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN PURSUIT OF
LEADERSHIP WHILE IN COLLEGE: A GROUNDED THEORY

A dissertation submitted to
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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By

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THE JOURNEY OF MALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN PURSUIT OF
LEADERSHIP WHILE IN COLLEGE: A GROUNDED THEORY (303 pp.)

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The purpose of this research study was to develop a grounded theory that identifies how undergraduate male-identifying students pursue leadership positions. Specifically, this grounded theory sought to answer the following questions: (1) How do undergraduate male students perceive leadership and (2) What is the process in which undergraduate male students decide to pursue leadership positions while in college? Nineteen diverse male-identifying students who had all held university-funded leadership positions at a large state university located in the northeastern United States participated in interviews. The study participants were asked about their leadership pursuit journey, as well as how they perceived leadership through the utilization of a semi-structured interview format.

Male-identifying students identified that they perceived leadership in four distinct ways: leadership as a way for personal advancement, leadership as a vehicle for altruism, leadership challenges self-esteem, and through the negative perceptions of leadership by peers. This study found that male-identifying students pursue leadership while in college through the process of Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation; this was also identified as the core category of this substantive theory. Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation encompasses six sub-processes that were identified to take place in a progressive step process, starting with step one and moving through step six. The six

fundamental processes identified are Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1), Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2), Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3), Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4), Pursuing Leadership (Step 5), and Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept “Snowball Effect” (Step 6).

DEDICATION

For my mom, Bonnie Jean Perkins

I am blessed to have had your unconditional love and support in all things.
You are missed and loved, always and forever!

And

To my kids,
May you approach all your goals with the same, dedication,
work ethic, and persevering spirit that it takes to complete a Ph.D.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“One of the universal cravings of our time is a hunger for compelling and creative leadership” (Burns, 1978, p. 1). Even though this quote was written and published almost 40 years ago, it is still very relevant today, given the current cultural climate and the need for leaders to grow and develop a team rather than manage personnel. Joel Goldberg (2017), Assistant Professor of Business at SUNY Empire State Colleges, provided a succinct and in-depth overview of why the facilitation of compelling and creative leadership still matters today.

Leadership . . . is more than management and administration. It entails the ability to motivate others and to inspire collective effectiveness. It also involves an ability to understand and respond to an ever-more complex environment - whether it is the corporate environment in which a team operates or the global market in which a corporation competes. (para. 1)

The understanding of leadership development has drastically changed in these 40 years, even though it has been researched, studied, and written about for more than 2,000 years (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). “A critical turning point in the study of leadership took place when scholars began to look at leadership as a process rather than defined only by specific individuals who exercised influence and authority” (Komives & Wagner, 2017, p. 7).

The understanding of how leaders are developed directly impacts society’s view of who can be a leader and thus, influences the role that institutions of higher education

take in infusing leadership development in the curricular (learning directly related to course of study) and co-curricular (learning that takes place outside of the classroom, but compliments the curricular). Osiemo (2012) contended that the collegiate years are crucial formational years that help to set the trajectory of a college student's personal and professional path. Likewise, Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt (1999) stated that the "development of leadership among college students is one of the goals often cited in the mission statements of higher education institutions" (p. 51). However, Komives et al. (2011) noted that leadership development "is more than a by-product of a college education" (p. 35) and entails more than skill building for the professional world. Similarly, Dugan and Kodama (2013) also highlighted the importance of leadership development; they noted that "cultivating leaders who are prepared to tackle complex social issues are positioned as a critical outcome of higher education and a tool for diversifications of the workforce" (p. 184). It is in the belief that cultivating leaders is genuinely a critical outcome of students' collegiate years that colleges and universities have begun to implement leadership development centers, leadership majors, minors, certificates, and programs (Komives et al., 2011).

Even though leadership development has genuinely become an area of emphasis on college campuses (Seemiller, 2016), it is imperative that higher education professionals know the makeup and unique characteristics of the students that comprise today's college and university campuses. It is in knowing this makeup that staff and faculty can ensure that students are genuinely engaging in the leadership development process. One of the significant tasks that higher education professionals have is to

develop the leaders of tomorrow. This mission is only possible if they know and understand the specific needs of students. While the mantra “developing the leaders of tomorrow” is a bit cliché, there is a significant level of truth in this statement, as research has shown that the collegiate years are critical formational years (Osiemo, 2012).

Many leadership theories and their subsequent models were framed, influenced, and developed in the social context in which they were created. It is imperative for both educators and practitioners to understand that the context and social norms of when a leadership theory and practice are created directly impact the parts of leadership and leadership development that are emphasized. This notion is reaffirmed by Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2013) when they stated, “Leadership is not static; it must be practiced flexibility. The rapid pace of change leads people to continually seek new ways of relating to shared problems” (p. 6).

It is important to note that many of the first leadership theories were developed out of a patriarchal view of leadership, resulting in a research focus on primarily male leadership development by default. In most instances, the term leadership and the desirable qualities associated with leadership are seen as masculine. Lipman-Blumen (1992) affirmed this when she stated, “The traditional American concept of leadership is a pastiche based upon a masculine ego-ideal glorifying the competitive, combative, controlling, creative, aggressive, self-reliant individualist” (p. 185). However, there has been significant progress toward a more inclusive approach to leadership development and, more specifically, student leadership development. This movement can be seen in the development of new leadership theories and subsequent publications such as Kouzes

and Posner's *The Student Leadership Challenge* (1987, as found in Komives et al., 2011), as well as in Komives, Longerbeam, Mainella, Osteen, and Owen's leadership identity development model (2005). As evidenced by the shift in culture today, there was a definite need to move away from the belief that effective leaders primarily embodied masculine qualities to a view that "leadership can be exhibited in many ways" (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013, p. 6).

On college campuses today, there is an array of students that identify in many different ways and with multiple identities. Ortiz and Santos (2010) also noted, "For the past few decades, research on students' identity formation has expanded to focus on social identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class" (para. 3). Given this knowledge, higher education practitioners need to know how to accurately engage and develop students that embody multiple identities. In the same way, Ortiz and Santos (2010) recognized students' multiple identities and observed that "to adequately support students' strong psychological need to explore and affirm their different social identities, it is important to understand how those identities develop and intersect" (para. 3). Leadership development thought, practice, and publication have expanded significantly beyond a patriarchal view of leadership to the point that now women are currently the most studied group of individuals regarding leadership development (Komives et al., 2011). Although the focus on women in leadership roles has been highly influential to modern leadership development theory, the abundance of current studies focusing on female leadership has created a gap in the literature on how

men and specifically male undergraduate students view and learn leadership in today's dominant culture (Komives et al., 2011).

The pursuit of this research project initially developed out of my anecdotal observations of the lack of male student leaders pursuing leadership positions on the college and university campuses where I worked. I have had experience at private liberal arts institutions as well as at a large public state university. In both educational settings, there are only a handful of male students who apply for university-sanctioned and funded leadership positions, such as resident assistants, orientation leaders, student teaching assistants, admissions ambassadors, and the like. In light of my own experience and practitioner need, I began to look for recent research studies on the topic of male leadership engagement. However, research studies on male leadership development are limited, and even fewer studies can be found addressing the topic of male leadership engagement on college campuses (Haber, 2012; Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016). Specifically, the research is limited when trying to understand, from a practitioners' standpoint, how to motivate male students to pursue college funded leadership positions during their undergraduate tenure. It is this lack of exploration of how male students pursue and engage in leadership opportunities during their collegiate years that attest to the need for research in this specific area.

Importance of Study

Historically, higher education and the leadership opportunities offered to students during these formative years were primarily geared toward male students. This influx of male students going to college is documented in the data collected by the National Center

for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Such data show that in 1950, the total college enrollment was 2,381,298 students; 1,560,392 were male, and 720,906 were female. Since the 1950s, there has been an emphasis placed on gender equality. Moreover, since 1979, female enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions has surpassed male student enrollment by a wide margin. In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), the divide among male and female college student enrollment is predicted to continue to grow into the foreseeable future. The lack of male enrollment, retention, and graduation in colleges and universities has become a topic of concern (Lewin, 2006; Marcus, 2017; Semuels, 2017). In light of the decrease in enrollment and retention of male students, there is also a need to understand how male-identifying students view leadership development as well as why and how they pursue leadership opportunities while enrolled in college (Haber, 2012; Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016).

The pursuit of this research project developed out of my observations and direct experience in not having enough male students apply for university necessary leadership positions (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). These observations included a wide array of essential university student leadership positions like that of resident assistants, orientation leaders, admissions ambassadors, and the like over the past 14 years. In light of the fact that the leadership positions I oversaw continually struggle to elicit enough male student participants, I began to look for research studies that had been done on the topic of male leadership engagement while in college. My goal was to understand specifically male leadership engagement better and to improve the number of undergraduate male students

applying for our orientation leader and resident assistant positions. However, I did not find many studies that addressed male leadership in general and even fewer that specifically addressed the topic of how male-identifying students perceive and engage leadership opportunities on college campuses. Of the research studies that I did encounter, they expressed the need for more research on the topic of male leadership development (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Eich, 2007; Haber, 2012). Haber (2012) specifically stated about college students in general that “research on college students’ understandings of leadership is sparse, and the existing studies on this topic are limited in scope” (p. 27). Additionally, Komives et al. (2011) noted that there is becoming a gap in the literature that informs theorists and practitioners on how men view and learn leadership in today’s culture.

Many of the research studies on student leadership development, although they include both male and female-identifying students, do not differentiate the results by gender identity and thus only provide generalized data. That is to say, these studies include male students but are not done with the purpose of exclusively examining male students and how they perceive and engage in leadership. Additionally, when evaluating the topic of leadership development and how to engage students, mentorship programs are the typical programmatic fix when seeking to connect and develop leaders.

This study is important not only at a theoretical level but from the standpoint of a practitioner as well. My initial intrigue with the topic of undergraduate male leadership development started after observing time and time again a deficit in the number of male students that were applying for all levels and types of university-funded positions,

including those that were sex-specific, such as a resident assistant. This study provides practitioners with an insider's view on how male-identifying students at a public four-year institution engage and experience leadership based upon their journeys. The findings of this dissertation and resulting theory provide a foundation in which to understand male-identifying students and their leadership pursuit process.

Purpose of Study

As a result of the lack of research and literature on the topic of male leadership involvement (Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016) during the collegiate years, this grounded theory research study on the topic of male leadership development benefits researchers and practitioners alike. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to understand the experiences, motivations, and processes in which undergraduate male-identifying students decide to pursue leadership positions while enrolled at a large, public, mid-western, four-year institution, which is called Northeastern State University (pseudonym) throughout this study. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do undergraduate male students perceive leadership while in college?
2. What is the process in which undergraduate male students decide to pursue leadership positions while in college?

Significance of Study

The significance of this study is founded on the lack of current research assessing why male students decide to engage in undergraduate leadership. More specifically, through the use of the grounded theory method, this research study provides practitioners and theorists concrete building blocks that contribute to the understanding of male

leadership understanding and development. The goal of this study, through purposeful interviewing of male-identifying students, was to identify a grounded theory that explained the leadership development process of male student leaders. Given the level of importance placed on students feeling connected to the university, and the push for programs and colleges to retain students, this study is very timely for institutions of higher education.

Furthermore, another significant component of this study worth noting is the methodology that was used to explore male-identifying student leadership pursuit. Whereas there are several quantitative leadership assessment tools (Leadership Attitudes and Beliefs Scale, Engagement Survey, and Socially Responsible Leadership Scale) available that allow researchers to reach out to large student demographics in order to hone in on generalized themes and beliefs about leadership, this qualitative grounded theory study provides a higher level of depth and breadth in understanding the male-identifying leadership process. The rich and accurate data that this study generated was a direct result of the utilization of the constructive grounded theory method.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) noted that by utilizing a grounded theory methodology, one can be “relatively sure that the theory will fit and work” (p. 3). Fit is a fundamental distinguishing component of grounded theory, as the process of data collection keeps the purpose of the study and population being analyzed at the forefront of the research process. The theory, Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation, that was identified in this research study is as Glaser and Strauss suggested, intimately connected to the data collected and not a theory that has been forced to fit. In order to be intimately connected

to the data, interviewing is typically used for data collection. For this study, face-to-face interviews were the primary data source, and so allowed male-identifying students to share in totality how they perceived, understood, and engaged leadership. In their interviews, they were not forced to select an answer that “best” described their experience, but rather their real, in-depth experience was shared and created the data, and ultimately the theory.

My substantive theory, Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation, accurately answers the question of how undergraduate male students not only perceive leadership while in college; it also describes the process in which undergraduate male students decide to pursue leadership positions in college, and adds to the current body of leadership research. Additionally, not only does this substantive theory answer the guiding research questions, it also provides a much-needed framework for college and university practitioners for how to best engage and provide formal and informal leadership development programming for male-identifying students. This practitioner need was made very evident when my proposal was accepted to facilitate a roundtable discussion entitled Where Have They All Gone? Engaging Undergraduate Male Student Leaders at the Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience held in Atlanta, Georgia.

Not only did getting accepted to present affirm this topic’s relevance, but also the fact that the room was filled to capacity with institutional representation ranging from large state universities to small private liberal arts institutions. The main question asked by those in attendance was, “How do we get more male students to engage in our leadership programs and positions?” It is in these questions that current higher education

practitioners have that also highlights the timelines of my research findings. While I do not presume that this research study now serves as the magic answer guide to all questions surrounding male-identifying engagement and leadership development, I do believe that it provides a significant platform to help practitioners to better serve and develop the male-identifying students at each of the institutions represented in that presentation room.

Key Definitions

One of the more difficult words to succinctly define is the term *leader*. Currently, there are many schools of thought on what it means to lead or to be a leader on a college campus. Shertzer and Schuh (2004) noted, “A student’s definition of leadership may play a significant role in whether or not the student perceives him/herself as a leader” (p. 112). In the literature, there does not appear to be one succinct definition used to define a student leader. For example, Tillapaugh and Haber-Curran (2016) in their research study looking at male leadership define “student leaders” as students who had “held at least one significant leadership position on campus” (p. 134) and that were known “for their prominence as student leaders on campus as well as their varied experiences on-campus” (p. 135).

Similarly, Komives et al. (2005) identify student leaders in their grounded theory study as “college student participants who had been observed working effectively with others toward shared purposes” (p. 594). Ultimately, Komives et al. (2005) focus on relational leadership as a key characteristic in their definition of a student leader. Although there are a number of definitions utilized for student leader in research and

literature, for the sake of this study, the term *student leader* is defined as an undergraduate student whose leadership role is earned through either a submitted application and or a face-to-face interview at a four-year public university and that is funded by the university and viewed as a key student functional role for the university (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). Examples of this type of role include resident assistants, orientation leaders, undergraduate student government positions, and admissions ambassadors, to name a few.

The phrase *leadership development* is another term that is commonly used in reference to students on college campuses. While leadership development can be viewed as merely the outward development of an individual, such as their public speaking skills, development happens internally as well. For this study, I am using the definition that Komives, Longerbeam, Mainella, Osteen, and Owen (2006) created for leadership development, which stated that it “involves engaging with learning opportunities in one’s environment over time to build one’s capacity or efficacy to engage in leadership. This developmental approach entails moving from simple to more complex dimensions of growth” (p. 402).

The crux of this study is focused on “*male*” *identifying leadership development and leadership pursuit*, and it is important to understand how this term is utilized and interpreted in this study regarding the different definitions that currently exist. The definition of a male from a biological perspective quantifies male as those born as a boy and have the associated reproductive system. The definition of being male from a gendered perspective does not focus on biological factors, but rather, the socially defined

characteristics of being male. While there are many ways that students identify on college campuses, this study defined “male students” through the gendered definition perspective. Each student in this study identified as a cisgender male. The following definition provides an explanation of what it means to identify as a *cisgender male*.

The term cisgender (from the Latin *cis*-meaning “on the same side as”) can be used to describe individuals who possess, from birth and into adulthood, the male or female reproductive organs (sex) typical of the social category of man or woman (gender) to which that individual was assigned at birth. (Aultman, 2014, p. 61)

The cisgender definition was selected in order to narrow the scope of the study. While future research on leadership development and engagement is also needed on all gender identities, this study was specifically narrowed so to be able to glean a clear picture of cisgender male-identifying students’ pursuit of leadership.

Delimitations

Leadership development is a vast concept, and for the sake of study clarity and focus I had to identify just one area to focus. Therefore, I intentionally chose to examine only male undergraduate student leadership development and engagement while in college. Currently, there is a lack of research studies on engagement in leadership and specifically within university sanctioned leadership positions (Haber, 2012). Due to the scope of this study, I only included essential student leadership positions that are paid by the university. The rationale for this exclusion is founded in the simple fact that I wanted to understand why male students choose to engage in leadership positions specifically

offered by the university. These types of positions traditionally have a set protocol on how they are facilitated, and thus, the students are expected to perform a specific type of duty or lead in such a way that has an intended outcome. In contrast, if this study would have been opened up to students that lead student organizations or serve in a varsity sports captain role, or were in leadership positions that they, the students, decided the responsibilities of the leadership roles, this would not be comparing similar types of leadership opportunities, training, expectations, and requirements. However, there is merit in studying these types of leadership positions, but this will have to be one day developed into a separate study.

Due to the small amount of research on the topic of undergraduate male leadership development while in college, this study has brought to light additional areas that need to be researched, and this is discussed at length in Chapter 5. Although I highlight multiple concepts that need additional exploration and follow-up studies, this study has successfully developed a foundational understanding of how male students in their collegiate years view, understand, and pursue undergraduate leadership.

Limitations

This research study presented a few limitations, but none of them impacted the value or trustworthiness of the findings. One of the main limitations of this study included the location in which the study took place. Given that all participants were from one institution, the data collected are not inclusive of the experiences of all male-identifying students at varying types and sizes of institutions. Additionally, to create a grounded theory, I had to reach theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014).

However, although I was initially concerned about reaching theoretical saturation due to only utilizing students from one university, this was not a problem. Another potential limitation of this study is the way that I defined leadership. Given the parameters that I placed on who is considered a leader in this study, the definition is limiting as there are students who see themselves as “leaders,” but are not in positions developed and hired by the university. As a result of this definition, an unintended result was my having to turn away some potentially great candidates to interview.

While the parameters of those that I studied—male-identifying undergraduate students in university-funded leadership positions—provide a specific group of students for the research sample, another potential limitation I faced was the demographics of students that have held a university-funded leadership position. Again, in using my definition of leadership, I have naturally limited the scope of my participant pool, meaning some populations did not have the opportunity to be represented in the data that I collected.

Additionally, since all the students in this study successfully applied for and secured a leadership position by moving through each of the process steps in this theory, I am not able to address alternate scenarios that fall outside of this scope. For example, I do not have data on what happens when male-identifying students either partially move through a process or skip a step entirely. However, with the data that I do have, I believe that the undergraduate male-identifying students that *do not* successfully move through each of these steps are *not likely* to pursue leadership positions while in college. The limitation is that I cannot say this conclusively as a result of this study or the findings.

Similarly, this study did not include unengaged students or student leaders who have not officially held a university-funded leadership position. As a result, this study cannot speak to these students' perceptions of leadership or how they would ultimately pursue leadership. However, if I had interviewed these students, I would have been able to develop an understanding of why they don't pursue leadership, but trying to develop a process in which they would pursue leadership would be very difficult and relative to each student's belief about himself or herself rather than based on a real leadership pursuit experience.

Another limitation of this project is the fact that this research study was conducted at one point in time with a specifically selected group of male-identifying students. The data shared, and theory developed, provide a much-needed understanding of how male-identifying students pursue leadership. Still, it does not provide a rich longitudinal perspective of each student's leadership development journey. The information from the past that each student shared was pulled from distant memories and now through the lens of a successful leader in college, rather than from a non-leader perspective of someone who was being encouraged by their relational support system to become a leader. A longitudinal approach would undoubtedly provide a more nuanced understanding of each student's journey, which would only enhance the developed theory.

To be involved in this research study, there were two key criteria that each student had to meet: He had to (a) identify as a cis-gendered male and (b) have applied for and attained a university-funded leadership position while in college. While these two criteria were all that was needed to develop a general understanding of male-identifying

students' pursuit of leadership, this study did not specifically explore the many identities that each student embodies. For example, I did not seek to understand how a student's sexual identity or socioeconomic status may have enhanced, accelerated, or slowed their leadership pursuit journey. Similarly, I didn't focus on if a student grew up in foster care or an abusive home. There are a number of personal factors and identities that, if specifically identified, may provide even more insight to each process identified in the created theory.

Even though this study did face a few limitations, I did not face anything that significantly hindered the value and validity of the study. Most of the limitations that I identified would provide a great starting point for additional research on the topic of male leadership engagement. However, in regard to my study's limitations, I find a level of comfort in knowing that additional research is going to be conducted on this topic, and as a result, some of the limitations of my study will likely be taken into consideration and directly addressed in a future research study.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides an in-depth review of the current literature surrounding the topic of student leadership development with an emphasis on the literature surrounding male leadership development and engagement. Chapter 3 covers the methodology that I utilized to conduct this study. Chapter 4 provides an overview of my findings and the substantive theory identified. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a discussion on how my findings and grounded theory are situated in the literature. Additionally, Chapter 5 explores the implications of the research findings and what the

findings mean for future research in the area of male-identifying student leadership development.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is divided into seven sections beginning with an introduction, which provides the working framework for the study and discusses various views on the definition of leadership and leadership development. The second section reviews the key student development theorists and their corresponding theories that have significantly impacted the field of higher education. In the third section, some of the more influential leadership development theories utilized in higher education practice are discussed in order to set the stage for understanding current leadership development guiding principles. The fourth section evaluates the literature focusing on the foundational underpinnings of this study—undergraduate male students' *motivations* for leadership. The fifth section explores the key components surrounding the development of a student's leadership identity. Section six reviews two primary modalities that higher education practitioners utilize to provide leadership development on college campuses. The seventh and final section provides an overarching summary of the literature review, highlighting that gap in research and literature that this study fills.

Introduction

The concept of leadership has been pondered, practiced, refined, and theorized about for centuries (Rost, 1991; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999) and yet, there is still more to understand about this ever-evolving concept. For example, in 1974 and then later in 1981, Stogdill and Bass found and analyzed 4,725 studies on leadership and still concluded that there is not a common understanding and practice of leadership (Rost,

1991). Similarly, Burns (1978), hailed as the father of leadership studies, noted that leadership “is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (p. 2). It is truly awe-inspiring to think about the fact that Rost noted in 1991 that there was still a lot to be understood about leadership and now, 27 years later in 2019, we are still seeking to understand the many facets of leadership which have grown even more complex (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). Currently, there are college majors, minors, student leadership development programs that solely focus on leadership development. Similarly, leadership is also the topic of many dissertations and research studies. I, like many before, have become perplexed and intrigued by the concept and philosophical underpinnings of leadership and leadership development, such as, what motivates male-identifying students to pursue leadership positions while in college. Even though there has been a significant amount of research done on the topic of leadership, there is still a lot that is not known, as this ever-changing phenomenon is constantly assimilating to the current social and cultural norms of the time. Years of research on the topic of leadership show that leadership is multifaceted and takes shape based upon the context in which it is viewed and utilized (Rost, 1991). Komives et al. (2013) stated that “the leadership process is not about things—it’s about people” (p. 1). Social norms, contexts, and even us, as human beings, are ever-changing, and thus, the concept of leadership will likely be an eternal topic of study.

The evolution of leadership development thought can be seen in the five approaches that morphed over time to explain how leaders either came to or were given their position as a leader. These leadership approaches include trait theory, behavioral,

situational, power-influence, and transformational. Trait theory is an approach that focuses on an individual's specific personality traits and innate abilities. In the behavioral leadership approach, leaders are said to have the leadership attribute because of what the leader does in a group setting. Situational leadership occurs when a leader can adjust and flex to the needs of the group. The power-influence leadership style is an approach that focuses on a leader's use of the amount and type of power to influence groups. Transformational leadership focuses on how the leader can create a positive culture of inspiration and motivation through the change of individuals and social systems (Brungardt, 1996).

Whereas there are facets of each style that may play a role in a leader's effectiveness, transformational leadership, and the associated approach to leadership development has struck a loud chord within higher education institutions. Transformational leadership aligns well with many institutions as they want students to see immediately in the recruiting process that students who graduate from their institution will become or evolve into change agents and global citizens, able to take on leadership in their respective futures.

Komives and Wagner (2017) noted that a critical shift in leadership development philosophy took place in the belief that leadership development is indeed a process and not solely dependent upon innate traits. Additionally, James Burns is credited with being one of the key individuals who challenged the common belief that leadership was due to innate traits of an individual; instead, he believed and wrote that leadership development is a process that can be developed (Burns, 1978). It is in the belief that students'

leadership acumen can grow and be refined that has created space for the development of multiple leadership development theories (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). The leadership theories were created to accurately provide a thorough and concise, systematic understanding of how individuals grow and develop in their leadership ability. Komives et al. (2011) also noted that it has only been in the last 30 years that standards of practice, professional support systems for higher education practitioners, and a student-centered focus on leadership development have come about in leadership education.

As highlighted in the descriptions of the five leadership approaches noted previously, leadership views and beliefs on what constitutes a leader have drastically changed over time. As a society, we have moved from the thought that leadership ability is the result of a specific innate trait, trait theory, to the understanding that true leadership acumen is multifaceted.

The term or phrase leadership development is heavily utilized in many environments, so much so, that a large contingency would say that it is over-utilized, especially in higher education institutions. Even though this longstanding argument will continue whether the term is overused, there is a consensus on the lack of agreement, or rather understanding, of what constitutes leadership development as well as how the term leadership should be defined (Haber, 2012). A consistent issue that is encountered when researching the concepts of leadership and leadership development is that there is not a universal definition (Burgoon, Keating, & Rosch, 2014; Osiemo, 2012; Rost, 1991). It is difficult to find a universal definition in the higher education realm that is used to define

leadership, as the term leadership can be attached to virtually anything. For example, there is ethical leadership, servant leadership, spiritual leadership, and authentic leadership, to name a few (Yukl, 2010). Bass (1990) noted that there are about as many definitions of leadership as people trying to define it. Even though there are varying views on what constitutes leadership or leadership development, it is still emphasized by higher education institutions as one of the sought-after outcomes for their students (Astin & Astin, 2000; Haber, 2012). While it would be impossible to state one working definition of leadership or leadership development, many commonalities exist in the literature regarding the types of attributes that are associated with the concept and practice of leadership.

One of the current questions regarding student leadership that many researchers are particularly interested in knowing is how students define, perceive, and engage leadership (Haber, 2012). These questions are of particular interest to those seeking to understand and develop undergraduate male students, as the research and writing on male leadership development are scarce (Komives et al., 2011). It is important to note that facets of how college students define, perceive, and engage leadership has been researched and written about in varying degrees by notable researchers and theorists like Komives, Dugan, Owen, and Posner to name a few. For example, Komives et al. (2005), in their grounded theory research study, looked at how undergraduate college students perceived and engaged leadership. In this study, they found that student “leadership development involves engaging with learning opportunities in one’s environment over time to build one’s capacity or efficacy to engage in leadership” (p. 402). Komives et al.

noted that students developed an understanding of what it means to be a leader by seeing individuals be leaders and then by getting an opportunity to lead, which ultimately led to the development of the leadership identity development model. While this grounded theory study, and now widely referenced leadership development model, provide an understanding of how students develop their perception of leadership and how they engage it, it does not explicitly look at cisgender male-identifying students in our current culture and how they build leadership efficacy.

Additionally, as noted in the leadership identity development model (Komives et al., 2005), it is essential for new students to be able to see themselves in the various leadership roles on a college campus. Not only is it imperative for new students to see leadership roles on a college campus, but it is also crucial for new students to see students who look like them in the various leadership roles. McCauley, Moxley, and Velsor (1998), like Komives et al. (2005), also noted the impact of leadership experiences on individuals' perceptions of leadership. So, to be able to provide a positive leadership experience that includes students seeing themselves in the leaders around them only builds one's leadership efficacy.

While student perceptions and reasons for engagement have been explicitly researched, as noted in the Komives et al. (2005) study, it like many other research studies, looks at students generally and lacks the specificity that will help practitioners reach and develop unique populations of students in an individualized way. In order to be sure that yet another research study is warranted on the topic of student leadership and that there are still gaps in the current research and leadership writings, an in-depth review

of the literature is necessary. Given that the topic of leadership is so broad, this literature review is intentionally positioned to look at the current research and literature that addresses how undergraduate male students perceive and engage leadership during their collegiate years.

Foundational Student Development Theorists and Corresponding Theories

The college years are important developmental years, and as such, there are a number of student development theories that higher education institutions ascribe to in order to provide a framework to develop their students. While facets of leadership development are intertwined within some student development theories, it is important to understand how student development theory impacts students and their developmental process. This next section helps to provide the foundational information surrounding student development theory as these theories many times aid in a student's leadership development process.

Time changes many things, and the same is true for student development theory and practice. Like many human service type functions, student development roots tie back to psychology, sociology, and the study of human behavior (Evans et al., 2010). The purpose of higher education is a question that is indeed as old as the formation of higher education. This purpose morphed from a religious focus, preparing students for the clergy, to a place that prepares students for vocational opportunities (Evans et al., 2010). Even though the end goal or purpose of higher education has evolved over time, the common goal of "developing" students has always existed in some format whether that was a focus on spiritual, moral, or vocational development. It is important to note

that “development” has looked vastly different based upon the period and corresponding social, religious, and vocational influences of the time. Historically, the phrase student development has been a very general phrase that was loosely interpreted and made to fit whatever the needs were of the time. However, Miller and Prince (1976) provided a thorough definition that is still very applicable today: they defined student development as “the application of human development concepts in postsecondary settings so that everyone involved can master increasingly complex developmental tasks, achieve self-direction, and become interdependent” (p. 3).

Additionally, Kurt Lewin developed a heuristic formula $B=f(P \times E)$ that helps to explain why people behave the way they do. The formula states, “that behavior (B) is a function (f) of the interaction (X) of a person (P) and environment (E)” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 29). This formula states that in order to understand students, the environment of students must be examined so that a complete picture can be developed about the students being studied.

Miller and Prince’s (1976) definition provides a solid foundation in which to understand the purpose of developing students while in college. However, more is needed to provide intentional direction on how to develop students, and this is where the expansion of student development theory has had a significant impact. College students are complex due to the intersection of multiple transitions at one time that all coalesce during a critical time of identity development. Additionally, as social norms have changed, and students evolve, new theories are developed to explain the most current student population better. Similarly, theories are developed to address specific

populations of students, as development is multifaceted. Currently, numerous theories can be studied, ranging from cognitive, emotional, spiritual, social, that address student development in some manner. However, this literature review highlights foundational student development theories, key student leadership theorists, and corresponding theories.

In order to explain and meet the complexity of the many ways that students change and grow during the collegiate years, researchers have spent countless hours developing theories ranging from racial identity development to gender identity development. However, as theory development has come a long way, it is essential to have an understanding of where student development theory started, the populations the theories sought to address, and who the founding theorists were. Nevitt Sanford, Arthur Chickering, William Perry, and Lawrence Kohlberg are four significant theorists who have had a longstanding impact on student development theory and are considered individuals who laid the foundation for the building of subsequent theories.

Nevitt Sanford

“Prior to Nevitt Sanford’s work, no developmental theory other than Erik Erikson’s was available to describe the changing patterns of thinking, feeling and behavior in college-age students” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 1). Nevitt Sanford, a developmental theorist, is regarded as one of the first scholars to look at the relationship between students, the college environment, and the transition from advanced adolescence to young adulthood (Evans et al., 2010). From his research, two pivotal concepts related to development emerged, and they are differentiation and integration. Additionally, he

believed that change in a student is based upon a student's level of readiness, and then the level of challenge a student can manage is proportionate to the amount of support available. One of the fundamental points highlighted in Sanford's work is that in order to adequately challenge students, there must be an appropriate level of support based upon each student's need.

Arthur Chickering

Arthur Chickering, a researcher and theorist, is best known for his book *Education and Identity*; his book is revered as a foundational work in understanding student identity development while in college. Through hours of administering tests, inventories, and other instruments to sophomore and senior students, Chickering used the data collected to develop a conceptual framework of his findings (Evans et al., 2010). As a result of these findings, he developed the theory that students move through seven vectors of development which include: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010). An important aspect to note is that Chickering specifically chose the term vector because this term communicates direction and magnitude. Like Sanford, Chickering believed that one's environment plays a significant role in influencing a student's developmental process. However, through his research, Chickering was able to provide specific developmental facets in a student's identity development journey that the external environment impacts, with the college environment impact being of specific focus. Chickering and Reisser (1993) are very

clear on what they believe the purpose of the college environment is as they state, “Our basic proposition is that human development should be the organizing purpose of higher education” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 265). The seven vectors provide a comprehensive overview of how college students develop identity while in college and how practitioners can, as Sanford would also recommend, both support and challenge students in their collegiate years.

William Perry

Like Chickering, William Perry and his associates at Harvard University conducted research that looked at how college students “interpret and make meaning of the teaching and learning process” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 84). Perry noted that Sanford’s work impacted his research, which is a testament to the fact that Sanford’s seminal work had a lasting impact. From this research, Perry developed a theory of what he believed was the typical developmental process of students’ patterns, thoughts, and views of the world. Like Chickering, Perry was also very intentional about the word he used to describe how students progress, and instead of using the word state, he chose position. Some of his rationale for this word selection includes the fact that the term “position” does not indicate duration, it best represents the fact that a person can range in structures and position and this term accurately describes the starting point from where we all see the world (Evans et al., 2010).

Perry’s theory of intellectual and ethical development seeks to show students’ meaning-making process, and it includes the following positions: (a) duality, (b) multiplicity, and (c) relativism (King, 1978). When students hold a dualistic position,

they view the world as right or wrong and black or white. In the position, students' view learning as getting knowledge through receiving insight and answers from the expert, a professor, and then they regurgitate that information with little processing. A position of multiplicity starts to develop when the experts start to contradict each other, and the student is placed in a position of realizing that someone is wrong and that all opinions deserve equal consideration. Additionally, in this position, students begin to see that peers can provide valuable insight and the right answers as well. The last position of understanding and learning that students come to realize in his model is relativism.

When students move to this position, they realize that opinions need support and that all opinions are not equal (Evans et al., 2010). Also, important to note, is that Perry believed that students could time-out in any of the positions, again reaffirming the selection of the term position. Perry's theory, in conjunction with Chickering's, strengthens a student development professional's ability to begin to understand students in their entirety.

While Chickering and Perry provided a deeper understanding of students' identity, intellectual and ethical development, Kohlberg filled a gap and developed a theory that addressed students' moral development.

Lawrence Kohlberg

Lawrence Kohlberg, a psychologist and researcher, developed a theory of moral development after looking at the process of moral reasoning in adolescent boys and then college students. From this initial research, he conducted studies to validate his theory. As a result, Kohlberg's theory consists of six stages that are divided into three levels. "Each level represents a different relationship between the self and society's rules and

expectations” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 103). Level one is called *preconventional*, and in this level, students do not yet know society’s rules and expectations. The second level is called *conventional* and, in this level, students know and now identify with the rules and expectations of society. Level three is called *postconventional*, and those at this level disassociate from the rules and expectations of society and begin to self-select their own rules and expectations. Within each of these levels sits two stages.

The preconventional stage includes heteronomous morality, and this is when students seek to avoid punishment by obeying rules. It also encompasses individualistic/instrumental morality, and this is when students follow the rules if they believe it will benefit them while trying to minimize negative backlash. The conventional level comprises the interpersonally normative morality, which is when students want others to view them as a good person and viewed doing right as meeting the expectations of those they care about. Additionally, the conventional stage also includes social system morality, and in this stage, students view the laws and rules as fair and equal for all and right is adhering to them. The postconventional and final stage is comprised of human rights, and social welfare morality, and in this stage, students evaluate governing laws through a human right’s lens to determine what is right. The morality of unverbalizable, reversible, and prescriptive general ethical principles is also included in the postconventional stage and in this “second principled stage, morality involves equal consideration of the points of view of all involved in a moral situation” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 104). In regard to the last stage, Perry was not able to prove the

existence of stage six in his longitudinal studies but believed it is necessary to complete the theory.

These four seminal theories played a key role in moving forward student development professionals' understanding of all the many facets that make up a student. As noted by all the theorists' work, in order to provide the right space for student growth, they first must be understood cognitively, emotionally, and morally. However, it is also important to note that while the majority of these classic theories were developed based on the experiences of male students, the idea of gender was not specifically taken into consideration for the purpose of the studies and resulting developed theories. It is in this understanding that provides space and warrants the need for research looking specifically at the influence of gender association on development (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010).

Student Leadership Development Theories and Models

“As a body of literature, leadership theory is complex, socially constructed and continuously evolving” (Komives et al., 2011, p. 38). Leadership education has grown and morphed over time, and many of the positive changes can be attributed to the research that has been conducted on the process of student leadership development. In understanding the current leadership models that exist and are utilized on college campuses, a clearer understanding of the current gaps that exist in each of the models presented.

Although there are some college student leadership theories presented in the literature, such as the servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1988), leadership challenge

(Kouzes & Posner, 2014) and the relational leadership model (Komives et al., 2005), there are three seminal theories that are consistently mentioned in the literature. These three works are Baxter Magolda's (2012) self-authorship theory, Astin and Astin's social change model (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996) and Komives et al. (2005) leadership identity development model. Of these three models that are consistently noted in college student leadership literature, only two, self-authorship theory and the leadership identity development model, provide a clear framework for understanding the developmental process that the student is likely to progress through as the student develops as a leader. These theories have sought to understand the development of a person in light of leadership ability. Although each can be used as a stand-alone theory of development, some of the leadership programs reference multiple theories.

Baxter Magolda's Self Authorship

The theory that is referenced the most in the context of leadership development is Baxter Magolda's (1998, 2008) theory of self-authorship. Baxter Magolda spent over 20 years conducting a qualitative study that sought to understand three key questions: How do I know? Who am I? and How do I construct relationships with others? (Davidson, 2011). In addition, Baxter Magolda contended that individuals move through four phases of self-authorship which include: following formulas (doing what authorities suggest), crossroads (dissatisfied with other's decisions), becoming the author of one's life (ability to choose one's beliefs), and internal foundation (individuals become grounded in who they are; Davidson, 2011). The programs that utilize this model tend to develop their

leadership opportunities or curriculum with the idea of purposely walking students through each developmental phase of this theory (Davidson, 2011).

Astin and Astin's Social Change Model of Leadership

The second theory that surfaced within the leadership literature is the social change model of leadership development, which was developed by a team led by Astin and Astin as co-principle investigators (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). This model was the result of Astin and Astin's work with the Higher Education Research Institute, a think tank of individuals who identified key characteristics that they believed students should possess in order to be effective communal leaders that promote social change (Komives et al., 2017). This theory emphasizes the fact that leadership is a collaborative process and that leadership should focus on change for the community (Komives et al., 2017; W. Wagner, 2006). Even though the social change model of leadership development does focus on leadership ability and skills, some say that it relies too heavily on a group to be valuable for personal development. Komives et al. (2005) noted that the social change model and theories like it, do not specifically address student leadership development by being too general. In contrast, they emphasized that their leadership identity development model (LID) is a more well-rounded model that accurately addresses leadership development.

Komives, Longerbeam, Mainella, Owen, and Osteen's LID Model

The third theoretical model that is consistently noted in student leadership articles and also serves as one of the better models for individualized leadership development is the leadership identity development model (LID). The leadership identity development

model was created as a result of Komives et al. (2005) and her team's grounded theory study that focused specifically on student leaders and their leadership development path. The theory suggests that student leaders progress through six stages of development and at each of these stages they go through a process of developing self, understanding group influences, changing the view of self or others, experiencing developmental influences, and continually broadening their view of leadership which also aligns with Astin and Astin (2000). This model does an excellent job of finding the balance between the development that results from group influence, as well as individual reflection.

These leadership development theories are continually referenced in leadership development programs, courses, and the like. However, while they are well researched and utilized in the literature, they lack a level of gender specificity. In understanding the leadership development path of male students, specifically, where a student's gender is intentionally taken into consideration, will only help practitioners address specific student development needs.

Student Leadership Identity Development

The current literature is saturated with leadership philosophies (Komives et al., 2009) as well as coordinating assessments. However, there is currently a gap in the literature that addresses leadership identity development, self-concept, and the development of leadership capacity over a lifespan (Komives et al., 2009). Students in college come to campus with many identities ranging from that of social identities to cultural identities. Some identities are innate, such as one's ethnic identity, but the identities that higher education practitioners can influence fall within the social identity

category. It is in this category that a student's leadership identity falls. Some students come to campus with a substantial leader identity, while others do not. As higher education professionals, who believe in the power of students finding their leadership identity, it is imperative that these professionals understand the various populations and their respective identities on campus. The goal of many institutions is to develop the "leaders" of tomorrow (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999), but if students are not taking on a leadership identity then we, as higher education professionals, are failing. Hall (2004) contended that a student's identity is one of the most critical aspects of leadership development.

When seeking to understand the male-identifying population on college campuses, there are several key areas that must be thought about as professional higher education staff seek to promote and develop a healthy leadership identity. Some of the foundational components to consider include gender, motivations for leadership, definitions of masculinity, leadership self-efficacy, as well as the current leadership development models, and leadership curriculum.

Gender and Leadership

When seeking to understand the needs of male students in their leadership identity development during the collegiate years, it is vital to understand the noted similarities and differences between male and female students in their leadership styles. The Almanac of Higher Education (2018), an annually published document that gathers and compares data about the state of higher education in the United States, asked a question of the 2016 incoming college class about their confidence in their leadership ability. The study found

that female students ranked their ability 7% lower than their male counterparts, 59.7% to 66.7%. However, this same study noted that female students also ranked their academic ability 6.5% lower than male students. Another interesting finding of this study was that there was a higher number of female students enrolled in college classes and that females graduate at a much higher rate at both the four-year and six-year mark (Marcus, 2017; The Almanac, 2018). The paradox here is that while male students self-report confidence in their leadership and academic ability they are not attending college or graduating college at the same rate as their female counterparts (Goldin, Katz, & Kuziemko, 2006; Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014). Now, while the scope of this study does not specifically look at the reasons for lower college attendance and graduation rates from college by male students, it is important to provide context to the current number of male students that are on college campuses that can pursue leadership positions.

It is documented (Goldin et al., 2006; Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014) that there is a noted gender difference in who currently pursues college. Similarly, there are also some fundamental commonalities and differences noted in the literature in the way male and female student leaders approach leadership. A commonality found in male and female incoming students is that they tend to view leadership as hierarchical and positions of power. Shertzer and Schuh (2004) conducted a research study that looked at students' perceptions of leadership that included both engaged and disengaged students. In their study, Shertzer and Schuh found that students perceive leadership as an individual possession, positional, and that leaders possess specific characteristics, skills, and possess internal motivations. For the disengaged students, Shertzer and Schuh found

that they had difficulty trusting student leaders as they perceived them to only be in leadership positions for the power given to them as a result of the position. This study provides some great insight into how students develop perceptions of leadership.

Another research study conducted by Komives et al. (2005) found significant commonalities between male and female students and how they perceive leadership. In this grounded theory study, five female students and eight male students were interviewed about their leadership journey. As a result, Komives et al. found that students typically move through six stages which include: awareness (students see that student leadership positions exist), exploration/engagement (students pursue opportunities), leader identified (see leadership as a position to be held), leadership differentiated (realize that leadership can exist without a title), generativity (leadership becomes about the greater good and align with personal philosophies), and lastly integration/synthesis (students just know they are a leader no matter the context and are not bound by the leader title). In this study, although both male and female students participated in the study, a generalized, non-gender specific model was developed.

The commonalities in the leadership perceptions of both male and female students are vast; however, there are some noted differences in how each student population approaches and engages in leadership. For many male students, the decision to pursue leadership positions while in college is motivated by their desire to attain a position of power within a hierarchical structure. This tends to be a different motivation as compared to their female counterpart, which tends to view leadership as a communal process that focuses on group consensus and betterment (Haber, 2012; Dugan, Komives,

& Segar, 2008). Yarrish, Zula, and Davis (2010) found in their research study of college students on a small liberal arts campus that there are significant leadership differences between male and female students in regard to the importance of interpersonal and cognitive skills believed to be needed in order to be a good leader.

According to their study, male students did not place as much importance on these dimensions as the female students. While one of the limitations of this study is that it was only conducted at one type of institution the results that Yarrish et al. (2010) found were similar to the research studies and corresponding findings of Haber (2012); Shertzer and Schuh (2004); and Wielkiewicz, Fischer, Stelzner, Overland, and Sinner (2012). In each of these studies, it is noted, to varying degrees, that male and female students engage, view, and perceive the role and qualities needed to be a leader differently. So, when thinking about gender and leadership, it is imperative not to overgeneralize how leadership development is perceived by the various types of students on college campuses, especially when considering gender.

While the scope of this study is situated intentionally during the undergraduate years, it is important to note that beyond the collegiate years, males typically face fewer obstacles in professional job attainment and advancement than females (Northouse & Lee, 2016). Similarly, males represent a much higher percentage of leadership at the CEO and upper administrative levels (Northouse & Lee, 2016). This is in part due to the current gendered (Acker, 1990; Northouse, 2004) work roles, social constructs, narratives, and resulting views of male and female leaders.

Females are more often than not faced with the double bind phenomenon (Acker, 1990; Rosenbach, Taylor, & Youndt, 2012), which is when a female leader is penalized in a professional environment no matter how she acts. For example, a female leader in a double bind situation would be condemned for being too communal in one setting and then too vocal and bold in another. Whereas a male leader, in a similar situation, is looked favorably upon for actually being communal and then is praised when vocal and bold, which is an expectation of male leaders. This double standard continues to plague society and does need to continually be addressed on a myriad of fronts, research being one of them. However, for this study, it is essential to remember the scope and setting, as within this context, male-identifying student leaders lack representation in most university-funded leadership positions. Again, it is essential to reiterate that even though we need to understand the male-identifying students' leadership development process better, this does not preclude the continual need to better understand undergraduate female-identifying student's experience.

Undergraduate Male Student Motivations for Leadership

What motivates male students to pursue leadership opportunities while in college? Understanding the motivation and appeal for why male students decide to engage in leadership positions is at the heart of this study. When I have engaged other higher education professionals in a conversation surrounding this topic, the beliefs held, and subsequent answers given, do align with Astin and Astin's (2000) belief that the views and definitions of leadership and students' motivations are as numerous as the individuals giving the responses.

For example, some professionals believe that male students do not engage in leadership positions while enrolled in college merely because they are too confident or even arrogant in the fact that they think that they will get a job without additional leadership experience. However, others hold the belief that as a result of emerging adolescence or emerging adulthood phenomenon (Arnett, 2014), male students are taking longer to mature. As a result, they do not understand the importance of utilizing their time in college to pursue the many different leadership positions offered, which in turn help to develop key skills that employers are seeking. Even if one or both of these beliefs are true, there is a male-identifying student phenomenon developing as the lack of male engagement also extends to college enrollment. Male students are pursuing and enrolling in college at a lower rate than female students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). For example,

In 1994, 63% of recent female high school graduates and 61% of male recent high school graduates were enrolled in college in the fall following graduation. By 2012, the share of young women enrolled in college immediately after high school had increased to 71%, but it remained unchanged for young men at 61%. (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014, para. 2)

Haber (2012) stated that “studies on students’ perceptions of leadership also suggest potential differences based on gender and race” (p. 28). Given Haber’s quote and the fact that male students are enrolling in college at lower rates than their female counterparts, a study seeking to understand male students’ perceptions and motivations for leadership development is timely. Komives et al. (2017) noted that “individuals

involved in the leadership process (leaders, participants, co-creators, and so on) need to know themselves well before they can effectively work with others to influence change or achieve a common purpose” (p. 97). This research study would provide yet another tool for male undergraduate students to understand themselves as well as providing a framework for administrators and faculty to understand how to develop male students better.

Another leadership motivator that is important to highlight is that of developmental influence. Developmental influence can manifest in many ways, but for many, it is seen in an encouragement to apply for a leadership position. In these instances, a person of authority takes time to give back to the leadership cycle by walking alongside an emerging leader. Komives et al. (2005) discussed the importance of developmental influences, stating that many times a student’s leadership journey starts with a comment such as “I really think you should apply for that” (p. 596). Positive reinforcement or being “selected” can give one enough of a self-confidence boost that they are then able to develop their leadership confidence that helps them slowly become an independent leader.

Currently, there are a few research studies that specifically look at the importance of, and how to develop female leaders (Chandler, 2011; Gipson, Pfaff, Mendelsohn, Catenacci, & Burke, 2017); however, it is difficult to find information on how gender is taken into consideration when leadership curriculum or developmental models are created. Most of the research addressed the individual differences between men and women concerning their view of the purpose of leadership. Boyd, Duran, and Rosch

(2014) looked at the difference in each gender's drive to develop initiative. In review of their findings they opined that,

Both women and men identified goals to increase their sense of initiative, men seemed more interested in developing initiative to overcome the opposition or complacency of others, while women were more interested in developing their own personal sense of their life's direction. (p. 25)

In understanding the history of gender inequality, this finding makes sense, and it is essential for leadership development programs to be moving toward more of an emphasis on inclusion.

While I found it interesting to read some of the different studies that have been conducted regarding gender and leadership motivation, I did not find research on the topic that I am most interested in, the process in which male-identifying students decided to pursue leadership positions on college campuses. Practitioners working in higher education and specifically with student leaders, quickly see the large pool of female students that apply for on-campus leadership positions and a lack of male-identifying students. In many instances, the number of male students that apply for on-campus leadership positions falls well below even the ratio of males to females that are in the total population of the incoming class. Again, by having the findings of this research study that explicitly addresses the process in which male students decide to get involved in university-funded leadership positions, it fills a gap in the current literature.

Masculinity

The scope of this research study is only looking at male-identifying students. However, to fully understand these students and the current social climate in which this study is situated, it is valuable to review how masculinity is defined and used in current literature. At this moment in time, the term masculinity evokes many different thoughts and feelings when discussed on college campuses. Some of the current common phrases that may be heard on a college campus include toxic masculinity, healthy masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, and multiple masculinities to name a few (Harris, 2010; R. Wagner & Tillapaugh, 2018). Historically, masculinity was only viewed through a patriarchal perspective that promoted a hegemonic form of manhood that was defined by the possession of power and control, guarded emotions, heterosexual promiscuity, overall aggressive nature, and opposition to femininity (Edwards & Jones, 2009; R. Wagner & Tillapaugh, 2018). This hegemonic view and understanding of masculinity has been the guidebook for many boys and adolescents on their journey to becoming a “man.” However, in light of the feminist movement and the current recognition of multiple gender identities, the historical and normative definition of masculinity has been challenged and thus has initiated the process of rethinking how masculinity is defined.

In addition to defining how a male-identifying individual becomes a man, masculinity also provided an understanding of how males are to lead; which included the view that good leaders lead with power, authority and do not show weakness, as noted by the great man theory, trait and situational leadership modalities (Tillapaugh, Mitchell, & Soria, 2017). Over time, more efficient and positive leadership approaches have

surfaced, such as the transformational leadership approach that directly coincides with Astin and Astin's social change model of leadership. This approach and model have little room for hierarchy. In many ways, male-identifying students in general, and more specifically cisgender identifying students are in the middle of figuring out how to grow, develop, and lead in a society and world that is redefining what it means to be masculine.

Current cisgender male students are being asked to recognize that who they are is a result of the intersection of multiple identities (Harris, 2010) and that there are also multiple definitions of what it means to be masculine. While this thought is very freeing to some male-identifying students, it can be a confusing journey for others. Even though multiple frameworks and theories have been identified to explain the developmental journey of other identities such as being a woman, an African American, or a student with a learning disability to name a few, models that exist to explain male college students' identity development are limited (Harris, 2010). Given the changing societal view of masculinity and leadership, the key question becomes how current undergraduate male students are learning the appropriate way to lead in this generation. If the way current undergraduate male students see leadership practiced at home or in their local communities, based on archaic gender norms, is no longer an acceptable modality of leadership, then where do they learn now how to foster healthy views about leadership? It is in these questions and shifts in culture that this study will provide some much-needed insight on how to best guide male students while in college.

Leadership Self-Efficacy

In order to fully understand the concept of leadership self-efficacy, it is important to note where the conceptual understanding of self-efficacy originated. Albert Bandura, a social cognitive psychologist, developed the concept that is used in many different realms as a lens in which to better understand individual internal beliefs and self-concept (Dinther, Dochy, & Segers, 2011). Bandura stated that “self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave” (Bandura, 1994). Additionally, he went on to say that individuals who are not confident in their abilities and identity do not pursue opportunities that they perceive as challenging or threatening (Bandura, 1994).

In his research findings, Bandura (1994) found that an individual’s belief about efficacy is developed in four different ways; the first is through mastery of experiences. If a person faces a task or challenges and completes it, this experience reinforces the belief in one’s ability to complete the said task. The second way is through vicarious experiences. If one can see others succeed, no matter the situation presented, this can strengthen the belief that any individual can succeed in the ups and downs of life. Thirdly, Bandura identified social persuasion as vital to one’s development of self-efficacy. This modality is effective when the persuasion seeks to verbally highlight and reiterate the recipient’s strengths and ability to complete the task or project before them. The last way noted to strengthen self-efficacy is by helping individuals recognize and accurately regulate their emotional and physical responses to stress. It is important to note that Bandura is not saying here that one should not have stress or an emotional response to stress, but he is saying that it is important to manage it accurately; meaning,

that one can engage and complete a task while still having emotional and physical reactions to the situation at hand.

One of the purposes of this research study is to understand how male undergraduate students perceive leadership. It is in this goal that Bandura's concept of self-efficacy development provides a solid starting point in which to think about male students and how their perceptions of leadership may be influenced by their attainment of leadership efficacy. Leadership self-efficacy is specifically looking at an individual's belief in one's ability to lead others and to become a better leader (Nguyen, 2016). This personal belief of leadership ability can be a significant factor in a college student's desire and pursuit of leadership while in college. If students do not believe that they possess the capacities to lead, whether that be from the lack of a positive experience, role model, encouragement and/or negative response to stress, then it is likely that they will not pursue leadership opportunities.

When considering the process in which male-identifying students engage leadership, self-efficacy and motivation need to be thought about and distinguished regarding the developmental process. In its purest form, motivation is the drive to achieve a personal goal (Rosch & Villanueva, 2016). The motivation to achieve may be encouraged by several factors, such as socio-economic: I am poor and need to work to get money; or physiological: I am overweight and want to lose weight. The motivation to attain these goals exist even if there is not the internal belief that the individual can achieve them on their own. Hence, multiple weight loss programs, coaches, and philosophies. However, as Bandura (1994) noted, the attainment of a goal to lose weight

builds self-efficacy, the belief that one innately possesses the ability to achieve. Separately, and even more so in conjunction, self-efficacy and motivation serve as essential building blocks in an individual's personal and professional development. One of the unique aspects of this study is that it provides foundational insight into male students' experience with leadership and specifically the road in which they developed their level of leadership self-efficacy.

Current Leadership Development Modalities

One of the main areas that I looked at to be sure this study was needed was the area of leadership development strategies. Leadership development strategies constitute a large umbrella, but it is essential first to identify what the literature says on this topic generally, but with the caveat of emphasizing undergraduate male student leadership development strategies.

In much of the literature, there appears to be an overarching need for a greater focus on understanding how one's gender impacts a student's view and understanding of leadership. Wielkiewicz et al. (2012) believed that "we need to know more about leadership and gender so leadership development can be customized to the needs of both males and females" (p. 5). Additionally, Haber (2012) believed that there is the need and opportunity to deepen the understanding of how race, gender, and age may influence how one looks at and defines leadership. Haber also said that "leadership educators must recognize and respond to this process of students' changing understandings of leadership in a way that supports yet challenges them" (p. 43). It is essential for higher education professionals to understand how students view and engage the world, society, and

themselves. Undergraduate students are ever-changing on multiple levels, and so, the leadership development strategies that are utilized on college campuses must change as well. It is no longer beneficial for students to view leadership development through a one size fits all lens, especially if educators want to fully develop each student in a way that maximized their potential. Currently, there are two common ways that leadership development takes place on most college campuses and that is through (a) a university's overarching leadership curriculum or approach to student leadership development and (b) mentoring.

Undergraduate Leadership Development Curriculum

The presence of formalized leadership development opportunities on college campuses has grown and developed significantly over time. Until the 1970s, there was not a lot being offered regarding student leadership training courses at the university level. However, there was keen interest in the topic of leadership, as there were research studies and papers submitted on leadership training curriculum in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, Grater (1959) conducted a study that sought to look at the impact of a leadership training group and its impact on the self, others attitudes, and how the training impacted one's desire to take the lead. Moreover, during the 1950s and 1960s, a considerable emphasis during this time was placed upon acquiring or developing practical management skills. Another interesting component to note is that the literature from the 1950s and 1960s made no mention of the importance of personal reflection or self-authorship for those seeking leadership development. However, as the literature from the 1970s was reviewed, there appears to be a shift in the culture of higher

education as more research-based studies started being conducted on leadership programs and their respective structures.

In 1970, Daniel Breen developed a report based upon surveys that he sent out to colleges and universities in a five-state area in the Midwest, requesting each college to share information on the leadership programs that they were currently utilizing. In his literature review, Breen stated the following, which also sheds light on leadership program offerings during the 1960s: “The published literature has almost nothing in this field, only David L. McKenna’s ‘Developing Student Leadership in the Two Year College’ as cited in the *Junior College Journal*, April 1960, Vol. 30, pp. 437-441” (Breen, 1970, p. 2). This quote by Breen is very telling of the student leadership development climate at the time. Although there were not many founded leadership programs in the 1960s, there were colleges and universities writing papers for conferences on the components of training and programs that they were beginning to offer in 1970 (Simonds, 1979). For example, Breen (1970) talked about an interesting paper he read about a leadership-training course that was being offered for credit by the University of Michigan. Following his evaluation of related surveys, he noted that student services were the area that should take the lead in developing leadership opportunities. Breen also noted that programs should be developed to address specific areas of skill that include feedback sessions. Additionally, he also said that effective conferences should include experience-based learning that focuses on interpersonal skills, problem-solving, and finally, that theory and lecture should be held to a minimum (Breen, 1970). While Breen’s survey was one of the most comprehensive pieces of literature found during the

1970s, there were others that provided some additional insight as well, like that of Fred Newton (1975).

Fred Newton (1975) stated in his presentation at the Annual Convention of the American College Personnel Association, that “developing more effective student leadership both through the enhancement of facilitative/consultative skills of professional staff and through the direct training of student leaders has been identified as a high priority goal on many college campuses” (p. 4). Newton’s quote shows the apparent need to change how student leader training was approached. While the 1970s were the start of a wave of student leadership type programs, the 1980s and early 1990s were when significant research and developmental theory started impacting leadership curriculum (Komives et al., 2011). During this time, there was a noted shift from focusing on the external presentation of leadership, which included the ability to control a group in order to complete a task, to that of focusing on diversity, communication skills, human dignity, civic responsibility, understanding people, and simply understanding the leadership process (Brunson & Comeaux, 1994; Willis, 1994). An example of the student leadership development shift and the new focus on self that took place in the 1990s can be seen in two example leadership course syllabi created by Willis and Brunson.

Inevitably, society and culture changed significantly from the 1970s to 1990s, which ultimately altered the type of information that was emphasized in the leadership programs being offered during this time (Komives et al., 2011; Moore & Parker, 1990). Fast forward another 20 years to today, 2019; another major shift can be seen in the type of information that now comprises our leadership curriculum and programs. When

looking back over the years, it is very apparent that leadership content, as well as the presentation style, changed. Lattuca and Stark (2009) would say that these changes are necessary due to the “new needs and new information” that are the result of having a relevant academic plan (p. 229). Patterson (2013) illustrated the importance of evaluating academic leadership plans, as he stated that in today’s culture, “Leadership involves a versatile process that requires working with others in personal and professional relationships to accomplish a goal or to promote positive change” (p. 1). If the curriculum and academic plan had not changed over time, the information would be archaic and useless to those seeking to lead in the 21st century. A couple of the major shifts that took place between 1990 and today are the focus on personal development, self-reflection, and a new emphasis on the implementation of new developmental theories that provide a foundation for the leadership development process.

Komives et al. (2005) stated that “individuals involved in the leadership process (leaders, participants, co-creators, and so on) need to know themselves well before they can effectively work with others to influence change or achieve common purpose” (p. 97). Komives et al. have helped to develop a current culture of student leadership curriculum that involves a significant emphasis on personal reflection and self-authorship. Currently, most colleges and universities have some leadership program that may take on an array of formats. The formats that currently exist across the country include the following: subject integration, which is when a core class has a leadership component integrated into the class (Jepson School of Leadership), undergraduate degree specifically in leadership studies (The Ohio State University), leadership specific classes,

classes that are only about leadership skills (Clemson University and Miami University), leadership workshops (these include a few hours of training on a topic or skill, Ohio University, and Bowling Green State University), and certificate programs, a certificate may be acquired if enough workshops are attended (Ohio University and Bowling Green State University). Some schools offer multiple formats of leadership courses, which allow individuals to engage in leadership development, but at their own pace. A current leadership curriculum that is worth noting is that of Becker College.

Becker College is a small school, but its leadership curriculum is top-notch as it was reviewed for a national award through NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. A key to their program's success is the understanding that the academic plan must be continually evaluated and adjusted as needed (Lattuca & Stark, 2009).

Today, the leadership curriculum places a significant emphasis on students' individual and personal development (Komives et al., 2005; Baxter Magolda, 2012; Rost, 1991). The emphasis on the individual is a very different approach to leadership development than was taken in the 1960s and 1970s. However, an undeniable trend that is easily seen in the history of the undergraduate leadership curriculum is that it reflects the needs and culture of the society in a specific space and time. On the whole, the student leadership curriculum has changed from being external, emphasizing management and being task-oriented, to a more internal process, emphasizing the importance of personal reflection and development that ultimately promotes leadership self-efficacy. While the leadership curriculum on college campuses does provide a

significant training ground for students, many times a mentoring relationship, formal or informal, plays a significant role in leadership development.

Mentoring

A review of the historical grounding of the word mentor can be traced back to Greek mythology. The term mentor was the name of Ulysses' friend who cared for Ulysses' son Telemachus. "To a major degree Mentor was responsible not only for the boy's education, but for the shaping of his character, the wisdom of his decisions, and the clarity and steadfastness of his purpose" (Barondess, 1994, p. 3). Throughout time, the term mentor has been loosely defined by the mythical story of Odysseus, but a consensus and universal definition have yet to be found (Dawson, 2014).

Wrightsmen (1981) asserted that "there is a false sense of consensus because at a superficial level, everyone 'knows' what mentoring is. However, a closer examination indicates wide variation in operational definitions, leading to conclusions that are limited to the use of particular procedures" (pp. 3-4). Many students who enter college do so with a host of held beliefs and social constructs that can be thick and difficult to break through. However, according to Osiemo (2012), "The university years present the culmination of the formative years in the life of a student and an important time to consolidate the years of study while developing career and life aspirations of any youth" (p. 131). It is in the belief that the collegiate years are formative, that mentors are given a platform to play a key role in college students' leadership development.

Osiemo (2012) contended that the collegiate years are key formational years that help to set the trajectory of a college student's personal and professional path.

Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt (1999) also stated that the “development of leadership among college students is one of the goals often cited in the mission statements of higher education institutions” (p. 51). Similarly, Dugan and Kodama (2013) noted the importance of “cultivating leaders who are prepared to tackle complex social issues is positioned as a critical outcome of higher education and a tool for diversifications of the workforce” (p. 184). A core component of higher education is to help students attain their highest degree of potential; mentorship, both formal and informal, can be instrumental in achieving this objective.

When looking at mentorship as a leadership development tool, a myriad of research studies expressed the need for more research on the different variables that constitute a successful mentorship program for male students. Crisp and Cruz (2009) conducted a critical review of the literature between 1990 and 2007 on the topic of mentoring and college students. As a result of their extensive review of the literature, they concluded that more research is needed in order to understand the components that must be included in a comprehensive mentor program. This sentiment is reiterated by Eich (2008), as the ultimate goal of his grounded theory research was to narrow in on the critical attributes of high-quality higher education and leadership programs. He also concluded that many of these high-quality leadership programs identified mentoring as an essential component in their curriculum. Continued review of the literature not only echoed Crisp and Cruz and Eich’s assertions but also highlighted the fact that there is currently a lack of formal assessment on the topic of mentoring. Gershenfeld (2014) noted that while many mentoring programs have developed across the country on college

campuses, the research and validation has lagged. Ultimately, Gershenfeld foresaw that with improved assessment administrators can accurately improve mentorship programs, assess the various types of mentors needed, and more accurately connect with the student population being served. However, Newcomb (2011) believed that a model built around Kochan and Trimble's (2000) micro view of mentoring is vital. Within this model, the following topics are addressed: getting to know yourself, relationship selection, development of a relationship, growing the relationship, and consolidating and transforming the relationship. Whereas mentorship has been assumed to be a valuable asset in leadership programs, Priest and Donley (2014) provided some empirical data showing the positive impact that mentoring can have if implemented in leadership development.

Chapter Summary

It is evident that the body of literature is vast on the topics of leadership and leadership development; however, even in its vastness, it is even more evident that there is a need for additional research that explores explicitly the process in which male undergraduate students perceive and decide to pursue leadership positions while in college. There are some leadership theories available that generally address student leadership development, but currently, there is no theory that specifically looks at how cisgender male students perceive and engage in leadership development while in college. Higher education is a vehicle in which students can grow personally and professionally, and a significant component of that growth comes by way of leadership development (Hall, 2004; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). However, it is also important to

meet each student and/or student group where they are in regard to their development, and while there has been a much-needed focus on female leadership development, our society has and is changing and now there also needs to be a focus on how male students are intentionally developed.

One of the current issues regarding leadership that many researchers are particularly interested in is how students *define, perceive, and engage in leadership* (Haber, 2012). Patterson (2012) stated that in today's culture, "Leadership involves a versatile process that requires working with others in personal and professional relationships to accomplish a goal or to promote positive change" (p. 1). Similarly, Komives et al. (2005) believed that "leadership development involves engaging with learning opportunities in one's environment over time to build one's capacity or efficacy to engage in leadership" (p. 402). McCauley et al. (1998) also noted the importance of engaging in learning experiences by highlighting the fact that "being able to take a broader, more complex view is another capacity that develops for most people, as the result of many life experiences" (p. 19). The thought is that if students are continually encouraged to think about their college experiences with a leadership mindset when they are preparing to leave the institution, they will be at the generativity stage of the leadership identity development model. Reaching generativity means that "students became actively committed to larger purposes and to the groups and individuals who sustained them" (Komives et al., 2005, p. 607).

As the current research and literary landscape has been assessed on the topic of undergraduate cisgender male students' perceptions of leadership while in undergraduate

education, it is abundantly evident that this research study and my findings are timely. Current college students crave an individualized approach to their development. As a result of conducting this research study, practitioners now have yet another tool in their toolbelt to help them better understand how to encourage and support male students in their leadership efficacy in a time and space where there is a level of uncertainty on the appropriate ways to learn and then engage in leadership while in college.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to understand the experiences, motivations, and processes in which undergraduate cisgender male-identifying students decide to pursue leadership positions while enrolled in a large, public, mid-western, four-year institution. To date, and as evidenced in the literature review, there has not yet been a theory identified that specifically addresses the process in which male students decide to pursue leadership positions while in college (Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016). As a result of this gap in the literature and being mindful of Rubin and Rubin's (2012) suggestion to be sure the topic being studied is valuable and warrants a study, I am confident that my study findings aid in filling a knowledge gap and provide value to researchers and practitioners alike.

The research questions for this study are:

1. How do undergraduate male students perceive leadership while in college?
2. What is the process in which undergraduate male students decide to pursue leadership positions while in college?

When developing my research questions, I kept in mind the following advice from Hatch (2002): "Identifying research questions is a critical step in the research design because questions give direction to the study, limit the scope of the investigation, and provide a device for evaluating progress and satisfactory completion" (p. 41). So, it is in this suggestion and the lack of a theoretical underpinning in the area of undergraduate male leadership development that I pursued my topic. This study sought to understand

the internal motivation and experiences of undergraduate male college students w decide to pursue leadership positions in college. Additionally, this study has proven to explain the process in which male students decide to pursue undergraduate leadership positions. My identified grounded theory will help to provide a platform for continued research in the area of undergraduate male leadership development.

Hatch (2002) asked students to think about their beliefs regarding the world as well as how they came to know things about the world. This ever-important question helped me to stay grounded as I pondered the best avenue in which to conduct my research. After negotiating the differences between positivism, post-positivism, and constructivism paradigms, I found myself aligning very closely with Charmaz's constructivist approach. My alignment is rooted in two hallmarks of her definition of constructivist which acknowledge (a) subjectivity and (b) the researcher's role in the construction and interpretation of the data collected (Charmaz, 2014).

Given all the factors included in a research study such as epistemological approach, the topic I researched, as well as the format of my research questions, a grounded theory study was affirmed to be a great fit for this dissertation

Epistemology

Before I selected a grounded theory research study design, I again thought about Hatch's (2002) question that encourages researchers to think about their beliefs about the world as well as how they believe they come to know things about the world. I appreciated Hatch's discussion as it has helped me stay focused as I pondered the best avenue in which to conduct my research. After negotiating the differences between

positivism, post-positivism, and constructivism paradigms, I found myself aligning very closely with Charmaz (2014) and a constructivist approach. A grounded theory approach proved to be the right fit as the methodology successfully facilitated my ability to identify a current theory that explains undergraduate males' perceptions of leadership while in undergrad. Additionally, the constructivist grounded theory method created space for me to get an in-depth understanding of male-identifying students leadership development process as explained by them. In turn, the data collected allowed me to construct a theory that fits male-identifying students (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). After conducting this research study, I agree even more with Birks and Mills' (2011) assertion in stating that "grounded theory is the preferred choice when the intent is to generate theory that explains a phenomenon of interest to the researcher" (p. 17). A more in-depth discussion on the rationale as to why grounded theory proved to be best suited for this study is addressed later in this chapter.

In contrast, a quantitative study would not have provided the right avenue to explore the depth of experience needed to fully understand the many facets and nuances of leadership development amongst male college students. Ultimately, I wanted to meet with students to fully hear and understand each student's experience so that a complete and in-depth story could be shared about leadership development for cisgender male-identifying undergraduate students. Charmaz's (2014) constructivist approach to developing a grounded theory was a perfect fit, based upon my desire and belief of the best way to conduct a qualitative study. This methodology recognizes that interviews are not done in a vacuum and that the researcher is an integral part of the interview and

analytic process. For me, accounting for my role in the study, my biases, and the perspectives I hold only strengthens the study and identified theory.

In light of my epistemological approach, the topic I am researching, as well as the format of my research questions, the constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014) was a great methodological match. “Grounded theory is a research methodology that has an enormous appeal for a range of disciplines due to its explanatory power” (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006b, p. 7). When thinking about the many parts that go into a dissertation, it is said that one of the more important or perhaps the most important decision is the selection of the correct methodology. Having completed the research process, I believe this statement even more. Maxwell (2005) highlighted that “a good design is one in which the components work harmoniously together, promotes efficient and successful functioning” (p. 2). It is the researcher’s job to be sure that all the different components, ranging from the purpose statement to the research conclusion, are all tied together in a consistent and logical manner.

Grounded Theory Research Method

In 1967 Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss published the book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, which provided a new and revolutionary way of doing social research (Dey, 1999). Glaser and Strauss (1967) noted that “the basic theme in our book is the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (p. 2). A hallmark of their approach is founded in the fact that “generating ground theory is a way of arriving at theory suited to its supposed uses” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). Additionally, Glaser (1978) stated in his follow-up monograph, of the original grounded

theory text, that grounded theory data “should not be forced or selected to fit pre-conceived or pre-existent categories or discarded in favor of keeping an extant theory intact” (p. 4). This approach differed from the dominant positivist approach that focused on creating a hypothesis and then conducting research to prove or disprove the initial hypothesis. Glaser and Strauss’s aim in their creation of grounded theory was to provide a systematic qualitative research approach that could equal quantitative methods at that time (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). It is important to remember that in the 1960s positivism was the standard philosophical research approach of the time. It is in the combination of Glaser and Strauss’s shift in epistemological research underpinnings, desire to provide a systematic approach to qualitative research and that “reality is unitary, knowable, and waiting to be discovered” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 34).

Induction and Abduction

Another hallmark of grounded theory is the use of an inductive method, which allows researchers to develop conceptual categories that move “from the particular to the more general” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 15). Grounded theory is inductive, as the theory develops once the data collection begins (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Additionally, grounded theory is developed and abstracted out of the data collected (Birks & Mills, 2011), which is an inductive process likened to developing an idea from the ground-up approach.

While induction is the critical mode of concept development when conducting a grounded theory study, the inductive process is not without critique. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) noted that the inductive process makes a significant jump in the

synthesizing of data in moving from a few very specific interviews to a generalized concept. However, it is essential to note that grounded theory methodology seeks to account for this “jump” through the utilization of theoretical sampling and a form of reasoning called abduction (Charmaz, 2014).

Abduction “is a mode of imaginative reasoning researchers invoke when they cannot account for a surprising or puzzling finding” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 200). The abductive process allows researchers to consider all possible explanations of the puzzling data that they can then explore until identifying the most plausible explanation of the data. Charmaz is quick to note that abduction is not an end-all process and that the theoretical leaps made by the researcher must be re-examined with the data collected and then explored further with continued data collection. “Abduction builds on the pragmatist tradition of problem-solving and supports the notion of indistinct borders between scientific discovery and justification (Charmaz, 2014, p. 201).

Abduction and induction help to better understand the process in which information is collected, synthesized, and theorized, but it is essential not to forget that the process of information collection, analysis and the like are imperative to a rigorous and trustworthy grounded theory study. Three essential components of a grounded theory study that set it apart from other qualitative studies are the steps of theoretical sampling, constant comparison, and theoretical saturation.

Theoretical Sampling, Constant Comparison, and Theoretical Saturation

A common question asked of the grounded theory approach is what makes grounded theory different from other qualitative methods. The irony is that the answer to

this question lies within the name; the primary distinguishing factor is that a theory will result from the completion of a rigorous study. The rigor of a grounded theory study encompasses three distinct components that set it apart from other qualitative research methods and provide the foundation for its systematic approach: “(1) theoretical sampling, (2) constant comparison of data to theoretical categories, and (3) focus on the development of theory via theoretical saturation of categories rather than substantive verifiable findings” (Bryant & Charmaz, p. 13, 2007).

Theoretical sampling. Whether reading about or conducting a ground theory study, it is imperative to understand the importance of theoretical sampling. Charmaz (2014) noted that “the logic of theoretical sampling distinguishes grounded theory from other types of qualitative inquiry” (p. 192). Glaser and Strauss (1967) provided a clear and succinct definition of theoretical sampling in their original text, *Discovery of Grounded Theory*:

Theoretical Sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, to develop his theory as it emerges.
(p. 45)

The research process for grounded theory is based on an emergent research philosophy. Theoretical sampling positions the research process in such a way that as the themes arise from the initial data collection, the researcher then moves forward pursuing interviews that elaborate and hone the developing categories in the developing theory. Simply put,

theoretical sampling informs the researcher on where to go next, and this is a key distinguishing factor from other qualitative sampling methods (Charmaz, 2014).

Constant comparison. Constant comparative analysis was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a way to systematically and simultaneously create space for the researcher both code and analyze the data collected. Specifically, they broke the process up into four stages which include “(1) generating and (2) integrating categories and their properties, before (3) delimiting and then (4) writing the emerging theory” (Dey, 1999, p. 7). For a grounded theory to emerge or to be constructed from the data collected, a researcher must constantly be comparing “incident to incident, incident to codes to codes, codes to categories, and categories to categories” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 11). The constant comparison must take place until the theory is fully developed.

Theoretical saturation. To fully understand theoretical saturation, one must revisit the goal of a grounded theory study, which is to construct a substantive theory as a result of the constant comparison of data. To discover a theory, one must exhaust each theoretical category with data (Charmaz, 2014). Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated that saturation happens when “no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category” (p. 61). A common mistake made by researchers in this area is believing that saturation has been achieved once repetitive stories are shared by study participants or a similar pattern is identified. However, theoretical saturation involves more than seeing similarities and patterns in the stories shared; saturation involves looking at the properties of the patterns and identifying that conceptual density has been reached (Charmaz, 2014).

Constructivist Approach

Currently, four mainstream versions of grounded theory are utilized throughout the literature: classic or Glaserian, Straussian, feminist, and constructivist (Breckenridge, Jones, Elliott, & Nicol, 2012). While each perspective has merit, I find myself most aligned with Kathy Charmaz's (2014) constructivist approach. My reasoning for this alignment is founded in the fact Charmaz seeks a structured approach to data collection all the while keeping the relationship with the research study participants in mind (Charmaz, 2014; Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014). Like Charmaz, I believe that it is crucial to maintain a balance between being relatable yet strict with the selected methodology. Additionally, Charmaz (2014) recognized that the researcher plays a significant role in the interview process and cannot merely sit on the sidelines, collecting data when conducting face-to-face interviews.

Charmaz's constructivist approach to grounded theory has drawn significant criticism from Barney Glaser (2002). However, the components of the constructivist grounded theory method that he criticizes are the very reasons as to why I was drawn to Charmaz's constructivist method. Charmaz (2000) gave the following overview of her constructivist approach of grounded theory.

Constructivist grounded theory celebrates first-hand knowledge of empirical worlds, takes a middle ground between postmodernism and positivism, and offers accessible methods for taking qualitative research into the 21st century.

Constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward

interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings. (Charmaz, as cited in Chiovitti & Piran, 2003)

Glaser's (2002) key argument to this view is the involvement of the researcher. Glaser said he believes that the mutual interpretation of the interview process would be an "unwarranted intrusion of the researcher" (p. 2). Glaser went on to say that participants tell the researcher what is going on and how to interpret the information being shared. However, I align with Charmaz in the belief that interviews and the interpretation of the interviews do not happen in a vacuum, and thus, knowing the researcher's interpretation and perspective is essential to the validity of the study.

Another facet of the constructivist approach that Glaser (2002) strongly disagrees with is Charmaz's (2000) belief that the researcher creates the story as a result of the mutual investment in the interviewing process. The co-creation of story opposes Glaser's view that the researcher simply observes and writes the story as it unfolds. Also, Glaser (2002) went on to say that grounded theory is not merely a description and the creation of a story, but rather a strict process in which data is collected, interpreted and developed into a generalized theory. In reading Glaser's critiques of Charmaz's constructivist approach, I was even more confident that this approach would be a good match for how I believe that a quality grounded theory study should be implemented. I do not agree that research happens in a vacuum, and so, I think it is imperative to acknowledge all the influences present during the data collection, interpretation, and analysis. I sought to do this through consistent memoing throughout the research process. To believe that interviewing can happen without interpretation bias should cause one to pause and think

about how accurate the data are that are being collected. For me, Charmaz's approach to grounded theory maintains traditional grounded theory stringent procedures all the while allowing space for the humanness in the process of data collection.

I will inevitably be asked, "why did you utilize a constructivist approach to conduct your research" and in addition to the points just noted, the very succinct and simple answer is because it aligned with my epistemological belief. I believe, like Charmaz (2014), that the constructivist perspective contradicts the notions of a neutral observer and value-free expert (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014; Mills et al., 2006b). While the best plan can be laid out on how to gather qualitative information, I do not believe that the researcher remains neutral in the process. Research does not take place in a vacuum void of cultural influence, and in order to fully understand people and their environments, relationships must be built. Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006a) highlighted this as they stated, "Engaging in constructivist inquiry requires a transformation of the participant/researcher relationship, and for the researcher to prioritize and analyze the interaction that happens between the two" (p. 9). Similarly, understanding social contexts, personal views of an event and how the researcher interprets and constructs meaning at a specific moment in time must be acknowledged and noted (Charmaz, 2014; Mills et al., 2006a). As the primary researcher in this study and the medium in which all the data were filtered through I found it assuring and freeing to closely adhere to Charmaz's constructivist approach, throughout the research process. I sought to remain honest, open, and authentic in my biases and beliefs regarding the information that I collected and analyzed.

Role of the Researcher

The many roles that a researcher holds in a constructivist grounded theory can be challenging to manage. Mills et al. (2006a) likened these roles to “selves” (p. 10) noting that one must have a passion for the topic being studied, all the while tempering the passion so as not to become blind to the truth of the data. I agree with Mills et al. (2006a) and recognized from the very start of my research study that I brought a belief and bias on how I understood leadership development to take place, or rather, how I believed it should take place for male college students while in college. This being said, I also recognized that my role is pivotal in participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. Niesz (2016) stated that the “‘voices’ of the researched are always filtered through those of the researchers” (p. 8). During the research process, Niesz’s quote almost haunted me, as I felt immense pressure to limit my voice and illuminate that of the participants. I also found it to be essential as the researcher and writer to ensure that the methodology being used is thorough and accurate (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002), hence why I sought to strictly adhere to the constructivist methodology. Now, in having done this, I believe that my body of work indeed contributes to the larger conversation on leadership and specifically on male-identifying students’ leadership pursuit process.

While I have a deep passion for this topic, I sought to put measures in place to keep my thoughts, internal doubts, and questions in check so to not distract me from collecting inaccurate data as cautioned by Mills et al. (2006b). Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) stated, “even seemingly straightforward descriptive writing, is a construction” (p.

46), my construction. Even though my motives and intentions to collect accurate data were real, like Emerson et al. (2011) noted, I know that I am human and entered each phase of the research process with my innate beliefs and biases that inevitably made their way into the study, sometimes consciously, but more often than not subconsciously. To address this, I utilized member checking, the process of memoing, auditing, and being reflexive throughout the research process. The methods I used are discussed at length in the trustworthiness section.

Sample

Glaser (2002) noted that “All is Data” (p. 1) and while this is true, as virtually anything can be collected and coded, for this research study the primary mode of data collection was face-to-face interviews. While face-to-face interviews provided the opportunity for rich data collection, I paid special attention to how the sample I identified and ultimately used was collected, again, being sure that I strictly adhered to Charmaz’s (2014) constructivist methodology. Coyne (1996) pointed out that “a qualitative research sample selection has a profound effect on the ultimate quality of the research” (p. 623). Given the scope of the study and its focus on how male students perceive and experience leadership, I set up interviews with cisgender male-identifying college students who had successfully interviewed and were selected for a university-funded leadership position. The criterion that I strictly adhered to was that each of the male students chosen for the study must have (a) interviewed for a leadership position, and (b) secured a university-sanctioned leadership position. In order to ensure I interviewed the best students for this study and collected the right information, I utilized selective sampling

and intensive interviewing. Charmaz (2014) described intensive interviewing as “a gently-guided, one-sided conversation that explores research participants’ perspective on their personal experience with the research topic (p. 56). In utilizing this interviewing method, it was essential to select participants who had direct experience with university-funded leadership positions (Charmaz, 2014).

As previously noted, two hallmarks of the grounded theory methodology are theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation. In light of how grounded theory interview data collection occurs, I reached theoretical saturation with conducting 19 interviews. However, I started the research process by interviewing six cisgender male-identifying students. After these initial interviews, I transcribed and coded them, all the while engaging in a constant comparative process that provided insight on how to move forward with additional interviews. While the number of interviews that I would need to complete in order to reach theoretical saturation (Creswell, 2014; Charmaz, 2014) was initially unclear, I finished my data collection process with 19 completed interviews. For this study, I kept the following points regarding saturation at the forefront of my mind as I interviewed, coded, and analyzed the data. Saturation is the point at which a concept is thoroughly examined and “a conceptual framework developed and verified by further data collection” (Baker, Wuest, & Stern, 1992, p. 1358). Additionally, Charmaz (2014) stated, “The number of interviews depends on the analytic level to which the researcher aspires” (p. 106).

To identify male students that fit the research criteria, I reviewed the university-funded student leadership positions across campus at Northeastern State

University to locate current male leaders. Some of the different types of leadership opportunities that I reached out to and included in this study were: resident assistants, orientation leaders, living-learning community mentors, freshman councils, college-specific mentors, diversity mentors, undergraduate student body college senators, undergraduate student body executive board members, fraternity executives, residential hall councils, and admission ambassadors. Once all the university-funded leadership position offices were identified, I reached out to the professional staff coordinators (see Appendix A) of the various leadership positions across campus asking for as many student names as they could provide that had held their respective student leadership positions. Once I compiled the list of potential interviewees from the various leadership positions across the campus, I reached out via email (see Appendix B) requesting an interview with six of the students who were either currently in a university-funded role or had been in a university-funded leadership role.

The initial six students that I selected and reached out to interview was strictly based on the type of leadership position in which they had been, meaning, I sought to interview cisgender male-identifying students who had varied leadership positions across campus. The next 13 students were selected from the initial list I had gathered by contacting each leadership coordinator. The students to which I reached out were highly recommended by each supervising coordinator. Additionally, some of the students to which I reached out were not only recommended by a coordinator but were also recommended by a current study participant as well. While some researchers may narrow their initial candidate pool with a screening questionnaire, I did not find that this

was necessary for this study as I was provided enough information from the leadership coordinators about the students that I was able to develop a good overview of each student before I reached out to them. Additionally, I wanted to avoid going into my initial interviews with each student with a preconceived understanding of the students based upon how they filled out the questionnaire.

Data Collection

Data collection is a fundamental part of any research project, and the type of data collected must be significant for the study being conducted. Hatch (2002) stated, “while the researcher’s stance in relation to their data may be different across qualitative paradigms, the basics of doing observation, interviewing, and unobtrusive data collection are similar” (p. 71). Even though the basics of research may be similar, I continually considered the distinction between focus and locus, as this distinction and refocusing helped to ensure that the right type of data was being collected throughout the study concerning the purpose of the study. Schram (2006) gave the following simplistic, but powerful warning concerning focus and locus, “when considering how to convey the purposes of your research, do not confuse where you are looking (or what you are looking at) with what you are looking for” (p. 29). For this study, the focus for me was to conduct sound research in such a way that sought to develop a grounded theory on cisgender male-identifying perceptions and engagement of leadership and the locus of this study was undergraduate cisgender undergraduate male student leaders. It was vital for me to remind myself of these principles from time to time so that I did not get off track and pursue variations of the original focus and locus of this study.

The purpose of this study was to explore undergraduate male leadership development, and although there are many avenues of data collection, I selected one-on-one, semi-structured, formal interviews (Charmaz, 2014; Hatch, 2002), as they were best suited for this specific constructivist grounded study that sought to understand male student perceptions of leadership and experiences. In preparation for the interviews, each participant was notified that this is a grounded theory study, and that as a participant, multiple interviews may be needed to provide the most accurate data. Each interview time was scheduled at a convenient time noted by the participant that allowed for an extended amount of time to meet, as I wanted to ensure ample time for the interviews so to avoid having to cut short a rich conversation.

The questioning that I used followed Rubin and Rubin's (2012) main-branches-of-a-tree approach. In this approach, the research topics were broken up into multiple parts, and then each of those parts was assigned a question that was meant to cover that specific area. For example, some of the main topics that I identified as branch questions included pre-college involvement, college involvement, support network, personal motivations, life, and career aspirations, to name a few.

In addition to the main-branches-of-a-tree method of interviewing, I also utilized Rubin and Rubin's (2011) responsive interviewing to ensure that I allowed the interview to be a conversation rather than merely an interview. According to Charmaz (2014), constructivist grounded theorists are aware of the construction of an interview, the interview participant's story as well as the silences. In this mode of interviewing, Charmaz (2014) noted the importance of the interviewer building a relationship with the

interviewee so that the interview becomes more than a “performance” (p. 91). As the interviews were conducted, I made a point to be in the moment, so the participants knew that I was genuinely engaged and interested in their story. The goal was to avoid students’ feeling that I was merely present to collect information so that I could complete my research study. Some of the ways that I sought to show I was present was by acknowledging the information they shared through eye contact, body language, and relevant follow-up questions. I found that it was equally important to avoid behaviors that also created a sterile and closed environment, such as being too concerned about note-taking rather than listening and engaging in organic conversation with the interview participants.

It is also important to note that there are two main categories of interview styles utilized in qualitative research, formal and informal (Charmaz, 2014). Informal interviews are typically used when a researcher wants to gather data by merely listening in an organic environment, and there is not a set interview time. In contrast, formal interviewing is when both the researcher and participant know that the meeting is meant to generate data. I utilized a semi-structured approach when interviewing the participants in this study. Before the official interview started, I would explain the purpose of the research study and then give the participants a copy of the consent form that they would read and sign if in agreeance. Next, I spent some time explaining the interview process, letting the participants know that the interview would be semi-structured, meaning that it would consist of answering pre-developed questions and follow-up questions. Upon completion of this explanation, I communicated to each participant that I was going to

record their interview while jotting down notes throughout the process. If an interview participant did not want to be audio recorded, which did not happen, I was prepared to ask them if they would be willing to answer the questions by typing their answers in a Word document before the interview and then we would just discuss them without an audio recorder. If this would have been a choice selected, I was prepared to provide a computer and the list of the questions on a Word document. After the participant completed the questions, we would then begin the interview, and I would commence taking notes.

The additional notes that I took throughout each interview served as my field notes, or rather “observational notes” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 124) when I was in the interviews. Some researchers view field notes as memoing, but there is a clear distinction and purpose for each, and I sought to utilize each process, but intentionally in different ways. “Field notes are data that may contain some conceptualization and analytic remarks. Memos, on the other hand, are lengthier and more in-depth thoughts about an event, usually written in conceptual form after leaving the field” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 124).

Taking field notes provides additional information to consider from the interview process. In conjunction with the audio recording, field notes allowed me to document in real-time my thoughts as students shared their leadership journeys. Additionally, they helped to guide my thoughts and follow-up questions as the interview unfolded. The field note format that I used had the date, interview time, participant’s personally selected pseudonym, interview questions, and an observations section. As I worked through the

interview questions, I wanted to be able to make notes about the specific questions and to have the ability to note follow-up questions that I found relevant and important to ask. At the end of each interview, I intentionally recorded key moments and/or observations made in the interview.

Lastly, I let each participant know that if at any time they felt uncomfortable, they could suspend the interview, as it was optional. I started each interview session with the pre-set list of guiding questions but was also quick to follow up on or ask additional questions on topics that were presented by the participants (see Appendix C for the interview protocol). I believe that this approach worked well not only for the interview research but for my personality and the way that I naturally engage people.

In addition to the interviews being conducted, I asked each participant to provide a current resume for analysis, which Charmaz (2014) categorized as an elicited written document. There were a few instances that the interviewee did not have a resume and so I asked them to develop one to submit in advance of their initial interview. By gathering this additional information, it provided another data point to analyze and another way to understand each student interviewed. The resume helped me to review the study participants, leadership roles, jobs held, roles, responsibilities, and characteristics that each student believed was important to note about themselves.

Data Analysis

“Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning” (Hatch, 2002, p. 148).

Ultimately, data analysis is at the core of grounded theory, as the goal is to let the data help researchers discover emerging concepts that then may be synthesized into a theory

that accurately fits the context being researched. When pursuing a grounded theory approach,

The researcher will be formulating potential explanations and searching for potential patterns through close reading and rereading of data throughout the analysis process, and constant comparison will be insured to determine if these potential ‘theories’ are grounded in the data. (Hatch, 2002, p. 55)

In using interviewing as the primary mode of data collection, decisions for data analysis took place right away regarding the type of follow-up questions that I asked while in the interview. Additionally, after the analysis of each interview, and as concepts and categories emerged, I gave myself the option to be able to ask follow-up questions in additional interviews; however I did not need to utilize follow-up interviews in this study.

To ensure that all the information shared by each participant was captured correctly, I audio recorded each interview, which all participants allowed, by having each student sign a participant consent form (see Appendix D). The audio recordings were then sent to a professional transcription company, Temi, to be transcribed. I doublechecked each returned transcription with the audio interview to be sure all transcriptions were accurate. Once I was confident that the transcriptions were indeed accurate, I uploaded them into NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software, for analysis. NVivo 12 allowed me to store all my data in one place, which helped to identify concepts and ultimately categories in the data, as well as it served as a powerful sorting tool when seeking to identify codes, concepts, and categories.

The NVivo software, audio recordings, transcripts, notes, and memos were all stored on my research computer, which was password protected and to which I alone had access. For the data that were collected from the participants, such as resumes, they were scanned and uploaded into NVivo on my research computer. The only hard copy item that I kept were the signed consent forms. These were stored in a personal locked filing cabinet.

Constant Comparative Method

Merriam (2002) asserted that “the basic analysis procedure in grounded theory research is the constant comparative method of data analysis” (p. 143). A hallmark difference from the grounded theory approach is that this method utilizes a constant comparative approach. Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated, “The purpose of the constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis is to generate theory more systematically” (p. 102). As previously stated, for a grounded theory to be discovered from the data collected, a researcher must constantly be comparing “incident to incident, incident to codes to codes, codes to categories, and categories to categories” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 11). The constant comparison must take place until the theory is fully developed. The process of continually comparing data in this study took on a few different forms. First, I compared the data with data (Charmaz, 2014), looking for similarities and differences within the same interview. Secondly, I compared similar statements and incidents from different interviews. Lastly, I created space to conduct follow-up, as needed, which I did not end up needing. Each comparison phase helped to identify the most salient concepts and themes that emerged from the interviews.

Additionally, this process forced me to consider diversity in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Coding

In the constant comparative approach, coding is a fundamental component in the process. Charmaz (2014) stated, “Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data” (p. 113). Glaser and Strauss (1967) also succinctly described how coding is a critical component in the comparative process: “As the coding continues, the constant comparative units change from comparison of the incident with incident to comparison of incident with properties of the category that resulted from initial comparison of incident” (p. 108). The coding process is fundamental in the narrowing process and helps the researcher start with real experiences that ultimately become abstract concepts.

Charmaz (2014) explained three key coding steps, line-by-line, focused, and theoretical, that need to be worked through when seeking to create a grounded theory. During the first phase of the coding process, I first utilized line-by-line coding, which allowed me to read through each line of dialogue to begin to create “codes” that emerge from the information shared. Emerson et al. (2011) noted that this process is not complicated, but that as the information is refined the level of difficulty and precision needed increases. Secondly, and through constant comparison, I assessed the initial codes that I created through a process noted by Charmaz (2014) as focused coding. This process enabled me to identify the broader concepts that surface as a result of comparing the initial codes. The last step of the process is theoretical coding, which is considered a

sophisticated level of coding that seeks to create the theory. In this stage, Charmaz (2014) stated, “The place of prior knowledge becomes ambiguous with theoretical codes” (p. 150).

Each one of these coding steps gave me the ability to identify the core concepts presented by each of the participants. Merriam (2002) cautioned that grounded theory is a difficult method to select a system to analyze the data. This cautionary statement can be worrisome if a specific methodology has not been selected, but through the utilization of Charmaz’s (2014) coding methodology, I am confident that the coding process I utilized in this study allowed me to fully analyze the data collected.

Data Management

I am a proponent of technology and the ability to compile all data in once place. For this research study, I used NVivo 12 as the analysis software, and due to its many functions, I was able to write memos directly in the program and upload memos that I typed on my computer. By fully utilizing NVivo, I was able to organize, sort, and access data that may otherwise have been difficult to find and review if done by hand. As “memo-writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory,” I used it to guide the study as well as to aid in developing a thick audit trail.

Study Rigor and Trustworthiness

“Theory based on data can usually not be completely refuted by more data or replaced by another theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 4). At the heart of grounded theory research is the data. To construct a trustworthy and rigorous theory, all phases of the research process must be done with attention focused on the data, its collection, and

the analytical process. If done well, the entire grounded theory method should showcase a rigorous process that closely adheres to the specific methodology selected. Glaser and Strauss (1967) provided the following list of fundamental components that must be present in a created substantive theory and they include fit, work, relevance, and modifiability. Each of these criteria help to ensure that the theory constructed accurately reflects the voice and experiences of the population studied.

Fit

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) if a grounded theory does not fit the population being studied then the process in which the theory was developed should be questioned, as the grounded theory is directly created from the data. Additionally, fit happens because the codes, concepts, and themes are developed through a constant comparative method rather than being created in advance and forcing the data to fall within the predicted categories. To ensure fit, I relied heavily on the constant comparative method throughout my research process.

Work

The work criteria means “that a theory should be able to explain what happened, predict what will happen and interpret what is happening in an area of substantive or formal inquiry” (Glaser, 1978, p. 4). For a theory to work, the theory construction must have accurately captured the facts and ultimately be relevant to the “action of the area” (Glaser, 1978, p. 5). The details of how my identified theory accurately explains what happens when male-identifying students pursue leadership as well as how it predicts the process are discussed at length in Chapters 4 and 5.

Relevance

The relevance of a study emerges because the topic is analyzed in a way that all facets are brought to light organically, including the core problems. Additionally, relevance is achieved when a researcher does not have to explain the focus of the study or why the study is worth conducting. Rather, the researcher “spends his time modestly, but assertively, searching for and discovering the relevance in his data” (Glaser, 1978, p. 5).

Modifiability

Developing grounded theory is an emergent process, and so, there must be flexibility in the process to allow the data to continually guide, direct, and speak as it emerges. Thus, it is imperative that the researcher be open to a modifying process. Glaser (1978) said that “nothing is sacred if the analyst is dedicated to giving priority attention to the data” (p. 5). It is when researchers lose sight of what the data is saying, and cling to one idea initially presented through the data, that a theory can lose its ultimate fit and relevance. I constantly allowed the data to direct and modify my data collection process as well as the ultimate theory that I identified.

It was through the development of these four criteria that set the initial foundation for the general nature of grounded theory. Since their creation in 1967, there have been several other ideas developed on what constitutes a rigorous grounded theory study. For example, this study adhered to Charmaz’s constructivist methodology, and as such, Charmaz (2014) has her criteria for what constitutes a quality study. Her criteria include credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. Rather than have a prescribed definition for each criterion, Charmaz instead asks a number of questions under each

criterion in order to help the researcher assess whether each category has been met in the research process.

As a result of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) as well as Charmaz's (2014) various criteria noted as necessary for the construction of a sound grounded theory study, I referenced them throughout my research process. For me, these criteria served as a foundational guidepost as I walked each step of this research process. Due to my desire to adhere to these criteria, there were multiple data collection procedures that I followed throughout this study. The specifics of each collection and analysis modality are explored in the following sections.

Lincoln and Guba (1984) stated that "the basic issue concerning trustworthiness is simple: How can an inquirer persuade their audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to" (p. 290). The choice of a data collection process is paramount to a research study; however, if the data collected are not trustworthy, then the study is suspect and virtually worthless. As noted in Seale (2002), "Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that establishing the trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability, also being central to any conception of quality in qualitative research" (p. 104). Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Seale, 2002) highlighted four criteria that they believed researchers should address so that their research is trustworthy. They included credibility, transferability (fittingness), dependability, and conformability. While two, credibility and confirmability, of the four trustworthiness criteria originally created by Lincoln and Guba are specifically applicable to grounded theory, the remaining two, transferability and

dependability, are not. Each trustworthiness criteria's fit for grounded theory are further explained.

Credibility

“Credibility refers to how much the data collected accurately reflects the multiple realities of the phenomenon” (Sikolia, Biros, Mason & Weiser, 2013, p. 2). Some of the various ways to establish credibility in a grounded theory study specifically are through triangulation of the data, letting participants read the transcripts of their interview and resulting themes, and through long-term observation of those being studied (Sikolia et al., 2013). For this study, I ensured credibility through the use of triangulation and member checking (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple face-to-face interviews and the submission of a comprehensive resume. Each interviewed participant was given the opportunity to review their transcribed interviews, so to correct any misinformation.

Although triangulation and member checking are often-cited ways to ensure creditability, they are not without challenges. For example, the goal of triangulation is to gain a complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation by collecting multiple data sources and perspectives. However, if the researcher does not select relevant sources, then the triangulation process can become clouded with irrelevant data; this is why it is essential to stay connected to the study's research questions. Similarly, member checking is a great way to ensure that the information each participant shared is accurate and representative of each individual. This process is very beneficial if each study participant is willing and has the time to read the transcribed script of the interview.

For this research study I provided each participant with a transcribed copy of their interview and asked them to confirm it was accurate of their experience. Of the 19 students that I sent transcriptions, I had four students respond, confirming that the information represented our interview together. Given that 15 of the students did not respond to the transcription check email, I sent a second email to each participant describing the theory that I had developed. Also, I asked each participant to review the bulleted overview I provided of the theory and then to respond with an email either confirming that the theory described their journey or letting me know that it did not describe their journey. This round of member checking yielded in five students responding; however, each student affirmed that the theory accurately encompassed their leadership journey.

Transferability or Fittingness

“Transferability refers to the applicability of one set of findings to another setting (Sikolia et al., 2013, p. 2). Essentially the question being asked is, can this study be replicated with the information provided in the research paper. This definition becomes a problem for grounded theory as the study is situated in time and space and is significantly influenced by the researcher conducting the research. It is not possible to duplicate a grounded theory study in its exact original form, and so, the more accurate grounded theory term for this trustworthiness criterion is fittingness (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). Fittingness takes into consideration that all aspects of a grounded theory study cannot be duplicated, and so suggests that it is probable that the findings will be relevant to those in

similar situations. This definition and criterion better align with the constructivist grounded theory method.

In order to increase the likelihood of fittingness, I sought to recognize my role in the constructivist grounded theory method. As a result, individuals reading the research study as well as seeking to replicate the study must have a clear understanding of the role that the researcher took. Some considerations to include are a description of what the relationship looks like between the researcher and participants, any biases, preconceived notions, experience, and/or expertise in the research area that the researcher brings to the study. This information is important as this relationship can have a significant bearing on the outcome of the type of information collected through face-to-face interviews.

Throughout this research study I have sought to share my biases and preconceived notions and experiences as they surfaced writing this dissertation.

To pursue fittingness in this study, I have developed thick descriptions and detail of the interview process, and provided ample information throughout Chapter 4 that each participant shared with me, which also provides insight to the level of respect I garnered by developing a relationship with each candidate interviewed so that others can judge the applicability of my findings and are able to fully understand the context in which the study took place. The term “thick” is commonly used when describing the type of descriptions necessary of the research process. As the researcher of this project and knowing all the nuances of the project, I experienced a level of information blindness, meaning that I understood the process so well that my mind just filled in the blanks, and I did not include important components in my writings and theory creation. To offset this

issue, I consulted weekly with a peer reviewer as well as with my dissertation committee who periodically reviewed my information.

Dependability or Auditability

Dependability is achieved when the research study accurately evaluates the phenomenon being studied through consistent research techniques and analysis. Again, a study is deemed dependable when the methods utilized are implemented correctly and can be replicated by other researchers. While similar to dependability, a better-grounded theory fit for this criterion is auditability (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). Auditability is when a researcher has thoroughly documented all decisions made in the grounded theory research process in such a way that another researcher is able to follow and understand every decision made. This process essentially forms an audit trail (Bowen, 2009) that anyone can understand and follow. “An audit trail is a record of the research process as well as the theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices made by the researcher” (Bowen, 2009, p. 307). As can be seen, to provide an accurate audit trail, it is important to keep and make available and provide field notes, memos, and any information that provides clarity on the decisions made during the research process. Halpern (1983) provided an overview of the key categories to include in an audit trail, and they included raw data, data reduction, and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, materials related to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information. Throughout the research process I utilized Halpern’s categories as a guide to ensure my audit trail was thorough and provided ample information. A key component of my audit trail was the utilization of fieldnotes and

memoing throughout the research process. In order to keep all the information safe and in one location, I uploaded and wrote my memos in NVivo 12.

Initially, I wondered how much I should write, but eventually, I got into a rhythm and basically just wrote until I had nothing more to say or ponder. As I previously mentioned throughout the entirety of this research process, I consistently utilized my peer reviewer and dissertation committee members as reviewers of the process and subsequent information created.

Confirmability

Confirmability in the grounded theory method refers to how accurately the research study reflects the participant's voice rather than the voice and biases of the researcher (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). A hallmark of confirmability is data coherence and researcher bias recognition. As the researcher serves as the primary data collection agent, in which all analysis is filtered through, it is imperative that the researcher makes known how information was collected, interpreted, and how analytic decisions were made. Similarly, it is through this detailed descriptive process that a researcher can ensure confirmability is achieved.

One of the ways that I sought confirmability is through reflexive writing. Birks and Mills (2011) defined reflexive writing as “an active process of systematically developing insight into your work as a researcher to guide your future actions” (p. 52). In this study, I incorporated reflexivity within my memo writing, so to seek complete transparency and objectivity of my process. When seeking to consolidate memos and reflexive writing, Birks and Mills (2011) stated to do this that it is imperative to take a

systematic approach and that the writings must build upon one another. “Consciously creating a record of how you feel during this process will allow you reflexively to analyse much more than just an audit trail of decisions made in relation to operational or analytical processes” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 54).

“Qualitative research has been criticized as lacking scientific rigor, as being merely a collection of anecdotes and personal impressions, and strongly subject to researcher bias” (Bowen, 2009, p. 305). It is in these criticisms that it is paramount for this research project to adhere to the tenets of a trustworthy study so that it is viewed by colleagues as meaningful and valid work.

Methodological Coherence

Another important aspect of study trustworthiness is making sure that the study has methodological coherence (Morse et al., 2002). Methodological coherence is making sure that the research question(s) and the components of the method align. Morse et al. (2002) went on to say that “the interdependence of qualitative research demands that the question match the method, which matches the data and the analytic procedures” (p. 18). Grounded theory studies seek to explain the phenomenon being studied, and so, from the start to the end of the study, the initial research questions serve as the focal point of the study that must be continually reviewed. In order to ensure that I practiced methodological coherence, I frequently referenced my research questions and made sure that my work was ultimately answering the question. Another way that I sought methodological coherence was through memoing. Memoing is when a researcher systematically records personal thoughts, feelings, insights, and decisions regarding their

study. In many ways, memoing and being reflexive provided ample review of my research process, as memoing helped to inform the reflexive information that I shared by writing and vice versa.

Memoing

As noted in the confirmability section, I heavily utilized reflexive memoing in this study. Not only did I record my thoughts and feelings, but I also used this process as a way to continually reflect on my methodology to be sure that it accurately answered my grounding questions. Ultimately, I took Schram's (2006) advice to heart, "Do not confuse your proposed research with a personal crusade" (p. 179). While I had personal beliefs about male student leadership and their perceptions, it was important to keep my thoughts and feelings in-check by memoing throughout the research study. In reviewing my memos and through reflexive writing, I was more accurate in my analysis and able to avoid "tweaking" the findings so that they reflected my "personal crusade."

Charmaz (2014) stated that while memoing is imperative to the grounded theory process, she also noted that "methods for producing memos rely on making them spontaneous, not mechanical" (p. 164). This sentiment is echoed by Birks and Mills (2011) as they said that most researchers "agree that flexibility and freedom are essential to the process" (p. 43). For this study, I reviewed prior memos and wrote a memo any time I engaged with the data. Even though Birks and Mills said that sometimes it is good to step away from the data and memoing so to develop a fresh perspective, I sought to memo at any point that I reviewed or read anything to do with the research process, as I believed that it was important to capture my consistent thoughts at each stage of this

process. For my memoing, I used a consistent format for each entry. The format includes the following: date, memo title, a memo that included reflexive writing, and a methodological journal section (Charmaz, 2014). Ultimately I used it to specifically highlight methodological considerations, questions, and decisions that surfaced in the research process.

Ethical Considerations

Merriam (2002) states that “ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings” (p. 29). This quote by Merriam is true of all research modalities; however, qualitative research and specifically constructivist grounded theory studies have several potential inherent ethical dilemmas that must be addressed and, if possible, avoided. One of the central figures that have the greatest chance of crossing an ethical line is the researcher.

Researcher Ethics

In a constructivist grounded theory study, the researcher serves as the only individual who makes all decisions regarding the study. Some potential ethical issues that can arise in this type of research setting are “how the grounded theorist is advancing the purpose of the study” (Chong & Yeo, 2015, p. 263) and how the researcher is conducting and documenting the research process. Because the collection of data and analysis were all conducted me, I had to pay close attention to not misuse interview data and the subsequent analysis to push forth a result that advanced my biased beliefs or agenda.

Given my role as the sole researcher in this grounded theory study, I sought to be transparent in every aspect of the process as I believe that it is imperative to the study's success. Given the history of qualitative and specifically constructivist grounded theory research's validity being questioned, there are already many ethical safeguards implemented. To maintain a high level of ethical practice, I utilized a thorough audit trail, member checking and memoing, as well as had peers and colleagues review my research at each step of the process.

Informed Consent

Another ethical pitfall for constructivist grounded theory researchers is the identification, selection, and interview process of the research participants. The primary research modality for a grounded theory study is interviews, and if a researcher only solicits interviews from individuals who are known rather than are specifically from the population under investigation, then the research is faulty. Additionally, given the research participants' fundamental role in the research process, the researcher must keep individuals informed of the exact purpose and process of the research study by providing informed consent. Again, to avoid ethical issues in the interview process, I was thorough and transparent with each of my participants during each step of their involvement.

At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed with them that their involvement was voluntary and that they could decide to exit the interview at any time. This step was important for my study as some of the students knew me and the role I served at the university. Additionally, given my role on campus, the power differential, and my connection to some of the participant's campus sanctioned leadership position supervisor,

I believed that some of the students might feel pressured to participate if asked personally, and so I communicated only through email. Additionally, if there was a student that I knew in the initial sample of students selected, I reached out to the supervisor of the leadership position in which they were currently and request they have a follow-up conversation with the student, inquiring about the student's comfortability in participating in the research study.

Data Storage

Conducting research that asks individuals to share parts of their personal story necessitates researchers to handle all information and data points with care and confidentiality. In order to assure each of the study participants that their information was safe, I communicated to each of the participants the method in which I was taking security measures with the collected written and audio-recorded information. In understanding these fundamental ethical considerations, I sought to inform each participant that all their information would be secured in multiple ways.

For this research study, I had audio-recorded interviews, field notes, memos, and signed informed consent forms and continuously made sure they were secure. I even took extra precautions with this information by password-protecting documents as needed and storing information only on my password-protected personal laptop. While pseudonyms only identified the data that was uploaded and analyzed in NVivo 12, NVivo ensured that only the account owner would have access to the transcriptions and that once information was deleted that the backup copies were also deleted.

Participant Emotional Care

The key component of this entire study is student participants. It was my job as the researcher to be sure that no intentional harm resulted from each students' involvement. While I did not encounter the interviews evoking strong personal emotions, I still sought to show my care for each participant by the way I handled their interviews and personal stories. If I would have had a student need additional emotional care due to the information they shared with me, I had a list of counselors available.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of pursuing a grounded theory study on the topic of male leadership was to provide a theory that impacts the way higher education professionals understand male-identifying student leadership development. Similarly, I wanted to contribute to the body of work surrounding male student leadership development so that when a practitioner searches for information on how to engage and developing male-identifying student leaders, there is a research study available for guidance and help. As noted by Haber (2012), "Very little is known, though, about how students perceive the concept of leadership" (p. 27). It was in this notion that the findings of this research study are timely and relevant for not only current male-identifying students on college campuses, but also for the generations to come. I hope that my findings and identified grounded theory generated through the precise following of a constructivist grounded theory methodology ultimately changes the way male-identified students are thought about and developed.

Additionally, leadership development is a prevalent programmatic theme on many college campuses, but for the administrators of these programs to be fully informed, it is

theories like the one I have identified on how male college students perceive and engage leadership that is necessary. It is in the lack of research on male students' perceptions of leadership that has created the space for which my theory is situated. The current research gap and the need of more information on male-identifying students has enabled my study to increase knowledge and provide a theoretical framework that helps to better serve male college students.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND SUBSTANTIVE THEORY

The catalyst for this research started years ago with my frustration in not being able to find information or research on how undergraduate male-identifying students perceive and then decide to pursue leadership while in college. The pursuit of this initial search for information was spurred by my department at the time, consistently not having enough male-identifying students apply for our campus leadership positions. Now, after having conducted this research study, I am happy to not only be able to answer my initial questions but, more importantly, to provide researchers and higher education practitioners a framework to better understand male-identifying students' leadership journey.

The purpose of this research study was to understand the experiences, motivations, and process in which undergraduate male-identifying students decide to pursue leadership positions while enrolled as an undergraduate student. Additionally, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do undergraduate male students perceive leadership while in college?
2. What is the process in which undergraduate male students decide to pursue leadership positions while in college?

These research questions were created so that I could better understand how male-identifying students engage in leadership. As noted by the questions, there are two related, yet different areas that I wanted to explore in this research study, and they are perceptions and process.

In order to understand the *process* in which male-identifying students engage in leadership while in college, I believe that it is first necessary to understand the starting point in which male-identifying students typically think about leadership. As a result of the findings surrounding the first research question, this study brought to light three leadership *perceptions* held by current male-identifying college students. The four perceptions that I constructed out of the student interviews are that (a) leadership is a way for personal advancement, (b) leadership is a vehicle for altruism, and (c) leadership challenges self-esteem, and (d) negative perceptions of leadership by peers.

While it is important to understand male-identifying students' perceptions of leadership, the heart of this research study is the substantive theory that was constructed. As a result of my research study, and specifically the second research question, I identified six distinct and yet connected processes through which undergraduate male-identifying students progress when pursuing leadership. Each category I constructed was a result of the concepts that were identified through the interviews and Charmaz's (2014) constructivist methodology. In addition, I identified properties, a key component of a category, and sought to exhaust these through the use of theoretical saturation. I also identified the dimensions of each category, which are ways in which a process differs for each participant. Lastly, I also noted and discussed the conditions in which a process took place, which are further described in the discussion.

The six processes that I identified as being fundamental of male-identifying students' leadership pursuit include (a) Being Encouraged Toward Leadership, (b) Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability, (c) Developing a Positive Leadership

Self-Concept, (d) Identifying Motivations for Leadership, (e) Pursuing Leadership, and (f) Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept “Snowball Effect.” Although there are six individual categories, they are all interrelated and serve an important role in each student’s decision to pursue leadership. In addition to identifying these six categories, I also developed an abstract core concept that succinctly integrates all six concepts, which helps to enhance the theory’s explanatory power (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hallberg, 2006; Pandit, 1996). Hallberg (2006) provided the following succinct explanation of the purpose of a core category: “Identification of a core category is central for the integration of other categories into a conceptual framework or theory grounded in the data. This core category determines and delimits the theoretical framework” (p. 143).

Another important component of this constructed theory is not only the categories identified but also the order in which each identified category happens in a student’s leadership pursuit process. By utilizing a constant comparative method (Merriam, 2002) in this research study, I realized that the six processes took place in a similar sequential step progression for each student interviewed. For example, in the first step, Being Encouraged Toward Leadership, all the students in this study shared about someone or something that had served as a leadership catalyst. Once I realized that each of the six processes happened in steps, I was able to confirm this realization through theoretical sampling.

This chapter provides an overview of the students who participated in this research study, describe the research study site and its current leadership culture, discuss

male-identifying students' perceptions of leadership, present the identified grounded theory, and close with a chapter summary.

Participant Overview

In order to participate in this research study, each student had to identify as a cisgender male (a male student who identifies with their birth sex) college student who had also successfully interviewed and was selected for a university-funded leadership position. In order to gain an initial group of students to interview, I utilized a purposive selection process, which takes place in Charmaz's (2014) initial sampling stage. The goal of purposive selection is to intentionally identify students who have shared experiences or knowledge about the topic being researched (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009). When beginning this research study, I selected six students based upon the type of leadership position they had before the research study or were currently holding. The rest of the participants were selected from the initial participant list I had developed and as a result of adhering to theoretical sampling.

Theoretical sampling differs from purposive sampling in that theoretical sampling "is to obtain data to help you explicate your categories" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 198). In order to explore the specific categories that started to form in this study, I pursued participants that I believed would "elaborate and refine" (p. 199) the data being analyzed. As a result of the theoretical sampling process, 19 cisgender male-identifying students provided the data for this research study.

Research Study Site Information and Current Student Leadership Culture

The participants for this study represent 25 unique leadership roles across Northeastern State University. It is important to note that many of the students in this study held more than one unique leadership position that met the criteria for this study, which included having to apply for and attain a university-funded student leadership position. The fall 2019 undergraduate enrollment for Northeastern State University was 22,262, and the Fall 2019 new student cohort consisted of 37% male and 63% female. As can be seen in Table 1, this study included two fifth-year seniors, seven seniors, six juniors, and four sophomores. I did not have first-year student representation as there are very few university-funded leadership positions that first-year students can apply for at Northeastern State University. However, there is a leadership course that is offered in the spring semester, and many first-year male-identifying students who want to pursue leadership positions on campus take this two-credit pass/fail course as a start to their journey. Several of the leadership positions that are included in this study require that the student leadership course be completed before the students can apply for their desired leadership position. Another point worth noting is that student organization involvement is heavily promoted at Northeastern State University, and so many first-year male-identifying students will join a student organization or start one that meets their specific interests if one does not already exist.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Participant (pseudonyms are used for confidentiality)	Self-Identified Race	Year In College	Major	Number of Unique, University-Funded Leadership Positions Held In College
Alav	White (Middle Eastern)	Senior/ 3 rd year on campus	Computer Science	5
Anthony	White	Junior	Aeronautics/Air Traffic Control	6
Brady	White	Senior	Business	3
CB	Black/Latino	Senior/5 th year	Exercise Science/Pre-Physical Therapy	3
Chris	African-American	Sophomore	Business	2
Daris	Caucasian	Sophomore	Biology/Pre-Med	3
Jack	African	Junior	Exercise Science/Pre-Med	2
Jake	White	Senior	Psychology	4
Jalil	Black	Senior	Human Development	3
Joaquin	Caucasian	Junior	Biology/Pre-Med	4
Joseph	White, Caucasian	Junior	Entrepreneurship	5
J.W.	African-American	Junior	Communication	5
Nate	White	Junior	Physical Education	2
Reggie	White	Sophomore	Sports Administration	2
Steven	White	Sophomore	Biology/Pre-Med	2
Tim	White	Senior	Communication Studies	5
Von	Caribbean, Black, Afro-Latino	Senior/5 th year	Fashion Merchandising	3
Wesley	Caucasian	Junior	Business	3
Z.R.	Arabic	Senior	Biology/Pre-Med	2

Note: All of the above information was self-reported as a part of the interview process

Types of Leadership Positions Held by Study Participants

Given the importance of the student story in the development of grounded theory, I re-affirmed that each student met the requirements of the study by asking all participants at the start of the interview a standard list of questions. I asked them about the race with which they most identified, their current year in college, and the number of university-funded leadership positions they have held while in college (see Table 1). Additionally, I also asked each student what pseudonym they wanted me to use in this research study, which can also be seen in Table 1. Examples of these unique roles include: resident assistant, orientation leader, undergraduate student government positions, advisory councils, student tutors, student leadership course facilitators, mentors and trainers, first-year experience course assistants, student multicultural center student leaders, honors leadership academy mentor, male diversity executive board positions, admissions ambassadors, new student welcome crew members, Black United Student executive board members, college student senators, and hall councils, to name a few. Additionally, most of the students in this study were also heavily involved in leadership positions that did not fall within the criteria of this study. For example, some of the participants had either started a student organization on campus or had served in a leadership role within an already established student organization.

As a result of this research study, I constructed a substantive leadership theory from the information shared by each student, even though their life journeys proved to be very different. For example, one of the participants grew up in Africa and attended boarding school for his primary and secondary schooling until he traveled to the United

States to pursue a college education. Conversely, another student grew up merely miles away from the university in this study. Although each of the participants in this research project had unique leadership stories, the process in which they decided to pursue leadership proved similar.

Findings—Perceptions of Leadership

In order to gain a better understanding of current undergraduate male-identifying student's perception of leadership, the following research question was developed: How do undergraduate male students perceive leadership while in college? Identifying how undergraduate male-identifying students perceive leadership is an important first step in understanding how they decide to engage it. For example, if male-identifying students perceive leadership as merely a popularity contest or not masculine enough, these perceptions can negatively impact their pursuit of leadership. Or the opposite perspective can hold true as well (i.e., a student's positive perception of leadership can serve as a motivator for pursuit). In either case, it is especially valuable for practitioners and researchers alike to understand the various perceptions that male-identifying students hold regarding leadership.

In order to answer this research question, I utilized parts of Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory methodology with a few purposeful changes and omissions. For example, I used an initial and focused coding process like the one that Charmaz (2014) outlined in her book. However, rather than identifying processes and a core category, I developed descriptive categories that embodied key concepts that I identified through the coding process of the transcripts. Additionally, I stopped at the

formal coding step, as this research question did not warrant the need for the theoretical coding step of Charmaz's methodology. As a result of this analytic process, four themes emerged of how undergraduate male-identifying students perceive leadership at Northeastern State University: leadership as a way for personal advancement, leadership as a vehicle for altruism, leadership challenges self-esteem, and negative perceptions of leadership by peers.

Leadership As A Way For Personal Advancement

Leadership is a term that is utilized in almost every social and cultural context, and having leadership experience, skills, and knowledge of how to develop others was viewed as a positive by the participants in this study. In each interview, participants discussed multiple aspects of how they viewed leadership as a way to better themselves in their current role as a college student as well as beyond college. Similarly, and as a result of many of the students noting the different areas in which they saw leadership helping them personally, I identified the perception category, leadership as a way for personal advancement. Brady highlights this when he states that leadership opportunities are "just kind of preparing me for like my professional career . . . you can speak about doing leadership positions, you know, impress employers and stuff like that." For Brady, he perceives leadership as a way to make him more marketable when he is pursuing a job. As I was reading and coding Brady's interview, as well as others like it, I labeled it "preparing for the future." For coding purposes, I considered planning for the future to be preparing for additional leadership roles in college as well as beyond. A number of the students were very aware of the importance of using the college environment as a

way to develop and test skills that they may need when in the professional realm. An example of this can be seen in the following exchange with Anthony.

Josh: Tell me about what you believe you have gained by being in your various college leadership positions?

Anthony: Yeah, I think I've gained real, real-world experience. Um, as far as like, um, within the RA position, handling conflicts. I mean, that's something that I can use in the workforce.

I labeled comments and conversations like this as preparation for the future, which served as one of the key concepts that ultimately led to the overarching leadership as a way for personal advancement category.

The participants in this study perceived leadership as a way to better their odds for position attainment. In most instances, the benefits of being in a leadership position were concretely tied to external motivation, meaning they wanted a leadership role so that they could put it on a resume or say that they had developed a specific leadership skill set. There was not one participant who said they only saw leadership as a way to better themselves internally. The internal personal benefit was only talked about in how the internal development would help in the pursuit of additional roles and professional jobs. So, while the participants did identify personal advancement as both internal and external, the external aspect was the concept most talked about and mentioned as to how they see leadership.

In the construction of the category, leadership as a way for personal advancement, there were two concepts that students kept bringing up, and they were intentionally using

student leadership as a way to develop leadership skills and to prepare for the future. Initially, I had coded these two concepts individually, but in further analysis, I come to see them as one concept that is dependent upon one another, so the key concept of this category is preparing for the future through leadership skill development. In most of the interviews, each participant identified that they saw leadership as a way to develop their tangible leadership skills, such as talking to people, leading meetings, and getting buy-in to a project. Although some of the students did say they thought learning these skills would help them during their college years, they all noted that they believed learning these skills would help them in their future jobs.

A commonly mentioned motivator for pursuing leadership positions while in college was due to being able to bolster one's resume, and the pre-med students especially noted this. These students were very aware that they needed to have additional experiences on top of a high GPA in order to submit competitive medical school applications. While being successful in the classroom was key to the medical school application process, students also noted that merely being a good student was not enough. Z.R. shares how he needs more than just a high GPA.

I definitely think that when people look at you, like med school or PA school, you are put in an interview, and that could be with one person, it can be with five.

And I mean, that's, I think in that, in that situation then, it's like they're not looking at you, they're not, they've already looked at your grades, they've already looked at what your grades going on, and in that moment it's like you need to be the best, you need to sell yourself to that. You need to show them what you've

done outside of the books. And I feel like me telling them, just like what I did, that I helped start an afterschool mentoring program. Like I helped, you know, like I was a leader. I was, I have two positions on an e-board while being a full-time student.

Steven also noted the importance of having leadership positions while in college in his pursuit of medical school: “I feel like that it (leadership) will help me, especially for the career that I’m pursuing as a physician one day.”

Planning for the future and wanting to be successful beyond college was not only a focus for the pre-med students who were interviewed but was also a common sentiment shared by almost all the students. For example, Wesley, a business major, notes the following regarding his leadership experience in college: “it’s preparing me not only for my career but for my future. Um, yeah, I mean, it’s getting me ready for, you know, what I’m about to get my next step into.”

Although Wesley, Z.R., and Steven were able to see the direct connection of their leadership experience to their future career as doctors and a business professional, Reggie currently does not know what job he is going to have or pursue after college, but still sees his leadership experience as beneficial and essential to his future and ultimately proving that he is capable of being successful. When Reggie was asked if he thought that his leadership experience would impact his future after college, he gave the following response:

I’ve been looking into a couple things recently, grad school and stuff like that . . .
So like I’m hoping they see something and say like he can do this. He can, he’s

proven that he can be a leader in some areas, stuff like that. But it's kinda like we'll have to watch to wait and see.

The students interviewed were keenly aware of the importance of showing future employers, graduate school application reviewers, and the like, that they were capable of being successful in the classroom while holding multiple leadership positions. However, this was just one facet of how they saw leadership preparing them for the future. In addition, the participants saw leadership as a way to not only build their resumes and professional network but as a way to attain real-life leadership experiences that can be discussed as they are pursuing professional endeavors. Ultimately, students saw leadership as a way to ensure that they are set apart by selection committees when the time comes.

Participants in this study also noted ways that their leadership experiences served as a way to learn, develop, and hone their leadership skills. As noted, this concept emerged in the coding process, but directly connects to students being prepared for the future. Leadership experiences and positions were perceived by the students to not only help them in their pursuit of a job within a profession, a futuristic pursuit after college, but also while in college. Anthony highlights this perception when asked about what he has gained by holding leadership positions in college.

I think I've gained real, real-world experience, as far as like, within the RA position handling conflicts. I mean that's something that I can use in the workforce. It's something I can use in my personal life. I think kinda hinting

back to what we talked about earlier, just opening up doors for other possible career opportunities.

Brady gives a similar response when asked about what he has gained:

Um, just like excelling and professional skills, like planning, communicating, noticing problems kind of as they're developing and trying to stop that, or prevent those I should say in a way. And, I'm just kind of building your professional skills all together. Being more confident in myself, getting a job after school.

While many of the students had set high expectations for themselves in the leadership positions that they held, they also saw their positions as a training ground for the future; thus, being able to hone their leadership skills and abilities in a controlled, safe environment. Jack talks explicitly about how college allows students to hold multiple commitments at one time so that they can prepare for real life.

What other point in life you're going to have other things to focus on. You know, you're going to have bills to pay, you're going to have a job to go to. If you're going to get married, you can have a family to take care of . . . you know. So it's like a way for me to start getting the experience of dealing with multiple things at the same time and still be able to perform on both, uh, on both sides of the spectrum. You know, understanding being, being able to, uh, to adequately perform and do good on both ends, you know?

In summation, leadership as a way for personal advancement proved to be one of the significant categories perceived of leadership by the students. In each interview, every student was able to articulate how his leadership experience had provided

something that would enhance them personally. It is important to note that while all the students assumed that by being in leadership positions would “look good” on a resume and that it would help them learn about leadership, they were not pursuing the positions for a specific skill development need. Many of the ‘aha’ moments happened during or after being in the leadership position. No matter the motivation, the students perceive leadership as a way for personal advancement. When asked what the leadership experiences have done for them, students often said that by having leadership positions in college, they were able to develop and grow their leadership skills in a safe place that is forgiving of mistakes made.

In knowing that male-identifying students perceive leadership as a tangible way to better themselves and their professional outlook, higher education professionals can leverage this knowledge in how university-funded leadership positions are marketed to male-identifying students. For example, providing student testimonials on what past students gained from the leadership position could help peak interest and provide a better understanding of what will be gained from the leadership role. Additionally, male-identifying students want to learn positive leadership skills that will make them successful in the future. While the collegiate years are genuinely a prime opportunity to shape the leaders of tomorrow and specifically male-identifying students, this time is only prime if leadership is taught in an intentional and relevant way.

Leadership As A Vehicle for Altruism

Another perception category that emerged in this study was that leadership is a vehicle for being altruistic. Although the students in this study acknowledged that many

times leadership is viewed by males as a hierarchical, a way to get power and to set oneself apart, they also saw leadership as a way to put others before themselves. Being altruistic manifested in many different ways for the participants, but in each interview, there was a specific discussion about the responsibility of leaders to better those around them. Although they all noted that showing concern and care for others is imperative to be a good leader, Alav, the undergraduate student government president, addresses the fact that many leaders know how to “look” like they care, but don’t. “You have to have a level of care in terms of seeming like you care, um, but deep down you don’t have to care if you’re in it for yourself.” This comment highlights the fact that care is an essential part of leadership, but authentic care for others is something entirely different. Jake noted this difference in his interview when he said, “I’m really seeing like leadership as genuinely caring about whoever you’re leading and not just making it, like you’re not just leading, you know, you’re kind of like you’re walking with them.” Like Jake, it was very evident in almost all of the participants’ interviews that they perceived leadership as a way to care for others and to make change by being an example for future leaders.

In this study, there were many different facets of altruistic behavior perceived to be associated with leadership. However, as I coded the interviews, two prominent concepts surfaced, opportunity to care for others and ways to make change. The caring for others concept was most often referenced when the students talked about the various purposes of a leader, how they believed a leader should act as well as the type of things they saw and felt from leaders in their lives. All of these experiences reinforced the view that leaders care for those they are leading. Additionally, the participants talked about

leadership as a way to make change, not only interpersonally, but to current normative structures and systems that hindered others. For the male-identifying participants in this study, they perceived leadership as much more than a power position or a status, they perceive leadership as a way to care for others and to make positive change.

Opportunity to care for others. One of the appealing aspects of a grounded theory research study is that answers to questions surface as a result of the combination of information shared and the researcher's analysis, thus many times providing concepts and categories that have not been thought of or extensively discussed in connection. The connection that this study made was that college male-identifying students see leadership as a way to care for others, and specifically their peers. When each of the students were asked what they believed are essential qualities of a good leader, every student mentioned something about having to care about those being led and or the population being served as a result of their leadership. A few of the students also shared experiences of being under the leadership of those who did not care about them or the position they were in and how detrimental that was to the work of the group.

Nate noted the following mantra that was shared with him in high school that he now prescribes: "They don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care and that's, you gotta really focus on the caring." Additionally, multiple participants talked about authentic care and how they can tell the difference in the leaders who genuinely care about others in their leadership position. So, for the participants in this study, they are talking about care in a very pure form. For example, Reggie told me that one of his primary reasons for pursuing leadership was "helping people." Similarly,

Brady says that leadership is “just kinda caring about advancing others and . . . like wanting others to do their best, wanting to make things go most successfully and um, I don’t know, advancing everyone else’s interests.” On the topic of care, Joseph says, “I just went into the role (RA) because I wanted to be that voice for someone and just be able to be there for someone.”

As many of the students generally talked about leadership, caring for others, and being in a position of care manifested on many levels. Some of the more passionate conversations that I had in each of the interviews surrounded the idea that to be a good leader, one must genuinely care about others. Some of the students’ reasoning behind feeling so strongly about the importance of care was the result of their own experience of being cared for by a leader at some point in their life. Steven shared the following story about a teacher in high school.

I had one teacher; she was my AP English teacher my junior year. She really like helped me out. I got really close to her and stuff. She would always like push me to do things and whenever I would do poorly on a test or something, I’d be mad or upset and she would always like tell me like, it’s fine, like you’re smart, you can do this. So, I feel like she really did like support me and pushed me to do things and she like taught me other things like about life other than like English related.

Leadership was concretely seen as encompassing a level of genuine care for those that one is seeking to lead. To pursue leadership without care was viewed by the interview participants as almost selfish. In most instances, each of the students knew that by

pursuing their desired leadership positions, that he has going to have to give of himself by caring for others, and yet each student still pursued a leadership position.

Way to make change. Another way students' perceive leadership is as a way to make change. There was a consensus that in order to make real long-lasting change one must have a leadership position. Initially, I thought that maybe the participants were stuck in viewing leadership as only positional; however, as I pursued this concept with additional questions, it became more evident that they understood that making change is not easy and happens on many levels. The participants in this study primarily talked about change in terms of being outside of themselves, such as changing a policy or serving as an example that other male students could look up to and follow. There were only a few instances that those in this study perceived leadership, at least initially, as an avenue for internal change.

Before he pursued his position in student government, Wesley saw the significant change he could make if able to secure the director of business and finance position. In this role, Wesley told me that he was able to increase the amount of money given to students for academic and leadership development. Additionally, as the director of business and finance, he was given a position in which he could draft the new bill and then meet with university administrators. Wesley described it this way, "I met with board of trustees and dean of college of Business and a dean of students and they agreed, um, to read, um, read my bill, essentially to change individual and orgs to upfront." In our discussion, Wesley was very proud of his ability to make positive change for the students he was selected to serve.

Wesley's story is one of an external form of making change through position and policy. However, many of the students interviewed saw leadership as a way to make change on more of a relational level. Tim provides an excellent example of how he perceives leadership regarding making change on a personal level:

I think leadership is having certain qualities within yourself that can make people around you better, and make people around you, uh, like find a potential within themselves and in turn like, uh, being like their best self and like improving other people around them as well.

Chris shared an almost identical sentiment as he said that leadership is about helping "people being the best person they can be."

Like I explained in the caring for others concept, there was also a similar reciprocal approach in wanting to make change. A few of the students said they wanted to be an example of change as others had been for them, by not conforming to the normative hegemonic view of masculine leadership. The change they wanted to make was to break down the falsehoods that male students can only lead in a hierarchy and by being in charge. For example, two students in this study explicitly stated they wanted to make change for future male student leaders. The change they wanted to make was to be an example to other males so they too could pursue and hold all types of leadership positions while in college. In his interview, Tim talked about hegemonic views of masculinity and how these views can hinder the type of leadership positions some male-identifying students pursue because they have a negative perception of campus leadership positions. Tim continued to share about how a lot of male-identifying students

may feel more comfortable in leadership positions that do not require reflection, confrontation, and a need to be open with feelings. When asked why he thought this was the case, Tim shared the following:

I don't feel like a lot of people, unfortunately, have grown up with like a vulnerable male in their life and they feel like, you know, they kind of have to be like, oh, like the man is not gonna cry. The man's not going to display their feelings like that. And unfortunately, I think people still kind of holding onto that.

In his statement, Tim touches on an important perception that several of the study participants also noted they had either believed or knew their friends thought to be true. Like Tim, they, too, were seeking to remove the barriers associated with certain leadership positions. For these students, the change sought was one of breaking down unfounded perceptions about the type of leadership positions male-identifying students could hold.

For Von, not only does he want to remove the barriers that definitions of masculinity create, but also to remove the barriers in front of male-identifying students of color. Von said the following about his experience holding leadership positions: "it gave me something to motivate other men of color that you can do this, you can be here, you can sit in in the same seat that I sat in at the same tables that I've been at." Von is taking intentional steps to change the perception of who can be a leader on his campus. His effort is one to celebrate, as the university under study is not only lacking

male-identifying student leaders but especially underrepresented male-identifying students in university-funded leadership positions.

Making change for the students in this study encompassed getting a position that allowed them to make policy and procedural changes to breaking down social barriers. However, the majority of the students talked about wanting to change perceptions that other male-identifying students held. Specifically, they talked of wanting to change how male students lead as well as the type of leadership positions viewed to be socially appropriate for male students. Additionally, a few of the students discussed wanting to change the way professional staff viewed male-identifying students and their leadership abilities. The idea of making change in this study was heavily focused on changing the false perceptions that male-identifying students hold about leadership.

Leadership Challenges Self-Esteem

The male-identifying students in this study discussed a perception of leadership that challenged their self-esteem on multiple levels. Although there were only a few of the participants who specifically used the term self-esteem in their interviews when talking about leadership, most of the students in this study used descriptor words included in the commonly used definition of self-esteem. For example, the term confidence was used a number of times when students were asked to talk about terms associated with leadership. However, when the participants were discussing their own leadership journeys, I noticed there were several words used in the interviews that I classified as negative descriptors and experiences around leadership that impacted their self-esteem. While I would consider the majority of the students in this study to be mature and

introspective (this opinion is based upon my interviews with the students and getting to know them), no one explicitly said their perception of leadership challenged their self-esteem, when in reality it did based upon the stories they shared.

The challenge to one's leadership self-esteem took on a few different forms, but after thoroughly analyzing the data, three key concepts came into focus, and they were identified in the interviews in multiple interviews. The key concepts are that leadership selection is based on being popular, positions are not masculine enough, and leadership positions are intimidating. In each of these concepts, there is a common thread that one's self-esteem is challenged when thinking about the perception they hold about being a leader.

Leadership selection is based on popularity. The participants in this study learned about leadership and that they could hold a leadership position at various phases in their leadership journey; however, by the time each of them entered high school, they all had an understanding of what it meant to be a leader. It was also in high school when many of their perceptions about leadership were initially formed, and for most of the students in this study, they carried these perceptions with them into college. For the participants, college served as a place to deconstruct each of their faulty leadership perceptions of experiences created in high school.

When I asked the participants about the type of leadership experiences available in high school, almost immediately, they talked about student council positions and sports team captains. After this answer had been given three times in a row in the interviews, I implemented a follow-up question asking, "why are these the positions that come to mind

first?” to which the common response was because they were the most visible and popular. An example of this can be seen in how Alav recalls who he viewed as a leader in high school. When asked about who he viewed as a leader in high school, Alav said, “I always thought like the people who were in student council, like the student body president, the vice president, and treasurer, the quarterback, the team captain soccer, the best player in basketball. I just looked at them.”

Similarly, when I asked Alav why he didn’t pursue leadership in high school he said,

I always wanted to in high school, but I wasn’t popular enough. And I think that’s like, unfortunately, the way in a high school, it, there’s a lot of people who would be amazing leaders but aren’t given that opportunity because someone is more popular.

Alav succinctly states what others I interviewed shared about their own high school experience and personal desire to get a leadership position. High school leadership was compared to entering a popularity contest.

Anthony shared a similar view in his comment when responding to the question of who he viewed as a leader in high school:

I felt like, you know, the captains of the teams just naturally stood out to me as, oh, they’re a leader of that team. Uh, also looking at, uh, like student council and who’s going for like student body president. Those were the big positions that were kind of advertised to us.

Jack, who went to boarding school in Africa, talked about his experience of how the leaders were selected for his boarding school. Even though he was selected for a leadership position, he admits that his selection was based on being liked and popular.

So it was, it wasn't really a judgment of who is really equipped for this position in primary school, you know. And in secondary school, it was, yeah, it had to do a little bit with, uh, uh, someone who, uh, you know, was smart, had smart, smart, was a good, uh, could strike up, a good conversation, uh, obey the rules kind of thing, uh, you know, and like just was, uh, was a pretty popular too because students voted.

While Alav, Anthony, and Jack's quotes are highlighted here, most of the participants in the study shared similar views of whom they viewed and believed were the leaders in high school. A common belief they held was that the students in these leadership positions were the popular students and that in order to get a leadership position, one must first be liked and popular.

A common practice used for both high schools and colleges when selecting a student organization executive board or team captain position is the ballot process. Given this type of leader selection process, the students typically most known or popular are selected, thus reinforcing the perception that to be a leader one must be popular. In some instances, a team captain may be selected by a coach, but more often than not, the captains of various sports teams are voted upon by the current players on the team. Again, the person(s) who typically get captain positions are usually some of the better players on the sports team and are also popular among their teammates. In the same way,

most student governments and student councils are selected through a voting system, and many times votes are cast based upon who is most known or most popular. This type of leadership culture in high school appeared to directly impact the students in this study and their perception of who can be, or at least who typically gets leadership positions as they entered college.

Since many students are conditioned in high school to believe that leadership is really about being popular, rather than actual skills, ability, and motivation, there appeared to be a heightened fear of not getting the leadership positions they applied for, thus equaling failure in their minds. For some of the students in this study, failing would only continue to weaken their already fragile self-esteem. Jalil succinctly describes these feelings when he talks about his own lack of belief in his leadership ability: “I’ve definitely had low confidence, low self-esteem in some areas.” Additionally, Jalil shared that some of his closest friends perceive leadership as something that may challenge how they view themselves as well. He recalled a conversation where his friends told him they “fear how people look at them, fear of the outcome when they pursue the leadership opportunities.” Jalil went on to say that the fear of rejection is a powerful force that can hinder male-identifying student as it hindered him initially.

The view that one must be popular in order to get a leadership position was a powerful and pervasive perception held by most of the participants in this study. However, for those who were considered popular in high school, they identified that even though their perception of who could be a leader may have been in error as they entered college, and that this perception did not initially hinder them. Additionally, the

participants' high school perception that popular students typically get leadership positions was only reinforced as they entered college, as there is very little that combats these perceptions once students enter college. In fact, at Northeastern State University, some of the positions that are most widely known and publicized as first-year students enter college in August are positions that are voted on. Some of the specific positions the students identified were student class representatives for student government and all student organization executive boards. Most of the participants said it was not until later in their college tenure they realized leaders are diverse and do not have to be popular in order to lead.

Students can leave high school with many positives; however, for the male-identifying students in this study, most left high school with a view that in order to be a leader, one needs to be popular. They also noted that this perception was reinforced as they entered college as a result of the initial leadership positions presented to them. Additionally, for the students in this study who did not hold a leadership position in high school, and who struggled with self-esteem, the idea of being a leader was unfathomable. Ultimately, fear of being rejected served as an eroding agent to some of the students' self-esteem and paralyzed a few of the students in this study for most of their first year as an undergraduate student.

Positions are not masculine. In all the interviews conducted in this study, each male-identifying student was able to pinpoint positions they believed were considered masculine. Overwhelmingly, two areas were continually noted, and they were positions in student government and a fraternity. When I asked why these positions held a

masculine connotation, it was said that the student government positions are more about power and policy, and the fraternity positions usually focus on leading other men and teaching leadership, not sitting around sharing one's feelings.

In contrast, study participants also identified several positions that they said were not as masculine. These positions included roles such as resident assistants, orientation leaders, and admissions ambassadors. When I asked the students in this study why the level of masculinity associated with a specific leadership role mattered, I was told that one had to be more confident in himself and his masculinity to pursue the less masculine roles that are more "care" focused. For example, even the students in the study who had been an orientation leader said the position requires one to be comfortable with himself, as there is a lot of jumping around and acting crazy in front of people. Steven, who served as an orientation leader, said that it took a level of confidence and being secure in himself to be able to get in front of people acting crazy and also to lead a new group of students every day. Steven went on to say that caring for others, like in a resident assistant role and making oneself look crazy in front of people in an orientation role, are not typically viewed as the most masculine. When reflecting on two university-funded leadership positions, Steven noted the following regarding masculinity,

Especially something like being an orientation leader . . . not the most masculine thing or like almost childish I guess, with certain things that you do as an orientation leader such as dancing and holding up a follow me (object that new students can see and follow). Just certain things like that. And I also think being

an RA is almost viewed as the same. I guess you're kind of like the mom to the floor. I don't think USG is like that though.

When I followed up with Steven and others about why they thought that some leadership position are not viewed as "the most masculine thing," they shared the following reasons: positions require too much personal reflection, being vulnerable, may result in failure, not viewed as cool, too much like a parent role, do not see many males in some of the different leadership positions, and most require you to be caring toward others.

Although some students talked about how views of masculinity shaped their perceptions of the type of leadership position they could hold as a male-identifying student, Reggie talked about how sometimes he feels that staff hold a similar view. For example, Reggie said this about caring in his leadership position as a Transfer Ambassador,

I feel like females are the majority hired, because they have that like caring sympathetic sensitive side to them where they can like give that to a student, offer compassion to a student. But I feel like as a male student that I also have that to offer.

While Reggie wants those who work at the university to know that he, as a male-identifying student, can and wants to care for others, some male-identifying students view this as not masculine and so avoid those leadership positions. Tim, a senior, who has held many leadership positions, provided this insightful comment about how views of masculinity can hinder some male-identifying students:

I think a lot of people, like, specifically looking at, uh, my friends that aren't in leadership positions, and I don't know if they're necessarily comfortable enough within themselves . . . I think an aspect that makes for a great student leader is the ability to be vulnerable and being vulnerable has been taboo with males.

Steven, Reggie, and Tim, as well as others in the study, noted that care for peers could be viewed as non-masculine as caring for others requires a level of vulnerability. Perceptions like this and others held about what it means to be masculine appeared to play a major role in how some male-identifying students perceive leadership while in college.

Similar to Reggie's perception that professional staff perpetuates the idea that some positions are less masculine, Blake holds the perception that female-identifying students are better than their male counterparts at some leadership positions, and as a result, he is at a disadvantage from the start of the interview process. Blake's perception that female-identifying students are better at "student interaction fields" than male-identifying students was reinforced when he was not offered a resident assistant position (one he sees as a student interaction field) in a climate when almost all guys get the job due to do a shortage of male-identifying students. When reflecting on his experience applying for the resident assistant position at Northeastern State University, he said that "males may feel like they have a disadvantage, like for instance, when I walked into the RA interview, I felt as soon as I walked in that I was already like kind of a step below." For Blake, applying for the resident assistant job, that he already viewed as not a masculine position, took courage and the suppression of his insecure feelings, but

when he did not get the position, it reinforced his perceptions and challenged his self-esteem.

The participants in this study shared how some student leadership positions, whether real or perceived, have a gendered stereotype on Northeastern State's campus. Given the perception that positions are gendered as masculine or feminine, the students discussed how they needed to have a level of security in themselves to apply for positions that were considered not masculine. Similarly, two of the students in this study also talked about how they believed that professional hiring staff perpetuated the perception that some positions are better suited for either male-identifying or female-identifying students. The students in this study identified how their views and beliefs of masculinity in conjunction with how a leadership role was gendered challenged how secure they felt in themselves.

Positions are intimidating. Even though all the students in this study have had significant success in their pursuit of leadership positions while in college, as evidenced by being selected for multiple positions (Table 1), many of them talked about how leadership in college can be intimidating. Alav, in his role as the student body president, at Northeastern State University shares how his role can be intimidating,

It's like every day, I get like a pit in my stomach of the possibility of failure. And then like, yeah, I mean it's still like, I get nervous, like with the position I'm in by giving speeches to like 4,000 people. I'm just, it's really hard in a place like that. Um, when you're in a position of power, people try to take it away from you all

anyway. It doesn't matter if you're the like Gandhi or something and they still hate you.

Alav's position as student body president is a very public position, and so naturally carries an additional weight that some of the other positions do not. However, multiple students talked about how leadership can be intimidating because many times, it means taking on the pressure to perform, meet deadlines, and the feeling that one has to be all things to all people.

Like Alav, Daris, in his interview, discussed additional facets of leadership that he believes are intimidating. He stated the following:

If it's an elected position or a position you have to apply . . . you could be worried about not being able to get it, and just that rejection that holds them back, or maybe it's the responsibility they'll have to take on that they don't think they can handle that at the time. Maybe they don't feel like they're best suited for it. So, I think there's a number of reasons why people might stray away from taking on a leadership position and maybe it's just they don't want to be in a spotlight of everybody again, can be seen in that sense.

Most of the worries and intimidating factors that Daris highlights in the above quote were also referenced and discussed by others in their interviews. Daris states that he thinks there are "a number of reasons why people might stray away from taking on leadership" and while this is true and echoed by many in this study, a key encompassing concept proved to be students feeling intimidated.

In this study, students identified two areas of intimidation, which included being intimidated by the role and responsibilities of the position for which they wanted to apply and then also being intimidated by the fear of being rejected. Even though all the students in this study ultimately overcame being intimidated and received a university-funded leadership position, some did note that being intimidated kept them from pursuing leadership in their first year of college. A standard, intimidating factor almost all of the students in this study noted was the fear of being rejected. Being rejected not only meant they did not get the position they applied for, but it also cut away at their self-esteem, reinforcing that leadership is an intimidating pursuit.

Negative Perceptions of Leadership by Peers

Each of the participants in this study has held a university-funded leadership position while in college. Even though the pursuit of college leadership was a condition of participating in this study, this group of male-identifying students also shared the perceptions that their friends held about their pursuing and being in leadership positions. The core of this research study is to understand the process in which male-identifying students decide to pursue leadership, but on the other side of pursuit, is not pursuing. An interesting category that I identified in seeking to understand the full picture of male leadership perception was how the study participants perceived their friends to view them and leadership.

The students in this study talked not only about their own experiences but also about how their friends reacted to them being in leadership. While this section focuses on the negative perceptions held by peers, it is essential to note that not all of the

participants in this study had negative peer influence, as a few of the participants' entire friend group consisted primarily of student leaders. However, in order to better understand the perceptions held by the friends of the students in this study, I asked the participants to talk about some of the thoughts and comments that their friends had shared with them about their being in leadership while in college. As the students in this study discussed how they perceived their friends to view their leadership role, the following three concepts were identified, leadership requires responsibility and is stressful, takes too much time, and don't see the need.

Requires responsibility and is stressful. Several of the participants said that their friends believe that by being a part of leadership on campus requires too much responsibility and that it significantly hinders the college experience. Chris recognizes that by being a leader his time is limited due to his leadership responsibilities, and so is not able to hang out as he used to before his leadership positions. Chris says that his friends who are not in leadership positions "would rather go to a party and you know, do other stuff, chill in their room, play 2K and stuff like that, then rather, you know, waste their time on leadership positions."

Jack recognizes that not all leadership positions are fun, and he shared how his friends realize this as well, which also impacted his perception of leadership. "I would say some jobs might be like, fun killers . . . you know, they just want to have fun time maybe to, they want to have less of a routine . . . you know, wing it."

Some of the participants in this study also said that even though they liked being in leadership positions, their leadership positions did take a lot of personal time and can

cause more stress. J.W. gave the following response when talking about how he perceives his friends to view his leadership role:

Extra responsibility! Um, and because of extra responsibilities, you might have maybe less time to just lollygag and just, you know, sit idly and um, some people would just prefer that . . . being like, being a leader on campus, you have sometimes, you have a lot of times, you have extra eyes on you and that can be a lot of pressure because then you feel like you can't be you.

When C.B. shared the following about how he perceives his friends to see his leadership role:

It means responsibility, it means being, having to be more organized, having to leave on top of things, having to be busy, having to give up things and time and certain comfortable aspects of your life and who likes to be uncomfortable, who voluntarily chooses that, only crazy people.

Brady asserts this regarding college leadership: “When you come to college it kind of forces you to do a lot more of the work and you know, be that leader to plan out stuff and you know, execute those plans.” As the participants talked about how they perceived their friends to view their leadership involvement, almost everyone in the study said their friends see leadership as extra responsibility and it is not possible for responsibility and fun to coexist.

A few of the students in this study admitted they used to believe that in order to have fun while in college, leadership must be avoided. To use Jack's term, the “fun killer” positions that were commonly highlighted included any position that encompassed

a role where the student had to address other students' misconduct, such as resident assistants and roles on executive committees. Jack also talked about his experience being a resident assistant and how his residents have told him they do not want to be a resident assistant because it means one has to write-up peers.

The students in these interviews also brought up that some of their friends may apply for an executive board position just so they can add it to their resume. They continued by saying that in reality these students did not want to do anything other than hold the title of the leadership position. When I asked a few more questions as to why these friends only wanted the title and not the actual job responsibilities, the participants said it was because their friends did not want the stress of leading a group, which ultimately caused more stress and limited their free time.

In almost all instances, university-funded leadership positions require time, responsibility, and motivation to succeed, and this is what friends of student leaders see. As a result, the students in this study have had friends question their rationale for wanting to be in leadership, especially when it requires additional time, requires responsibility, and appears to hinder the college experience. One of the more challenging impacts of negative peer perception on the students in this study was how their friends changed the way they acted around them when they had held leadership positions that required them to report misconduct. It was in these types of roles that a friend's negative response to leadership was the most challenging, and added an additional layer of stress.

Takes too much time. It is no secret that in order to successfully lead a group of people, an organization or cause, that time is involved. Those involved in this study quickly admitted that to be a student leader at Northeastern State University, there is a significant amount of time required between the position and the necessary trainings. A common perception shared by study participants was that their friends thought their leadership position took too much of their free time. The unique aspect of this perception is that student leaders would agree with their friends. However, those in the study articulated they believe the time spent is worth it, due to the personal advancement and ability to give back that the leadership position provides.

The students in this study noted that they believe those who do not see student leadership as a way to give back or view it as a way for personal development ultimately perceive student leadership as just “one more thing” to do. An example of this is seen in Brady’s response when he talks about the time involved in being a student leader.

You know, there’s some people who just don’t want to put that time in and uh, you know, go into meetings or having to plan out their schedule. I dunno, you know, like when you think about putting together an event, someone’s got to do that kind of time commitment.

Similarly, Jake shares an exchange he had with his friends, where they questioned his motivation to be a first-year experience student instructor (fall semester position) and a student leadership course facilitator (spring semester position)—roles where the student leader teaches a class of students about the college experience and leadership.

I applied for the student leadership course and teaching assistant and I'm like, people ask me, why are you applying for the leadership course. Like, it's like, it's so much of a time consumer and like you don't get any pay out of it.

After Caleb shared this exchange with me, I then followed up asking, "why do you do these jobs?" Jake simply said, "I enjoy it." He then went on to share a bit more about his motivation noting that:

I'm getting that like satisfaction and it's kinda like, um, resolve from like doing it and like kinda, getting that experience and knowing like I'm also building my resume at the same time. Like, I'm very conscious of like taking those experiences and making them something tangible for like, later on.

There is a saying that perception is power, but what is even more powerful is when perception is truth. One of the truths of student leadership is that it takes time, as confirmed by those in this study. Additionally, participants also noted how they perceived their friends viewed leadership as requiring too much time too. This held perception proved to be especially challenging for the participants in the study when their time spent in the leadership was not valued by their friends and ultimately questioned, as Jake experienced. In summary, the participants perceived that their friends held a negative view of how much time student leadership required, based upon their comments and lack of understanding. However, a unique aspect of this too much time concept is those in this study would agree that leadership positions do take a lot of time, thus reinforcing the perception that leadership is time-intensive by peers.

Don't see the need. A logical thought is that if a student sees the need to do something, they will more than likely also view it as a worthy cause and, thus, worth their time and energy. However, the inverse is true as well, and in this case, when male-identifying students do not perceive there to be a need to pursue leadership, they typically do not. However, there can be reasons why students do not perceive leadership as valuable while in college, as Anthony shared in his interview. Anthony, who is studying to be an air traffic controller, shared that having various student leadership positions on his resume *will not* aid him in getting a job. In Anthony's case, his employment as an air traffic controller is solely based on his knowledge of the field and not on his extracurriculars. So, for Anthony, spending time being a student leader does not directly help him in getting job and may actually harm him if his grades suffer due to being overcommitted. For Anthony and students in a similar situation, leadership development and opportunities happen in different formats, and students in his situation do not see the need to be leaders while in college.

A common thread for most of the students in this research project is that they are very intentional and future-minded. However, some students are not future-minded at all, and do not know all the benefits that can come from being a student leader while in college. Tim said this when talking about how his friends do not understand him and his motivation to be in leadership:

I think they just kinda . . . they just kind of don't understand like they don't understand the importance of it I feel, because they weren't necessarily ingrained into it . . . Like that's like high up on the chain in terms of like how, what in terms

of like what's important to me right now. But like my friends from high school, they, they basically knew what they wanted to do like before, before they were even in high school at the time. So like they don't, they're just like not in that mind space. They're not in that headspace.

Tim addresses two thoughts in the above quote: (a) students are just not aware of how leadership can benefit them and (b) if students have a set trajectory that equals a job, doing extra things can be perceived as just a distraction and a waste of time or, as J.W. put it, "it's extra stuff to some people and they might think it's pointless."

As a result of the information shared in this research study, it is apparent that there are multiple reasons as to why male-identifying students may perceive leadership as not needed. However, one of the key reasons shared was that some students do not see the need for leadership because it does not align with their educational path or even professional need. Pursuing leadership while in college requires time, and unless there is an educational or professional need can be seen as just one more thing and not needed, as in Anthony's case.

Summary of Leadership Perceptions

Leadership is a multifaceted topic that can be researched, studied, and analyzed in several ways. However, in the scope of this research study, I sought to better understand undergraduate male-identifying students' perception of leadership by seeking to answer the first guiding research question, which asks, How do undergraduate male-identifying students perceive leadership? In answering this question, I identified four perception categories: leadership is a way for personal advancement, leadership is a vehicle for

altruism, leadership challenges self-esteem, and negative perceptions of leadership by peers. These categories provide a rich baseline understanding of how male-identifying students think about and perceive leadership.

The participants in this study not only provided the data that resulted in the identified categories, but they also provided insights on how they thought about leadership at different moments in their leadership journeys. All of the students identified coming to college with the perceptions of leadership they developed in high school. However, looking back they see how much these perceptions have changed. Additionally, the students in this study provided some valuable insights on how their perceptions of their friends' reaction to their leadership views affected them.

Perception is power, and the categories that emerged as a result of the first research question provide a way of understanding how undergraduate male-identifying students perceive leadership at Northeastern State University. The identified categories consisting of leadership as a way for personal advancement, leadership is a vehicle for altruism, leadership challenges self-esteem, and negative perceptions of leadership by peers, all set a platform for seeking to ultimately understand the process in which leadership is pursued. It is in understanding these categories that a starting point from which male-identifying students may be coming from provides value. As was noted by some of the students in this study, their perception of leadership served as a deterrent to leadership, which impacted their pursuit.

Grounded Theory of Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation

This research study not only resulted in a foundational understanding of the perceptions that male-identifying students hold regarding leadership, but also the identification of a theory that highlights the process in which undergraduate male-identifying students decide to pursue leadership while in college. The theory developed as a result of seeking to answer the second research question which specifically asks, What is the process in which undergraduate male-identifying students decide to pursue leadership while in college? The theory that was developed consists of the following six themes: Being Encouraged Toward Leadership, Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability, Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept, Identifying Motivations for Leadership, Pursuing Leadership, and Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept “Snowball Effect.” These themes were constructed as a result of the utilization of theoretical sampling, constant comparison, and theoretical saturation. Specifics about the methodology used can be read about further in chapter three.

In addition to identifying categories, I also identified an abstract core category, *Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation*, that embodies all six categories from the theory. This core concept provides a succinct and thorough overview of the process undergraduate male-identifying students utilize in the leadership pursuit process. Another important component of the theory I identified was that the categories manifest in a step process. Each participant in this study moved through the categories in a similar way that ultimately resulted in the participant applying for and attaining university-funded leadership positions. Step one in the theory starts with Being

Encouraged Toward Leadership and then is completed at step six, which is the category Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept “Snowball Effect.” In the context of this study, all of the participants moved sequentially through each of the steps identified (see Figure 1).

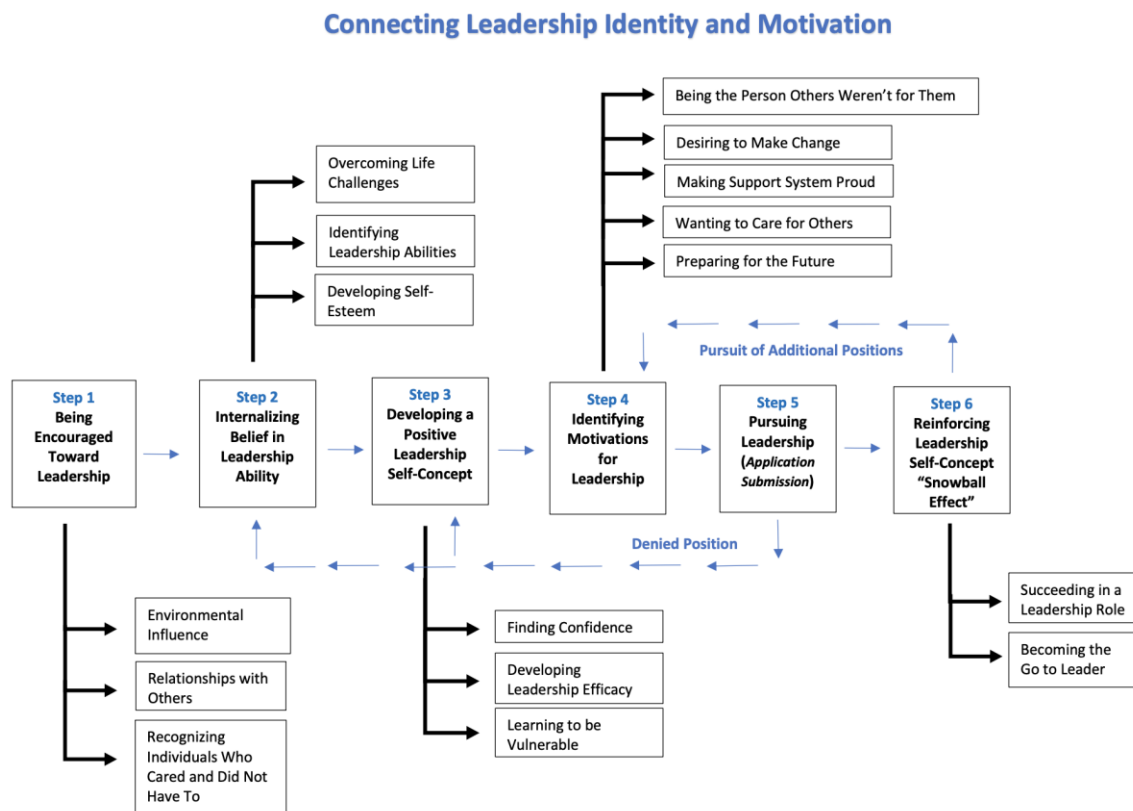


Figure 1. Conceptual model and step process of the theory.

Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1)

One of the very first themes that I identified in this study was that each individual had someone, or something, serve as a catalyst in his leadership journey. Even though the male-identifying students in this study are diverse, they each were able to identify a person, experience, or environmental influence that I considered to be an external push toward leadership. Many of the stories shared included the influence of a coach, teacher,

or parent. However, there were also stories of random people, death, and also the election of a president who served as catalysts as well. While the encouragement toward leadership varied in each participant's journey, they each noted being impacted by environmental influence and relationship with others that comprised the category Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1). Additionally, I also identified one facilitating condition, recognizing individuals who cared and did not have to. It is important to note that some of the students had multiple encouragement catalysts that influenced the beginning of their leadership journey and that this process is not isolated to just one encouragement relationship.

In this substantive theory, Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1) was identified as the first step in each male-identifying student's pursuit of leadership. When each student thought about and reflected on the very first thing that impacted the start of his leadership journey, each identified something outside of himself, resulting in this category and being the first step.

Environmental influence. Naturally, all students in this research study were raised in a unique environment that played a role in their understanding of leadership. As a result of this crucial influence in each student's leadership journey, environmental influence was identified a key property in the Being Encouraged Toward Leadership category (Step 1). While I recognize that this property is broad, this study also brought to light that some of the students grew up in environments that intentionally fostered a home setting where becoming a leader was the expectation, while others did not. The type of

environmental influence proved to be different from one student to the other concerning just how naturally encouraging it was for the student.

For example, while most of the students were able to identify specific experiences and people that played a role in their leadership process, two students could not. In further exploring their experience with follow-up questions, these participants noted that just the way they grew up influenced them. For example, Alav said:

So, I know for me, I just have always, like, I wasn't ever exposed to the word leadership. It's just, I think it was something I was just in the environment. I don't recall ever getting any less than, and it just might be, it might've been the environment I was in growing up that I had to take control of things . . . but I just think it was the way in my environment that I was raised. I just naturally like, uh, was made like, not naturally, but like I was just kind of born with into that.

Alav grew up in an environment where even though the word leadership was not formally used, he still grew up understanding how to be a leader and some of the characteristics that are necessary to be a leader.

Jack grew up in a very different environment, as he went to a boarding school in Africa. His external environment presented as different from that of most American male-identifying students in this study. His journey with leadership started by being selected as the assistant head boy, which Jack equated to being a class president. He says this about his experience:

I was the assistant head boy, it was just a position where you know, uh, we didn't really do a lot. It was more like ceremonial to be honest, but, and then mostly

based on, kinda how smart you were . . . I mean, it's not really a lot of leadership qualities you have at that age, but like they kinda judge that bit. And I was smart. In both Jack and Alav's leadership journey, the environment in which they were born into and grew up in served as the initial catalyst for their leadership pursuit. As each of them continued to share about their leadership experience, they both also went on to identify individuals who served various roles in helping them to develop as leaders, but their initial encouragement toward leadership was different from the other participants.

Relationships with others. The most common source of encouragement toward leadership was due to the relationships the students had with various individuals. When the participants were asked to reflect on the thing that has had the most impact on their leadership journey, specific individuals mentioned. The relationships consisted of all types of individuals, but all played a similar role in the relationship with others category. Four primary variations of relationships were identified by the students and they include family, educators and coaches, and peers.

Family. Within the Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1) category, family was most often noted as the foundational encouragement catalyst in each student's pursuit of leadership. Within the family structure, biological parents were specifically mentioned as being the main individuals who laid the foundation in the student, believing they could be a leader. Parental encouragement took on many different forms ranging from verbally telling the student they were a leader within the home, students seeing their parents serving in leadership roles, and parents helping students get involved in

leadership opportunities as kids. Daris highlights how his dad encouraged him toward leadership by getting him involved in leadership opportunities when he was young.

I kinda just always found myself taking on leadership positions. Probably mainly just to start was mainly because of my parents always tried to push me, like obtain most I could, and everything. Um, so my dad was real big into getting me involved in things I wanted, do things I liked to do, but like I went after them, and he just pushed me to do my best in them and then I eventually found myself leading whatever group I'd be in. I kind of got comfortable with the position and um, sort of saw in myself as someone expected to do something that I enjoyed doing. So, going from there, it really became more a personal thing for me. I, I kind of enjoyed seeing the impact I could have on whatever position I was in, and tried to make it the best that I could be, because I'll hold myself to higher standards after having that my whole life, I kind of developed that own mindset for myself.

Like Daris, Nate shares how his dad served as a catalyst in his leadership journey by being a leader in the community and serving as a coach of a high school sports team:

The biggest thing that I can think of is my dad, just having him, he was always a leader in his community, at his school that he taught at he was a coach. He was someone that people looked up to. People would follow what he said, because they knew he was trying to do the right thing, stuff like that. I'd probably say that the first experience of leadership was from my dad.

J.W. also mentions how his mom and dad's constant verbal affirmation that he was a leader impacted his journey. He recalls, "I feel my dad always says I'm a leader, I believe my mom, my mom says the same thing." J.W. in his comment notes how he "believes" his mom; he didn't mean this to be that he didn't believe his dad, but for many of the participants, their moms were the most influential external influencers. When asked about the key leadership influencers in his life, Chris said, "my mom, my grandma and encouraged me . . . they always said I was a natural-born leader." Blake shared this about his mom when asked who impacted his leadership journey:

My mom is definitely a huge one on that. Um, she, she is kind of taught me like that work ethic, stuff like that. Like how to show other people like, I can get stuff done. So they'll like fall behind it.

Also mentioned as influential in the family structure were aunts, uncles, grandparents, and other extended relatives. However, while the family structure was seen as a foundational catalyst for most of the study participants' leadership pursuit, some of the more emotional stories that were shared discussed family members that invested in them and did not have to. Tim shares the following about his uncle:

You know, I do look at my uncle, he was uncle of mine or he is an uncle of mine. He was always just kind of like, um, my parents are divorced and so like my mom was never, never got remarried and stuff. So, like he kind of, and it's not that I didn't have a relationship with my dad and stuff, and I have a great relationship with them; but, uh, my primary residency was with my mom. So, if we needed like, he was just kinda like that male presence on my dad's side. That was really

good. And like, it, it was cool, cause like he didn't like, he didn't like have to be like that, a dad, you know what I mean? He could, he could lead and teach me in ways that wasn't like, you know, very like, like you need to do this cause like I'm your parents type thing. So, like he would, he would be able to just come cause like he would be around all the time because like, he's a like he has his own like computer software, like restoration, like company and stuff. Like he does it all, you know what I mean? So, like if we had any issues with like, whether it was like, like something with like, uh, like a pipe or something, or if it was like a computer, like anything like that. Like, he would always be there, and I would be able to like, look after like, you know, like what he did and stuff. And like, even when I came to college and stuff, I still wouldn't have a car, so he would drive me here and back and stuff. So, like, he really did play like a huge and important part in kind of like, just in a sense of like how like...you know, like how to like, be a man per se. And like, I definitely look at him as kind of like that, um, how to emulate that, like being a man type of thing.

Family served as the primary source of leadership encouragement, as they were typically the most present and consistent influence in the students' lives. Some of the specific ways that family encouraged the participants in this study included: verbally telling the student that they were a leader and had leader qualities, family members (typically a biological mom or dad) socialized the student in leadership environments by providing opportunities for their student to be in leadership positions as a child, and finally, family served as a tangible leadership role model. The process of thinking about

and being called a leader was substantially perpetuated by the family structure surrounding each student. While those who specifically served in the parental role were the most commonly referenced as the primary source of influence, this study also showed that there are multiple types of family members who can have a powerful impact on one's understanding and pursuit of leadership.

Educators and coaches. When the students were asked to think about the people and experiences they believe significantly impacted their view and understanding of leadership, high school teachers and coaches were some of the individuals mentioned. These individuals were mostly from middle school and high school years. However, there were a few instances where professors from college were noted as well. Additionally, every student in this research study shared with me that he was exposed to leadership before his college years, even if he did not hold a position in high school. This is important to know, as most of their definitions of what it meant to be a leader and what leadership looked like were formulated in high school. C.B. highlights how high school impacted his ideas about leadership: "So my definition of leadership in high school was just based off of the people that I was around and the older adults that I had in my life at the time." J.W. shared a similar experience when reflecting on how his view of leadership was shaped: "I also had some teachers and professors, coaches that I looked up to, that I respected. And um, I believe that's like a mixture of those things, helped me develop the definition." These examples show how those with whom the students interacted pre-college played a significant role in the students' understanding of leadership, good and bad.

Those who served as teachers were also commonly mentioned as influential and formational in the participants' leadership journey. Similar to family, teachers are one of the most consistent adult figures in a student's life and, as a result, can build a level of trust with a student. It is in this trust, where the student typically believes a teacher's word, and in some cases holds more significance than a family member's because the individual is not someone who has to say something positive or share an encouraging word. However, since teachers are another consistent presence and can observe students outside of the home, they are also able to speak to a student's strengths in a specific way. When sharing about the impact that teachers had on their leadership journey, the students in this study said that one of the more powerful things that their teachers did was to show care and to tell them that they believed in them and their ability to do great things. Not only were these educators mentioned but many were mentioned by name in most of the interviews. Teachers were not only highlighted as leaders because of their professional position, but as people they respected and looked up to as leaders. Nate shared the following about one of his key influencers from high school and how he cared for his students:

The first name that comes to mind is a teacher I had, his name is Mr. Murphy.

And he wasn't as much of a, a vocal leader on your case or super strict. He was super understanding, extremely friendly with everybody. Um, he was, um, he's a great guy. He cared about his kids and he was there. He understood, he knew how to work hard and worked really hard to try and make a difference and make it the best opportunity for everybody in high school.

Steven discusses how he was impacted by some of his teachers who made a point to build a relationship with him.

I feel like I'd point teachers out because there were a few teachers that I kind of was close with. So, I would go to for questions and stuff and they would guide me and help me out, which to me is a leader . . . I had one teacher, she was my AP English teacher my junior year. She really like helped me out. I got really close to her and stuff. She would always like push me to do things and whenever I would do poorly on a test or something, I'd be mad or upset and she would always like tell me like, it's fine, like you're smart, you can do this. So, I feel like she really did like support me and pushed me to do things and she like taught me other things like about life other than like English related. And I feel like that did really help my development as a leader.

Alav also shares about the influence one of his high school teachers had on him. "I had a, uh, a teacher in a high school who like taught financial literacy, entrepreneurship, uh, e-commerce stuff. And he would always like push me to be a leader, but he never used those words." While most high school experiences were reflected upon with fond memories, this was not the case for everyone, and yet, teachers still played an important role in Joseph's life. He says this about high school:

I did not have good experience in high school. Like even in elementary, I was constantly bullied, I switched schools. Like it was always something that I dealt with and I never was close with anyone. So, I really wasn't eager to be in leadership positions. But you know, I grew close with like other teachers at our

school and you know, I consider like teaching even being a leadership position, like you're impacting someone else. So, I would just always ask them about their stories and like how they got to do what they did. And that was just inspiring to me.

Though a very different experience than that of Steven's, Joseph, too, found a direct and essential connection with teachers in his high school. Additionally, he learned very early that leadership for a teacher is so much more than just standing at the front of the room; it is about caring for students and meeting them where they are in their development and experience.

Those in teaching roles hold much power in a student's life, as evidenced by the stories shared by Joseph, Alav, and Steven. As the students talked about those who directly influenced their leadership journey, teachers were second only to family members. In most of the stories shared, the reason the teacher had made such a profound impact was because of the personal relationship that was made with the students.

Similar to teachers, though not mentioned as much, coaches and sports played an influential role in some of the participants' understanding of leadership. An interesting point that emerged was the influence of sports on the students who did not play sports. For those who did not play sports, they still viewed captains of sports teams as leaders and someone they respected. However, for those who did play sports, the coaches had a direct and significant impact on their leadership understanding and pursuit. Like the students who did not play sports, those who did all viewed the captains of the sports

teams as leaders. The impact of a coach can be seen in Reggie's comments about his high school coach.

My high school hockey coach, he had a huge impact on me. Um, he literally said in his speech, for like I got an award at the end of the year, that if you told him (referring to Reggie) to run through a brick wall, he would do it. I was like, well, it's because of the leadership and stuff like that. Like, I wouldn't do that for someone I didn't trust.

C.B. shared this about his high school coaches:

Cross country coach Rick, that I still talk to this day, one of my favorite people and I literally still go back to my high school so I can talk to him. Jason, he was one of my coaches for basketball for my freshman, JV, and varsity seasons, and he was a really, really good guy. He knew when to turn on the intensity and the passion to get people to understand like this is important, but then also knew how to come at people in a gentleman that way they could understand as well.

An important aspect to keep in mind when seeking to understand male-identifying students is how the pre-college years impacted the student. In almost all these stories, a connection with a teacher or coach played a significant role in a student's belief in himself and belief that he too could be a leader. The typical process that teachers and coaches alike implemented that helped to encourage leadership was showing their students that they genuinely cared for them. The students in this study perceived care from teachers when they would ask how the students were doing, would spend extra time with the student when an assignment was not understood, and by providing an unsolicited

encouraging word from time to time. Additionally, students also felt encouraged toward leadership when their teachers and coaches would “push” them out of their comfort zones. Everyone in this study perceived being pushed as care, because they knew that the teacher or coach wanted them to grow and be the best version of them that they could. However, the key ingredient that enabled teachers and coaches to have a voice in a student’s life was because they had built a meaningful relationship with the student or had garnered respect by being caring or shared a similar interest area as the student.

Peers. As previously noted, most of the students started to develop their understanding of leadership in high school through relationships developed with their teachers, coaches, and high school staff. While the foundation is likely to have been laid in high school, college provided another impactful influence in male-identifying students’ pursuing leadership. The students in this study talked about peers serving as encouragers toward leadership in several ways. One of the ways that peers impacted pursuit was by merely being a male-identifying student visible in a university-funded leadership position. Anthony shares the following about how just seeing male-identifying students in various roles was a reason he started thinking about being a leader:

So, like with orientation leader and RA, I kind of pursued those because I had people that I looked up to. Like when I was going through orientation, there was an orientation leader that I looked up to, or a couple of classmates actually, and you know, I wanted to be like them; or the RA on my floor was a great role model. I wanted it to be like him. So, I think with a lot of the leadership positions that I’ve held, it’s because of someone else.

J.W. said this in regard to how he learned about leadership in college: “I’ve learned about leadership by seeing it, by trying to apply it and by experiencing it.” Others, like Joseph, experienced the power of peer leadership firsthand: “When I went through a tough time, my RAs were there for me and throughout the year I was just like, I want to be that person for someone else.” As a result of this experience, Joseph identified that he wanted to be a leader like his RA.

The simple fact of male-identifying students seeing other male-identifying students in leadership positions, especially other male-identifying leaders in university-funded roles, plants the seed that perhaps they too could be a leader. The power of seeing someone like yourself in a leadership position is also highlighted in Komives et al.’s (2005) leadership identity development model. According to the leadership identity development model, one of the first steps in a college student’s leadership identity development is recognizing that a leadership position exists and that there are others like you holding leadership positions. Peers also played another vital role in serving as a leadership pursuit catalyst, and that was through personal encouragement.

A powerful push to start thinking about pursuing leadership in college for a number of the participants happened as a result of a shoulder tapping experience from a peer. The peers who students talked about in their interviews were either currently in a leadership position or had previously held a leadership position. For the participants in the study, these individuals played an influential role in getting them to begin believing that they, too, could one day be a leader, holding the same positions that the peer talking to them had held. Anthony shares explicitly about the impact of a comment:

I hadn't really thought about any leadership positions. Like, I mean it was in the back of my mind, like maybe it'd be cool to be an orientation leader, but I didn't know how to go about it or anything like that. But obviously like someone's sitting down there and saying, I believe in you, I think you could do a good job, is always going to boost your confidence.

Anthony had a peer, Dan, who was very intentional in his conversations with him about leadership, which Anthony believes significantly impacted his leadership journey.

Anthony said this about Dan and how his words influenced his leadership pursuit:

Dan was really the first person that sat me down because at first, I didn't register for the student leadership course and it was like November or something. And it was like two weeks after I'd registered for classes and he texted me, he said, Hey, can you meet for dinner or something? I want to talk about some stuff. So, we sat down and he was like, hey, I think you need to register for the student leadership course. I think you'd be a great orientation leader. I was like, okay, that's cool. Uh, sure. I'll look into it. So, I waitlisted for the class, got off the waitlist magically. I'm not sure how, when I'm thinking, you know, had I not gotten off that waitlist, it would have closed the doors for everything else that I was involved with . . . things like that that you don't really think about until like someone actually comes to you and says, hey, you'd be great at this, I think you should pursue it. So, he said, you know, you'd be a great orientation leader. I was like, okay, cool. Yeah, I guess I'll apply. So, I took the student leadership course to become an orientation leader. Then I saw everyone else applying to be

an RA and I was like, hey, you know, I think I might as well just go for it. You know, the worst they can do is say no. So out of my class I was like the only one that became an RA. And that was something I wasn't even thinking about when I took the course. So it really just needs to like that one person to say, Hey, I think you'd be great at this. Go for it. You know?

Daris also specifically names a peer that spurred his thinking about becoming a leader:

Also like the RA that I had in the past like, Charlie, he was kind of the ones that, one of the ones that pushed me to join NRHH [National Residence Hall Honorary], he suggested I apply to be an RA. He said I should be an orientation leader and like all these different things. I mean, some, some things I picked up, some things that I didn't.

Like Anthony and Daris, Tim also noted an individual who encouraged and helped him in becoming a leader in college. The difference in Tim's experience was that his major influencer identifies as female. In this study, there were several female teachers and peer mentors identified who played an essential role in the leadership development of these male-identifying students. My point in bringing this up is that while it is important for male-identifying students to see other male-identifying students in various university-funded leadership positions, female-identifying individuals were able to motivate and encourage male-identifying students as well. Tim notes this of a female peer and long-term peer mentor:

The person that got me into USG, her name is Celine. She was one of my, uh, she was one of my Excel mentors my first year. And like, we definitely had, we definitely had those great conversations and stuff about developing myself and stuff. And there were, there was a point where like, I thought I kind of knew what I wanted to do that first year, and then I went home and like, I thought about it a lot and stuff and I just kinda came to the realization that it wasn't, it wasn't it. So, I was kind of back at square one, that kind of like, it got me down a little bit. Um, but then like I talked to her and stuff and she just like, she really instilled that confidence in me like that, like just because it didn't pan out the way I thought it would like that, but that's not a bad thing and it's a, it's a good thing that you know, that you don't wanna pursue that anymore and even like the next year, like I became a mentor . . . we would always kind of have these like one on ones.

Peer influence, whether that was from male-identifying students just seeing other students in leadership positions or having a shoulder tap for leadership, proved to be very impactful for the students who participated in this study. As can be seen in some of the above quotes, the students who shared how being told by a peer that they too could be a leader, it built their confidence and planted a seed that they could lead. This concept is not a unique finding of this study, as Shook and Keup (2012), in their literature review of peer leadership, also noted the influence and power of peer-to-peer relationships in leadership pursuit. What this study did find was that peers did impact male-identifying students' pursuit of university-funded leadership positions.

Those who cared and didn't have to. The concept of care was one that was mentioned many times regarding various contexts by those in the study. I specifically address the care concept later in this chapter, but regarding the impact that relationships with others had, a unique facet of care emerged, and that was the identification of individuals who cared and did not have to. Being authentically cared for by teachers, coaches, and peers significantly impacted the students and their desire to do the same for others. Chris shares the following powerful memory about a mentor who showed him care and didn't have to:

Josh: Can you tell me a little bit about that mentor person in your life?

Chris: Okay, so it's like he wasn't like a mentor in school, like a mentor outside, but like I met him, and then we just, I don't know, we just gelled, like I've never really had a father figure, so he filled that, that action space and like he would do stuff that like, you know, teach me how to become a man. And he, he had a problem growing up. Like he didn't have a father either. So he was telling don't do what he did and, you know, just help me experience life.

Josh: What was, in thinking about that particular relationship, what was most important to you? Like what impacted you the most about that relationship with your mentor?

Chris: Um, him taking a time out of his day and doing stuff with me because he didn't have to, like, it wasn't, he wasn't getting paid for it. I just met him randomly and we just became cool, you know.

Similar to Chris's comments above, Tim also highlighted how impactful it was that his uncle stepped in to be a father figure in his life and he didn't have to. When talking about Tim's uncle, Tim made the following comment about his uncle and his willingness to care when he did not have to. "It was cool cause like he didn't like, he didn't like have to be like that a dad." Though from completely different backgrounds, Von describes a similar connection with his uncle—someone who was not required to do anything for him.

Um, so like growing up, uh, the only person that was a mentor to me was my uncle who passed away when I was seven years old and I didn't have a father figure like that growing up. And so he was a father figure, a mentor to me. Um, and even though I was seven when he passed away, I just remember so much that he instilled into me . . . He loved me no matter what.

I previously discussed the power of coaches and educators on students' leadership journey, but Reggie had an even deeper connection with his coach as he said the following about him. "I feel like he was one of the first persons that truly believed in me, not because he had to, just by choice. I think that's like really big to me." This comment by Reggie accurately displays the power of someone "who did not have to" show care and concern for students. Although it is challenging to communicate emotion through the writing process, it is important to know that as Reggie talked about his coach, I could sense the deep respect and regard that he held for this individual. Even though every student in this research study could identify someone who impacted them and their leadership journey, those who had people in their lives who cared and didn't have to were

profoundly moved and thus have gone to college with a sense of what it means to care for others, even if it means giving of your time for those who did not have to.

Some of the ways in which the individuals who were classified as those who cared and did not have to encouraged students toward leadership were primarily serving as an example of what it means to give of themselves for others. The differentiating factor for this group of individuals, from that of parents, coaches, and peers, was that the care, time given, and support was perceived by the student as completely voluntary and unwarranted. Whereas many of the ways that these individuals supported the students in this study were similar to other support individuals in a student's life, it was viewed differently. It was seen differently because the student had identified a relational void in their life that someone voluntarily filled even if it required additional time, resources, and emotional support.

Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2)

The power of others in male-identifying students' leadership pursuit was undeniable, as every student in the interview was able to identify someone who had served as a foundational catalyst. Though very different from an external encourager, another prominent category identified in the data and played a role in leadership pursuit is Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2). Simply put, it is one thing to be told that you are or can be a leader; however, it is entirely another thing to truly believe it internally. J.W. articulated this point well in his interview when he said, "If people say you can do this like you have to believe it." For the students in this study, a few different conceptual properties surfaced for the Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability category

and identifying leadership abilities and developing self-esteem. In addition to the identified properties, I also discuss overcoming life challenges, a dimension of this category.

Identifying leadership abilities. The identification of leadership abilities also proved to be an important part of male-identifying students' belief that they are equipped to be a leader. Again, it is essential to distinguish the difference between being told that one is a leader as compared to believing one is a leader because they have identified their leadership abilities. For several of the students, there was a developmental process in which they come to understand that they did possess leadership abilities.

Tim's journey in identifying his leadership abilities was realized and fostered over time through seeing leadership skills in someone else and then trying them himself. It is also through seeing and emulating process that individuals can come to know, understand, and believe that they, too, can be a leader. Below, Tim describes a time that he not only identified a leader but the specific skills that the leader had, that he then sought to emulate:

I grew up like, um, I grew up like a huge basketball fan . . . I remember the day LeBron was drafted to the CAVs. So like, I just remembered I enjoyed basketball before that, but then whenever LeBron came to the CAVs, that's when I started, like really getting into it. And so like, you know, my dad would get, like my mom would get me DVDs and stuff of LeBron, and like I would start watching videos and stuff about him. And just how, like how selfless he played as well as how selfless he was, talking about his teammates and the team, that really kind of

made a big first impression on me. That like to kind of try and emulate that just in terms of, either like if I played sports and stuff, so it was like a team game, but it also made like an impression on me to kind of do that in everyday life as well to try and just like include everyone and to make sure to try to like do whatever I can to implement everyone's strengths of well.

An interesting aspect of this story is that this process for Tim started around six years of age. In regard to his leadership development journey, he was just starting. However, the idea that he could develop the leadership skill of inclusion resonated with Tim and proved to be an ability that he learned to operate in comfortably. Tim shares the following example of how his inclusion ability manifested in high school:

I had a very strong, I had a very strong passion to be inclusive in high school. I never really was like, like our school wasn't very big on, I mean there were cliques and stuff, but I wasn't like a huge fan of like sticking with one group and stuff. So I just made a huge effort and stuff to try to like include for example. It's cliché, but I would like hang out with people in the band, and I would hang out with people in theater, as opposed to just people that I played sports with and stuff, and it wasn't even necessarily that like I was, I was like, okay, I'm going to sit down and I'm going to do this just because that's what a leader does. It was like, I genuinely had things in common with them, so it kind of happened organically. But as I look back on it, I do see like that was like me trying to like lead by example.

However, for Chris, he shares how he believes that some are just born with leadership ability. While Chris just believes he has leadership abilities, all the other participants in this study shared the belief that leadership abilities are realized and developed over time and through experience. Even though some may disagree with leadership trait theory, as Chris appears to ascribe to, the vital component to a student Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability is ultimately believing that they possess leadership ability, whether that is developed or believed to be an innate trait.

Chris is a very driven and hardworking student who ascribes to a view that leaders are born, as can be seen in his following statement:

I believe there are natural-born leaders, people who are just naturally gifted with the ability, with the ability to lead others. And like some people would just naturally take that, take the rein and stand out. If there's a problem they take charge.

Later, in the interview, Chris shed some insight into where he developed his born trait philosophy as well as where his belief in his own abilities stemmed. Concerning his own story Chris shares, "my mom, my grandma encouraged me to, you know, that like they, they always said that I am a natural-born leader and I should be, should be the people that people listen to." For Chris, he grew up being told that he was a leader and one that others should listen to, and as a result, he now very much believes that he is a leader and was born with the necessary skills to lead.

As Tim's story shows, he was made aware of his natural ability to include others through an external example that resonated with him on a DVD. Others in this study

identified their leadership abilities by being pushed by a teacher to take a lead on a class project, asked to serve in a high school student organization, and through others naming a leadership ability that the student was exhibiting. While Tim's experience coming to identify his leadership abilities is very different from that of Chris, and in fact, of all of the stories, the common concept that appeared was that the students in the study realized and came to believe that they possess leadership abilities.

Developing self-esteem. The importance of the concept of positive self-esteem surfaced in a couple different ways in this research study. The first way was just through the interview process and talking with each of the students in the study. As I interviewed them, it was very apparent that they had a good feeling about themselves and their abilities at the time that they applied for their various leadership positions. This is not to say that all of the students have always had positive self-esteem or will continue to have positive self-esteem, but I am saying that at the time of the pursuit of their leadership position, they did. In some instances, developing positive self-esteem started with getting into an environment where they were accepted for who they were as individuals. Joseph shared the following about his leadership journey, and how being accepted for whom he was moved him toward believing in his leadership ability.

I finally found the place where I can truly be myself and not worry about what other people are thinking. Cause that's constantly been something I've worried about. So coming in and having that clean slate and just realizing I can have a voice if I make myself have a voice.

Joseph's sentiments about being accepted were noted by a number of the students in this study. Specifically, in Joseph's journey, by being accepted, he realized that he did not have to change who he was to be a leader and that he can develop his leadership abilities.

Participants in this study also articulated that there is a false narrative that is promoted by various views of masculinity regarding leadership. The damaging narrative is that male-identifying individuals should be lone wolves, set themselves apart, and be the person that others want to be accepted by. These views appeared to damage some of the student's self-esteem, as they were contrary to their perceived leadership abilities and personal desire to be a part of community, and lead in community. Ultimately, the traditionally held hegemonic view of masculinity and leadership negates the importance of a healthy community that promotes self-acceptance, thus growing one's self-esteem.

When thinking about his leadership journey, Von talks about how being in a bit of an identity "puzzle" directly impacted his self-esteem, even though others were telling him he was a leader.

During that time, [high school] I actually was in so much of a self-identity, I won't say crisis, but like jigsaw puzzle, that I didn't know who I was. I remember people in my life, always telling me, Von you're such a leader. Like you, you have something about you like this, there's something about you that you're so, even when you are not talking there, just something about you. And I be like, okay, cool. That's great. Wonderful. I like being in the background. So, in high school I didn't really hold a lot of leadership positions because I didn't feel like

one, I didn't feel like I was worthy enough. I mean to, I didn't feel like I was like qualified.

For some, feelings of not feeling worthy or less than can paralyze male-identifying students, as it did in Von's leadership pursuit. These feelings, coupled with a fear of failure, can keep students from ever pursuing college leadership positions. While some students may stay stuck in not feeling worthy enough, Von inadvertently began to find his identity and leadership voice by seeing a need and stepping in as an advocate.

The strength of one's self-esteem can ebb and flow, but for the study participants, developing self-esteem was an essential process in ultimately being able to internalize the belief in their leadership abilities. The process of developing positive self-esteem happened for the participants in this study by finding an individual or community that accepted them for who they are, seeking to be an advocate for others, and through continued positive reinforcement by others of the students' value to a group or relationship. All of the students in this study who identified that they had poor self-esteem did not believe that they had the ability to lead or even possessed leadership abilities. Instead of focusing on the leadership abilities they did have, they were fixated on the abilities that they did not have. However, as students started to develop their self-esteem, they then opened a window to identifying their leadership abilities and then internalizing their belief in their leadership abilities.

Overcoming life challenges. In the analysis of the data, I identified a concept that is a dimension of the category Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability. Overcoming life challenges proved to be a significant aspect in some of the participant's

leadership journeys; however, it is not present in all instances like that of a property. At first thought, and as I initially did, it is easy to dismiss the concept of overcoming life's challenges, as one may think, what life challenges does a college student have? If this is a question that is asked, some of the life challenges shared in this research study ranged from being the child of immigrant parents who could not speak English to being overweight. In the context of this study, I identified anything to be a life challenge if the student viewed it that way. The life challenges shared served as concrete moments in time where the students realized that they had developed leadership abilities such as discipline, persistence, flexibility, resilience, one that can take the lead, and the like. Through the challenges shared, these students developed a belief in themselves and their abilities that they then utilized in their leadership pursuits.

When thinking about overcoming life's challenges, Wesley's story quickly comes to mind. Wesley was not involved in leadership in high school, he was overweight, his parents divorced at age 12, and he was in the English as a second language classroom (ESL) until 11th grade. When reflecting about his past, Wesley stated that "high school is like not great for me." However, despite these life challenges, and now in college, he serves on the Undergraduate Student Government executive board. In reflecting on his journey, Wesley specifically highlights how losing weight helped him to realize that if he could be disciplined enough to transform his body, he too could face and overcome other significant challenges. Wesley shares this about his weight loss journey:

So, I kinda did my own thing and it wasn't always the best. So, I didn't always have the best of grades or the best work ethic or was the nicest to people . . . when

I was a sophomore in high school I was 242 pounds. So, uh, my transition, like senior of high school to college, I lost. So, I lost like a lot of weight. Like in a year and a half . . . I want to say like a couple months after that, like I started like going to the gym more and like caring a little bit more about my grades and like figuring out like what am I do with myself . . . So, like even losing weight was like a huge journey that you know, that I had to deal with and then like grades and all that. So, like the little things I think was the first like implementation of like, hey, I should change.

Losing weight served as a critical moment in Wesley's life when he realized he had developed the ability to change not only his physical form but also to make changes in all aspects of his life.

Another story shared that exemplifies overcoming a significant life challenge is that of Ziad. Ziad's parents immigrated from Syria, and they did not speak English, resulting in natural challenges for Ziad that most do not encounter. However, it is the challenge of his parents not speaking English, coupled with his need for medical assistance, that allowed Ziad to realize that he had inadvertently developed leadership qualities. Ziad shares this about starting to believe that he was a leader due to his life challenges:

In middle school, like I was like diagnosed with Crohns . . . my parents aren't from here, they are from Syria and they didn't know what was going on . . . when I, when I got diagnosed, my mom and dad was like freaking out, like they were so worried, they didn't know what was going on . . . So, it was like me talking to the

doctors, talking to them. And I was like, the doctor telling me something, I would ask like a hundred questions. I'm like, what is this, you've got to break it down to me. I'm only at like a 14 year-old kid. And then like that, that doctor had told me, he's like, what do you want to be? I, I don't know, he was like, well, I think you should come to the healthcare field. Like if it's not a doctor, it's a nurse or something . . . So like from a young age, I guess I learned that like, and I had missed a bunch of school, so like I had to learn that like . . . I guess I just like, people telling me that like I should be a leader because of the things I did . . . I was like, I actually was a leader in a lot of situations that I didn't know about. Like, I guess like even to my parents I was a leader.

Ziad's ability to serve as a translator between his parents and the doctor as a 14-year-old kid not only showed the doctor helping them that Ziad had leadership abilities, but also that he could be successful in the healthcare field.

Ziad's and Wesley's stories are unique in the fact that both include language barriers and immigrant parents; however, they succinctly highlight how facing and then overcoming life challenges can serve as moments in time when internal belief in leadership ability occurs. Other life challenges shared in the interviews included the loss of a parental figure due to divorce and death, learning disabilities, and mental health navigation. Even though each life challenge shared was not easy and was life-changing, in a direct way, these experiences helped each of the students understand and believe that no matter what happens in life, they can make it.

The life challenges presented to the students in this study forced each of them into situations that they had to learn how to navigate whether they wanted to or not. It was in their navigation process that they developed necessary leadership skills such as caring for others and effectively communicating, as Ziad did with his parent's language barrier. Similarly, Wesley had to develop discipline and perseverance in order to lose the weight that he desired to lose. While overcoming life challenges was only a part of a few students' leadership journeys in this study, this dimension of Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2), did prove to be significant and essential to address.

Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3)

The third category and step identified in this study was the process of Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3). This category developed as I further explored some of the concepts already discussed such as developing positive self-esteem, identifying leadership, and abilities and environmental influences. In the early stages of coding, I identified a number of stories and statements that were all similar and yet appeared to be a part of different processes. However, as I continued interviewing, coding, analyzing, and then recoding, I identified the third category that happens as a result of students moving through Being Encouraged Toward Leadership and Internalizing Leadership Ability. Essentially, the third process happens as a result of students Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1) and Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2), while encompassing additional concepts shared by students and their reflections. The first two steps move the student from hearing externally that they are a leader to internally believing they have leadership ability, but it is the

combination of having had external support and internal belief that a student has the foundation to begin Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3).

For clarity, self-concept in this study is the knowledge of what one knows to be true of himself rather than how one feels about himself, which is self-esteem (Baumeister, 1999; Mruk, 2013). I spent a significant amount of time thinking about the term that would best fit this category and supporting properties. I had multiple iterations such as developing positive leadership self-esteem, knowing oneself and identifying positive views of self, to name a few. However, Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3) accurately fit, as it provides room for both having developed a level of confidence while still allowing for additional growth. In order to have a self-concept one must engage in a level of self-reflection, even if it is minimal. When thinking about the participants in this study and the varying levels of maturity presented in the interviews, I was able to see in the students that as one matures, the detail in which they reflected on life and experiences also grew. As a result of this reflection process, and specifically in the context of a student's leadership journey, the stronger one's leadership self-concept becomes. For example, the students who are a part of this research study vary significantly in having a positive leadership self-concept. For those in this study, the strength in the self-concept is a result of several factors such as age, level of maturity, leadership experience, time spent self-reflecting, and affirmation of leadership abilities. For this category, two significant properties were identified, consisting of finding confidence and developing leadership efficacy. Additionally, a facilitating condition of learning to be vulnerable was also identified.

Finding confidence. The finding confidence property was a property that was identified as this study developed. Meaning, my initial question guide did not have a specific question that asked about the participants' views and understanding of their leadership confidence. However, once the concept surfaced in an interview, I then added it as an additional question explicitly asking about it. The finding confidence concept was identified as the result of the participants talking about confidence in multiple contexts, such as receiving external confidence, developing internal confidence, having confidence, not having it, wanting it, and even wanting more of it. When thinking about the range of students who were a part of this study, fifth-year students who have held multiple leadership positions compared to sophomore students currently in their second leadership position, I noticed the more seasoned student leaders were able to better articulate the role confidence played in their leadership journey.

There were a number of factors shared that both built and challenged study participants' confidence in their leadership abilities. Jack shares this about his confidence:

Uh, my confidence is still, I'm still working on it . . . like I just always told myself, you know, I, I can do it, you know, it's going to be harder, but I'm gonna find a way. I'll find a way to get through it . . . my confidence, some of them always working then and just telling myself I can get through it.

Jack's understanding and view of his leadership confidence was not shocking to me, as previously in the interview, he surprisingly opened up about losing his mother, the primary support person in his life. As he talked about losing his mom, he shared how

painful that experience was for him, and yet, he had to keep moving forward. So now, years past the death of his mom, he is faced with pursuing leadership positions in college, to which he approaches with confidence in his ability to get through anything thrown his way.

On the whole, the students in this study talked about how they continually compared themselves to their friend's leadership abilities. In most instances of this comparing ritual, the students shared that they compared because they lacked confidence in their leadership abilities. Daris highlighted in his interview how his confidence is challenged when he compares himself to others, but then finds it again with a reinforced vigor. He views himself as a relatively confident student, and yet he admits that even his confidence does waiver. However, Daris presented as a mature and very reflective student, and even though he may have moments of questioning his leadership confidence, he has a positive leadership self-concept and is able to compartmentalize his self-doubt. In his interview Daris describes the progression of his thought process as he compares his leadership ability to others.

There's times I see other peers of mine that um have these big leadership positions. I see that they're absolutely killing it. They're doing a great job. And I, and sometimes I'm like, am I to that level? Am I viewed as that level because they just radiate, um, that leadership and the qualities that you look for in somebody that does well. And um, so those are the times that maybe I'll start questioning it, but I think I don't dwell on that and put myself down. I think I

more so use that as like fuel to myself and go and make sure that I am sure doing those things. So, that's, that's a big thing for me is the self-motivation sometimes.

While some students had their confidence in their leadership ability challenged by comparing themselves to other student leaders, Jake also had a parental figure who would compare him to his peers, asking him why he was not more of a leader like his friends. As a result of these two constant comparisons Jake had, his own and that of his parent, his confidence in his leadership ability was depleted in high school and followed him into his first year of college. Jake shared this regarding the state of his confidence as he entered college:

When I thought leader, I was probably not at any of those like similarities where I'm like thinking, oh, that's me, I'm a leader, no! I was very much not confident in myself. I was like, oh no, I couldn't be a leader, that's not me. I have friends that are outgoing and popular and stuff like that, but like, I could never, you know, stand up in front of class and teach anything. I could never, you know, kinda like be organized, create group projects, you know, kinda like, and have people listen to me. Like, you know, be, I never thought I could be impactful at all, so I'm like, I never tried to do anything cause I'm like, it's never going to happen anyways. Ah, and even into my first year at college I was like, I'm probably not going to get too involved. I'm going to try to do at least something, you know, with research, if I can in psychology, but high school I was just like, I'm not a leader, so like, so why would I apply.

Jack, Daris, and Jake all have different experiences in their leadership journey and how they came to find a level of leadership confidence in spite of various challenges. However, each student articulated that he ultimately found confidence, which strengthened his leadership self-concept. Jake's quote provides a good window into some of the feelings that some male-identifying students have if they live in an environment where constant comparison by authority figures exists.

Finding confidence in themselves and their leadership abilities, as a result of challenge in some cases, was identified as an essential process in each student Developing a Positive Self-Concept (Step 3). When students talked about having found a level of confidence in themselves and their leadership knowledge and abilities, it also moved students from merely feeling good about themselves and their leadership abilities to that of knowing what was true of them, no matter the external circumstances or internal doubt.

Some of the ways in which students in this study found confidence was through consistent verbal affirmation from colleagues and peers after completing a task. J.W. shares how hearing the same positive affirmation of his work helped him find confidence.

People speaking, pouring into me, speaking into me and just people saying like, you're doing a good job. Like hearing that from other people. And you know, if you hear about it often and you're like, okay, people say this to me often, I guess I must be doing a good job.

Like J.W., Nate also discusses how continued verification of his ability and the job he was doing built his confidence.

I think a lot of that comes down to just doing it right and then getting verification from it. I think positive reinforcement is huge because, um, positive or negative reinforcement can be changed behavior completely. And if you're receiving positive reinforcement from good leadership, you're going to feel more confident what you're doing.

For both J.W. and Nate, finding confidence happened as a result of being validated and affirmed in the jobs they were doing and the abilities they were presenting to those around them.

Developing leadership efficacy. The second property in Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3) is developing leadership efficacy. For this research study, I have defined leadership efficacy as the level of confidence in one's skills and abilities to lead in one's desired university-funded position (Bandura, 1994; Dintner et al., 2011; Nguyen, 2016). Developing leadership efficacy was identified as an important concept even though it manifested in various ways in the interviews of the participants. For four of the students in this study, their leadership efficacy journey started in college and was jumpstarted by taking the student leadership course. Additionally, leadership efficacy was further developed for 15 of the students during their first and second years of college by also participating in a student leadership course. These 15 participants identified having some leadership experience in high school prior to attending college. These high school experiences included examples like being a secretary for the Spanish club, captain of a sports team, serving on a student council, being a mentor for a school transition program, and serving as a tutor. The experiences mentioned above regarding

high school, in conjunction with a continued affirmation of their leadership abilities and skills in college, helped to develop the belief in each student that his knowledge of and skill ability qualifies him for his pursuit of a desired leadership position.

Anthony's experience exemplifies the process in which leadership efficacy builds for male-identifying students. In high school, Anthony's only leadership position was that of the role of captain on his high school's soccer team in his junior year. When he started college, he got involved with the university's club soccer team. As a result of these positions and then in conjunction with his taking the student leadership course, his belief in his leadership skills grew. Anthony explains it this way,

As I finished certain leadership roles, that gave me the confidence to partake other responsibilities across campus. Um, so like for example, the student leadership course student facilitator, I felt like I was very qualified for it and I felt like I could just talk about, you know, my experiences and that's gonna make me a good trainer.

Most of the experiences shared, followed a similar leadership progression like that of Anthony's, where a small leadership role was attained by either teacher selection, popular vote, or pursuing a personal interest in an organization. Many times, these roles helped to grow one's leadership knowledge and to provide a low-risk environment to explore and develop leadership skills.

A vital component of the leadership efficacy concept is that students "believe" that their knowledge and leadership skill level qualifies them for the position they are applying. Now, this does not mean that all students are selected that have this belief, as

sometimes students need more development, but again, the belief is key to promoting a holistic positive leadership self-concept. However, as noted above, the process in which male-identifying students develop leadership efficacy is by amassing small leadership successes where they can try out and use their leadership capacities in a low-risk environment. For 15 of the students in this study, high school served as a safe experimenting environment as most of the student leadership positions available are heavily guided by teachers and staff. It was these types of positions and opportunities that were key experiences in a student's process of Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3).

Learning to be vulnerable. When talking with some of the participants about confidence, the concept of being vulnerable surfaced, and I decided to explore it further through more questions. The concept of vulnerability came up in my first interview, so I was able to ask the rest of the study participants about it and if they saw it having a role in their leadership journey. However, it was through constantly comparing the data, analyzing the data, and pursuing theoretical saturation of concepts that I eventually identified the learning to be vulnerable concept as a facilitating condition. For reference, “a facilitating condition facilitates the process represented by a category, but the process may still take place even if that condition is not present” (Hudson, 2015, p. 215). While learning to be vulnerable was identified to help facilitate the process of Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3), this process still happened even when students did not value being vulnerable in leadership.

In Chapter 2, I discussed views of masculinity and how these views can impact students' perspectives on how to lead, what it means to be a male-identifying college student and a leader, and especially the type of emotion that students are supposed to show as a male leader. Similarly, male leaders are often viewed as hierarchical leaders who pursue leadership positions because they desire position and power. While this may be true for some male-identifying students, this was not the view held by most of the participants in this research study. In fact, in the very first interview that I conducted, Tim discussed the importance of being able to be vulnerable as a leader and how he believes views of masculinity keep some males from being vulnerable:

I think an aspect that makes for a great student leader is the ability to be vulnerable, and being vulnerable has been taboo with males, like Um, but I think we're getting to the point where like, it's becoming more common for men to be more vulnerable with each other. And I, I think that's a, that's a great step in a great direction to go in. Um, but I don't think, I don't feel like a lot of people, unfortunately, have grown up with like a vulnerable male in their life and they feel like, you know, they kind of have to be like, Oh, like, the man's like not gonna cry. The man's not going to like display their feelings like that. And unfortunately, I think people still kind of hold onto that.

Tim also went on to say that because some of the university-funded leadership positions require continual reflection, and then being vulnerable with those reflections with staff or supervisor, this practice has detoured some of his friends from pursuing leadership

positions. As Tim noted, the ability to be vulnerable ultimately comes as a result of male-identifying students being “comfortable enough within themselves.”

Like Tim, Reggie brought up the topic of vulnerability on his own in our interview. Here are Reggie’s thoughts on vulnerability, and an example of how I explored the concept further with him.

Josh: What are the characteristics of the people that you view as a leader now, possess?

Reggie: So, one I would say openness. Definitely! Like, if you’re willing to be yourself, stuff like that, and willing to like be vulnerable, give like show who you are. That definitely means something. Um, loyalty. Like they’re always by your side no matter what. I have a third one, I just forgot.

Josh: No, you’re good.

Reggie: Yeah, that’s all I got. Sorry.

Josh: Can you speak a little bit about the vulnerability piece? Why does that matter?

Reggie: Um, so I think being a leader is more than just telling people what to do. Cause I’m like anyone can sit there and direct people and tell people what to do. But like there’s a whole different side to being like, this is me, it’s more than this. And like I’m willing to share this with you, I’m willing to entrust you with this. Like willing, like I think leaders can

share their stories and then directors can't, it's just this is what you should do.

Reggie and Tim, similar to others in the study, provide slightly different perspectives and understanding of vulnerability and how it manifests in leadership, but the common thread is they both view it as an important aspect in their leadership development. A common belief held by most who talked about vulnerability was that it came with time and learning to be comfortable with oneself.

Study participants also spoke about the process of learning to be vulnerable by watching peer and professional male-identifying leaders be vulnerable with others. In a few instances, some of the study participants experienced a leader displaying vulnerability by admitting fault, sharing their leadership weaknesses, and for peers being willing to “put themselves out there” when applying for a highly sought-after leadership position. When the students in this study had learned to be vulnerable, they commonly associated it with being secure enough in their leadership abilities to admit they still have room to grow and learn.

However, this concept proved to be a facilitating condition as there were some of the participants who did not know if vulnerability was necessary to be a good leader. Given that the interview responses were mixed on the process of learning to be vulnerable, I reviewed the data again that was associated with each interview and realized that those who identified finding vulnerability as an important process in their leadership journey were all students who had held a number of university-funded positions and were in the last two years of their college career. Even though not all students could articulate

if vulnerability played a role in their leadership journey, learning to be vulnerable appeared to significantly aid in students' Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3).

Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4)

Thus far, the following categories consisting of Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1), Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2), and Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3) have provided insight into the process of how male-identifying students develop a leadership identity. The identification of these categories and properties provided varying “aha” moments throughout the analytical process. However, the epiphany moment came for me when Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4) came in to focus.

For the students in this study, their leadership pursuit process happened in a linear fashion with moments of looping back to previous steps, such as reapplying for leadership positions, pursuing new ones, or when initially denied a leadership position. The linear pursuit process appeared to take place in part because this was how the students matured interpersonally and socially, since 15 of the students started the leadership pursuit process in high school. For some, being a leader wasn't even on their radar until they were encouraged toward leadership, had internalized the belief that they could be a leader, and then come to know and have confidence in their developed leadership abilities. The idea of becoming a leader and taking on more work happened as a result of having a positive self-concept and then identifying the motivation that would make the idea of adding more work logical.

Data analysis can be a complicated process, simply because of the sheer amount produced as a result of conducting 19 interviews. In continuing to review the initial categories and concepts I had identified, I very clearly saw how each one played a part in preparing the self of a student for leadership, but I was having difficulty identifying the key process that moved students to apply for a leadership position. However, as I persevered in the data, and remained faithful to the constant comparative method, the Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4) was pinpointed.

Once the awe of the epiphany moment wore off, I started thinking about the motivation process in relation to my experiences working with male-identifying leaders for the past 15 years. In vetting this category through my own experiences, it only confirmed the importance of the motivation process. For example, I thought about one student specifically, he was a natural connector and students flocked to him, he had all the external and internal development needed to be a great resident assistant, and yet I could not get him to apply for the position. However, in looking back at that situation through the process of Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4) lens, I can now clearly see that this male-identifying did not have a motivation to apply for the resident assistant job or to take on the extra responsibility. However, different from the student who I just shared about, each participant in this study was able to identify at least one, and in most cases, more than one, motivating factor that led him to apply for his desired university-funded leadership position. As I sought to exhaust the concepts, I identified two properties, preparing for the future and wanting to care for others, two facilitating

conditions, making support system proud, desiring to make change, and one dimension, being the person others were not for them.

Preparing for the future. All of the students in this study saw leadership position attainment as important to prepare them for the future, whether this was for another college leadership position or their future professional job. In their interviews, the following things were mentioned when participants were talking about preparing for the future property: resume building, skill development, developing relationships with professional staff who can serve as references, networking, and gaining experience to be able to apply for more selected university-funded leadership positions. Items in this concept were often connected to another concept. For example, when I asked the study participants why they applied for their leadership roles, a typical response shared was, “to help people and to bolster my resume,” but these students had the future in mind, and it served as a motivator. C.B. talks about how he believes that the pursuit of a leadership position will help him in the future. He stated that,

[Leadership] will set me up as far as just being able to have one resource that people that I can call back on and be like, hey, can you help write a recommendation? Hey, can you help give a reference in this regard? But as well as just like the practical skills, just like leadership in general, it prepares you for a lot because if you're in leadership, again you're dealing with people and if you're dealing with people you're ready for just about every single profession that there is out there because almost every single profession do people in some way.

C.B.'s quote does a great job of encompassing some of the main reasons talked about in regard to future motivators shared in the interviews. The one area that he did not address was how some students were motivated to pursue an entry-level position while in college in hopes that it would help them get another position or one that they really wanted.

In our interview, C.B. went on to talk about how he sometimes has different motivations for pursuing leadership positions:

I know some of the choices as far as which there's positions I would take definitely were like, okay, this will help me in my career or oh, because of the leadership, it will grow me in some way, shape or form, which will help me in the future. But other positions, it was just kinda like, no, this is something that I felt in my heart. I needed to be a part of that I felt like I needed to do because I wanted to either, um, aid and encourage someone else or aid and encourage myself.

C.B.'s acknowledgment that sometimes he pursues leadership because he wants to encourage someone else is an excellent introduction to the next concept that emerged: care for others.

In Jalil's interview, he describes how his motivation to pursue leadership while in college is so that he can practice being a leader, managing his time, and building relationships in a low-risk environment. He believes that the leadership experience he gains in college will better prepare him for "real" life outside of college.

If I can control these leadership positions now, I have the knowledge and insight to be able to do that later. So yeah, the preparation, this is just practice to me, you

know what I'm saying? And I like to think of college as a mini-community like things that we do here is like corporations and businesses outside of the college . . . Everything else I do on the side with poetry and everything else, I feel like it's just practice.

Jalil's future planning process involves using undergraduate leadership opportunities as a way to ensure that he is ready to be as successful as he can once he graduates. Others also identified this view and motivational approach in this research study. However, the most common way that it was described was that college leadership positions provide a "safe space" to practice leadership, as they will rarely lose their job if they fail.

C.B. and Jalil's examples of how wanting to be prepared for the future served as a powerful motivator to pursue leadership while in college. The process of preparing for the future was many times spurred through intentional conversations that each of the students had with peers, staff, and faculty while in college about personal and professional goals. Additionally, students noted that the process of preparing for the future was also sometimes spurred due to their major of study and being forced to think about the future due to curriculum requirements. This was especially true for the pre-med students I interviewed. All of these students talked about needing to have leadership experiences on their resume so they stood out on their medical school applications.

Wanting to care for others. Generally speaking, when thinking about culturally-based definitions of masculinity, male leadership, and the like, caring for others is not typically identified as one of the significant motivators as to why

male-identifying students pursue leadership. However, for the participants who have all held a university funded-leadership position, the opportunity to be in a position where they could care for others was a universal and robust motivator and the second property in the Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4) category.

As I analyzed the data for this concept, I looked at the type of positions that the participants in the study have held; in the analysis, I realized that many of the university-funded positions on the Northeastern State's campus require an element of care. For example, the role of a resident assistant sometimes requires helping students on a 24/7 basis, as well as listening to them at various times of need. Another example of a care position is orientation leaders. One of the most common responses given when I have asked students applying for an orientation leader position why they want this position is "because I want to help other students transition to the university"—a sign of care.

Steven, Daris, and Wesley highlight in the quotes below how their motivation for pursuing leadership was because they wanted to be able to care for others. Steven shares how his liking to help people specifically motivated his pursuit of leadership:

I also really enjoy helping people and I feel like in my past people have helped meet. So getting involved as a way I could help people and give them what I got and maybe make something a little bit easier for them.

Daris shared about the importance of pursuing a leadership position where he could help incoming students, due to his own experience as a first-year student. Daris provided the following insight about his motivations for leadership:

I saw these positions as being able to like interact with the incoming students and, it just seemed like something I would like to be a part of because I felt like I gained a lot out my first year here and there is definitely times where I was worried about starting college. So being able to be somebody that could help someone else through that was really the thing for me. It all goes back to the primary reason I think now I go into leadership, is the impact that I could have on others.

Like Steven and Daris, Wesley highlights a couple of motivators for why he pursued leadership: “The reason I wanted to become a leader is, you know, to help people, to get that feeling . . . to show my mom that, you know, she raised this amazing person.”

Since care for others was such a common motivation shared as a foundational reason for why the student leaders pursued leadership, I spent additional time analyzing the answers given surrounding this concept. In the continued analysis of my codes and fieldnotes, I realized the majority of the students who identified caring for others as one of their motivations for pursuing leadership also mentioned having someone in their life who directly cared for and supported them. So, in many ways, these students’ views of what it meant to be a leader was conditioned by those who first cared for them. This type of leadership becomes cyclical and truly transcends all types of leadership positions. I agree with Alav and his gleanings from being a student leader: “There’s a lot of things I’ve learned. I’ve learned that everybody wants to be wanted.”

The concept of wanting to care for others was universally motivating, and each of the students saw pursuing university-funded leadership positions as a vehicle to be able to

show care for their peers. What the care looked like in each of the leadership positions was relative to the student and how they perceived care. How each student cared differently is exemplified in the quote above by Daris, who said that he wanted to show care by helping others to have the same great experience he had in his first year. While still seeking to care, Von described in his interview how he individually cared for underrepresented male students and wanted to personally encourage them to pursue leadership by being an example of an underrepresented male-identifying student in leadership. In summation, wanting to care for others was identified as one of the two properties in the Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4) category.

Making support system proud. In addition to the two properties I identified, I also identified three facilitating conditions, of which the first one was making support systems proud. Many of the participants were able to articulate someone who they wanted to make proud of their achievements by being seen as a leader. Additionally, I also identified that in most instances, the person the study participant wanted to make proud was a result of the relationship(s) built during the Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1) step in the student's leadership journey. Individuals not only served as a leadership encourager but also as people that the students did not want to let down because they had been influential and had invested in them. The feeling of not wanting to let someone down was especially true in the instances that the support system was still a part of the student's life during the college years. The support systems most often noted were parents, peers, and educators. For example, Alav spoke

about wanting to make his parents proud by his leadership achievements as they sacrificed a lot for him.

A lot of what I do is to make my parents proud. It's, I think it's because they like, I don't think I'd be the person I am today if my parents didn't move here. So they, they like moved from having, like being, like the top, top. So, I was born in Iran. They were, they dropped everything there just to like experience America. And I think growing up hearing my mom and dad always like, um, sorry, uh, just like always kind of like, oh, I miss Iran. I kind of wish that we never moved here because my dad was a doctor. Now he's, he's a physician's assistant, so he's no longer a doctor here. So, like we have a better status in Iran than we do here and I just like want to make them proud and that like, it was worth moving here. Like, I'm going to prove myself, like I thank you for the opportunity. So, I think a lot of what I do deep down is for them and myself, but also to make them proud.

Like Alav, Wesley shares about how his mother served as a motivator to pursue leadership. "I feel like everything I do is like, to show her that like I am a leader and you know." An interesting note is that it appears that the deeper the emotional connection to the support system, the more pressure to succeed the students felt. When talking with both Alav and Wesley, I could hear the motivation they possessed and the desire to be successful for their parents by the way their voice intonation changed. This was not a topic that they were merely giving lip service to, or just answering my question; their responses were heartfelt and full of emotion.

Peers also served as a support system once in college. In the instances that a student leader peer took the time to invest and encourage one of the participants to apply for a position, the individual, or in Anthony's case, the continuance of a legacy became a motivator for pursuit. Anthony provides an excellent example of peer motivation in the statement below:

So, uh, I kinda think of it as a legacy. Like Dan kind of left me in his path and then there's a resident I had last year, Jimmy, who's now an RA, um, he, I would say it's probably my legacy. So that's really cool and hopefully, he'll be able to influence others and go from there. It's like a hopefully never-ending chain because it always takes that one person to kind of push you. So, I kind of pushed him to apply and he applied and ended up getting it. So hopefully he'll find someone that you can kind of mentor and push.

Personal investment is a powerful motivator and is seen in not only Alav, Wesley, and Anthony's stories, but most of the others as well. For these students, the thought of letting someone down who believed in them, and that had even sacrificed for them, was far more disheartening than applying for a leadership position and not getting it.

For those who could identify a specific person that had served as a support to them in their leadership journey, they all noted that they were motivated to become a successful leader in part, for these individuals. Even though the process of making one's support system proud proved to be a powerful motivator to pursue leadership, it did not show to be necessary for students to successfully move through the process of Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4) successfully.

Desiring to make change. The second facilitating condition I identified is desiring to make change. For some in this study, they viewed the attainment of university-funded leadership positions as a way to better the campus environment. Some students in this study saw leadership pursuit as a way to gain a platform to share their story in hopes to make positive change for students by being a positive role model. In our question and answer exchange, Steven shared with me some of his perceptions as to why he believes male-identifying students pursue leadership.

Josh: In your opinion, why do you believe male-identifying students pursue leadership positions in college?

Steven: I feel like males pursue leadership positions in college in order to make a difference. And I also feel like sometimes males are told like they have to be like masculine, they can't show like weakness and stuff. Like that. And I feel like the males that pursue these leadership positions want to say like, no, it's okay to get help. It's okay to like, reach out. Um, just stuff like that. I feel like, they want to be a good role model for others and tell them that they don't have to be this certain image that society like forms for them.

For Reggie, his motivation for pursuing leadership is founded in his desire to share his personal story in hopes that it will help others. In talking about his life journey, Reggie said, "I feel like I have story to share finally, and then like the leadership positions give me that platform to kind of like speak myself; which is great and like kind of like influence other people I guess."

Both of the examples shared provide insight on the types of processes used to initiate change. Reggie's change process sought to promote personal change; however, for other students like Alav and Wesley, their process entailed pursuing leadership positions that would allow them to make large external changes that would impact the entire student body. Even though the type of change desired was as unique as the students talking, the connecting point was some of the students in this study wanted to get a leadership position so he would have a platform to make change.

Being the person others weren't for them. The dimension that I identified was being the person others weren't for them. Many of the examples I have shared throughout this chapter have identified individuals as key components in either making students aware of their leadership potential or serving as the encourager. While personal relationships did play a part in each of the students' leadership journeys, some of the students talked about their lack of having positive peer influence. They not only experienced a lack but, in some instances, peers in high school represented points of discouragement in their leadership journey. As a result of these experiences, and the lack of positive peer influence, a few students said their motivation to be a leader was founded in the fact that they wanted to be the person for others they did not have in their leadership journey. In his interview, Joseph shares about his challenging high school experience and how he longed for a supportive peer.

I did not have good experience in high school. Like even in elementary, like I was constantly bullied, like I almost switched schools. Like it was always something that I dealt with and I never was close with anyone . . . I went through

a lot like growing up and I had people supporting me but it was just my family and I know my family, like they're going to tell me what I want to hear. Like that's just how a mom, dad and sister are. So, I want to make that impact because sometimes you just need someone else to listen to you, other than like your family. So, if I can be that person, like use me as your personal punching bag in a sense. Like, if I can help you become or even get close to the best person that you can be, then I'm here for you. And a lot of people, like I used the saying, I'm not mad about what happened in my past, because that's brought me to where I am right now, so I wouldn't change anything. Yes, it wasn't a great experience growing up because of it. But, right now I'm where I'm at because of it and I'm helping other people.

In his interview, Joseph said multiple times how great his family was and that they continually support him, but due to his being bullied and then not having a peer who cared enough to listen to him, it caused a void for him. It was in having these negative experiences and the lack of peer support, that as he entered college, he became motivated to pursue leadership positions that allowed him to be a listening ear and caring peer for those who need it. Joseph's story provides some insight into the fact that students have varying needs of support, and in some instances the care from peers is paramount.

In thinking back to step one on this theory, Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1), a noted catalyst for some was seeing other students who looked like them holding different university-funded leadership positions. The thought a few students shared in their interviews was if a male student, who looks like me, can be a leader,

perhaps I can too. Merely seeing someone in a role sometimes served as an encouragement toward leadership pursuit. Von, who identifies as biracial, talked about his leadership journey and how in his journey, he did not see a lot of male-identifying students like him in leadership positions. He shares the following about his motivation for being a student leader:

It [leadership] gave me something to motivate other men of color, that you can do this, you can be here, you can sit in in the same seat that I sat in at the same tables that I've been at. And I think that's what motivated it was just like, it was an energy drink, it was an energy drink. I was able to pass on to somebody else. Like, here's a red bull, have wings, you know? So it was, I think that's why I love it. That's why I do it, and that's why I think that, and then also like leadership, like I really, I felt so passionate because I would not be where I am in any form without the leadership I did. It was a growing, it was like a, it was like my pot or like, uh, an area that you're about to start a garden and it's like I'm the garden and somebody who was like, here's leadership

As can be seen in Von's quote above, he is genuinely motivated to be the person and peer leader example, underrepresented male-identifying student, he did not have in his leadership journey. Von also pursued leadership positions within his university's student multicultural center so that he would be given a leadership role that allowed him to engage in face-to-face conversations with other underrepresented male-identifying students.

This dimension of the concept of being the person others weren't for them was identified as process that served as a motivation for pursuing leadership when it existed for the students. However, it did not rise to the threshold of being property and is not and does not always have to be present in a student's process of Identifying Motivations for Leadership.

Pursuing Leadership (Step 5)

Even though the pursuit of leadership while in college is how the guiding question is framed, all of the students had to have held at least one university-funded leadership position in order to participate. The reason I required the participants to have been given a position was twofold. First, it was to ensure a level of consistency in the students who were a part of this study, meaning they had all experienced applying, interviewing, and being trained for a leadership position, and secondly, I wanted the perspective of the students to be from that of successful attainment of a university-funded leadership position. Step five in this substantive theory is the actual pursuit of a university-funded leadership positions while in college, and the ultimate reason why this emergent theory is essential. This step is not a category that I specifically identified as a result of the data, but instead was a requirement of the research study.

While the outset of this research study was to identify the process that male-identifying students pursue leadership, this Pursuing Leadership (Step 5) is the culmination of steps 1–4. This study found that in order for a male-identifying student to put forth the energy to submit an application they must have been encouraged to pursue leadership at one point (Step 1), internalized a belief in their leadership ability (Step 2),

developed a positive leadership self-concept (Step 3), and finally, identified a motivation for leadership (Step 4). Pursuing Leadership (Step 5) is not only the goal that students in this theory worked for, but it is also something that practitioners work for as well, and through the understanding of the steps necessary for Step 5 to exist is a student leadership development game-changer.

The Pursuing Leadership (Step 5) is not only the culmination of the prior four steps, but also proved to be a fundamental landing spot for students that want to reapply for attained leadership positions and have the desire for a new or more highly regarded student leadership position. For example, once a student attains a leadership role and then does a great job in the role, many times this experience in concert with support system affirmation moves a student back to desiring to pursue additional positions, thus bring them back to the Pursuing Leadership step (see Figure 1). This step gives students a platform to develop their leadership skills and apply for additional challenging leadership roles.

While only two of the participants in my study discussed applying for a position and not getting it, they did discuss how it was disappointing and challenged their self-esteem. Additionally, they noted they had to re-evaluate and regain their confidence in their leadership ability. They developed self-doubt as a result of being rejected for their desired position. However, each of these students eventually did apply for and attain a university-funded leadership position. One of the students has since applied for multiple university-funded leadership positions, and successfully attained them all after his initial rejection. These examples provide evidence of a loop pursuit process that

happens between steps 3 through 5 in the Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation theory (see Figure 2).

Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept “Snowball Effect” (Step 6)

A requirement of the students who participated in this study was that they had held at least one university-funded leadership position while in college. At the onset of this study, I anticipated my theory would end with male-identifying students pursuing a leadership position through the submission of an application, Step 5. However, as a result of the data collected, I identified a process that the students in this study entered after their actual attainment of a university-funded leadership position. Given my initial plan stopping at Step 5, I wasn't sure if this identified category added value or needed to be presented as part of the theory. However, after reviewing my second research question again, which asks, What is the process in which undergraduate male-identifying students decide to pursue leadership positions while in college? I believe that this category, Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept “Snowball Effect” (Step 6), and the sixth step provides additional insight into the leadership pursuit process.

As a result of each of the students having held a university-funded leadership position, the participants naturally reflected on their positions and the impact that the roles had on their leadership development and ultimately continued pursuit of leadership while in college, which I termed the “snowball effect” in my coding process. In most of the leadership stories shared, and as can be seen in the participant characteristics list (Table 1), every student has held at least two leadership positions while in college. The process of pursuing a leadership position again happened as a result of identifying the

property, succeeding in a leadership role, and the facilitating condition, becoming the go-to leader.

Succeeding in a leadership role. When in a new leadership role, there are two roads most student leaders travel: the road of success or the road of struggle. For this research study, all of the students achieved some level of success as multiple positions have been held. For the majority of the students in this study, their positive leadership self-concept was strengthened as a result of being in their leadership positions. Jake shared how his belief in his leadership ability was reinforced by being successful in his resident assistant position.

So, slowly I was just getting more and more involved, you know, did RA [Resident Assistant] like even when I wasn't sure if I could handle it, but you know, everything kind of ended up working out. I was kinda like a match for a lot of the things that I did. And the fact that I'm getting like, you know, positive feedback from like Cody, like asking me, hey, he's like you coming back for next year? It's like super, you know, it's like, wow, like seeing, looking back and seeing how much I've changed in the last four years, it's like super. Um, it gives, it really does give me like, that purpose of like drive, like continue forward, keep marching on, like can keep being better.

Jake has held several university-funded leadership positions and said in the interview that with the completion of each position his confidence and belief in his ability grew. An interesting aspect of confidence he developed as a result of success was that now, even if he was not completely successful all the time in his leadership roles, he still believed in

himself and his leadership abilities. In a way, his leadership self-concept is not as fragile as it was the very first time that he decided to pursue leadership in college. Jack talks about how his confidence has grown as he secured his leadership positions while in college.

As I've gotten every leadership position, my confidence has grown, and you just go out and like, I just joined this premedical fraternity Phi Delta, about a week ago, two weeks ago . . . And, you know, I just went in, I was myself . . . I'm confident, you know, I don't, I don't think like right now there's a job on campus that I would apply for, and I wouldn't be confident in myself in that position. That grad school med school is a different thing, you know? But as far as right now, it's concerned, like I don't think this is a job that I wouldn't be confident enough. I mean, it's not like I'm over-confident or it's just because like I've now been through at a couple of times that I feel like I can give a good interview, you know?

Success in leadership positions while in college appeared to develop a positive leadership cycle for most of the students, like that of Jake and Jack. Male-identifying students' confidence in their leadership ability grew with each positive step. For example, confidence was gained by just getting a university-funded leadership position, then once some success was reached through successful completion of the duties of the job, students began to believe they could hold more challenging leadership positions on campus.

Becoming the go-to leader. The facilitating condition of becoming the go-to leader was identified as a result of how students talked about finding a “home” in a particular leadership office. For example, many of the students in this study have held multiple university-funded leadership positions in the same office. Some of the students shared that once they had proven to be successful in a role and had received affirmation from leaders in an office, this encouragement made them want to apply for additional roles in that same office.

In many ways, the participants noted that the offices that have multiple leadership positions within them became a community for the student leader, which also ultimately reinforces their leadership self-concept. Similarly, the students shared that they believe that hiring managers wanted to hire students who had proven to be successful. Thus, these students become the go-to individuals for the office as well. Being a go-to leader is exemplified in Tim’s leadership journey as he has held five university-funded positions, and four of them have been in the same college. Here is how he discussed his college leadership progression in becoming a go-to leader:

I was a student success leader, so I helped out with, uh, with a, a first-year experience class. Uh, and that was, uh, that was really cool cause I also had another, uh, SSL in my class too. Uh, that was a good friend. So that was like a really positive experience . . . What was next? . . . So then over the summer, then I was an orientation leader, so I was uh. In a broad sense, I was a orientation leader . . . helping out with the orientation program, leading students to different sessions and stuff, but also trying to help develop those relationships whenever they first

get here and making them feel acclimated . . . Um, then I was a resident assistant, so I was, I was an RA . . . if they needed anything going from something was wrong with the room to like simple things like that to, if there was like some other stuff going on, like, uh, with their family, mental health just to, or just like getting involved on campus and you know, the possibilities are endless with that job . . . now this year I am, um, I'm an Excel mentor again. I have a title of senior mentor, so that's pretty cool. Um, as well as I'm the, uh, I'm on undergraduate student government, I'm the Senator for university college.

Tim went on to share in his interview with me that his friend group became the leaders he met in all of his various leadership position within the same college. While he found community as a result of his leadership roles, by becoming a go-to leader for an office or college, he was also engaged in the process of having his leadership self-concept reinforced.

While some of the students in this study proved to be very successful in each of their leadership positions, not everyone had the experience or feeling of being a go-to leader. As a result of the students not having to become a go-to leader for the reinforcement of their leadership self-concept to successfully develop, this concept did not reach the property status.

Summary of the Substantive Theory

The purpose of this research study was to identify a grounded theory that answered the following research question, What is the process in which undergraduate male-identifying students decide to pursue leadership positions while in college? The

answer to this question resulted in the identification of a core category, Connecting Leadership Identify and Motivation which encompasses and represents the following six categories and essential processes for leadership pursuit, Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1), Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2), Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3), Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4), Pursuing Leadership (Step 5), and Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept “Snowball Effect” (Step 6). In addition to developing these categories, I also identified that each process happened in a sequenced step process, starting from Step 1, Being Encouraged Toward Leadership, and then finishing with Step 6, Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept “Snowball Effect.” Ultimately, this theory shows that if a student completes each process, they will likely pursue university-funded leadership positions.

Each of these categories are interrelated, and students in this study appeared to only progress to a new step after they had completed the previous step. However, each student varied greatly as to when they started the process of Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation. For example, J.W. shared he believes he was Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1) as a child while others did not believe they started Step 1 until high school. Even though the phase of life was different when each student engaged the steps, they all ultimately progressed through them.

Another component of the Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation theory that was also apparent was that while each of the students did progress through each of the steps in a linear fashion, there were moments in which some of the students would loop back to a previous step. For example, once a student had successfully attained and

completed a university-funded student leadership position, this student would oftentimes loop back to Pursuing Leadership: Step 5. The students who looped back to Step 5 articulated they wanted to apply for the same leadership position again or believed that as a result of their past leadership experience and success they were now ready to apply for a more demanding university-funded leadership position. For some students, this loop took place two or three times in their undergraduate tenure.

Additionally, I had one student who discussed applying for a job and not getting it. While he had progressed all the way through the theory to the point of applying for a leadership position at one point, he was rejected and had to reevaluate his leadership self-concept, which looped him back to the Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept: Step 3. From this point he had to again find confidence and be vulnerable and ultimately identify his motivations for applying for another leadership position. Each of these instances bring to light that this theory not only shows the linear path students can take to pursuing leadership, but this theory also encompasses multiple cycles in the pursuit process as well.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented four perceptions of leadership that current undergraduate male-identifying students have consisting of leadership is a way for personal advancement, leadership is a vehicle for altruism, leadership challenges self-esteem, and negative perceptions of leadership by peers. Additionally, I presented my six-step substantive theory that describes the process of how male-identifying students pursue leadership by Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation. I

thoroughly describe each of the following categories that comprise my substantive theory, Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1), Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2), Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3), Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4), Pursuing Leadership (Step 5), and Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept “Snowball Effect” (Step 6), so that the reader fully understands how the students in this study progressed through each step. Ultimately, the data, analysis, and findings of this research study have provided a deeper understanding of how male-identifying think about and engage leadership while in college.

This theory emerged as a result of the data collected from students who have been successful in leadership during college and provides a theory directly explaining their leadership journeys. However, this theory also serves as a reference point for the male-identifying students who have not pursued leadership while in college. It is my hope that this theory, and the step format, provides higher education professionals a lens in which to view and analyze the male-identifying students on their respective campuses. Thus, the real value of this theory is being able to use it to figure out where students are in their leadership journey, and then helping them move through to the pursuit of leadership.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I briefly provide an overview of my substantive theory and the current perceptions of leadership held by undergraduate male-identifying students and how they add to leadership theory and male-identifying leadership development. I present a discussion of how the perceptions and substantive theory I identified are situated in the current literature, explicitly addressing the void in the literature surrounding undergraduate male-leadership perception and engagement (Haber, 2012; Komives et al., 2011; Ortiz & Santos, 2010). Additionally, I provide an overview of the key implications identified as a result of the findings and how they can impact practice. Lastly, I share my recommendations for additional research.

Overview of Perception Categories

The motivation for this research study grew out of my desire to better understand how male-identifying undergraduate students perceive leadership and the process in which they pursue leadership. If a quick Internet search is conducted, one will find that there is an inordinate amount of literature and research available surrounding the topic of leadership, student leadership, leadership development, and the like. However, if the words “undergraduate male” are added to the same search, not only are the number of results much smaller, but the results, and identified literature, do not specifically look at male-identifying students’ perceptions of leadership and their leadership engagement process. It is in this void that the results of this research study provide significant value

to the growing body of leadership research and literature (Haber, 2012; Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016).

When working with college students and specifically male-identifying students, it is easy to develop beliefs about how one thinks male students perceive leadership, based on one or more anecdotal events. However, they are just that, anecdotal experiences, and not developed out of a rigorous research process. The danger in acting on and developing programs out of anecdotal experiences can cause practitioners to miss connecting with the male students on their respective campuses. As a result of this grounded theory research study, consisting of 19 diverse interviews from male-identifying students, I have identified that undergraduate male students at Northeastern State University perceive leadership in four distinct ways. For the students in this study, they perceive (a) leadership as a way for personal advancement, (b) leadership as a vehicle for altruism, (c) leadership challenges self-esteem, and that their perceptions are impacted by peers, and (d) negative perceptions of leadership by peers.

When the students in this study talked about what comes to mind when they think about leadership and being in leadership positions, every student noted something that benefitted them personally in some way. In the majority of instances, students discussed personal advancement in terms of future goals and employment. They noted they wanted to pursue leadership so to build leadership skills and gain experience so they could ultimately put it down on their resume when applying for future college leadership positions, and even more specifically for future employment.

The second leadership perception category identified was leadership as a vehicle for altruism. This category was not future-focused but was talked about in terms of how the student saw leadership and leadership opportunities in college. Caring for others was identified as one of two properties in this category. For study participants, they saw leadership as a way to care for their peers by being in positional leadership that impacted students' experience, such as being an orientation leader or resident assistant.

The second concept highlighted was that students saw leadership in college as a way to make change for other students. The avenue for change was viewed on both a macro and micro level. Several students in the study talked about wanting to be a part of making campus-wide changes that would impact a large contingency of students, whereas others noted wanting to make change for one student or a small demographic of students. Specifically, those in the study sought to make change by breaking down normative barriers surrounding ideas of the type of leadership positions that male-identifying students hold. Similarly, students also wanted to help other male students change the way they viewed themselves by being an encouraging agent and connecting them to leadership opportunities such as the student leadership course.

The third perception held by students is that leadership challenges self-esteem. The majority of students in this study identified high school as the place where their understanding and perception of leadership started to develop. High school proved to provide very different experiences and resulting perceptions for study participants. Some of the students' had their self-esteem reaffirmed by being selected as a sports team captain or being voted in as the band major. However, most of the students, as a result of

their high school experiences, developed a perception that leadership is only for the most popular students. This perception was fostered because they saw leadership positions being attained typically through a ballot system. As a result of these high school experiences, all of the students started their college experience with a skewed perspective of the type of person that typically gets to be a leader, the most popular.

Once in college, study participants discussed two additional ways in which their self-esteem was challenged. First, students identified that the various university-funded leadership positions on Northeastern State University's campus had masculine and feminine stereotypes associated with them. Secondly, students said they perceived college leadership as intimidating.

The concept that positions are not masculine enough were viewed this way simply because the majority of leaders who hold the various positions are female. However, it was also noted that the actual duties required in some of the positions are perceived as more feminine in nature. Some of the specific examples shared were, roles require too much reflection and sharing of feelings, being a resident assistant means that you are just the floor mom, and being an orientation leader means you have to open up about your feelings and get connected to a team as well as the new students. As a result of the not masculine enough stereotype, the participants shared that they had to have a strong self-esteem to apply for and be seen in these stereotyped non-masculine roles.

Another way that participants perceived leadership to challenge their self-esteem was by being intimidated. Perceiving leadership as intimidating took on two primary forms, being intimidated by the actual leadership role, meaning the student did not feel

adequate in their abilities, and the fear of being rejected if they applied for a position. While both were referenced in multiple interviews, the fear of being rejected was most often talked about as an intimidating factor.

The last perception of leadership identified embodies the impact of peers on the study participants' perception of leadership, which I called negative perceptions of leadership by peers. All of the students in this study referenced the various ways in which friends and peers influenced their leadership journey. As a result of these types of discussions, I identified study participants who had developed a perception of how their friends viewed them wanting to be a leader as well as being in a leadership role. In some instances, the study participants' perceptions of how their friends viewed leadership delayed their pursuit.

In the negative perceptions of leadership by peers category, there were three concepts discovered, leadership requires responsibility, and is stressful, takes too much time, and there is not the need. Study participants shared with me that their friends had on various occasions questioned their rationale for wanting to be in leadership positions that take away from personal time and ultimately requires them to have more responsibility than they already have with classes and cause more stress due to needing to meet position deadlines. These type of comments by friends did cause some of the students to pause before applying for additional leadership positions, and in some cases this negative perception combined with a sub-par leadership experience kept them from reapplying for a specific position.

The four perception categories I identified were the result of a multilayered analysis process that provided a broad framework in which to understand how male-identifying students view leadership while in college. When thinking about students' leadership pursuit journey and the steps before a student even begins this process, they have a perception of leadership, and this perception can significantly impact the process of leadership pursuit. For example, a student may identify with the concept because, in high school, he was not voted in for a leadership position. While his high school experience affirmed his perception, it is crucial for college practitioners to understand this perception, as most of the college leadership positions are selected through an application and interview process. In understanding how male students perceive leadership, it is then possible to address and reframe the false overarching narratives male students believe to be true of all leadership experiences as they enter college.

Discussion of Male Students' Perception of Leadership

General research and literature on the experiences of undergraduate male-identifying students is growing, but is still very limited (Haber, 2012; Harris & Edwards, 2010; Komives et al., 2011; Ortiz & Santos, 2010). There are a number of factors as to why information is sparse on understanding the male student experience. Edwards and Jones (2009) provided the following thought, "student affairs educators have recognized that many student development theories were developed by looking primarily, and at times exclusively, at White men, they often wrongly assume that student affairs professionals understand men" (p. 210). Komives et al. (2011) reiterated this by

saying that “attention is needed to understand how men in the dominant culture learn leadership” (p. 13). The need to better understand male college students, as previously noted, is often discussed and recognized as a need in a generalized sense, such as looking at experience. However, the literature becomes even more challenging to find when the topics are narrowed, such as explicitly wanting information on male-identifying college students’ leadership pursuit process.

In 2004, Shertzer and Schuh conducted a qualitative research study that specifically sought to understand college student perceptions of leadership. Their study on leadership perceptions resulted in the following outcomes,

The students were asked a broad range of questions with the intention of discovering their perceptions of what leadership is, who leaders are, and what the process of leadership entails. Several themes emerged through the analysis of the interview, including: (a) leadership is an individual possession, (b) leadership is positional, (c) leaders possess particular qualities and skills, and (d) leaders act from internal motivations. (p. 116)

As can be seen, the outcomes of Shertzer and Schuh’s study are different than the perceptions I identified, thus showing that while we both sought to understand leadership perception, the context, sample population, and purpose of the study matters.

My findings span a difference of 16 years from that of Shertzer and Schuh (2004), and specifically focuses on male-identifying college students where their study included all college students and even had a sample of five uninvolved students. The fact that my study sample is only undergraduate male-identifying students’ all of whom had held a

university-funded leadership positions sets it apart from all mixed gendered studies (Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016). It is in the need of continued research on male student experience and specifically, a current understanding of male students' perceptions of leadership that my findings on perception contribute to leadership research on male-identifying students (Haber, 2012).

While Shertzer and Schuh's (2004) study sought to understand student perceptions about leadership, my research study and corresponding perception are not only needed but provide specific information on how a diverse group of male-identifying students perceives leadership. Now, as a result of this research study and the corresponding findings, when asked how to get more male students to apply for leadership, this study and the identified perceptions aid in providing an answer and essential starting point in understanding how current male students think about leadership. While this study produced male perception categories, it also shed light on when the perceptions were developed for the study participants, how perception impacts male-identifying students' view of university-funded leadership positions, and how students perceive professional staff perpetuating stereotyped leadership.

High School to College Student Leadership Transition

George Kuh (2007) talked about how high school engagement is a significant predictor of college engagement and success. Even though his research primarily looks holistically at student success, his research does lay a foundational understanding of how perceptions and practices developed in high school can impact the collegiate years. My study also found that the perceptions students developed in high school both hindered and

promoted their leadership pursuit while in college. This finding is also affirmed by Dugan and Komives (2010) as they stated that “students’ pre-college leadership capacity and knowledge regularly emerge as the most significant predictors of leadership” (p. 527).

The transition from high school to college was a specific time that the students in my study highlighted as a key transitional moment that either changed or confirmed their perceptions about college, and specifically leadership. This finding is confirmed by Small and Waterman (2017), as they too, found that how college students transition to college and engage in the first year typically impacts the third and fourth year. For those who start college with the belief that leadership is only for the popular students, these beliefs are quickly reinforced. The reinforcement happens as a result of many of the first leadership opportunities available consist of elected positions voted on by peers, such as hall councils and student organization executive roles. This type of leadership attainment only reaffirms that leadership in college is also about being popular. For the students in my study prior experience and previously held perceptions were noted as being reinforced as they started college because the type of leadership positions immediately available were similar to that of high school (e.g., hall councils, fraternity selection, and student organization executive boards). However, for the students who are elected to the hall council position, this typically serves as a confidence builder and affirms their belief that they are a leader.

Understanding how male students perceive leadership entering college needs to impact how leadership is talked about and presented in students’ first semester on

campus. How leadership is talked about on college campuses should be highlighted at every turn in light of Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt's (1999) statement, that "development of leadership among college students is one of the goals often cited in the mission statements of higher education institutions" (p. 51). If one of the goals of a university is to develop students to be the leaders of tomorrow, then it should also be the goal to develop balanced perceptions of what it means to be a leader while in college.

Peer Perception Impact on University-Funded Leadership Positions

How are students being made aware of the university-funded leadership positions on college campuses? Where are their perceptions about university-funded leadership coming from for students? This research study found that the majority of the perceptions formed around university-funded leadership positions were the result of conversations and perceptions articulated by peers. Similar to the findings of this research study, the impact of peer influence was one of the key findings in Dugan and Komives' (2010) research on students becoming more socially responsible leaders. Although their study was not specifically looking at peer influence on perceptions of university-funded leadership positions, it did evaluate peer-to-peer influence.

Similarly, Haber (2011) in her discussion on the importance of peer-to-peer-education also acknowledges how influential peers are in a students' leadership journey. This study affirms that peer influence is paramount (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Haber, 2011) in students creating positive perceptions of university-funded leadership positions. However, the inverse was true as well; there were instances noted in my study

where students did not pursue a leadership position because of a negative perception created.

The impact of peers on students' views of college leadership and university-funded leadership positions cannot be overstated. This focus is essential because, as the students in this research study noted, the students who are applying for a specific leadership position will reach out to the current student leaders holding the roles they want to get looking for advice and information on the job. Shook and Keup (2012), in their extensive review of the literature on the positive impact of peer leadership training programs, noted the importance of peer leaders as being a vital resource and referral agent. They highlighted how peer leaders can be the key to new students finding their fit on campus. If peer leaders can help new students find their fit on campus, it is also possible that the same peer leaders can perpetuate a negative perception. It is in this potentially negative perception that professional staff must be mindful of how their current leaders are talking about university-funded leadership positions.

The participants in this study articulated how peers in some instances helped to change their negative perception about a university-funded leadership position. For example, the resident assistant role was the position most often talked about as having a negative view. Some of the students in this study discussed that they once held the perception that the resident assistant role was only comprised of being a floor mom and tattling on your friends. However, due to peer influence and lengthy conversations with peers, these negative perceptions were many times dismantled. So, in this instance, the

way a student talked about and portrayed the resident assistant role ultimately changed the perception.

Professional leadership development staff need to be aware of the significant impact their current student leaders may be having on their candidate pool, especially when it comes to the number of male-identifying students applying. As this research study found, if a male student already thinks that the university's orientation leader position does not pay well and may potentially take too much time (not worth it), a past student leader with a negative perception can singlehandedly confirm the new student's doubts and detour him from leadership. The crux here for leadership practitioners is to think about how they want current and past leaders to talk with new and upcoming leaders. Although it is impossible to ensure that every student leader has a fantastic leadership experience and they hold a positive perception of student leadership, something that can be done is training student leaders on how experiences are individualized and helping them to understand what one student views as too much work may not be the same for others. Primarily, professional staff can help students learn to share their real experiences in a value-free way.

Professional Staff Perpetuation of Student Perception

Professional staff perceptions about leadership and who can be a leader can take place on many different levels and formats. Even though this research study's focus was on male-identifying students' perceptions, many of the students talked about the impact of external influences on their pursuit of specific university-funded leadership positions. In this study, students specifically talked about how professional staff played a part in

confirming or changing their perceptions about university-funded leadership positions.

The notion that staff and faculty have the power to influence student leadership perception is noted by William Richardson in his forward in the book *Leadership Reconsidered: Engaging Higher Education in Social Change* when he stated,

Each faculty member, administrator and staff member is modeling some form of leadership and that students will implicitly generate their notions and conceptions of leadership from interactions inside the classroom and in the residence hall, through campus work and participation in student activities, and through what is taught intentionally and unintentionally across the educational experience. (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. vi)

Given that external influence played such an important role, students in this study articulated that professional staff need to be aware of the perceptions they hold and how they are communicated to students.

Staff and faculty have significant power to confirm both positive and negative perceptions for students, and this study identified that this is also true for male-identifying students in their leadership pursuit. In their research study on academic achievement researchers, Steele and Aronson (1995) found that by putting students into groups where their academic ability is negatively viewed, this stereotype alone, significantly impacted student academic performance. The parallel in implications for male-identifying leadership is that if staff and faculty perpetuate a stereotype that certain genders are better suited for specific positions, this can confirm student perceptions.

An example of Steele and Aronson's (1995) stereotype threat can be seen in Reggie's experience. In his interview, Reggie talked about how he saw professional perception of leadership impacted his own leadership pursuit journey when interviewing for a resident assistant position. Reggie shared with me that he felt even before he started the interview, he was not going to get the job because he was a male-identifying student. Reggie said this about that experience, "I was immediately perceived to lack the ability to be vulnerable, caring, and able to connect on an emotional level." Reggie's experience directly shows how staff and faculty stereotype threat can impact male-identifying students' pursuit of leadership.

Summary

The students in this study identified three main perceptions held by undergraduate male-identifying students which included high school to college student leadership transition, peer perception impact on university-funded leadership positions, professional staff perception perpetuation. Current literature also confirms the transition from high school to college and the perceptions held at that time are influential to a student's likelihood to get connected and engage in curricular and co-curricular opportunities (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Kuh, 2007). Similarly, there is a significant amount of literature noting the importance and power of peer influence on perception (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Haber, 2011; Shook & Keup, 2012). Lastly, students identified how their interactions and experience with staff and faculty had a significant impact on perpetuating their preconceived perceptions about leadership; this finding was also supported in various scholarly works (Astin & Astin, 2000; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Overview of Substantive Theory

The second research question of this research study asks, What is the process in which undergraduate male-identifying students decide to pursue leadership positions while in college? The answer to this question, which was developed as a result of this research study, is through the process of Connecting Leadership Identify and Motivation. This core category of my theory embodies six key processes that take place in a step process in which each process builds on the prior process. The six that are encompassed by the core category are Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1), Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2), Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3), Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4), Pursuing Leadership (Step 5), and Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept “Snow Ball Effect” (Step 6).

Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1) is the foundational process in a student’s journey in Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation (Step 1). This process sets the leadership pursuit wheel in motion and is characterized by two properties: environmental influence and relationships with others. Every student in this study was influenced by the environment in which they grew up; there were environments that ultimately continually encouraged students toward leadership. The second property identified was relationships with others. Participants identified four key relational influences that served as encouragers toward leadership. The four relational roles that students noted were family, educators and coaches, peers, and those who cared and did not have to. While each relational connection was different, each role was identified by the students in this study. In this category, I also identified a facilitating

condition, recognizing individuals who cared and did not have to. This concept was identified but was not something that had to exist in order for the Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1) to take place.

The second step and process of this substantive theory is Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2). Once a student has been encouraged toward leadership, the next process and building step is to internalize the belief that they do have the ability to be a leader. This process proved to be an important step, as it is one thing for a student to be told they are a leader, but another to internalize it. This process proved to be a progressive step that moved the students in this study toward leadership pursuit. Even though leadership encouragement is needed in this process, it is equally important for a student to believe it about themselves.

The coming to believe process includes two properties, identifying leadership abilities and developing self-esteem. One of how study participants identified some of their leadership abilities was by watching others and then mimicking them. Additionally, leadership ability development happened as a result of students being placed in small leadership roles and work positions where mentors and professional staff co-led or supervised them. The second property, developing self-esteem, happened when students in the study found an environment where they were accepted and allowed to be themselves without having to conform to normative views of masculinity. The final concept identified was overcoming life challenges, which I identified as a dimension of Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2). Some of the students in this study

have overcome incredible life challenges and, as a result, attributed their belief in their abilities to the overcoming these challenges.

Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3) is a process that takes place in the leadership pursuit journey as a result of the successful movement through the first two steps. It is after a student has been encouraged toward leadership and has internalized a belief in their leadership ability that they move into the process of Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3). The category consists of two properties, finding confidence and developing leadership efficacy. The students in this study identified that they found confidence as a result of having external support and being affirmed as a person and that they have leadership potential and believing in their leadership abilities. The second category, developing leadership efficacy, which happens as students begin to have confidence specifically in their leadership abilities, and they can operate in them independently of supervision. Learning to be vulnerable was identified as a facilitating concept, that while it also aids in moving students towards leadership is not always present or necessary for Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3).

The first three processes identified in this substantive theory all promote the development of a student's leadership identity, but do not ultimately ensure leadership pursuit. However, after students had successfully progressed through steps 1–3 of my theory, they then moved into the process of Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4). This process consists of two properties, preparing for the future and wanting to care for others. Preparing for the future took the form of students wanting to get a leadership

position so that they could apply for a higher profile position while in college or wanting to have a vast resume for professional jobs and applications, such as medical school. Additionally, students found motivation to pursue leadership as they wanted a position in which would provide a place to care for students in the same ways they had been cared for in their college experience. In addition to the two properties, the following three facilitating conditions were identified, making support system proud, desiring to make change, and being the person who others were not for them.

Pursuing Leadership (Step 5) is the actual process of a student putting his application in for a university-funded leadership position. Understanding how students get to the point of actually applying for a leadership position was the foundational goal of this research study. The answer to this research study's foundational question is, Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation.

The sixth process, Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept "Snowball Effect" (Step 6), takes place as a result of the students getting a university-funded position and having what they believed and knew of themselves and leadership abilities affirmed. This process has one key property, succeeding in a leadership role. Succeeding in the role for study participants consisted of them getting a university-funded leadership position and having their leadership abilities affirmed by other peer leaders, professional staff, and students they led. When an affirmation process happens, the student's confidence in what they believed to be true of their abilities is reinforced by both experience and external affirmation. I also identified a facilitating condition of becoming the go-to

leader. This process happened with an office or supervisor who would ask or encourage a student to reapply for the same position or apply for another position within the office.

Discussion of Substantive Theory

This research study identified that undergraduate male-identifying students pursue leadership through the process of Connecting Leadership Identity and motivation. The foundation of this substantive grounded theory rests upon six primary processes that were found to sequentially build on one another. The processes that comprise this theory include, Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1), Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2), Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3), Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4), Pursuing leadership (Step 5), and Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept (Step 6). The theory that I identified is unique in that it is specific to male-identifying students and their pursuit of university-funded leadership positions.

This theory is also unique in that it melds two theoretical spheres, male leadership identity development and male leadership engagement. Currently, one of the more prominent leadership development models is Komives et al.'s (2005) leadership identity development model. However, while this model provides an excellent overview of how college students progress from developing an awareness (phase 1) that leadership exists to that of just living as a leader in everyday life integration/synthesis (phase 6), it does not address the motivating factor(s) that drives students to begin the leadership development process/engagement process. A valuable aspect my theory provides that the leadership identity development model does not, is that mine provides insight into the

actual process that a male-identifying student pursues to get a position he has been made aware of while in college. In many ways, I see my Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation theory complimenting the leadership identity development model, as there are similar influences found to develop the student in both development theories.

The first three processes in my substantive theory develop a student's leadership identity. However, developing a leadership identity alone does not mean that a male-identifying student will pursue a university-funded leadership position. In my theory, I found a key process to leadership pursuit involved students Identifying Motivations for leadership (Step 4). Leadership motivation and motivations for leadership are discussed at length in the literature (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Grant & Shin, 2012; Rosch & Villanueva, 2016); however this study again provides a theory and in-depth understanding of what specifically motivates college male-identifying students to pursue leadership while in college.

The influence of motivation on leadership pursuit and development is discussed in almost every discipline. Additionally, there are varying findings and beliefs on what serves as a motivator for individuals in their leadership development and pursuit process. For example, Hannah and Avolio (2010), in their comprehensive review of leadership interventions since World War I, found individuals tend to be open to leadership development when two things are present, motivation and the ability to develop. Additionally, in their theory-building process, they found the following motivations to promote leadership development, interest and goal, learning goal orientation, and developmental efficacy. Hannah and Avolio believed that these categories provide

motivation, as interest and goals are typically intrinsic to an individual, as goal orientation refers to one believing that they can change and grow, and developmental efficacy is the level of confidence in which an individual believes that they can change.

Hannah and Avolio (2010) presented their findings of motivation in such a way that situates motivation as the starting point for individuals to start their leadership development and pursuit process. This presents a different perspective than what I found in my theory. For the theory I identified, Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation, motivation for leadership and leadership development was found to play an impact after Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1), Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2), and Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3). While the point in which we each believe motivation comes into play in the leadership pursuit process, it is important to note that Hannah and Avolio are specifically looking at what moves individuals to pursue leadership development, whereas I am looking specifically at leadership position pursuit.

While Hannah and Avolio's (2010) findings on motivation differ from those of mine, Chan and Drasgow's (2001) research study mirrors my placement of motivation in the development process as well as confirms the importance of the connection of identity development and motivation in leadership pursuit. Ultimately, their study found "that personality, values, and past leadership experience are related to MTL [motivation to lead] both directly and indirectly through leadership self-Efficacy and that MTL is related to behavioral criteria that are indicative of the participation in-leadership-training-and-activities construct" (p. 495). There are three aspects of Chan

and Drasgow's study that support the findings in my study, and they include the placement and importance of motivation in leadership pursuit, the development of leadership self-efficacy, and the value of leadership training activities.

In addition to the above literature and research studies discussed, a large portion of chapter two discusses the more prominent student development and student leadership theories, such as Kohlberg's moral development, Chickering's theory of identity development and Perry's intellectual and ethical development theory, as well as the current leadership theories and models, social change model of leadership, self-authorship, and leader identity development model. The purpose of the discussion in Chapter 2 is to highlight the fact that while they are the go-to theories for many higher education practitioners, they do not specifically address the necessary nuances that comprise students today. There is a call for more specified research on various populations, but specifically on male students (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Haber, 2012; Yarrish et al., 2010). This is where my theory fills a research void, as it specifically addresses a population of students, having taken in account each unique aspect shared in their interviews.

Similarly, there is a growing emphasis on the importance of understanding the unique identities that each student possesses as well as the intersectionality of these identities (Komives et al., 2013; Ortiz & Santos, 2010). While each of the theories discussed in Chapter 2 provides well-established ways to understand leadership development, most are missing an element of specificity and consideration of the many identities associated when looking at specific student groups (Lipman-Blumen, 1992).

Like many aspects of life, doing things the same way they have always been done creates an environment where missed opportunities are likely to result. It is through re-evaluation, continued researched on time tested models, and the pursuit of growth students are best served and not missed as a result of old ways of understanding. The social and political climate of today has created a very different environment than 20 years ago, and as a result, learning how male students understand leadership *today* is imperative. It is in these needs that my study is situated and illuminates how male-identifying students engage in Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation.

Process Identified: Multiple Steps to Pursuit

This grounded theory research study was developed in the hopes of identifying the process in which male-identifying college students pursued leadership. As a result of the data collected and analyzed, a six-step process was identified that includes both external and internal factors that contribute to leadership pursuit. This finding is consistent with those of other similar leadership development theories (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Komives et al, 2005; Komives et al., 2011). The process of leadership pursuit is a significant finding as it, for the first time, provides explicitly a framework on how to answer the question, “how do we get more male-identifying students to apply for our leadership positions.” The reason I call this a framework in how to answer the pursuit question is because male students are different, and as this study shows, each student can be at a different step within the pursuit process. However, a new piece of knowledge my study brings is a way to understand the steps involved in a male-identifying student’s pursuit process, which gives professional staff a starting point to evaluate their

male-identifying students to see if there are areas that need to be encouraged and or developed.

In most of the leadership development theories, there is not a specified amount of time in which it takes a student to progress through a step, phase, or process (Evans et al., 2010), and I found the same to be true in my theory. Each of the participants entered step one at very different points in their lives and in turn, spent varying amounts of time in each of the following steps. Many factors either sped up or slowed the rate in which they moved through each process.

Importance of Relationships in Leadership Pursuit

While my theory is comprised of six processes, I found that external support and encouragement to be an important factor as male-identifying students' progress through the process of Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation. This finding also mirrors what Komives et al. (2005) found in their study on leadership identity development. In their study, they identified that both adult and peer influences served as a constant all-encompassing factor in a student's leadership development cycle. Additionally, there were also several universal experiences noted throughout the interviews that highlighted the various components of relationships, with a key one being how male-identifying students' value and seek to foster personal connection.

Every male student interviewed shared how a personal connection played a role in his leadership journey. In Chapter 4, I discuss in depth how family, educators, coaches, and those who cared and did not have to were pivotal relationships in a student's leadership journey. Tillapaugh and Haber-Curran (2016) highlighted how much of the

literature and research on leadership distinguishes the difference between men and women concerning how they come to leadership and then ultimately lead. However, they note that many of the views held by male college leaders are archaic and are not accurate for today's male students. In fact, in their research study, Tillapaugh and Haber-Curran found that male students were just as focused on relationship building as they were on completing the task at hand, and in some instances, male student leaders were more focused on relationship building.

My study results not only found relationship-building to be important to how each of the students led in their respective positions, but they also identified how pivotal relationships were throughout their entire journey. I found in the undergraduate male leadership process having a supportive relationship was not only key to a male student's start in leadership, but a continued relationship was also crucial to the continuation of leadership pursuit. All the male students were keenly aware of the value and importance of relationships in their leadership journey, but also in the leadership journeys of the next generation of male student leaders.

Like Tillapaugh and Haber-Curran (2016) identified in their research, I also found that the traditionally believed ideas on why male students pursue leadership as well as how they pursue it are no longer accurate of today's male college students. For example, the students in this study all talked about the importance of community, support, and being a servant leader, which are all very different from the all too often held idea that male students want power, control, notoriety, and are most successful in hierarchal leadership. My study also found that for some students, professional staff encouragement

may not result in a student applying for a position in the same year, but the encouragement begins the process for the student. Encouragement one year, resulted for some of the students, an actual leadership application another year.

Male-Identifying Students are Multidimensional

In 2013, USA Today published an article entitled “Are men’s centers essential for college campuses,” and in this article, there were several topics addressed, but one line, in particular, stood out, “Distress over fulfilling gender norms can lead to depression and anxiety for college men” (para. 17). This statement highlights the fact that almost seven years ago, male college students were struggling to adapt to their environments, with either not living up to the normative definition of being a man or were potentially acting out in ways that were deemed to be too masculine, or toxic, for the college campuses they were on.

More recently, a book written by Warren Farrell and John Gray, in 2018, called *The Boy Crisis*, also discusses how gender norms and views of masculinity can be isolating and ultimately ignores the complexity of what it means to identify as a male student today. Although each of these different literary outlets are discussing male student identity in general, I found the students in my research also saw themselves and others as multidimensional leaders, not ascribing to the traditionally held male leader stereotype. Prior held beliefs are sometimes difficult to change, and such is the case with views of what it means to be a male leader. In much of the research done in the past, the focus has been on the differences between male and female leaders, noting that female leaders are more communal in their leadership and male students are more task-oriented

and hierarchical (Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016; Yarrish et al., 2010). However, as my study found, male-identifying student leaders on campuses today are multidimensional and need to have their nuances understood and development programs created that address all types of male students.

In this research study, the students identified some characteristics that they believe necessary to have as a good leader, and ironically, many of them would not traditionally be thought of as characteristics valued by male leaders. Some of the common characteristics talked about in my interviews include being vulnerable, willing to listen, having passion, willing to grow, being selfless, humble, a servant leader, want to make a difference, helping others, personal betterment, and being a positive example for others. The male students in Tillapaugh and Haber-Curran's (2016) research study looking at male students' perceptions of their leadership practice also recognized the importance of a relationally oriented leadership style, which includes many of the characteristics identified in my study. However, I also found that the students in my study were not void of wanting to accomplish a task. In a few instances, some of the participants talked about both wanting to help others by bringing out their best, while still accomplishing a task. The point that the students in my study were making is that these two aspects of leadership can coexist in a healthy relationship.

Admittedly so, leadership is contextually bound, meaning the type of leadership skills needed and utilized will likely look different on a battlefield than on a college campus. However, in a recent article published in Military.com entitled, "The Army Has Introduced a New Leadership Value: Here is why it matters," it is noted that the Army

has taken a moment to reevaluate its leadership development curriculum and now recognizes that humility and empathy are two characteristics of leadership that need to be included in their leadership training curriculum. The recognition of these valuable leadership characteristics by the military is yet another example of a shift in the belief of what is valued and deemed important in the leadership development process for successful leaders. Additionally, in the context of my study, a college campus, the students identified an array of characteristics that helped them become leaders and are imperative to their success as male leaders. It is now the job of leadership practitioners and instructors to acknowledge that male-identifying students are multifaceted and need to be developed as such.

Motivation Identification

In the theory that I constructed, identifying motivation proved to be an essential step in which male-identifying students decided to actually pursue leadership. While the likelihood of a student pursuing leadership is questionable if any of the steps are not developed, motivation identification was identified to be the tipping point process in which male-identifying students submit their application for a university-funded leadership position. The findings of my research study align with that of Rosch and Villanueva (2016), who also identified motivation as a critical component in students' readiness for leadership pursuit. Rosch and Villanueva stated that "motivation provides the critical fuel for mobilizing developmental pursuit" (p. 50). This quote epitomizes what I found in my study, and only confirms the power and necessity of motivation in leadership pursuit. However, as I noted in Chapter 2, many times research studies and

leadership findings are generic, meaning that theories and concepts are generally valid for whatever population is under evaluation. However, as a result of this research study, I can concretely say that motivation is specifically vital in male-identifying students' pursuit of university-funded leadership positions while in college.

I not only identified that motivation is a key process in a student's leadership pursuit journey, but that there are different properties within the motivating processes, such as caring for others and planning for the future. Rosch and Villanueva echoed this point as well stating:

Designers of leadership development processes must contend with the different reasons individuals opt to participate (i.e., different motivations to lead) based on their unique circumstances and the fluctuation in the level of engagement with the development process across and even within individuals. (2016, p. 53)

The idea that individuals have "different motivations to lead" was also echoed in Chan and Drasgow's (2001) study seeking to identify an individual's motivation to lead. Ultimately, the findings of my study and the leadership literature, both identify that motivation is imperative in the process of leadership pursuit.

Summary

My substantive theory, *Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation* provides a multidimensional understanding of the multiple processes involved in male-identifying students pursuing leadership. A review of current leadership literature, in light of my theory, shows that it is affirmed by similar findings in prior studies, while still contributing a unique understanding of the development process of male-identifying

students. Specifically, the identification of this theory provided the following key understandings about undergraduate male-identifying students: that students do move through a multiple-step process when pursuing leadership, that relationships are and remain important through their pursuit process, male-identifying students are multidimensional, and that finding motivation is imperative to leadership pursuit.

Implications of Theory When Compared to Select Theories and Models

“Theory is a valuable tool . . . but its use also presents challenges. To be effective, theory must be used responsibly” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 26). The focal word in this quote is responsibly, and in order to use theory responsibly, one must understand the theory being used as well as the theoretical landscape in which it resides. In some instances, a student’s developmental process is best described through multiple theories as a result of the intersectionality of more than one identity. So, in order to best understand and support a student and or student population, an understanding of the relevant and applicable theories is a necessity.

In order to understand the Connection of Leadership Identity and Motivation theory that was constructed as a result of this research study, a review of how this new theory aligns and challenges some existing student leadership development theories is shared in the following sections. Specifically, the following reviews the Connection of Leadership Identity and Motivation theory in light of the most often referenced student leadership development theories such as Baxter Magolda’s (2012) self-authorship theory, Astin and Astin’s social change model (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996), and Komives et al. (2005) leadership identity development model.

Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship

Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship is a foundational student development theory that is often associated with not only a student's personal development but their leadership development as well. This conclusion comes from the following quote of Baxter Magolda on her view of the purpose of higher education, "Higher education has a responsibility to help young adults make the transition from being shaped by society to shaping society in their role as leaders in society's future" (Baxter Magolda, 1999a, p. 630). Additionally, the duality of this theory is a result of it being developed out of the interviews of college students throughout the entirety of their college tenure and later, beyond college. The self-authorship theory was the result of a five-year longitudinal study of 101 students, male and female, who were interviewed from their first year of college through the year after college (Evans et al., 2010). Ultimately, Baxter Magolda identified four phases in a student's self-authorship process, which include: phase 1: following formulas, phase 2: crossroads, phase 3: becoming the author of one's life, and phase 4: internal foundation.

When evaluating my theory of Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation to that of Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship, I found that there were some key tenets of each theory that align and provide support for one another. Given the scope of my study and its focus on leadership, there were not major challenges that my theory posed to the findings and construction of Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship. However, one of the key tenets that I found to be pivotal throughout my theory was the

importance of “others;” either through the form of support, encouragement, and or affirmation. Baxter Magolda, throughout her research, also found that external relationships were important in a student’s self-authorship journey. Specifically, “she noted that family and community are especially important in students’ decision making throughout their cognitive development process” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 128). While the above quote is in reference to decision making and the cognitive-developmental process, the key similarity is decision making. In my research study, it was identified that all students made the decision to pursue leadership as the result of being encouraged toward leadership primarily through relationships with others. So, in both theories, external relationships serve as catalysts for the start of each theory.

Another important point to make is the fact that the first three steps in the Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation theory are building blocks to a student, ultimately Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3). This connection can be seen in Baxter Magolda’s (2008) definition of self-authorship as she says self-authorship is “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations” (p. 269). For the students in this research study, they found part of their identity in being a leader. In addition, I believe that as students are on their leadership pursuit journey, as identified in my theory, that they are also simultaneously on their self-authorship path. The leadership pursuit process can be seen as a subprocess in the larger self-authorship process. This thought also coincides with that of Baxter Magolda’s belief that “cocurricular involvements emphasize the student’s experience, legitimizing it as a basis for constructing new knowledge” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 129). In summation,

my constructed theory, specifically evaluating the leadership development process, compliments Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship.

Social Change Model of Leadership Development

One of the most popular and applied leadership theories is the social change model of leadership (SCM; Kezar et al., 2006). The social change model was co-created by a number of higher education experts who were called together by Alexander and Helen Astin as a result of a grant to create a leadership development model for college students (HERI, 1996). The social change model was built based upon a research study that Helen Astin and Carole Leland conducted on 77 female leaders, a longitudinal research study that Alexander Astin conducted assessing the influence of peer groups, and through multiple philosophies and ideas presented by relevant thought leaders at the time on the concept of self (HERI, 1996). At its core, the social change model has two points of emphasis,

1. To enhance student learning and development: more specifically, to develop in each student participant greater:

Self-knowledge: understanding of one's talents values, and interests, especially as these relate to the student's capacity to provide effective leadership.

Leadership competence: the capacity to mobilize oneself and others to serve and to work collaboratively.

2. To facilitate positive social **change** at the institution or in the community.

That is, to undertake actions which will help the institution/community to function more effectively and humanely. (HERI, 1996, p. 19)

While the above goals of the theory may not be as widely known, the “7 C’s” of the model are typically referenced and consist of Collaboration, Consciousness of Self, Commitment, Congruence, Common Purpose, Controversy with Civility and Citizenship. Another important point to note of the SCM is that the authors specifically say that the SCM is one model on leadership development and that practitioners may find pieces and parts more applicable than others.

When comparing the social change model and my Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation theory, there are a number of similar processes and points of emphasis that show that the theories are complimentary of one another. However, there are three main differences in how the theories were developed. First, my theory was developed out of students attaining a university-funded leadership position, whereas one of the key premises noted in the SCM is that leadership is a process and not a position. Specifically, my second research question’s focus is on the process in which male-identifying students pursue leadership, a position. I intentionally excluded non-positional leadership positions. Secondly, a foundational difference is the main population used for the theory creation. The foundational study used in the creation of the SCM was comprised of 77 women, whereas my study consists of 19 male-identifying students. Lastly, the SMC places a large emphasis on the importance and influence of the group in the leadership development journey. In my research study, “group” was only evaluated and recognized

as it impacted the individual in their leadership journey. While these are the major difference noted in the theories, my theory has more in common with the SCM than difference.

In the creation of the social change model, the importance of peers was identified and taken into consideration. The ensemble assembled to developed the SCM moved forward with the following view of the importance of a student's peer group.

More specifically, the single most potent source of influence on leadership development among college undergraduates appears to be the amount of interactions that students have with each other. Enhanced leadership skills are associated with participation in volunteer work, tutoring other students, and working on group projects with others students. (HERI, 1996, p. 11)

The findings of my research study and subsequent theory, echo the importance of a student's peer group in the leadership development journey. Specifically, in my theory, peers played a key role in encouraging students toward leadership pursuit, served as mentors, provide an example of how to lead, as well as serving in the role of someone that could affirm leadership capacity. Additionally, the students in my study identified the value of an inclusive and communal leadership style, again, acknowledging the importance of peer groups.

The obvious focal point in the social change model is that of change. "CHANGE . . . gives meaning and purpose to the 7 C's. Change, in other words, is the ultimate goal of the creative process of leadership—to make a better world and a better society for self and others" (HERI, 1996, p. 21). While change serves as the core of the SCM, change

was also identified in my study as a key motivation for male-identifying in their pursuit of leadership. In fact, in the Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4), desiring to make change was identified as facilitating condition for why students decided to pursue leadership. In most instances, the change that was desired was for the larger campus community and, in some instances, for a specific demographic of students.

Lastly, the first “C” in the social change model is Consciousness of Self, and while this is the first value in the SCM, the components included in this value, “talents, interests, aspirations, values, concerns, self-concept, limitations, and dreams” (HERI, 1996, p. 31) are similar to the components identified in the first three steps of my theory. In my Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation theory, the ultimate goal of the first three steps is to develop a positive leadership self-concept that is essentially the result of identifying talents, interests, values, and the like. The social change model places a key emphasis on self-awareness, and I, too, found that the pursuit of leadership for the male-identifying students took place as students developed a level of self-awareness. However, I also found there were levels to self-awareness and the depth of self-awareness portrayed by the student was correlated to the amount of leadership experience the student had experienced.

Similar to the comparison to Baxter Magolda’s theory of self-authorship, my theory of Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation ultimately aligns and affirms key components of the social change model. Ultimately some of the key facets that have been identified to be important in the social change model for all college students were also found to be foundational to the specific population of male-identifying students and

their leadership development journey. This is an interesting finding considering one of the core research studies utilized in the creation of the SCM was based solely on the leadership success of 77 female students (HERI, 1996). In this theory comparison, my developed theory is also affirmed in that the components that I identified to be important in male-identifying students were also deemed so by a thinktank of highly regarded higher education professionals that convened in 1996 at UCLA.

Leadership Identity Development Model

In a quick review of the student leadership theories, very few specifically address how a student's leadership identity is formed. In fact, Komives et al. (2005) noted about their research that "at the time of this study there was no known research on how leadership identity was formed" (p. 594). Given the gap in research on the topic of leadership identity development, Komives et al.'s study has become the main study, and now theory referenced on leadership identity development for college students.

In their grounded theory study, Komives et al. (2005) interviewed 13 diverse male and female students inquiring about their leadership journey. As a result of the interviews and coding process, the leadership identity development model was developed that consists of six stages, which include, awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis. Additionally, in each stage, a student cycles through each of the following sub-processes, developing self, changing view of self with others, broadening view of leadership, and all the while is learning from group influences (Komives et al., 2005). Komives et al. found that

Developmental Influences, such as adults, peers, involvement, and reflective learning, are present throughout the entirety of a student's progression through each of the stages.

When reviewing leadership development theories, in relation to the Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation theory, the leadership identity development model shares by far the most similar theoretical components. For example, and as I found in my research study, Komives et al. (2005) noted that "the Essential developmental influences that fostered the development of a leadership identity included adult influences, peer influences, meaningful involvement, and reflective learning" (p. 596). Additionally, not only did both studies find that adult and peer influence were key to a student developing a leadership identity, but that these influences remained present and needed throughout the developmental journey. Another similarity both studies found, and subsequent theories acknowledge, is that "attributions from adults, family, and peers helped them identify aspects of themselves that were strengths and aspects that needed attention" (Komives et al., 2005, p. 599). The findings of my research study mirrored what Komives et al. found in their study when specifically looking at the importance of environmental influences and relationships with others.

While my theory acknowledges the importance of relationships with others, I did not find that "adults were the first to recognize the students' leadership potential" (Komives et al., 2005, p. 596). In some instances, adults proved to be a negative force in the student's leadership development journey. In fact, some of the students were encouraged toward leadership specifically by their peers and the example that they provided. I found that the students who began their leadership journey in high school had

their leadership potential recognized by adults; however, once in college, the recognition came from friends and college student leaders.

Developing “self” has proven to be a common component of each of the theories discussed thus far, and this trend continues as the leadership identity development model also highlights it as a key category comprised of dimensions for personal growth.

Similarly, a key step in my theory is Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept, and this takes place as the result of a student developing many of the same dimensions, as highlighted by Komives et al. (2005) in their Developing Self Category, which also takes place in steps 1 and 2 of my theory. The specific categories of self-development that are highlighted in both theories are the importance of self-confidence, establishing efficacy, identification, the use of new skills, and expanding/identifying motivations.

An important clarification between my Connecting Leadership Identify and Motivation theory to that of the Komives et al.’s (2005) leadership identity development model is that the theories are explaining different end goals. In my theory, the goal is to understand the process in which male-identifying students pursue leadership, which I found involved significant components of developing a leadership identity. However, for Komives et al. (2005), they stated that “the purpose of this study was to understand the process a person experiences in creating a leadership identity” (p. 594). Even though the ultimate outcome of the processes identified in each theory is different, there is mutual affirmation that there are universal and fundamental components to a student’s leadership identity development. However, my theory isolates male-identifying students as the focal population and narrows in on multiple processes and components that aid in

male-identifying students' leadership identity development journey as they pursue an actual leadership position.

Finally, the key facet of my Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation theory that distinguishes it from the leadership identity development model is my theory moves beyond students only identifying as a student leader. It also explains the process in which male-identifying students actually pursue leadership as well as the process in which male students are affirmed in their leadership roles. My theory provides an in-depth nuanced understanding specific to that of male-identifying students in not only their pursuit of university-funded leadership positions but also how they specifically develop a leadership identity.

Summary

Upon evaluating my Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation theory to that of Baxter Magolda's (2012) self-authorship theory, Astin and Astin's social change model (HERI, 1996) and Komives et al.'s (2005) leadership identity development model, I found that my theory confirms facets of each theory reviewed. The common components that play a significant role in each theory, including mine, is the importance of peers and external relational support as well as the development of self. Although there were a number of commonalities between my theory and the rest, there are three defining contributions that my theory makes and they are (a) my theory specifically looks at one population, male-identifying students; (b) the creation of a theory that identifies the specific processes involved in a male-identifying students leadership identity development process; and (c) my theory moves beyond focusing on the self, or a

leadership identity, and explains how male-identifying students pursue university-funded leadership positions on a college campus.

Implications for Practice

The impetus for this research study was to understand the process in which male-identifying students pursue leadership, and as a result, a substantive theory emerged that consists of six stepped themes. While this study was conducted on one campus, a large Midwestern State University, there are many implications for practice that may benefit all institutions seeking to engage their male-identifying students. By understanding the leadership engagement process, practitioners can better meet the developmental needs of the new and returning male-identifying students on campus. This research study provides a rich foundation for understanding male engagement generally, but four significant implications first need to be considered, and they include: process assessment, leveraging peer leaders, leadership training, and the value to cost of leadership.

Assessing Where Male-Identifying Students are in Their Leadership Pursuit

When thinking about this research study and the information collected, I cannot help but keep coming back to the simple phrase, “now what.” These two words, though simple, are compelling and critical to the long-term impact of the findings within this study. I must also acknowledge that this phrase is driven by the practitioner that resides within me. Research is imperative to knowledge advancement; however, it is also essential to consider how the knowledge gained ultimately helps the subject under study or aids in furthering to help those studied. It is in answering the “now what” question

that I believe the results of this study are not only a value to knowledge advancement but also real-life application. Through my lens as both a researcher and practitioner, I believe that one of the more significant implications of the theory is that it provides a way to assess where male-identifying students are in their leadership pursuit process. Rather than trying to guess at why male-identifying students are not pursuing leadership generally, as well as specifically university-funded leadership programs, this theory gives practitioners a way to assess the pursuit step that a student is in.

Jake's experience serves as a great example of how this leadership theory, and ultimately being able to assess where a student is in his leadership journey, can aid students who have feelings and experiences like Jake. Jake shares the following about the start of his leadership journey:

I never felt genuinely cared about, and I think it's one of those things now, like where in college, I'm just like there's so many people out there that might feel or felt that way . . . lonely; not really feeling worth . . . if I can at least find one person who, like, feels similar to that, like kinda felt how I did, I want to . . . walk-in their path, and like develop them and like say like, hey, like it's not all over high school.. it's not your last stop, there's so much more you can do with yourself.

In this example, Jake not only shares about his experience of not ever feeling truly cared about, a lack of Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1), he then goes on to talk about other male students whom he sees as having the same need. For Jake, and students like him, this theory provides a way to think about each student's leadership development

experiences, the step he is currently in, as well as how to meet his leadership needs to move him to the following steps.

Once a student has been identified to be in a specific step, like that of Jake, it will then be important for professional staff to narrow in on if the student is stuck in the stage or merely working through the process. I noted earlier in this chapter that my theory as well as others like it (Evans et al., 2010; Komives et al., 2005) do not specify an exact amount of time that a student may be in a process. However, if a student is identified as being stuck, the method to aid the student through will be dependent upon the stage. For example, in Jake's case, feelings of not being cared about can be addressed through the intentional pairing with a professional staff or faculty mentor (Campbell, Smith, Dugan & Komives, 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Rosch & Villanueva, 2016). In many ways, if students appear to be stuck, a possible way to help the student through a stage is by reviewing the properties within the category to see if they have started or completed any of those processes.

Leveraging Peer Leaders to Promote University-Funded Positions

Peer leader impact, meaning the influence and encouragement that other current students provide, was noted in every interview and thus must be intentionally thought about and leveraged when engaging male-identifying students. In Komives et al.'s (2005) leadership identity development model, the first stage is awareness. Awareness in Komives et al.'s study is when students become aware leaders exist. This stage was also found to be true for all of the students in this study, as all of them identified a leader example from childhood or the pre-college years. However, the participants identified

another aspect of awareness that proved to impact their way of thinking about leadership and peers significantly. All of the students spoke about how their awareness of leadership opportunities came from either seeing peers serving in various roles or by peers telling them about leadership opportunities. In every case, a past or current peer leader had made an impact on each participant. Peers proved to be vital leadership informants and influencers. Here are two examples of how some of the study participants talked about peer influence:

Josh: All right. Tell me about how you've learned about leadership while in college?

J.W.: I've learned about leadership by seeing it, by trying to apply it, and by experiencing it, um, from both sides. Like someone leading me and tried to be a leader too. For someone else, learning what can work kind of universally and what should be maybe more person-focused.

When asked how he learned about leadership, Joseph said the following about peer impact on his journey: "It's been by word of mouth, but it's been me actively seeking out those different opportunities . . . So getting connected with other student leaders or students or other faculty members has really helped."

The leveraging of past and current male peer leaders can look a myriad of ways depending on the needs of the institution of focus. The idea of leveraging student peers, specifically male-identifying students, means that they are equipped and trained to have one on one conversations with other male students. Some of the more popular ways noted in the literature of how peer leaders are utilized include peer mentors, course

co-facilitators, position recruiters, peer tutors, residential advising, information dissemination, and campus community builders (Astin, 1993; Shook & Keup, 2012; van der Meer, Skalicky & Speed, 2019). Keup (2016) said this about the impact of peer leadership:

Research has yielded substantial evidence to support the decision to use peer leaders in higher education and in a wide array of roles and settings. Those students who are the beneficiaries of peer leadership, mentorship and education have garnered a wide range of positive benefits from the experience, including increased engagement. (p. 32)

The students in my research study all talked about how either a current peer leader or a past one had helped to push them toward leadership. As noted in the literature, by having peers serve in various capacities they are in positions to talk with students about leadership and the university-funded positions available.

However, at a minimum, those who coordinate university-funded leadership hiring need to consider the impact their male student leaders are making or not making, on new male students. As I previously discussed, peer leaders can influence the type of perception that is passed along about student leadership, and specifically about university-funded leadership positions. For male students, they need to have male peers to talk to about campus leadership. Male leadership peer connection becomes difficult if new male students do not see male representation in the university-funded leadership positions across campus. While the study participants talked about needing to have more male representation in university-funded leadership positions, some of the students

specifically talked about how a female-identifying student was the catalyst for their leadership pursuit. It was universally noted by the study participants that leadership is best when there is a balance of male and female representation.

Using Leadership Training as Motivation Affirmation

An essential part of most leadership positions is training. Student leadership training can range from a few hours to a few weeks, and in some instances, take place continually. However, no matter how they occur, they are valuable development platforms. I recognize that the focus of this study is on the process of male leadership pursuit, but when thinking about the importance of peer influence on leadership pursuit, I believe there is opportunity within each leadership training to teach students, specifically male-identifying students how to talk about their experience in such a way that intrigues other male students who they are leading or interfacing with regularly.

This research study identified several leadership perceptions held by male-identifying students as well as five key concepts that served as the foundation for the Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4). In understanding the perceptions and concepts identified in this study, practitioners can leverage training sessions so that they specifically provide a space to reinforce the motivation of current male students as well as train them on how to articulate their experiences in such a way that resonates with potential male students' motivations.

Additionally, leadership training provides a space to articulate why the university-funded leadership position is of value to the male students who have been selected for the role, as well as to the university as a whole. The students in this study identified that one

of the key motivational processes was preparing for the future. Training staff can leverage this by highlighting how their specific leadership position develops one or all of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) competencies. These competencies have been identified through large-scale employer surveys as the areas that companies want to see developed in those they hire (Career readiness defined, 2020). By having this noted in the training outline, male-identifying students will continue to see the value of their leadership experience and then will potentially share this with their friends.

Similarly, Corey Seemiller (2014) has developed *The Student Leadership Competencies Guidebook*, which was primarily created to help practitioners develop leadership training and curriculum. By utilizing Seemiller's guidebook, practitioners not only are made aware of the competencies but are also given information on how to assess students' understanding of the competency. Again, by helping male-identifying students tangibly see the skills that they will learn and how it will prepare them for the future, their initial motivation will be affirmed.

A few of the participants discussed the power of merely feeling wanted because of their unique qualities, and training can provide a space to show genuine care and appreciation for the students' leadership initiatives. In many ways, the leadership process is cyclical; when a student feels genuinely cared for, they will share a perception of the leadership position and environment in a positive light with peers, thus creating a positive perception of the leadership culture, intriguing other students to check it out. In today's higher education climate consisting of professional position cuts, and the mentality of doing more with less, it can be easy to recycle training from the prior year, but in doing

so, there may be some missed opportunities to build a well-rounded leadership program with an equal amount of male-identifying students represented.

Evaluating the Benefits of Leadership to That of the Costs

A consistent feeling articulated by participants was that their time and energy was limited. As a result of these feelings, participants shared how they were continually evaluating whether their pursuit of a leadership position was worth their time and effort. For example, after Nate's evaluation of the time and effort required by the resident advisor position, he decided that it was not worth it for him. He said the following about his evaluation process of the resident assistant position:

I wanted to be an RA cause I thought it'd be cool to meet new people and branch out my social circle. And the more I kind of learned about it, the more I realized that it is a lot of work, and I didn't want to do that much work, which is a lazy thing to say.

Similarly, Jack went through a similar evaluation process of his leadership positions. He provides another view of an evaluation process:

I heard about the orientation leader job . . . the money caught my eye . . . Then I was like, I looked at the flyer . . . we have trainings from this, and this, then I'm like, nah, I'm not doing it. I don't, I don't want to do it . . . like when I saw the five to seven training sessions on Fridays, I'm like, ah, do I wanna give my Fridays up . . . spend that time during the summer and all of that.

For Nate and Jack, they both had an evaluation process in which they engaged to see if the role was worth their time and energy, and in Nate's case, he did not see the value

being worth the effort. Even though Jack ultimately did apply for and got the orientation leader position, if it had not been for an outside mentor influence, he would not have completed his application as the time required for the training would have been the deterrent.

As a practitioner and passionate advocate for leadership development, I find it is easy to become so focused on the leadership positions that I oversee, that I fail to remember that the students applying are multifaceted individuals with only a certain amount of bandwidth. Jack's experience is a prime example of how many male students process potential leadership opportunities. He is a pre-med student with limited time, and so, the thought of signing up for a leadership position that is guaranteed to take up multiple Friday nights for training seems immediately overwhelming. Like Jack, others also talked about how much work it is to be a student leader and that they almost expect their grades to suffer due to the lack of time. If this type of sacrifice is not appealing to the male students who highly value leadership roles and development, logic would say that the male students who are wavering in their leadership pursuit would see the value to cost as significantly lopsided and ultimately not worth their time.

In van der Meer et al.'s (2019) research study looking at what students perceive as the benefits from being a peer leader, they found that 91% of the 239 students sampled viewed their peer leadership position as a positive experience and benefit. Additionally, when the students were asked what they believe they got out of their leadership experience, they noted skill development, undergraduate experiences, employability, and academic performance. The participants in my research study also highlighted three of

van der Meer et al.'s benefits, which include skill development, enhanced college experience, and employment. These also align with the participants' perception of leadership as a way for personal advancement.

Similar to Van der Meer et al.'s (2019) findings, I also found that the majority of the students in my study had a positive view of their leadership experience. Additionally, when I asked the students if they pursued their university-funded leadership position for the money, most of them laughed, saying that if they did get paid, it was not very much. However, there was one student leadership position, resident assistant, that a few did admit to applying for merely because of the pay, or rather, because of the room and board stipend.

Outside of this specific position, the monetary pay was seen as negligible and a small benefit. Griffith (2019) specifically addresses the lack of student leadership pay in her article that highlights the University of Minnesota's student body president Simran Mishra. She wrote this about Mishra's daily routine,

On the first day of spring semester, Mishra woke up around 6 a.m. to get ready for a yoga class at 6:45 a.m. Then she went to three classes, checked in with her colleagues and called University administrators. At the end of the day, she fit in dinner with her friends before working on homework and getting to sleep around midnight. She did all this while getting paid what equates to just over \$3 per hour for a 40-hour work week. (para. 2)

A similar grueling schedule was also standard with participants in my study. The participant schedules, like that of Mishra, were full from the moment they woke up until

the moment they went to bed, which was often late. For students who do not find benefit in skill development, and perceived enhanced college experience, and employment, the cost of leadership, will likely be viewed as too much and not worth giving up their time.

It would be a significant leap to say that even if the value of leadership as compared to the cost was heavily weighted toward value, and male students saw the value, that it would result in a 100% pursuit rate. However, there is still an evaluation process that needs to occur in two ways: (a) practitioners need to evaluate their leadership programs and training for the value it brings to the student and to be sure it is worth the student's time and effort, and not merely a position to fill a functional need for the university and (b) that coordinators of leadership programs remember that "their" students are multifaceted and in many instances have multiple offices and individuals demanding their time.

Summary

The implications for practice topics identified in the above sections consisting of assessing where male-identifying students are in their leadership pursuit, leveraging peer leaders to promote university-funded positions, using leadership training as motivation affirmation, and evaluating the benefits of leadership to that of the costs, provide a list of pointed and practical ways in which to make change based on the findings of my theory *Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation*. Additionally, the identified implications and resulting suggestions for change were evaluated against current research and literature for commonalities and ideas for implementation. The value of this theory rests

in the real ways that it can facilitate and make a positive change for male-identifying students pursuing leadership.

Implications for Future Research

One of the challenges that I have found in conducting a research study is trying to avoid answering all my questions and pursuing all my ideas in one study. Thankfully, my dissertation committee served as a consistent reminder that I must “narrow, narrow, narrow,” so that my study is significant and adds value to the leadership research. Now, looking back, I am satisfied with how this study came to a narrowed focus and has provided valuable insight into male-identifying students. However, the perfectionist in me still sees the additional research that needs to be done, so that male-identifying students are afforded every leadership development opportunity.

Multiple Campus Sample

This research study was conducted on one large Midwestern State University and comprised 19 racially diverse students. Even though the institution under study was a large institution and the participants came from very diverse backgrounds and communities, I see significant value in this study being duplicated on other varying sized state universities, private liberal arts institutions, community colleges, and even similar schools located in different geographic locations within the United States. The ultimate goal would be to confirm the theory developed with various male student participants.

Step Cycle

A significant finding of this study was the emergence of a step process that the students progressed along when pursuing leadership. While the step process proved to be

accurate of the students' experience, an aspect of the step process that was not within the scope of this study was identifying what happens when students put in an application for a leadership position and then does not get the position. More specifically, the inquiry needs to identify what step(s) the student goes back to after denial. Does the student start over at Step 1, needing an additional external catalyst, or does the student go back to the positive leadership self-concept step (Step 3) and re-evaluate his confidence and leadership efficacy? Essentially, the question is what happens when a student is denied a position the very first time, he applies for a leadership position, and what happens when a student who has held multiple leadership positions is denied as well.

Further Exploration of Motivation

Motivation proved to be a significant concept in this theory and the key theme that many times stood in the way of actual leadership pursuit. As a result of this study, five motivation concepts were identified, preparing for the future, wanting to care for others, desiring to make change, and being the person others weren't for them. While these were the motivations that emerged in this study with the students from a large state university, it would be valuable to know if additional concepts tied to motivation would be identified at small liberal arts institutions or any other type of institution? Additionally, since motivation is such an important component, further research on how to help students identify their motivations would also be valuable.

I have identified thoughts on areas that still need to be researched based on the findings of my study; however, I also identified a few more areas to consider based on additional research studies that have looked at motivation and leadership. Chan and

Drasgow (2001) suggested conducting a study to understand how one's personality impacts leadership motivation. Rosch and Villanueva (2016) discussed in their article the difficulty in developing a program or process that supports the motivation process. Specifically, additional research needs to be conducted on the type of programs and continued training that best foster motivation and continued motivation, rather than it being left to the student to figure out.

Assessment Tool

The development of this theory and the step process creates the need for a correlating assessment tool that can be administered to male-identifying students that will then place them in one of the steps. The value of an assessment tool developed out of this substantive theory is multifaceted. An assessment tool can provide male-identifying students with a better understanding of themselves concerning leadership development, and it would directly help leadership practitioners to know how to address the leadership development needs of these students on their respective campuses. Additionally, a tool like this can also begin to collect longitudinal data on male-identifying students, allowing for large scale analysis of the averaged step of the theory that male-identifying students enter college, amongst other such uses of large-scale data.

Owen (2001), in a chapter she wrote on the topics of assessment and evaluation, provided a thorough review of all the current assessment tools utilized in the following leadership areas:

1. Assessing attendance and participation (tracking)
2. Assessing leadership trait styles and attributes

3. Assessing leadership behaviors
4. Assessing leadership learning outcomes
5. Assessing leadership in groups and organization
6. Evaluating program effectiveness (including benchmarking and using national standards, conducting cost analyses, and comparisons to national normative data) (p. 187).

Owen identified some robust assessment tools such as the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI) based off of Kouzes and Posner's leadership challenge (2014), and the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale which was developed out of the social change model of leadership development (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). However, while these are great validated assessment tools, none of them directly fit the constructed theory of Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation, thus still warranting the need for the creation of an assessment tool.

The Uninvolved

When narrowing in on my dissertation research topic, I knew that I wanted to understand the process that male students pursued leadership, but I also thought about how significant a research study would be looking at why undergraduate male students do not pursue university-funded leadership positions. A study looking specifically at uninvolved male students would provide a valuable parallel study to mine and help to paint a fuller picture of all male-identifying students on college campuses.

While it is not a robust study on the uninvolved, Shertzer and Schuh (2004) did include five disengaged students in their research study consisting of 29 students when

they sought to assess college student perceptions of leadership. They found that the disengaged students, which included all identities, “demonstrated a lack of confidence, a lack of interest in leadership, a self-perceived deficiency in leadership qualities, and fewer opportunities to lead” (p. 111). Either an expansion of this study only focusing in on the uninvolved, or an entirely new one would provide valuable and much-needed data.

The findings of how disengaged students perceive leadership, in Shertzer and Schuh’s (2004) study, also confirm the findings in mine. Such as, I found that male-identifying students that *did pursue* leadership had developed confidence and have had their leadership qualities developed and affirmed. Whereas Shertzer and Schuh also found that these were the areas that uninvolved students said that they lacked.

Additionally, when considering Shertzer and Schuh’s (2004) findings in conjunction with my theory, two key areas should be further researched in conjunction, confidence and self-perceived deficiency in leadership qualities, in order to better understand uninvolved students. As both of our study’s address the concept of confidence, mine in the sense of its importance to leadership pursuit and Shertzer and Schuh’s noting that disengaged students lack it, this seems that this is a ripe area to better understand if students just need confidence in general or if it is specific to only needing confidence in leadership ability to pursue it.

Lastly, when thinking about my theory, a question that I have regarding this potential study is, do the uninvolved students (defined as never have held a university leadership position) go through a similar step process as the involved male students, but are the uninvolved students stalled out at the motivation step? Do uninvolved students

start the process at all? No matter the specific focus of this potential study, it would add significant value to the research and literature on the topic of undergraduate male leadership engagement.

Leadership Process and Mental Health

Two participants in this study talked about their mental health ups and downs between high school and college. The mental health challenges they faced ranged from depression to significant anxiety. It was apparent that their mental health needs significantly hindered their quality of life and self-confidence. In the two examples shared, it was articulated that the attainment of a leadership position provided a confidence-building moment as well as an intentional support system. A research study looking at how the attainment of college leadership position impacts male students' mental health would provide significant value today considering the growing mental health needs of college students (DeAngelis, 2019).

Specifically, it would be beneficial to develop a study that looks at all college students and how leadership development and specific university-funded leadership positions impact student mental health. It would also be beneficial to conduct a leadership impact on mental health study based on various identities, such as male-identifying, female-identifying, and the like. A facet of these studies could include evaluating if university-funded student leadership positions develop or enhance student resilience, grit, and coping mechanisms. Ultimately, given the importance of student mental health and their college success, this study would be timely and of great value to higher education professionals.

Conclusions

“Without an understanding of student development leadership educators might respond to struggling students by simply pushing harder with the same message rather than adjusting to meet students where they are” (Wagner, 2011, p. 85). This quote epitomizes why the grounded theory I developed is needed. Various authors and research study findings have said for far too long that more research has been needed on male students and how they perceive and engage leadership (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Eich, 2007; Haber, 2012; Harris & Edwards, 2010; Komives et al., 2011; Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016). The goal of this research study was to better understand male-identifying students and how they engage leadership.

Through the use of constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014), the theory Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation was created and provides researchers and practitioners a leadership development roadmap for male-identifying students. The key finding of this research study, represented in the core concept, is that male-identifying students must develop a leadership identity and identify the motivation for leadership to ultimately pursue it. Components of how male students develop a leadership identity are similar to the findings of Komives et al. (2005). The similarities are in the findings that male-identifying students need external support, learn leadership from others, and need to build a level of self-confidence. However, my findings surrounding motivation and why male-identifying students pursue leadership initially distinguish it from Komives et al.’s model, and others like it.

Secondly, the finding that the Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation theory takes place as a result of male-identifying students progressing through a developmental step process is also significant. The significance of this finding is twofold; first, it not only identifies the process on a core-category level of how male students move toward leadership, but it also provides insight into the multiple subprocesses that take place in each categorical process. The specificity of each step provides not only an in-depth understanding of the process but also allows for easy application in practical ways, such as leadership training and leadership curriculum development.

This research journey has been challenging, eye-opening, and inspiring. Doing this research has provided growth opportunities throughout, ranging from insights learned in the interviewing process to being reminded of how amazing male-identifying students are at caring for their campus and the students on it. I am thankful for this research opportunity, but I realize that it is only the start of all that can and needs to be learned about the male-identifying students on college campuses. The following statement by Daris does a great job of summarizing the student leadership journey as well as my feelings about leadership research:

[Leadership] is long and ongoing, and I don't think it's an ever-ending journey. I mean, there's always things that are gonna come up, what the future's gonna hold, and how its gonna shape you as a person. I think that's another thing I like about leadership, is that it constantly helps me to grow as a person. And, you know, the possibilities are endless.

To everyone who works with student leaders, be inspired in knowing that the leadership development journey is truly a never-ending journey that not only shapes the students in our care but continually shapes us as well.

Chapter Summary

Discussed in this chapter were the varying levels of impact that perception can have on students and professional staff, the significant implications resulting from the identified substantive theory, the “now what” implications for practice, and suggestions for further research. As evidenced, the substantive theory identified has not only provided a starting point for furthering knowledge on male-identifying students, but it also provides some suggested ways to use the theory to evaluate and serve undergraduate male-identifying students.

The process in which male-identifying students pursue leadership is multidimensional and is comprised of varying experiences, genuine relationships, believing in oneself, and ultimately finding a motivation. This research study successfully answered the original guiding questions that asked:

1. How do undergraduate male students perceive leadership while in college?
2. What is the process in which undergraduate male students decide to pursue leadership positions while in college?

In regard to the first question, this study identified four perception categories from the data that consist of leadership as a way for personal advancement, leadership as a vehicle for altruism, leadership challenges self-esteem, and the negative perceptions of leadership by peers. These four focused categories are comprised of concepts that were

identified through the study and provide a rich context for understanding perceptions of leadership.

The second question provided the spark for the substantive theory that was constructed, consisting of the following six processes: Being Encouraged Toward Leadership (Step 1), Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability (Step 2), Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept (Step 3), Identifying Motivations for Leadership (Step 4), Pursuing Leadership (Step 5), and Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept “Snow Ball Effect” (Step 6). In addition to furthering the theoretical understanding of undergraduate male students, the findings also provide an outline on how to implement and utilize the theory in practice, all of which begin to lay a much-needed foundation of information regarding male student leadership development (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Haber, 2012; Komives et al., 2011; Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016).

Lastly, the theory, Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation, has established a foundation and springboard for more research. This study provides a window into male-identifying students’ leadership development and engagement process. However, as Chan and Drasgow (2001) found in their study, the influences and developing forces for students are multi-dimensional and, as such, need to be researched continually.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PROFESSIONAL STAFF OUTREACH EMAIL

Appendix A

Professional Staff Outreach Email

Hello.

My name is Josh Perkins and I am a current PhD student in Kent State's Higher Education Administration program. Likewise, I am also an associate director in Student Success Programs office. The reason I am contacting you is because I am currently working on my dissertation for my PhD that is looking at male college students' leadership identify development and specifically how male college students decide to pursue leadership positions while enrolled in college. The reason I am reaching out to you is because you work with and hire male student leaders. I am seeking to develop a potential interview list of male students who fall within each grade classification (first-year, second year(sophomore), third year (junior) and fourth year (senior). If you would be open to providing suggestions of male students who you think would be open to an interview and have held a leadership position in your area, I would greatly appreciate it. When I reach out to the students, it will only be to request their voluntary participation in an interview asking about their leadership experience, if they decline, they will not be contacted again.

Thank you for your consideration and help. If you have questions about my dissertation, please contact me at jperki12@kent.edu or by phone at 330-672-0982. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have questions about the rights of research participants, you may call the Kent State's IRB at 330-672-2704.

Best,

Josh

APPENDIX B

STUDENT OUTREACH EMAIL

Appendix B

Student Outreach Email

Hello!

My name is Josh Perkins and I am a current PhD student in Kent State's Higher Education Administration program. Likewise, I am also an associate director in Student Success Programs office. The reason I am contacting you is because I am currently working on my dissertation for my PhD that is looking at male college students' leadership identify development and specifically how male college students decide to pursue leadership positions while enrolled in college. I am contacting you as you have been identified as someone who has held a university student leadership position on campus.

This interview is completely voluntary and all information shared will be kept confidential. In regard to the interview format, I have a few questions that I will ask as prompts, but I am ultimately interested in your leadership experience and why you decided to pursue leadership positions while in college. If this is something that you would be willing to participate in just let me know and we can set up a time to meet. While the interviews will vary in the amount of time needed, I am asking participants to schedule 90 minutes, but we may be completed before the 90 minutes have passed. I have research consent form that I will have you read and sign at the time of the first interview. Additionally, to ensure that the data I collect is accurate, a follow up interview may be needed. This would be scheduled at a later time that is convenient for your schedule.

Again, if this is something that you would be interested participating in, please feel free to respond to this email, send me a text or call me on my cell phone at 330-280-xxxx.

If you have questions about my dissertation, please contact me at jperki12@kent.edu or by phone at 330-672-0982. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have questions about the rights of research participants, you may call the Kent State's IRB at 330-672-2704.

Thank you for your consideration and I hope to learn more about your leadership journey.

Josh Perkins

Doctoral Student, Higher Education Administration Program, Kent State University

APPENDIX C

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Appendix C

Individual Interview Protocol

Name:

Pseudonym:

Welcome

Hello _____! Thank you for your willingness to participate in my dissertation research project on male leadership. Does this time still work for you to participate in this interview?

Participant Consent Form

Before we get too far into this process, I want to give you a copy of my participant consent form for you to read over, ask any questions and sign if you are still ok to move forward with being a part of this research study. Do you have any questions regarding the study?

Brief Overview of the Study

As you read in the participant consent form this study is looking at the process in which male students engage leadership positions, hence why you are here today. You are a male-identifying student who holds or has held a university leadership position while in your undergraduate tenure. The goal of this interview is to better understand your leadership journey. For this interview, I have a list of guiding questions that I will ask, but if the questions spark another thought please feel free to share.

Interview Process

I will be audio recording our interview as well as taking notes. Are you ok with me recording our interview? The recorded interview and all subsequent information collected will be kept completely confidential and password protected. Once I type up the transcript of our interview conversation, I will give you a copy of the transcript for your review to be sure you feel it is accurate. Please know that if at any point in our interview you begin to feel uncomfortable, we will immediately stop the interview. Again, thank you for your willingness to participate.

Guiding Questions

1. Tell me about the earliest memory that you can recall that influenced your understanding of what it means to be a leader?
2. Describe all the leadership positions that you pursued and or held throughout high school.
 - a. Did these positions require you to fill out an application or participate in an interview?

3. If you pursued leadership opportunities in high school, what made you want to pursue the leadership positions?
 - a. Tell me about where your motivation came from specifically?
4. Tell me about how you developed your definition of leadership in high school?
5. In high school whom did you classify as a leader?
6. Did you have a mentor in high school? No
 - a. If so, in regard to leadership, what was most impactful about that relationship?
7. As a college student, describe all the leadership positions that you have pursued and or held.
 - a. Did these positions require you to fill out an application or participate in an interview?
 - b. Were the positions you held paid positions?
 - i. If they were paid, how much of a motivator to apply was the money?
8. Why have you decided to pursue leadership positions while in college?
 - a. Tell me about your friend group, how many of them are in leadership positions or have held a university-sanctioned position?
9. In what ways, if at all, has your definition of leadership changed from high school to college?
10. As a college student, who do you view as a leader?
11. Do you think it is easy or difficult for male students to get leadership positions on campus? Why or why not?
12. In the leadership positions, you have held while in college, please describe the various student demographics represented. Such as how many male, female and identifying students were hired for the position?
13. Tell me about how you have learned about leadership while in college?
14. Who or what has encouraged or discouraged you from pursuing leadership position(s) throughout your life?
 - a. In high school?
 - b. In college?
15. How do you believe the leadership positions you have held in college may impact your future after college?
16. When you need guidance or input on a decision, to whom do you talk?
17. Parent Question: Talk to me about your family structure? What type of household do you live in? Traditional? Who are you closer to?
18. Confidence Question: Talk to me about your confidence journey, have you always been confident? How did you become confident to pursue leadership?
19. At this moment in time, what is your definition of leadership?
20. What is your definition of a mentor? Do you have one?
21. If you have a mentor, either formal or informal, do you believe this person influenced your decision to pursue leadership in college? If so, how?
22. What has had the most impact on your development as a leader? Continuum 1 – 10

23. In your opinion, why do you believe male-identifying students pursue leadership positions in college? Inversely, what do you believe are some possible reasons why male students don't pursue leadership positions while in college?
24. What leadership development opportunities does your current college or university make available to you?
25. Tell me about what you believe you have gained by being in your various college leadership positions?
26. Do you have anything that you would like to share regarding your leadership journey that I may not have asked?

Concluding Remarks

This concludes the interview as we have discussed all my questions, do you have any questions for me? Again, thank you for sharing your leadership journey and if at any time you have questions about this study please feel free to reach out to me at jperki12@kent.edu or my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Stephen Thomas at sbthomas@kent.edu. At this time, I am going to stop recording and again, once this interview is transcribed, I will send it to you for review. In the event that a follow-up interview is warranted, I will reach out by email asking if there is a time that is convenient for you to meet.

APPENDIX D
CONSENT FORM

Appendix D

Consent Form



Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: The Journey of Male Undergraduate Students in Their Pursuit of Leadership While in College: A Grounded Theory

Principal Investigator: Dr. Stephen Thomas

Co-Investigator: Joshua Perkins

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to understand the process of how undergraduate male college students decide to pursue leadership positions while enrolled in a midsized mid-western public four-year institution. Currently, the research is limited on how undergraduate male students view their own leadership development while in undergrad. This study will help researchers and practitioners alike better understand how undergraduate male students view leadership and leadership development. In light of this understanding, higher education staff, faculty and administrators will be better equipped to meet the leadership development needs of undergraduate male students.

Procedures

This is a qualitative research study and interviews will serve as the primary mode of information gathering. Each individual that agrees to participate in this research study will be asked to take part in one 60-90 minute interview. The interview will focus on each student's leadership journey and all questions asked will be related to this topic.

Audio and Video Recording and Photography

Given that this is a qualitative grounded theory study and the data analysis is strictly drawn from the interviews, each interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be transcribed so that the information shared can be coded and utilized for theory development. The interviews and audio recordings will only be used for this research study and the audio recordings will not be shared in any other setting. Each participant's interview will be made available if the participant wishes to review the information shared in the interview.



Benefits

This research study will not benefit you directly. However, your participation in this study will help us better understand undergraduate male leadership development during college. While there may not be an immediate benefit to you, this research study has the potential to impact how higher education professionals engage and provide leadership development opportunities for undergraduate male students. In light of this, your participation can impact undergraduate male students in years to come.

Risks and Discomforts

Given the topic of this research study, leadership development, there are no anticipated risks beyond those encountered in everyday life.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Your interview and identity, such as name, year in college and the like will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Any identifying information will be kept in a secure location and only the researchers will have access to the data. Research participants will only be identified in any publication or presentation through the use of a pseudo name. All documents will be password protected and saved on an external hard drive, which will also hold all the interview information obtained for this research study. The hard drive will be locked up at all times unless being used by research staff. Upon completion of the research study all identifying information collected will be deleted.

Your research information may, in certain circumstances, be disclosed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research at Kent State University, or to certain federal agencies. Confidentiality may not be maintained if you indicate that you may do harm to yourself or others.

Compensation

There is no compensation being offered for participation in this research study.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact the principle investigator, Dr. Stephen Thomas at 330-672-0654 or the co-investigator, Joshua Perkins at 330-672-0982. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

**Consent Statement and Signature**

I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

Participant Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

MEMBER CHECKING OF TRANSCRIPTION

Appendix E

Member Checking of Transcription

Hello,

I hope this finds you well! As I promised at the end of our interview time, I wanted to provide you with a transcript of our interview. **There is nothing that you need to do**, as this is just part of my being transparent in the research process. If you would like to review the transcript feel free, and if you have any questions or concerns about the transcript please let me know.

Just for your knowledge, I used a transcription software program for the initial audio to text transcription, and then I confirmed and made corrections to the transcription by listening to our interview 1-2 times while reading the transcription.

After the transcript was completed, I then went through the transcript an additional 1-2 more times for the coding process. I coded the interviews initially word by word and then phrase by phrase. As a result of this process, themes, concepts, and the ultimate theory emerged from the interviews.

Again, if you have any questions or concerns about your transcript or the process please feel free to reach out to me or Dr. Stephen Thomas, the chair of my dissertation.

Thanks again!

Josh

APPENDIX F

MEMBER CHECKING OF SUBSTANTIVE THEORY

Appendix F

Member Checking of Substantive Theory

Hello!

I want to thank you again for your participation in my dissertation research study. I thoroughly enjoyed interviewing you and getting to know your leadership story.

I am happy to share that I have been making great progress in completing my dissertation since the last time that we met for our interview. A very important part of the grounded theory development process is member-checking. Member-checking is simply participant validation of the data and or theory developed. So, in this case, **I want to provide you with an opportunity to give your thoughts and feedback on the Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation theory that I have identified as a result of your interview in conjunction with the 18 other male-identifying students that participated in this study.**

This theory should do two things, 1) answer my study research question, “*what is the process in which undergraduate male students decide to pursue leadership*” and 2) this theory should encompass your leadership story as well as every participant’s story.

This is where you come in, please think about your leadership journey, and then specifically think about if this theory encompasses your journey to the point you pursued leadership while in college. If you are able and willing, I would greatly appreciate any thoughts you may have about the theory that I have come to as a result of the data collected. Even a simple “yes, this fits me or no it doesn’t and this is why would be great. Please keep in mind that this theory will be published and so, I want to be sure it is accurate and representative of your story and if it’s not, I need to know. ;))

Please look at the attachment that shows a concept map of the created theory.

If you would like more explanation of the theory as you look at the attachment, please keep reading. Also, if you have specific questions or would like to meet with me to talk about it just let me know!

Thanks again for your participation and input!

Josh

Theory explanation:

Connecting Leadership Identity and Motivation

The core of the theory includes 6 steps (boxes connected by the arrows, see the attached document), and then the branches connected to each of the core concepts of the theory are the components that make up the concept.

Step 1 to leadership pursuit: *Being Encouraged Toward Leadership* – In every leadership journey that was shared with me, there was an external force that served as a catalyst for the initial idea that one had the potential, ability, etc. to be a leader. For example, maybe you just grew up in an environment where you were told that you were a leader, or maybe you had someone shoulder tap you and ask you to step into a leadership position, or maybe you saw a peer in a leadership position and thought that because they could do you it could to, all external factors.

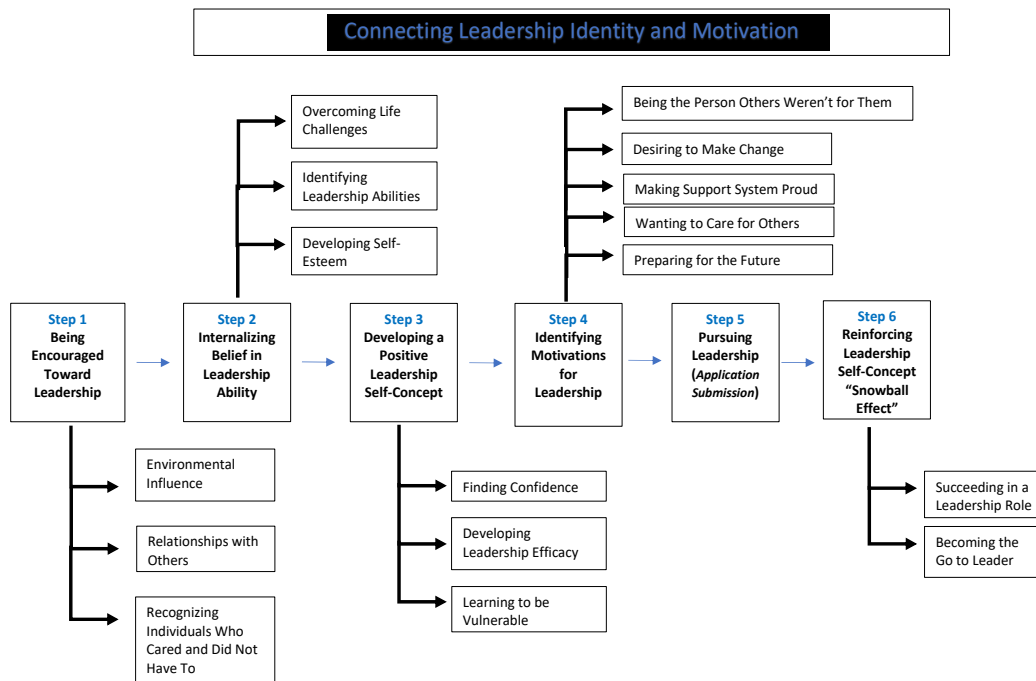
Step 2 to leadership pursuit: *Internalizing Belief in Leadership Ability* – Once the external catalyst has happened, then there is the internalizing step of the leadership belief. Meaning, even though someone else believes you have what it takes to be a leader, there was a theme that emerged noting that in each journey there was an internalizing moment where you believed or started to believe that, yes, “I do have leadership ability” that ultimately coincided with a positive self-esteem.

Step 3 to leadership pursuit: *Developing a Positive Leadership Self-Concept* - Self-concept is basically the combination of one’s internal belief about themselves and how others view them. In regard to this theory, *a positive leadership self-concept* is the culmination of steps one and two, and ultimately results in personal confidence, being secure in oneself, allows you to be vulnerable (willing to pursue leadership positions even if it’s not guaranteed that you will get it, as well as being willing to share your stories with others), and you are confident in your leadership abilities and knowledge (it’s like you have all the “how to” knowledge and now you are ready to put it into practice).

Step 4 to leadership pursuit: *Identifying Motivations for Leadership* – Motivation emerged as a key step in the leadership process, as every person interviewed for this study was able to articulate a motivation for why they decided to actually apply for a leadership position. This is a key step as many of those interviewed also shared about friends that have leadership ability, but just don’t have the motivation to put in the time and energy needed for a leadership position. Some of the reoccurring motivations included wanting to make others proud, see the position helping in the future (maybe for other college leadership positions or for getting a job one day), almost every person interviewed said that their motivation was to help others realize their potential, make positive change, or to just simply care for others. Also, there were a number of interviews that noted that their motivation was to be the leader that they didn’t have in their life.

Step 5 to leadership pursuit: *Pursuing Leadership (Application Process)* – This is the ultimate goal, male students actually submitting a leadership application and is the culmination of steps 1-4.

Step 6 to leadership pursuit: *Reinforcing Leadership Self-Concept “Snowball Effect”* – The belief reinforcement, or what I labeled as the “snowball effect”, is the step after the leadership application process and or leadership experience. In almost all the interviews, each participant talked about how getting smaller leadership positions many times led to the pursuit of “bigger” leadership positions. For example, let’s say you were the secretary of on an exec board, if you had a positive experience, were affirmed that you did a great job, and that you have good leadership skills, you were likely to pursue the president position or a leadership position that in your mind, was a step up. However, this stage could also be negative. For example, let’s say a male student applied for a leadership position but didn’t get it, this can essentially send the student back to steps one, two or three. Meaning that the student may need to have a positive external voice again to encourage them, and or the student may need to reevaluate their internal belief and motivation.



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