THE LEADER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK WOMEN IN COLLEGE: A GROUNDED THEORY

by

REBECCA LEE SHETTY

(Under the Direction of Laura A. Dean)

ABSTRACT

Through this constructivist grounded theory study, I explored how Black women in college have developed their identities as leaders. Through analysis of the conversations with participants, I developed a theoretical model for this leader identity development process titled the Black Undergraduate Women Leader Identity model (BUWLI model). Data collection occurred in the form of individual interviews with 11 women from one college and one university located in the Southeast region of the United States. Through these conversations, participants discussed the intersection of race, gender, and leadership how they learned about leadership, and how they came to see themselves as leaders.

Data analysis occurred using grounded theory methodology, paying particular attention to coding, memo-writing, theoretical sensitivity, and member checking. I completed initial line-by-line coding before moving to focused coding, through which I found 62 distinct codes. Next, I condensed these to 14 themes through theoretical coding. Participant experiences were fairly consistent related to leader identity development and each described preparing to lead, learning to lead, leader identity and its complexities, and applying leadership (the four developmental steps of the BUWLI model). They also described at length the contexts in which they developed

their identities as leaders including oppression and discrimination as well as being influenced by the mothering behaviors of their mothers or female caretakers.

INDEX WORDS: Leader Identity, Leader Identity Development, Leadership Identity Development, Black Women, Black Undergraduate Women, Undergraduate, Identity Development, Student Development, Leadership

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# DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to every Black woman who has ever felt less than, who has been told they are unworthy of leadership. To every Black woman who has risen as a leader anyway out of necessity, heart, ambition, or courage. To these women, with whom I cannot identify but whom I deeply respect and champion, this work is for you.

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*The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; Do not be discouraged.* -Deuteronomy 31:8

To my God who is bigger and more faithful that I could have ever imagined, this work is for Your glory. This work is a testament that one can dream big, accomplish big goals, and aspire for more even in the midst of stress and chaos. I give all praise, glory, and honor to a God who has never failed me, never given up on me, and continues to give me strength.

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To my parents, who came from little and have given me much. For every sacrifice you

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marvel at your words.  You will live forever in my heart.  I would follow you in a heartbeat wherever you led me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

As higher education professionals, part of our role is to develop the future leaders of our world. Not only should we be familiar with leadership as a field, but we should also be interested and invested in the way students experience leadership education and leadership development and come to see themselves as leaders, if at all. While this sounds like a simple charge, it is actually quite complex. To understand the leadership development of our current student populations assumes we understand how leadership intersects with the existing identities of our diverse student populations. Unfortunately, literature shows a significant gap remains in the leadership research related to various populations.

Many of the mission statements of institutions ranging from Ivy League universities to large, public colleges include statements about developing future leaders, ethical leaders, or engaged civic leaders, or addressing leadership in some capacity. The world has become increasingly complex with problems ranging from healthcare, to clean water, to war, to clean energy sources, and one of the roles of higher education is to develop the future citizens of the world who can make change in such a complex and ever changing world (Bennis, 2007; Gallagher, Marshall, Pories, & Daughety, 2014; Kodama & Dugan, 2013; Ramaley, 2014; Wilson, 2013). Gallagher, Marshall, Pories, and Daughety (2014) stated,

> Institutions of higher education are ideal settings for training leaders. Recent research has shown (Hu, 2011) that both intentional leadership training opportunities in the undergraduate curriculum as well as community engagement experiences can positively

> influence leadership qualities. In addition activities associated with campus life and extra-curricular activities also foster leadership skills. (p. 47)

Institutions of higher education can and should serve as training grounds for future leaders who are able to use their talents and skills to facilitate social change.

In addition to training leaders to improve our society, some would argue that part of the purpose of higher education is for students to be better prepared to enter the job market and to acquire a suitable position post-graduation. In addition to other soft and hard skills, leadership ability is among the top ranked qualities employers are looking for in new employees. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers' (NACE) Job Outlook 2018 survey, leadership is the fourth quality out of 20 employers are looking for in student resumes, with 72.6% of survey respondents indicating leadership is an important quality in new hires. In addition, having held a leadership position in college was the fourth leading influential attribute that would set a candidate apart from others when prospective employers compare resumes. Having a leadership position ranks higher than eight other possible attributes that might set a student apart (Gray & Koncz, 2017). Not only should institutions of higher education be concerned about developing future leaders for civic and social change, but practically speaking, employers are also seeking leadership qualities among students.

If institutions of higher education are to train leaders for both social change and the practical function of employment, administrators must consider how best to employ leadership development and education practices among their diverse student bodies. According to the most recent National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) projections of enrollment in postsecondary education, by 2022 the number of Black students will have increased by 26% since 2011. This percentage is just shy of the 27% increase of Latinx students from 2011 to

2022. While Black students may see increased enrollment in post-secondary education over the next several years, Black students still face discrimination, microaggressions, and oppressive systems, particularly when attending primarily White institutions (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009; Leath & Chavous, 2018; Payne & Suddler, 2014). With Black students as the second largest growing population among institutions of higher education or post-secondary education, and with Black women enrolling at higher rates than Black men (Payne & Suddler, 2014), administrators should be concerned with understanding and providing strong services for their Black female population.

This study did not seek to contribute to the research on professional competencies or knowledge and skills acquisition. However, this study does contribute to the literature by providing additional knowledge for practitioners to use as they seek to provide culturally competent and relevant services for students. Developing, researching, and seeking out tools for best practice is critical as practitioners engage more and more diverse student populations. As such, it is important to consider ongoing professional development, competencies, and social justice related to both leadership education and the student affairs profession as a whole.

Currently, the student affairs profession has developed specific competencies that practitioners can refer to when training and preparing to work individually and collectively to serve unique and diverse student populations. In 2009, the two largest associations for professionals in student affairs, ACPA-College Student Educators International and NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, developed a list of core competencies for professionals in the field. This list was edited in 2015. Currently, student learning and development, advising and supporting, and social justice and inclusion are three of ten

competencies directly related to the leadership development of Black women and working with Black women generally.

Of particular importance is the competency of social justice and inclusion. While the other two competencies still require practitioners to consider issues of equity, diversity and inclusion, having a specific competency for social justice and inclusion demonstrates the critical nature of understanding this area. According to the competency description, practitioners can "incorporate social justice and inclusion competencies into their practice through seeking to meet the needs of all groups, equitably distributing resources, raising social consciousness, and repairing past and current harms on campus communities" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 30). While little research exists related to the competencies necessary for leadership educators specifically, it is assumed that leadership educators, like other student affairs practitioners, should have multicultural competence, the ability to work with diverse populations, and knowledge of relevant developmental theories reflected in these ACPA and NASPA core competencies (Wilson, 2013).

As campuses become more diverse, campus administrators must recognize the need to cater to a wide range of needs related to campus engagement. Approaching education both inside and outside the classroom with Eurocentric views and catering to the privileged does a great disservice to students from a wide variety of student populations (Harper & Quaye, 2009). If leadership and leadership development are a goal for institutions of higher education, higher education administrators and faculty should be prepared to develop each and every student who walks through the doors of their institution. Students of all identities should have the same opportunity to experience excellent leadership development during their collegiate experience.

## Statement of the Problem

Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011) argued that leadership is not merely a relationship between leaders and followers but that this relationship takes place within a social group context. Because of this, individual leader qualities, while important, are not the sole predictor of leadership success. Aspiring leaders must consider the influence of group processes and how individual identities contribute, or do not contribute, to a group identity for which there is buy-in and commitment from followers. If followers feel a strong sense of group identity, they are more likely to follow the leader. If the opposite is true, the group may fall apart or fail to function well. This context is critical as we explore leader identity development. Both students and educators must explore how race, gender, leader, and other identities intersect related to leadership and to the ability to lead others well. For Black women, whose racial and gender identities may not be the same as those they are leading, creating a strong social group identity may be challenging. In some cases, it may be impossible. Because of the oppression Black women experience as leaders, they may have more difficulty assuming leadership roles, being offered leadership development opportunities, and having the opportunity to explore *leader* as an identity. Simply put, Black women may struggle in their attempt to become leaders. More research is needed on this topic if administrators are to assist Black women in navigating possible volatile group environments both in college and beyond.

In addition to the need for better understanding of Black women and their experiences with leadership, a primary motivation for this study was the fact that Black women have been forgotten in academic research. As Hall, Garrett-Akinsanya, and Hucles (2007) so eloquently stated, "Since Black women are classified as 'other,' they are not the focus of any movement's objectives" (p. 281). Research in a number of academic fields has failed to tell the story of Black

women. Particularly in the field of leadership, research has focused on White men and women, which is problematic (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Christo-Baker, 2012; Parker, 2005). Sadly, when the research does include Black women, it is typically included in feminist literature broadly (Stanley, 2009), "and as such does not contribute to the understanding, or lack of understanding, of the intersectionality of race and gender that African American women face in their leadership development" (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 49). Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) argued that leadership research needs to consider intersectionality, particularly related to women of color.

Not only are Black women mostly absent from leadership research and literature, an overwhelming lack of literature exists as related to leader identity development and the leadership experiences of Black women in college. According to Domingue (2015),

> Specifically, studies of race and college student leadership typically do not include an analysis of gender identity differences, and studies of gender and leadership do not include racial or ethnic identity differences. In both of these contexts, the experiences of black women college student leaders, who have a particular social location as a minoritized social identity group in terms of race and gender, are not taken into consideration. (p. 455)

Significant bodies of literature exist addressing Black male students (Goings, 2017; Harris III & Harper, 2014; Harris III & Harper, 2015; Jenkins, 2012; Strayhorn & Devita, 2010), experiences of Black students at predominantly White institutions (Cody, 2017; Jones & Reddick, 2017; Karkouti, 2017; Leath & Chavous, 2017; Leath & Chavous, 2018), and Black student persistence and retention (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Harper & Newman, 2016; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Wood & Palmer, 2013). Little research exists discussing leadership, particularly

pertaining to Black female leadership. If we are to develop all populations of students as aforementioned, and if we are to serve students through strong engagement opportunities on our college campuses, we are currently at a significant deficit when understanding the explicit elements of how Black women develop their understanding of leadership and leader identity.

While other populations have also been pushed to the margin, the focus of this study was to shed light on the experiences of Black women related to leadership and how Black women, specifically, develop their identities as leaders. Because I believe leader identity is radically shaped by other identities, I define "Black" as African-American or those who claim the United States as their country of origin. I believe cultural and nationality differences may greatly influence attitudes, beliefs, and practices related to leadership. Therefore, to keep the scope of this study focused, I chose to study Black or African American women who come from a United States context.

## Definition of "Leader Identity"

This study specifically addressed the development of "leader identity," which I distinguish from "leadership education" or "leadership development" broadly. Leadership education and leadership development are larger umbrellas under which leader identity falls. Leader identity development is merely one aspect of leadership development. Developing one's personal identity, and eventually an identity as a leader, is an important aspect of becoming a strong leader, along with other developmental activities such as learning about leadership theories, practicing specific skills, and navigating groups and systems (Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, & Wagner, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2018).

I focused on "leader identity" specifically because of the critical role it plays in broader leadership development. Developing one's personal identity as a leader facilitates the emergence

of behaviors necessary for strong leadership. For example, interpersonal skills and decision-making abilities are two of the most critical human functions associated with identity. Research literature suggests that these two functions are also closely associated with leadership (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009). Throughout this study, "leader identity" refers to "a student's own theory about who he or she is as a leader and how the student thinks of himself or herself and his or her role in relation to the world" (Guthrie et al., 2013, pp. 30-31).

For the purposes of this study, the term "leader identity" deviates from the term "leadership identity" used by Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Owen (2005) in their original work on leadership identity development in college students. I feel "leader" more accurately reflects the notion of identity by mere semantics. *Leader* connotes a type of person who enacts behaviors, attitudes, knowledge, and skills. *Leadership* connotes a broader field of study, a mass of literature and research, something less descriptive of a single person.

## Significance

At this time, a model or theory does not exist to explain or describe the leader identity development of Black women in college. Currently, the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model developed by Komives et al. (2005) is the single existing model for leadership identity development among college students broadly. While Komives et al. claim to have used a diverse population for theory development, eight of the thirteen participants identified as White and eight identified as men. Both students of color and women were underrepresented in the initial grounded theory. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) stated, "although men and leadership have been studied extensively, women, especially women of color, have been largely ignored in this research and theory development until recently" (p. 171). The LID model has garnered the attention of many leadership educators; however, it is also not clearly widely transferable or

applicable to sets of diverse populations, and additional research is needed that is applicable to and specific to Black women. A newer, second model exists for the leader identity development of women in college (McKenzie, 2018), yet, again this model does not specifically account for racial differences.

Theories of leadership have evolved over time, as has the literature on leader identity. The most current research suggests that leadership is not only a blend of characteristics and skills but is also an identity to be formed and developed (Komives et al. 2011; Priest & Middleton, 2016; Yeager & Callahan, 2016; Zheng & Muir, 2015). In their study reconceptualizing the model of multiple dimensions of identity, Abes, Jones, and McEwan (2007) addressed the evolution of intersectionality and its impact, particularly on women of color. They described identities as a simultaneous occurrence rather than a hierarchical occurrence. Individuals are their fullest selves when all identities are being recognized and interwoven. Race cannot be separated from gender; gender cannot be separated from race. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) addressed the formation of leadership and its connection to race and gender: "Because leadership is a social process, the formation of self-identity, social identity, group identity, and gender and ethnic differences may be particularly important" (p. 175). The present study was an attempt to give race and gender the spotlight when exploring the leader identity development of Black women in college.

## Purpose and Research Questions

In an attempt to further the work of Komives et al. (2005), a number of researchers have chosen to expand upon their initial grounded theory. Many of these researchers have been interested in the applicability of this specific model to various identities. Studies have been conducted applying the LID model to students of color, women, Hispanic women, and LGBT

students (Beaty, 2014; Onorato, 2010; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). This study, on the other hand, did not simply apply existing LID model concepts to Black women; rather I sought to contribute to the body of leader identity development research by developing a brand-new model for Black women. The purpose of this grounded theory was to identify the experiences by which Black women in college come to adopt and understand their identity as a leader. Not only did this study extend beyond the work of Komives et al., but this new model is specific and directly related to the experiences of Black women and how these experiences shape Black women's leader identity development independent of the LID model.

While the LID model provides a basic framework from which leadership educators can conceptualize leader identity, further research is necessary to address leader identity development cross-culturally and among various identities. Therefore, the following questions guided this study to explore the specific leader identity development for Black women in college:

1. How have Black women in college come to understand their identities as leaders?
2. What experiences have contributed to the leader identity development of Black women in college?

By considering the importance of intersectionality and the multiple dimensions of identity, I conducted this study through theoretical and methodological lenses that lend themselves to a rich exploration of Black women in college as they make sense of their leader identity.

## Theoretical Framework

As a White woman, with Latinx heritage, completing academic research with Black women as participants, I felt as though I was "merely a visitor, interested in learning more about the group of which [I am] not a part" (Greene, 2014, p. 3). I will never have the lived experience of facing the intersectionality of two marginalized identities, gender and race. Domingue (2015)

stated, “The ways in which black women have had access to, define, and practice leadership at colleges and universities have been based upon their social location within multiple systems of oppression where widely accepted notions of leadership do not fully capture their experiences” (pp. 457-458). For many Black women, these two identities, race and gender, cannot and will not be separated. To address this, I turn to Womanism.

The term Womanism was first defined by Alice Walker in her 1983 work *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose.* Womanism is based on and rooted in the life experiences of all women of color. According to Phillips (2006), Womanism has five primary tenets; it is antioppressionist, vernacular, nonideological, communitarian, and spiritualized. Womanism addresses social change and the elimination of all forms of oppression, not just sexism. Thus, while Womanism addresses sexism and race, it also addresses class, sexuality, and the intersection of various identities and oppressions (Phillips, 2006). It is important to note that Womanism is not merely a form of feminism. Womanism is a response to feminism’s inherent Eurocentrism and focus on White women. Womanism responds to feminism by considering how intersecting identities result in varying types of oppression that extend beyond sexism (Phillips, 2006).

Womanism as a theoretical framework heavily influenced my interest in exploring the experiences of womanhood, ethnicity, and culture that shape leader identity development. Womanism served as my frame of reference for understanding the importance of the intersectionality of identities and the fight against oppression experienced by Black women. As a social justice advocate, I found that using Womanism as a theoretical framework was a way I could honor the voices and perspectives of women who cannot separate their womanhood from

their race or visa versa. It was my hope that by doing so, I could bring my authentic, White self to the table, while also seeking to hear the authentic voices of my participants.

Two specific tenets of Womanism directly related to my research. I chose Womanism as a theoretical framework for this study given a) its specific emphasis on the vernacular and b) on being communitarian. I approached my grounded theory research from a constructivist point of view in which my participants can and do build their own realities (Hays & Singh, 2012). In an effort to help amplify their story and to develop a model of their development, I was interested in the vernacular tenet of Womanism, the everyday stories of my participants. As a vernacular theory, Womanism gives individuals permission to feel confident in their imperfections and to see their very lives as every day activism (Phillips, 2006). This theoretical tenet resonates with my understanding of college students as they develop cognitively and emotionally as leaders, developing self-awareness, identifying strengths and growing edges, and learning to use their voices to create positive change in their groups or organizations (Guthrie, Osteen, Bertrand Jones, & Hu, 2013).

A number of current, popular leadership theories used in college leadership education emphasize the importance of self-awareness, understanding diverse identities, promoting inclusion, and working through challenging circumstances (Domingue, 2015). Womanism's communitarian tenet suggests that women of color can and do promote healing among and between people from different groups and between people and their environments (Phillips, 2006). I used the communitarian tenet as a framework from which to understand how these women may choose to relate to others and how this informs or impacts their leader identity development. My interview protocol specifically asks about relationships between participants and those they are leading, and participants spoke at length about leading others and serving their

communities. This is a direct correlation to this communitarian tenet and helped me understand the role of relationships and their level of importance to Black women in leadership as I created a holistic model of leader identity development for Black women in college.

According to Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, and Wagner (2011), it is important to consider how a leadership identity integrates seamlessly into the existing sense of self for college students. As college students develop their identities as leaders, various life experiences, culture, gender, ethnicity, and interactions with peers impact this process. Particularly for students with marginalized racial or ethnic identities, ethnic culture plays a role in their identity development as leaders (Komives et al., 2005). Similarly, the influence of gender on leader identity development cannot be ignored. At its core, Womanism paves the way for paying homage to cultural influences that impact women of color by being "ethnically situated" to value and to "harmonize" differences across diverse peoples (Phillips, 2006). The recognition that various identities intersect to impact life experiences is a key tenet of Womanism. Womanism actually critiques forms of single-issue resistance and how the single-issue perspective does not take into account that all oppression is rooted in a larger system of power and domination that affects all marginalized identities (Phillips, 2006).

While all women of color are invited into the philosophies of Womanism, Womanism has its roots in Black culture and history. As such, any person, including other women of color, wishing to adopt this theoretical framework must first explore their own racism and bias, particularly against Black peoples and culture. According to the Womanist philosophy, it is imperative that one's own ethnic and cultural background be explored and addressed (Phillips, 2006). As a White woman, I recognized that I tread a fine line using Womanism as a theoretical framework. I am neither Black nor do I identify as a woman of color. However, because my

research is grounded in social justice advocacy, I found it inappropriate to use feminism as a theoretical framework due to its lack of emphasis on women of color.

Particularly for this study, I found it imperative to use Womanism as a theory rooted in social change, a theory that addresses ethnic and gender inequality and respects the cultures of all women in a fight against White supremacy. As a White woman, I understand that I am inherently racist. I must combat years of socialization on a daily basis, checking any tendency to discriminate or unfairly judge those around me. As I have been educated over time through both graduate school and my doctoral program, I have been enlightened to the power of practicing allyship. I do not believe I can give voice to marginalized women as they have their own voices, strong and powerful. However, I do believe it is my calling and a privilege to use my Whiteness to amplify the voices of women of color at the appropriate time and place, and I believed this research was an opportunity to do so.

While I have provided context on why I selected Womanism as a theoretical framework of choice, I want to briefly address why I did not choose another theory, particularly why I did not choose Critical Race Theory. While Critical Race Theory might serve as a powerful framework for similar studies, this study did not seek to solely examine the role of race in the cultural, societal, and developmental experiences of my Black female participants. Race is only one point of interest, and the role intersectionality plays makes Critical Race Theory less suitable for this study.

Womanism focuses on how individuals experience all areas of their life through a lens of intersectionality. The intersectionality component of Womanism becomes one of the most important aspects of this study because if and as participants shared about other identities beyond race, beyond gender, these had to be equally considered. Womanism allows for the space,

consideration, and discussion of the varying identities women hold and how these come together to form a whole person, informing their life experiences. Participants did ultimately speak to identities as daughters, siblings, being on the LGBT spectrum, being poor, and being multiethnic. While a primary aspect, race is not the only consideration for my model, and I wanted to leave space for other identities to shine through as they felt important to participants. Other identities could possibly have been more important than race to their leader identity development, and Womanism allows the space for this deviation from race in ways that Critical Race Theory may not have. In addition, Womanism touches on critical aspects of the Black female experience that cannot be overstated. For example, Womanism addresses the importance of community and family, and the ways in which this could have shown up in the data would have greatly influenced the outcome of my model and certainly did.

## Summary

While my study was rooted in personal interest and inquiry, this study was also an attempt to meet a demonstrated need for campus administrators and leadership educators. Not only was this study an attempt to address a racial gap related to leadership literature, but I believe studying leader identity is the first step to employing effective leadership education. I find it significant that existing models do not address leader identity development for students of color, particularly Black women. Without understanding if and how students come to see themselves as leaders, we cannot begin to assume which educational practices or tactics will be most effective for leadership development. Institutions of higher education appear to be touting their role in sending engaged leaders into the world. Employers are seeking leaders to enter their businesses. If this is the case, university employees and student affairs practitioners must rise to the charge to develop an increasingly diverse population of students into the young leaders of

tomorrow.  Because of the complex nature of understanding Black women and their leader identity development, my next chapter delves into several bodies of literature, weaving them together, to paint a picture and create context for my study.

# CHAPTER 2

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study was an attempt to conceptualize and theorize the leader identity development of Black women in college. My research was rooted in and predicated on the fact that my participants are Black and women and in college. These three factors invoke a complex web of understanding. One must ask about the nature of Black women in college and how their leader identity development is influenced by their identities of being Black, of being women, and of being in the developmental context of early adulthood. A single source does not exist that can help us understand the nature of leader identity development in Black women. While this study aimed to do so, we must first consider individual areas of development that provide a backdrop for such a niche issue.

I begin this chapter by describing how seemingly unconnected bodies of literature – student development theory, intersectionality, leader identity development models, and Black women and leadership - weave together to paint a backdrop for this study. I then individually discuss each of these areas of literature in depth related to Black women in college. Because this study focuses on women in college, the first section of this literature review includes numerous student development theories often used in higher education and student affairs. These theories can be applied to Black women and may help us understand the larger picture of human development that frames identity development. Second, I describe and explore intersectionality as it is the intersection of race and gender that I was most interested in as possible factors influencing leader identity development. Third, I describe existing research related to leader

identity development including relevant models. Finally, I give a brief overview of how Black women have experienced and continue to experience leadership today.

## Overview

Student development theory is used within higher education to understand the various aspects of development among college students. These theoretical models and frameworks help administrators better understand students' identity, psychosocial, moral, racial and cultural, sexual, gender, and other development during late adolescence and early adulthood (Patton, Renn, Guido, Quaye, Evans, & Forney, 2016). Individually and combined, these theories provide a basis of understanding for how human development occurs. While many of these theories were developed by studying White men and with Eurocentric standards (Jones & Stewart, 2016; Marcia, 1966; Onorato, 2010; Patton et al., 2016), they still prove useful when considering human development broadly. Related to Black women, I argue that psychosocial and racial identity development models in particular may be used in combination to understand how Black women develop a sense of self, not only in terms of belief systems, purpose, and personal relationships, but how each of these is also impacted by race and racial culture.

The concept of intersectionality bolsters the use of and the knowledge provided by student development theories. Intersectionality helps us better understand the interlocking of racial and gender identities and how these must be considered together to gain more holistic picture of possible life experiences, particularly for Black women (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis 2010). Intersectionality takes us a step further than traditional student development theories by explicitly acknowledging how various social identities come together to shape an individual's life experiences (Bowleg, 2013; Creswell, 1989). However, intersectionality and student development theories can also work in tandem. Student development theories shed light on

broader elements of identity that then inform other areas of development for people of color and other marginalized populations. Intersectionality requires us to consider how these broader elements of identity weave together to create complex, ever-changing personal identities. For example, a young Black woman may experience traditional psychosocial development of identifying and developing a core set of values and beliefs systems. However, these values and belief systems may be influenced by her ongoing racial identity development as she considers how her Blackness and her Black community inform those values. It is almost impossible to consider a time and space in which an individual's intersecting identities would not affect their development.

I provide a more in-depth review of student development theories and the concept of intersectionality to lay a foundation of assumptions from which I sought to develop my own theory about Black women and their identity development as leaders. In addition to understanding theories of development, it is also important to recognize where this study fits into the picture of extant literature related to leader identity and leader identity development. The concept of a leader identity is not new but seems to have garnered particular attention over the past couple of decades. While we can certainly understand that individuals take on leadership *roles* it is not as common in day-to-day practice to consider individuals assuming a leader *identity*. However, existing research suggests leaders are most effective when *leader* has been subsumed into their existing sense of self-concept, or in other words, their identity (Guthrie, Osteen, Bertrand Jones, & Hu, 2013; Hall, 2004; Ibarra, Snook, & Ramo, 2010). The identity of a leader can be impacted by racial identity, gender identity, class identity, and additional identities. Concurrently, racial, gender, class, and other identities can be impacted by one's identity as a leader.

In addition to understanding the concept of a "leader identity," it is also important to explore what existing leader identity development models exist. This entire study was directly influenced by Komives et al.'s (2005) Leadership Identity Development (LID) model. I have always been interested in how college students develop their leader identity. When looking at the LID model with a critical lens, I sought to learn more about the process of leader identity development for non-White populations. When digging further into the literature, I found that the LID model is not the only leader identity development model; however, it is one of only two models explicitly grounded in the college student experience.

By understanding the current landscape of leader identity development and existing models, we can place young, developing Black women into the picture and begin to explore deeper connections between Black women and leadership. To provide a final piece of necessary context, I explore how Black women have experienced leadership, the oppression they face related to leadership, and how Black women have forged strong leadership skills and practices over time. Understanding a brief historical context and the current climate for Black women and leadership demonstrates the importance of formalizing a model that can help describe how leader identity development is utterly unique to this population. Existing models do not take into account the oppression, discrimination, and challenges Black women face as they work their way towards not only becoming leaders but towards seeing themselves as such.

Weaving these pieces of literature together provides us with a solid understanding of how Black women develop their identities, of existing work that exists on leader identity and leader identity development, and of the landscape of leadership for Black women. With the pieces of the puzzle now before us, I describe in detail each of these elements to provide a clear narrative in which to root the work of determining how Black women in college formulate and develop a

leader identity. For college students, specifically, developing a leader identity is related to how they conceptualize themselves as leaders and to how they weave a leader identity into a matrix with their already existing identities such as race, class, or gender (Komives et al., 2011). The following literature review provides a baseline from which to understand how *leader* may be woven into this identity matrix for Black female college students.

## Student Development Theory

According to Guthrie, Osteen, Bertrand Jones, and Hu (2013), "Understanding how students develop leader identity and capacity is fundamental to our ability to meet students where they are in the developmental cycle while challenging and supporting their leadership growth" (Guthrie, Osteen, Bertrand Jones, & Hu, 2013, p. 30). According to Guthrie et al. (2013), leadership is rooted in identity. Because of this, one must explore identity development broadly to fully understand how leadership fits into a larger picture. As this study specifically focused on the experience of college students, I briefly address several identity development models commonly used in higher education. I begin with a brief overview of Erickson's (1959/1980) theory of identity development. I then turn to Marcia's (1966/1980) and Josselson's (1987/1998) theories specifically related to the identity development of young adults and women, both of which were informed by Erickson's work. These theories may help higher education professionals broadly understand the development of students as we seek to help them develop leader identities.

### Erickson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

Erickson's (1959/1980) stages of psychosocial development provide the hallmark foundation for identity development in psychology and education (Patton et al., 2016). Erikson developed eight stages of development, the first four of which address childhood and adolescent

development, the last four of which address young adulthood and adulthood. The stages of Erikson's theory most relevant to college students are stage five, identity versus role confusion, covering ages approximately 13 to 19 years, and stage six, intimacy versus isolation, covering ages approximately 20 to 40 years. In stage five, young adults are beginning to define their core beliefs, values, and goals in life. During this phase, individuals begin reconciling how they see themselves versus how others see them. In stage six, young adults and adults work towards creating positive and meaningful relationships with others (Erikson, 1959/1980).

**Marcia's Ego-Identity Statuses**

Marcia's (1966/1980) work expanded on Erickson's fourth stage, identity versus identity confusion, giving greater emphasis to the role of crisis in identity development. Marcia's work was also an attempt to empirically confirm or reject Erickson's stages for an adolescent population (Karkouti, 2014). Marcia developed four identity statuses, all emphasizing two critical elements of identity formation for young adults: exploration and commitment. Exploration refers to the notion that adolescents must "relinquish one's parents as psychosexual objects, relinquish childhood ideology based on one's position as a 'taker,' and relinquish the fantasized possibilities of multiple, glamorous life styles" (Marica, 1980, p. 160). Commitment refers to "attaching ownership to pronounced choices, values, and goals…Individuals who have solidified their commitments have made conscious decisions about which they are confident and optimistic" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 52). Marcia's (1980) four statuses demonstrate the ways in which a young adult balances and compromises exploration and commitment. These four statuses are foreclosure, moratorium, identity achievement, and diffusion.

In the foreclosure status, individuals rely on parents and authorities as sources of knowledge, goal setting, and values. Individuals easily accept the information being provided to

them; therefore, they experience commitment without crisis to their identity. In the moratorium status, individuals experience crisis as they begin to question authority and sources of knowledge while not yet committing to new ways of thinking, new values, or new life goals. In the identity achievement status, individuals have explored various identity options and made strong commitments to an internal set of values and beliefs. In this status, individuals may actually experience increased crisis as they are more willing to continue to explore who they are and who they might want to be while still being guided by a core set of principles. Finally, in the diffusion status, individuals neither experience crisis nor commitment to an identity. These individuals seem flexible and adaptable but typically struggle developing meaningful relationships or identifying their core values and beliefs. Ultimately, the hope is that college students would work towards and reach identity achievement.

**Josselson's Identity Theory for Women**

Josselson (1987/1998) wanted to explore the identity formation in women, specifically. She expanded on the work of Marcia by transforming his four statuses from foreclosure, moratorium, identity achievement, and diffusion into four pathways, guardians, searchers, pathmakers, and drifters, respectively. Josselson's (1998) theory of pathways strongly mirrors Marcia's initial identity statuses (Patton et al., 2016). However, unlike Erikson's and Marcia's understanding of identity development, Josselson's theory describes female identity development as it is impacted by life experiences and evaluating achievement as one grows from adolescence to adulthood. This is different from Erikson's theory, which emphasizes the importance of commitment to beliefs, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and career exploration (Karkouti, 2014). While Josselson attempted to further identity development research specific to women,

little research followed Josselson's work, nor have many new theories related to women been developed (Karkouti, 2014).

**Synthesis: Identity Development Theories**

These three identity development theories have two primary similarities: the emphasis on identifying values and beliefs and on developing meaningful relationships. Identifying core beliefs and goals should be part of a young adult's psychosocial development according to the work of Erickson, Marcia, and Josselson. According to Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2013), leadership is a type of philosophy and as such requires values-based practice. While identifying values is important for overall identity development, identifying values is also a key element of leadership development for college students (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). In addition to the identification of values, relationships and community are paramount to both strong and effective student leadership (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013). Understanding how to work with diverse groups of people, how to inspire others towards a shared vision, and how to celebrate and recognize the strengths of others are all elements of leadership (Komives et al., 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2018). As young adults develop psychosocially, they move towards maturity, which makes way for leadership development to occur. This maturity is seen in a student's ability to make independent decisions without relying on authority, by committing to an internal set of values, and by developing healthy and meaningful relationships.

**Racial Identity Development**

According to these psychosocial identity development theories, identity development is a complex process by which individuals explore and wrestle with their values, beliefs, and goals and with identifying sources that influence how they define these things. As administrators, it is critical to first understand the broad development of students as they seek to ground themselves

in core systems of belief and decision-making processes. The core of a person's development lays a groundwork by which they assume leadership roles and experience leader identity development. While these theories provide a framework from which educators can understand college students, specifically, they are also problematic. Typically, these theories were developed by using very homogenous populations. Onorato (2010) eloquently describes the problematic nature of these existing identity development models:

> While Erikson and his followers focused on identity development of European American males, research has challenged the existing developmental theories derived from studying people from traditional orientations of power; White, male, upper middle class. Collectively, this research suggests that the construction and self-perception of identity is not singular in nature but is rather the intersections of ethnicity, gender, culture, social class, sexual orientation, and ability. (p. 42)

As I explore the Leadership Identity Development model created by Komives et al. (2005), I see a similar problem with the homogeneity of their research sample.

Because these identity development theories and the LID model typically used homogenous populations for their development, it is also important to explore not only identity development, broadly, but also racial identity development. A number of racial identity development models exist addressing development for specific races and ethnicities (Helms, 1995; Phinney, 1990; Porter, 2013; Renn, 2003; Renn, 2004; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). While these are all useful depending on the ethnicity or race being addressed, this study addresses Black women specifically. Therefore, I turn to three racial identity development models that are most appropriate for understanding Black identity development.

**Racial and cultural identity model.** The Racial Cultural Identity Model (RCID) model presented by Sue and Sue (1999) includes five stages: conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and synergistic articulation and awareness. This identity model is useful because it can apply to a number of various races and ethnicities, including African Americans, and broadly describes how individuals experience racial identity development. In conformity, individuals are disinterested in learning about their cultural heritage and identify with White culture. In dissonance, individuals experience incidences that make them question their White perspectives. In this stage, individuals increase their desire to learn about their own heritage and culture. In resistance and immersion, individuals consciously explore their racial or ethnic identity and reject White dominance and culture as they form a new identity. In introspection, individuals wrestle with the balance between fitting into a dominant culture while maintaining their new identity. In synergistic articulation and awareness, individuals accept themselves, respect those who are different from themselves within larger groups, and can balance their racial or ethnic identity with other aspects of their identity and the dominant culture.

Salazar & Abrams (2005) suggested that the RCID model is useful because it addresses the intersectionality of identities through its emphasis not only on racial identity but also on cultural identity. The model "describes common themes [among cultures] in the process of learning self-valuation in a world in which all or some aspect of one's selfhood is devalued" (Salazar & Abrams, 2005, p. 51). In the case of the RCID, cultural identity can include sexual orientation, gender, class, and ability. While the RCID does not provide an explicit developmental model for the intersectionality of identities, it asserts that each individual identity can be simultaneously examined through its developmental lens. For example, an individual

may be in one stage for their racial identity but in a different stage for their sexual identity (Salazar & Abrams, 2005). This model is useful in understanding how a student may go from being completely unaware of their racial identity to feeling particularly confident in and proud of their racial or ethnic culture.

**Model of Black identity development.** Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) revised Cross' (1971, 1991) original work regarding Black identity development and provided a model of how Black individuals specifically go through their racial identity development. The revised version of this model takes into account the full lifespan of an individual as well as how children experience and process racialized experiences. The Black identity development model is quite complex and includes three "nigresence patterns" and six sectors describing how a Black individual develops their racial identity. A "nigresence pattern" describes the ways by which an individual is socialized and comes to understand their Black identity. The six sectors of the model describe life stages and how identity is developed in infancy, preadolescence, adolescence, early adulthood, and adulthood.

Within the model, infancy is marked by the social, societal, and environmental factors that make up a small child's life when they are still unaware of race or racial identity. Preadolescent development is dependent on the family's influence and reinforcement of racial identity, whether positive or negative. Cross and Fhagan-Smith (2001) asserted that race salience is developed during preadolescence, and low versus high salience at this point is a strong indicator of positive self-concept related to race. Low or high salience describes the level at which an individual identifies with, understands, and values their Black identity. During adolescence, individuals begin to develop a more cohesive and authentic self-concept and affirm or redefine the salience developed in preadolescence. The adolescent stage of Cross and Fhagan-

Smith's model uses Marcia's ego statuses and indicates that adolescents experience these types of statuses but specifically related to race.

Early adulthood in Cross and Fhagan-Smith's (2001) model is marked by continued development of race salience and the grappling with a commitment to Black identity and culture. Adult nigrescence is a more complicated sector and includes four stages mirroring the RCID model that take an individual from low race salience to having an internalized commitment to their Black identity. This occurs through experiences of cognitive dissonance that help shape the individuals' perception and identification with their Black identity. The final sector, nigrescence recycling, suggests that individuals will continue to face experiences that call their Black identity into question. Individuals must continually explore the role their race plays in their identity, and those who reach a level of particular wisdom are confident and firm in their Black identity.

**Model of identity development in Black undergraduate women.** In her dissertation, Porter (2013) developed a model of identity development specific to Black women in college. Porter's model does not occur in stages but rather represents cyclical experiences Black women face as they experience identity development. The model is represented by flat cylinders that stack upon one another. A foundation cylinder is found on the bottom upon which pre-collegiate socialization, collegiate socialization, interactions with others, and articulation of identity cylinders are stacked. Each of these five cylinders represents specific processes Black women experience as they come to understand their identities. Again, these are not linear, and women may progress through these various processes more than once. The identity development of Black women in college is cushioned by role models and the media as both seem to heavily influence Black female identity development for women in college. Porter's model strongly

emphasizes the role relationships play on identity development as well as the importance of intersectionality.

**Synthesis: Racial identity models.** Like broad identity and psychosocial developmental models, racial identity development models often include determining and defining values, beliefs, and goals. However, racial identity development includes a more specific emphasis on culture and identifying with one's racial group or community. As one considers leader identity development, it is critical to consider how influential racial identity development could be on a student's development as a leader. While a Black female student is developing their self-concept as a leader, they may also be wrestling with the salience of their race, the role it plays in their life, and the role it may or may not play in their leadership. Existing literature suggests that Black women assume specific leadership traits given their history of oppression and the role oppression has played in the leadership development of Black women; this literature is discussed below. As we consider the interplay of various identities, the concept of intersectionality helps us better understand how an individual's multiple identities may come into play as one considers the concept of leader identity development.

## Intersectionality

An exploration of the aforementioned student and racial identity development theories provides a reference for understanding how students may develop a core sense of self. However, this exploration also illuminates the gaps in addressing the development of students of color, women, and women of color. Understanding leader identity must take into consideration the social identities held by individuals. Luckily, new waves of research have resulted in theories and models of social identity development that have addressed and acknowledged the oppression of groups that are not White, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, and privileged (McEwen, 2003).

More time and attention are being given to diverse populations, and this study sought to contribute to the growing body of literature on marginalized groups. To fully understand how individuals develop a leader identity, I turn to the concept of intersectionality and to the model of multiple dimensions of identity as integral to the understanding of leader identity development.

**Definition**

Crenshaw (1989) coined the term "intersectionality" when describing the legal concerns of African American and Black women. In the legal system of the late 1980s and early 1990s, an individual could enter the legal system with complaints as a woman or as a Black individual, but not as both Black and a woman. Crenshaw's work in the legal field brought to light the problematic nature of separating identities as identities can and do influence one another. Bowleg (2013) provided a comprehensive definition of intersectionality as "a theoretical framework that examines how multiple social identities such as race, gender, sexual identity, socioeconomic status (SES), and disability (to name a few) intersect at the level of individual experience (i.e., the micro level) to reveal multiple interlocking social inequality (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism) at the macro social-structural level" (p. 755). Because identities interlock in a way that affects individual and societal level experiences, *leader* as an identity cannot be considered without considering an individual's other salient identities. If leader as an identity is to be truly interwoven among the existing identities of students, then we must consider the impact of these identities on students' lived experiences, particularly those experiences that impact leader identity development. As Davis and Maldonado (2015) described, "the interlocking systems of race, gender, and social class give voice to African American women on encounters with intersectionality in their leadership development" (p. 55).

**Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity**

The model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) provides a conceptual framework by which individuals understand and process their various identities. Jones and McEwen originally developed the MMDI in 2000. While much research had been conducted on the identity development for single identities such as race or gender, few developmental models address the intersection of social identities (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The model is meant to demonstrate identity as fluid and dynamic; therefore, the MMDI only represents identity at a single moment, recognizing it can change over time or in different contexts. The model is broken into three components: 1) a core sense of self, which is represented by a small circle like the core of an atom, 2) externally defined dimensions of identity (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, etc.), represented by intersecting circles around the core, and 3) a context, which is represented by a circle encapsulating the core and the intersecting dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

The complete model demonstrates that each person has an individual core that is internal to themselves and acknowledges the reality of socially constructed identities. These identities cannot be understood individually but can only be understood in relation to other dimensions of identity and influenced by external contexts such as family, life experiences, and career decisions (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The study "underscores the importance of seeing students as they see themselves or as they reveal themselves to others. The participants in this study wanted to be understood…as the totality of who they were, rather than be understood through externally imposed labels and by a singular dimension" (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 412). Jones and McEwen (2000) urged higher education professionals to explore the complexities of identity and to withhold judgment about which identity or identities may be most salient to a person.

Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) revised the original MMDI, keeping all of its original features but adding an additional meaning-making filter to the model. Adding this meaning-making filter allowed Abes et al. (2007) to further explore the cognitive and psychosocial elements of identity formation. Their second study found that depending on the cognitive and psychosocial development of the person, their meaning-making skills may be greater or lesser. Abes et al. described this phenomenon in relation to their model: "How contextual influences move through the filter depends on the depth and permeability of the filter. The depth (thickness) and permeability (size of openings) of the filter depend on the complexity of the person's meaning-making capacity" (p. 6). When considering how context and core affected or were affected by their social identities, Abes et al. found that individuals exhibited one of three types of meaning-making: formulaic, transformational, or foundational.

These three types of meaning-making align with other identity and cognitive development theories such as Erikson's stages of identity development, Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship, and Kegan's theory of the evolution of consciousness (Abes, Jones, and McEwen, 2007). These theories, and the MMDI, describe an individual's progression from relying on external formulas to relying on their own internal foundations and core set of beliefs. The MMDI provides leadership educators with a theoretical reference that addresses both the traditional identity and cognitive development of students while also recognizing the tremendous importance of their social identities and how students perceive themselves. The MMDI was particularly important to this study as a way of understanding the identity development of students and remaining ever aware and sensitive to the ebb and flow of identity salience as they develop as leaders.

**Synthesis: Intersectionality**

This study, specifically, sought to shed light on the experience of Black women in college developing a leader identity. Previously, I discussed the lack of research conducted with Black female participants in several fields including leadership. Domingue (2015) described the lack of leadership research that considers intersectionality specifically within the collegiate realm:

> Specifically, studies of race and college student leadership typically do not include an analysis of gender identity differences, and studies of gender and leadership do not include racial or ethnic identity differences. In both of these contexts, the experiences of black women college student leaders, who have a particular social location as a minoritized social identity group in terms of race and gender, are not taken into consideration. (p. 455)

By understanding the importance of intersectionality and by using the MMDI as a reference, future researchers can consider populations with varying identities as they continue to explore and understand the experiences and process by which college students become leaders. Porter's (2013) work with Black women specifically sheds light on this as she described how Black women in college had the cognitive ability to describe and define how intersectionality played a role in their identity development. She described how participants were able to discuss both the ability and the pressure of balancing various identities while navigating spaces that were both welcoming and oppressive. Individual identities do not exist within a vacuum, and exploring how all social identities interact with leader identity formation is crucial to the understanding of leadership development broadly and cross-culturally.

## Leader Identity Development Models

Now that I have explored key elements of college identity development and intersectionality, I turn to key concepts in the literature that discuss the identity of being a leader, as well as models of leadership identity development. Note that past researchers do use the term "leadership identity" instead of my term "leader identity". This discussion will provide a framework for understanding an additional layer of intersectionality. Along with understanding social, psychological, and racial identity development, we must also consider how being and identifying as a leader plays a role in the holistic identity development of students. Current leadership identity development models have many similarities. Perhaps the most important similarity is the emphasis on individuals claiming themselves to be leaders and determining the salience of their leader identity. I find it critical for the purpose of contributing to existing leadership research to understand the framework of existing models by which to compare and contrast the development of Black women in college. Black women in college may in fact develop in the way these models suggest; however, they may not. This study ultimately shed light on how some of these existing models are useful and how they are not.

### Leadership Identity Development (LID) Model

Komives et al. (2005) developed their Leadership Identity Development model as a response to the lack of literature and research around leader identity development, particularly in college students. According to Komives et al.:

> Numerous books and articles focus on leadership theory, behaviors, effective practices, or on particular populations (e.g., women, youth, ethnic groups), specific settings (e.g., civic leadership, business leadership, church leadership), and diverse outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, effectiveness, social responsibility). Despite the broad scope of this

> literature, there is little scholarship about how leadership develops or how a leadership identity develops over time. (p. 593)

In an attempt to develop a useful tool for understanding how leader identity develops, Komives et al. conducted a grounded theory study to develop what we now know as the Leadership Identity Development model or the LID model. Instead of focusing on the skills and behaviors associated with leadership, they focused on the actual process of how individuals come to see themselves as leaders.

In the article in which the LID model first appeared, Komives et al. (2005) briefly explored the evolution of leadership theory over several decades, ending with a description of relational leadership. Komives et al. used relational theory as a foundation for their study as they argued that many leadership educators agree that a relational model of leadership is best for the development of college students. They recruited participants who demonstrated the use of relational leadership. They ultimately invited 13 participants to participate in the study. Eight participants identified as White, one identified as Asian American, three identified as African American, and one student identified as African. Eight participants identified as men; five identified as women. The study does not indicate if participants identified as both African American/Black and female. Two participants identified as gay men; the other participants identified as heterosexual or did not identify their sexual orientation. Two of the students were sophomores, nine were seniors, and two were recent graduates.

Through their data collection and analysis, Komives et al. (2005) established a theory that includes five interwoven concepts that contribute to leadership identity: developing self, changing view of self with others, broadening view of leadership, leadership identity, and group influences. Within the leadership identity concept, Komives et al. describe six specific identity

stages. All concepts are influenced by adults, peers, meaningful involvement, and reflective learning. According to Komives et al., the LID model can be used in individual advising and in advising groups of students. Below is a description of the six identity stages identified in the LID model:

Stage 1: Awareness. In the first stage of identity development, children recognize leaders external to themselves such as parents or historical figures. They do not view themselves as leaders nor do they recognize group roles.

Stage 2: Exploration/Engagement. In the second stage, young adults often engage in various organizations through school or after school programs. During this time, they observe peer leadership and begin to understand roles within group dynamics.

Stage 3: Leader Identified. In the third stage, young adults continue to refine their understanding of leadership within groups, but they view leadership as limited to positional roles.

Stage 4: Leadership Differentiated. In the fourth stage, students finally begin to understand that leadership extends beyond positions and that anyone within a group can exhibit leadership. They begin to see the importance of leadership as a shared process among the group.

Stage 5: Generativity. In stage five, not only did students understand leadership as non-positional, but they also began to align their leadership roles and goals with their interests, passions, and values.

Stage 6: Integration/Synthesis. In stage six, students considered leadership as part of their identity and part of their daily lived experience.

While this theory provides detailed information on how individuals develop a leader identity from childhood through early adulthood, one of the primary limitations of the study is its

lack of transferability to various cultures and populations. Like other developmental models, the LID model does not account for intersectionality, but rather addresses leader identity development as an independent identity. In addition, as the study was conducted primarily on White men; studying a more diverse participant population would allow for greater representation of diverse experiences, voices, and considerations in the development of such a model.

Since the time of the original model, other researchers have explored the LID model and its applications. Similar to my study, others have recognized the limitations of the LID model related to various and specific populations. The extant literature currently includes LID related studies for LGBT students (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005), Latina women in college (Onorato, 2010), first year students (Shehane, Sturtevant, Moore, & Dooley, 2012), college recreation and athletics (Hall, 2015), women in college (McKenzie, 2015, 2018), and students of color (Beatty, 2014). Of these studies, only McKenzie (2018) attempted to develop a new model of leader identity development for a specific population, women in college.

McKenzie (2018) developed her leader identity development model in her 2015 dissertation, and the model was formally published in 2018. McKenzie's (2015, 2018) model is quite similar to the LID model and contains four phases through which female students move as they develop a leader identity. McKenzie recognized that these phases are fluid, and students may not necessarily move through them in a linear fashion. The phases include 1) awareness, 2) leader identified, 3) leadership differentiated, and 4) generativity. The definitions for these phases closely mirror that of the original LID model. In addition to the four phases, McKenzie's model includes five foundational categories that are critical to a student's

leader identity development including influences, meaningful involvement, expanding views of leadership, changing views of self as leader, and reflective learning.

**Leadership Identity Construction Process**

In addition to the LID model, which was developed specifically for college students, several other researchers have developed theories and models in an attempt to explain how leader identity development occurs. DeRue and Ashford (2010) developed a theory to explain a leadership identity construction process. While this theory is not specific to college students, it provides an additional perspective to how individuals, generally, come to see themselves as leaders. This theory also includes how individuals come to see themselves as followers. DeRue and Ashford's leadership identity construction process is predicated on the notion that individuals can either claim or grant others the role, title, and responsibilities of a leader or follower and that the claims and granting of these positions can be accepted or rejected either verbally or nonverbally. The continuous cycle of claiming leadership or being granted and accepting leadership creates positive reinforcement that "promote[s] the individual internalization of leader and follower identities and their relational recognition in group members' roles and relationships" (DeRue & Ashford, 2010, p. 632).

**Leader Development Across Multiple Domains**

Hammond, Clapp-Smith, and Palansky (2017) developed a model of how leader identity development occurs over four different domains including strength, integration, level of inclusiveness, and meaning. The level of development for each of these four domains is described in detail but can also generally be described as low, medium, or high. Within the model, "strength" indicates how strongly or not an individual identifies with being a leader. "Integration" indicates the level to which an individual feels their leader identity is woven into

the fabric of their "global self-concept" (Hammond, Clapp-Smith, & Palansky, 2017, p. 483). The "level of inclusiveness" indicates whether a sense of leader identity is tied to an individual's understanding of self as individual and unique or rather understanding their identity as part of group membership. Finally, "meaning" indicates the understanding or definition of leadership an individual believes in or holds. While domains indicate the levels of growth a leader may undergo, Hammond et al.'s theory also includes a sensemaking component which describes the process by which leaders grow through the levels of each domain. Sensemaking includes noticing particular environmental triggers, interpreting these events to make meaning of them, authoring one's own role and connection to the event, and enacting new leadership competencies and an authored sense of self as a leader.

**Synthesis: Leader Identity Development Models**

These leader identity development models provide current researchers with a strong foundation for understanding different, yet similar ways of how leader identity development occurs. These models focus on the process of identifying or claiming leadership, the relationship with followers, and how salient the leader identity has become. While these theories recognize and identify that identity is a complex concept based on group memberships, contexts, and environment, they do not directly explore the role race and gender may have on leadership development. While race and gender are seemingly singular elements of an individual's identity, the concept of intersectionality and related theories show us that combinations of identities impact the life experiences, relationships, and opportunities for different populations. While existing identity theories and models do not necessarily assume individuals will develop in the same way or have the same developmental experiences, neither do they honor varying

experiences or explain possible variations depending on an individual's combination of sub-identities.

## Black Women and Leadership

Now that I have explored identity, racial, and leader identity development and the role of intersectionality, I finally focus on Black women and leadership. As I sought to develop a new model to explain the leader identity development for Black women in college, I would like to create context for the world in which this model now lives and breathes. Black women have been oppressed, pushed to the margins, and dismissed since the days of slavery in the United States. However, in spite of this, Black women have also risen to great heights as they have assumed leadership roles among their communities and experienced leadership through justice seeking and freedom fighting. Both history and the current state of affairs are important when considering significant factors that may influence a Black woman's development as a leader. Given the historical marginalization of this population, I would have guessed, and correctly, that a Black woman's path to claiming a leader identity might look much different than a White man's, a White woman's, or even a woman's of another race or ethnicity.

I begin this section by discussing the role and concept of mothering within the African American, female community. Mothering is a critical element to understanding the female community within many African American cultures. The concept of mothering speaks to the way in which mothers and grandmothers are viewed as matriarchs, examples of leadership, and educators. Black mothering can also be viewed as an example of strength, resistance, and support that many young women need as they explore their racial, gender, and leader identities. After exploring motherhood, I turn to discussing the oppression Black women face related to leadership in addition to the strength of Black women in the face of oppression.

**Mothering**

Trotman (2011) acknowledged how African American mothering differs from European mothering based on cultural evolution and experiences. African American mothering, rooted in African culture, dates back to the days of slavery and slave trade (Abdullah, 2012; Collins, 2000). African American mothering finds its roots in oppression ranging from the heinous acts of "rape and breeding" during slavery to the oppressive political systems of our current age (Abdullah, 2012). Society often portrays African American mothers negatively as mammies, emasculating matriarchs, promiscuous, welfare mothers, or other such "controlling images" (Abdullah, 2012; Collins, 2000). Due to these negative images and the oppression faced by African American mothers, motherhood has not only been a form of nurturing, love, and self-sacrifice but has also been a form of resistance.

African American motherhood actively involves raising resilient, self-reliant, and independent daughters (Abdullah, 2012; Collins, 2000; Narcisse, 2013). Abdullah (2012) asserted the role of survival in resistance, resistance not only for oneself but for one's children. The relationship between mother and child is not just one of nurture and care but also one of tough love and practical lessons of survival. This tough love can serve as motivation to succeed (Narcisse, 2013) yet also results in possible tensions in mother-daughter relationship. Collins (2000) wrote about the importance and challenge of educating Black daughters for survival: "Understanding this goal of balancing the need for the physical survival of their daughters with the vision of encouraging them to transcend boundaries of the sexual political of Black womanhood explains many apparent contradictions in Black mother-daughter relationships" (p.185). Mothering within the Black community is filled with both lessons of love and culture as

well as that of fighting and breaking chains of oppression. Its roots in history and tradition make it a strong foundation for leadership learning.

Relating to leadership specifically, I turn to the concept of the motherline, which is rooted in African tradition that has been carried through centuries. The motherline is a "master education, task master, refiner, and finisher" that uses various verbal teachings as a pedagogical tool to shape and raise future generations (King & Ferguson, 2011, p. 67). King and Ferguson (2011) described the leadership lessons learned from the African American motherline that include a tending to both community and the self throughout the process of leadership. Dozier-Henry (2011) identified the role Black mothers play as role models in their children's lives in addition to setting an example for their children, inspiring their children to be the best versions of themselves. Black children begin to associate leadership with the teachings and behaviors observed in their mothers or other women role models in their lives. Black girls learn how to be Black women, assuming various roles such as friend, sister, mother, and daughter, from their mothers (Dozier-Henry, 2011).

In addition to the description of Black women receiving life and leadership lessons from mothers, I want to additionally address the importance of othermothering. Collins (2000) described the role of othermothering within African American communities: "…vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, othermothers-women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities-traditionally have been central to the institution of Black Motherhood" (p. 178). Othermothering originally grew out of necessity during slavery when children and mothers would be separated (Mawhinney, 2011). Pertaining to leadership, King (2011) described the communal leadership she was taught through relationships with many women in her life, all of whom passed down

various pieces of wisdom and experience. Not only do Black women receive a vision and lesson of leadership from their mothers, but they may also have a complex web of grandmothers, aunts, sisters, cousins, and other female figures in their community to learn from and who contribute to their development.

**Oppression in Leadership**

According to a number of studies and authors, African American women have very poor representation among executive positions in education and business in the United States (Alexander, 2010; Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016; Christo Baker, Roberts, & Rogalin, 2012; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Fortune 500 businesses are often turned to as an example of how disproportionately women and women of color are underrepresented compared to their male counterparts. As of August 2018, only 5 percent of Fortune 500 hundred companies were led by women CEOs (Catalyst, 2018b). When breaking down the most recently analyzed statistics by race and ethnicity, as of 2015, only 7.7 percent of Fortune 500 company employees identify as Black, and only 1.3 percent currently hold senior level or executive positions (Catalyst, 2017). In addition, only one African American woman has ever served as the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, and she only served within the last decade; until 2009, an African American woman had never been a Fortune 500 CEO (Catalyst, 2018a).

Because companies, places of work, and leadership practices are typically guided by societal norms, typical workplace norms contribute to the glass ceiling experienced by African American women (Beckwith et al., 2016). The evaluation of leadership is primarily based on male-dominated, masculine traits and is marred by sexism (Christo Baker et al., 2012; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Beckwith, Carter, and Peters (2016) described the role sexism plays in the development of this glass ceiling:

> The root cause of the inequity is perpetuated in part due to the fact that men wrote many of the workplace policies, norms and practices, for men and out of the experiences of men. As a result of this one-sided perspective, the interests and needs of women continue to be underrepresented or ignored altogether because these "ways of doing business" are deeply entrenched, and in many respects have become a part of the organizational DNA. (p. 118)

While women, generally, experience a glass ceiling, African American women, in particular, experience multiple oppressions making the glass ceiling even more profound. Black women are restricted by racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism, all of which continue to bar the advancement towards leadership (Byrd, 2009; Collins, 1990; Hall, Garrett-Akinsanya, & Hucles, 2007). Women of color are often judged by standards developed by majority populations while also being expected to support and advocate for marginalized populations (Sachez-Hucles & Sanchez, 2007).

Sanchez, Hucles, Sanchez-Hucles, and Mehta (2007) argued that women of color cannot even address the glass ceiling they face until they also address the "concrete wall" built of "racism, higher standards, overscrutiny, stereotypes, double outsider status, invisibility and hypervisibility, exclusion from information networks, challenges to authority and credibility," and other discriminatory factors (p. 229). African American women also experience isolation as a result of often being one of the only individuals with their identities in the workplace. An inability to develop formal and informal networks due to discrimination and their marginalized identities (Byrd, 2009; Christo Baker et al., 2012) may also negatively affect Black women's social capital. The leadership expectations and socialization of Black women including traits such as assertiveness, equity, independence, and confidence may be seen negatively by the

expectations set forth by the dominant social culture (Christo Baker et al., 2012). The concrete ceiling is not only limiting to women's career trajectories but also makes it difficult for women of color to simply exist within their organizations and workplaces. The concrete ceiling is nearly impossible to break (Beckwith et al., 2016).

**Characteristics and Strengths**

Despite the significant barriers for Black women to assume leadership roles in our contemporary society, Black women leaders are rising in number and in influence in many fields of work (Hall et. al, 2007; Rosser-Mims, 2010). While the glass ceiling exists for Black women, a number of studies articulate tools for success for Black women related to leadership. According to a study by Davis and Maldonado (2015), there were several elements that contributed to the positive leadership development of African American women including strong family support and influences (King & Ferguson, 2011), support from career sponsors and mentors, and learning how to play the politics within a work environment. Not only is it important to have strong support from family or sponsors with various identities, but Dillard (2016) argued that Black women must engage consistently with other Black women leaders in order to develop and inform their own leadership practices. Because African American women are often the only one with their identities in leadership roles, many women often feel isolated. The role of mentorship becomes critical for Black women in leadership (Beckwith et al., 2016; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

In addition to specific practices or approaches that can lead to more successful leadership for Black women, one must also consider the historical influences of Black female leadership and how these impact how Black women lead. Tracing back to slavery, "Black women exerted their power through the form of resistance" (Rosser-Mims, 2010, p. 3). Black women have

assumed leadership and claimed power in nontraditional ways compared to men and to White women. In many ways, Black female leadership is rooted in the liberation of the Black community from racism, classism, and other forms of oppression (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Rogers, 2005; Rosser-Mims, 2010). In the words of Dillard (2016), "we lead and love as Black women in a place that has never affirmed Black womanhood. So we affirm it for ourselves" (p. 34). From past literature, a number of key themes seem to emerge when considering Black female literature: 1) leadership for the sake of survival, 2) the role of networks of Black female leadership, and 3) community empowerment (Byrd, 2009; King & Ferguson, 2011; Parker, 2005; Rosser-Mims, 2010).

In spite of the leadership roles Black women take on, whether voluntarily or not, many Black women fail to identify themselves as leaders and do not own this title (King & Ferguson, 2011). This is due to a number of oppressive factors such as gender stereotypes about leadership performance, systemic racism, negative perceptions of Black women in leadership, the value of humility within Black families and community, and a conflation in leadership terminology and how leadership is perceived by Black communities (King & Ferguson, 2011). Often, those of marginalized groups refrain from exerting overt "social influence" over others in their community. This is compared to those who are more "prototypical" of the Eurocentric standards of leadership, who may be unafraid to exhibit this kind of behavior (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). While Black women may not always see themselves as leaders, "as black women's lives require complex negotiations and the mediation of contradictions, the capacity for leadership has been shown in our ability to create strategies for survival and advancement" (King & Ferguson, 2011, p. 10).

## Summary

Abundant literature exists related to the concept of identity and identity development, particularly for college students. Higher education professionals can easily access resources to better understand the development of students related to identity, race, gender, sexuality, and many other factors. In addition, significant literature exists regarding intersectionality and how this plays a role in the development of young adults. However, research is lacking related to understanding how a leader identity is developed by students with varying identities, particularly students with marginalized racial and ethnic identities. While a growing body of literature is expanding on the work of Komives and her colleagues, this study sought to contribute to the literature by addressing the unique position of Black women in college, how their identities as Black women contribute to their claiming a leader identity, and how these leader identities form.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to generate a theory that describes the process by which Black women in college come to adopt and understand their identity as a leader. The exploration of experiences, relationships, and social identities resulted in the development of a theoretical model of leader identity development for Black women in college. Constructivism was used as an epistemological framework to guide the research tradition and methods used in this study. As previously discussed, Womanism was used as a theoretical framework and influenced research questions, interview protocol questions, and the general lens through which I viewed and view working with Black women in college. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How have Black women in college come to understand their identities as leaders?
2. What experiences have contributed to the leader identity development of Black women in college?

## Research Tradition

To provide the rationale for my methodology, I begin this section by examining the role of constructivisim in qualitative research and why this best fit with my use and interpretation of grounded theory. I then explore grounded theory more in depth, giving historical context and describing Charmaz's (2006) more current approach that I employed during my research. Finally, I describe why grounded theory is an appropriate approach to exploring leader identity,

specifically. In this section, I explore both my methodological approach and my beliefs regarding research and how my topic and personal ideologies align with grounded theory.

**Constructivist Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is interpretive research that focuses on exploration and discovery of a particular phenomenon and the lived experiences of participants. Researchers typically approach qualitative research in an "open-ended way, without prior expectations" regarding the phenomenon being studied (Johnsen & Christensen, 2014). While qualitative researchers may attempt to conduct research without affecting the environment or participants, the researcher is typically intensely involved with research participants, making this type of sterile interaction impossible (Creswell, 2014). In qualitative research, rather than collecting numerically-driven data, the researcher serves as the data collection instrument collecting narratives, stories, and non-numerical data.

Constructivism is an epistemological perspective wherein research participants articulate subjective meaning of their life experiences (Creswell, 2014). Within constructivism, researchers seek to understand these varied life perspectives through understanding participants within their own life contexts, exploring a particular phenomenon within those contexts, and listening to varied voices and perspectives about the phenomenon. Within constructivist research, some would argue that the researcher becomes deeply entrenched in the work, bringing their own culture, values, interpretations, and beliefs to each research encounter. This engagement can positively influence research findings by allowing researcher and participants to co-create knowledge throughout the research process (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010). Constructivism is a strong paradigmatic fit for grounded theory because "rather than starting with a theory (as in postpositivism), inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or a

pattern of meaning" (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Ultimately, a constructivist perspective assumes "that concepts and theories are *constructed* by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and/or lives, both to the researcher and themselves" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 10).

**Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s in attempt to demonstrate that systematic qualitative research could produce equitable outcomes to quantitative research (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) and to infuse strong and methodical data analysis into qualitative inquiry (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser and Strauss "advocated *developing* theories from research grounded in qualitative data rather that *deducing* testable hypothesis from existing theories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 6). In short, the purpose of their new methodology was to be able to generate theory through qualitative means, which greatly challenged the positivist lens of the time that favored the scientific method, empirical data, and quantitative research.

While Glaser and Strauss used qualitative methods, they still approached research with a more positivist lens, given the climate towards research in the 1960s and previous decades. Over time, others have explored grounded theory through new epistemological lenses such as pragmatism and constructivism (Ralph, Birk, & Chapman, 2005). Ralph, Birks, and Chapman (2015) argued that grounded theorists apply their own epistemological and ontological interpretations to grounded theory methods, which is how there has been an evolution from Glaser's and Strauss's (1967) original postpositivist lens on grounded theory to Charmaz's (2000) constructivist view. I approach this study from a constructivist lens which emphasizes the relationship between participant and researcher and the co-construction of meaning (Mills, Bonner, & Francis; 2006). I believe each researcher brings their own values, assumptions, and

beliefs to their research, all of which must be examined as values and beliefs certainly shape the outcome of the research (Mills et al., 2006). While epistemological and ontological perspectives may vary, it is important to recognize the boundaries and scope of grounded theory and to remain grounded in consistent methods. Over time, the central methods of grounded theory have remained little changed regardless of epistemological perspective (Charmaz, 2006; Ralph et al., 2015).

While researchers have long disagreed as to the exact application of grounded theory methodology (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Ralph et al., 2005), key elements are typically agreed upon as to the heart and purpose of grounded theory. According to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original work and the subsequent work of both authors (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987), grounded theory research heavily emphasizes the role of data and data analysis. This remains true today. According to Charmaz (2006) "all variants of grounded theory offer helpful strategies for collecting, managing, and analyzing qualitative data" (p. 15). Grounded theory, broadly, includes a) concurrent and recursive data collection and analysis, b) focus on actions and processes seen in the data, c) theory generation (not confirmation) throughout the data collection and analysis process, d) memo-writing for the purpose of data analysis, and e) theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987).

A significant tenet of grounded theory important to the present study is theory generation rather than theory confirmation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Komives et al. (2005) used grounded theory in their initial research leading to the Leadership Identity Development model. While important to the field of leadership education and development, I was uninterested in confirming or building upon their theory. I sought to generate a new theory based on the lived experiences and development of my participants. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), theories, once

generated, cannot be replaced as they were developed through intimate examination of data. If anything, they can be modified. The existence and development of the LID model is not to be replaced. Rather, the goal of this study was to contribute a theory specific to Black women in college to the larger body of theories and models related to student leader identity development. Given the demographic I sought to work with, the generation of a new theory grounded in new data is important. Komives et al.'s (2005) model was specific to their population, which was primarily White with a small number of students of color. The grounded theory generated by this study is specific to Black women in college.

Grounded theory is also specially positioned to serve a social justice purpose (Charmaz, 2005). Because of its emphasis on recursive data collection and analysis, researchers can pay particular attention to equality, fairness, rights, and legitimacy and follow up on topics or issues that arise within the data. Because grounded theory often focuses on participant behaviors, actions, and the processes by which they navigate their lives, social justice concerns around inequality both individually and institutionally can be explored more easily. According to Charmaz (2005) "researchers must define how, when, and to what extent participants construct and enact power, privilege, and inequality" (p. 512). Because I focused on Black women, who may experience lack of access, equity, or power due to systemic oppression, I paid particular attention to how social justice concerns emerged in the data and how they played a role in my emerging theory.

**Grounded Theory and Leader Identity Development**

The existence of theories results from the desire people have to create order regarding many aspects of life. According to Patton et al. (2016), "theory enables the organization and interpretation of enormous amounts of information existing in the world" (p. 60). Theories are,

by nature, socially constructed and can be altered with changing historical, sociological, and political contexts (Jones & Abes, 2011). Related to student development theories, many were developed in historical and sociological contexts in which White students or participants were used in their generation and development. While individual theories exist as related to ethnic and racial development, female psychosocial and moral development, leader identity development, leadership development, and other related topics, a single theory is absent from the literature related to leader identity development specifically for Black women in college.

Jones and Abes (2011) suggested theory is used for one (or more) of six purposes: to describe, to explain, to predict, to influence outcomes, to assess practice, and to generate new knowledge and research. As I sought to describe the process by which Black women in college develop their identities as leaders, I turned to grounded theory as my research tradition. According to Fassinger (2005), a grounded theory's ultimate goal is to explore the complex nature of the lived experience of participants and to ground a new and innovative theory in the data collected from these participants. Once a theory is generated, it often helps explain the actual process or action by which a phenomenon is experienced (Hays & Singh, 2012). I chose grounded theory because I was specifically interested in the process and the events that enhance young women's understanding of themselves as leaders. Grounded theory as a research tradition adapts to changing times and societal pressures (Ralph, Birks, & Chapman, 2015), making it an appealing choice for exploring the development of Black women in college who have not been seen predominantly in academic literature but who may begin to be represented as attention is given to more diverse populations in research.

## Personal Significance and Subjectivity

In graduate school, I had the privilege of serving as a teaching assistant for a course on leading groups. As my first foray into the field of leadership education, I was instantly intrigued by the theories, methods, and activities we explored as we taught undergraduate students how to serve their communities as better leaders. I fell in love with seeing students explore their potential, their skill, and their ability to serve their communities in college and beyond. I was truly captivated by the learning I saw happening before my eyes, by seeing students develop not only as leaders but as individuals. Students would tell me how being in our class changed their perspective on college, on their career path, and on their life. I was made hopeful as I saw these students using their newfound knowledge and abilities to change their communities for the better.

As my career has progressed, I have had a continued interest in student leadership development. I am interested in the skills and best practices for leaders, the best methods and forms of leadership education, and the hope that lives in developing the future leaders of our society. From early in my doctoral program, I knew I was interested in studying something related to leadership development. This was confirmed by my attendance at my first Leadership Educators Institute in December 2016. Hearing Alexander Astin and Susan Komives discuss their work and the role leadership plays in higher education sparked such profound excitement and interest for me; I decided then I wanted to study something related to college students and leadership.

As a researcher, scholar, practitioner, I have come to discover the profound responsibility we have as researchers to assume and maintain a lens of social justice, equity, and inclusion in our work. As I have grown in my understanding of the systems of oppression at play in research,

higher education, and society broadly, I felt called to study leadership with a lens that shed light on the marginalization that exists for a specific group or groups. As I continued to refine my dissertation topic, I was in consistent conversation with three classmates whom I had grown to admire and deeply respect. All three of these happened to be Black women. After conducting a pilot study with Black women as participants, I knew this was the population I needed to address in my research. The women in my pilot study had trouble naming their leadership. They had difficulty claiming their leadership. In many cases, these women felt they were forced into leadership roles or were encouraged to be leaders out of necessity within their communities, not because they felt empowered or ready. I began to wonder how their leadership experiences might look different if they were White women, White men, or members of a different social group. I knew Black women were often excluded as subjects of research. As I delved into the literature related to leadership development and leader identity development, I certainly found this to be true.

My topic of researching the leader identity of Black women came from a deep love of leadership education and a desire to infuse social justice into my work. However, this research is also personal in nature. The Black women in my life who have so positively influenced me are certainly a primary motivation for conducting this research. Black women were chosen because of my personal connection to both Black colleagues and students who have shared their stories of being pushed to the margins. This study was and is an homage to the Black women in my life who have struggled to serve as leaders, who have been passed over as leaders, and who deserve to be guided and shaped into leaders in a way that honors their culture, racial history, and context in our world. Higher education practitioners can better serve this population in the future with

progressive research that provides a theory or framework for understanding Black women's leader identity development.

Because I chose Womanism as a theoretical framework, which emphasizes self-reflection and self-awareness, and because my racial identity differs from that of my participants, I find it necessary to address my identities and my privilege as I explore the lives of women of color. I identify as a White, cisgender, straight, Christian woman, privileged in almost all ways. I also identify as a student affairs administrator, a scholar, and a social justice advocate. All of these identities play a role in the research I conduct. I chose a career in student affairs because I care deeply for college students. I have an invested interest in the personal development of college students, particularly their leadership development, and I consider myself a leadership educator, specifically. As I have added scholar and advocate to my list of identities, I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility to conduct research that gives students of all identities an opportunity to be heard. The research I conduct as a social justice advocate, particularly research related to theory formation, cannot be conducted solely with or for participants with privileged identities nor without me addressing my own privileged identities.

In relation to my research participants as women, I am an "indigenous-insider" (Greene, 2014) in that I am also a woman. Like my participants, I know what it is like to have a woman's body and to experience the systemic sexism that all women face. It is my race that separates me from my participants and also makes me an "external-outsider" (Greene, 2014). I will never be Black, and I will never understand the intersectional experience of being a Black woman. I have never been discriminated against because of my perceived ethnic or racial identity. Because of this, I cannot claim to understand the plight and the oppression of any racial or ethnic minority. If anything, growing up in predominantly White communities socialized me to be racist and

unquestioning about my white privilege. I was color blind until graduate school, believing that skin color did not matter, that it could be overlooked, and that there was hope all people could be treated equally. While I work towards the hope that oppression will end one day, I am also educated enough now to understand that skin color does matter, that to ignore skin color is to ignore the beautiful heritage of many different people, and that people are treated terribly, often due to their skin color. This research was just one more step towards addressing the lack of attention given to women of color in the world who deserve the time, attention, care, and spotlight within academic research.

To guide my thinking and perspective-taking, I turn to my theoretical framework, Womanism. Hudson-Weems (2001) describes the essence and priorities of Womanism which directly address intersectionality: "Our priorities are race, class, and gender, while the feminist concentrates on gender issues" (pp. 138-139). As a social justice advocate, I have found that using Womanism as a theoretical framework is a way I can honor the voices and perspectives of women who cannot separate their womanhood from their race or vice versa. It is my hope that in doing so, I was able to bring my authentic, White self to the table, while also seeking to hear the authentic voices of my participants.

I recognize that I have privilege and power that my participants do not, based on my age, race, and role as a campus administrator. All of these factors certainly played a significant role in the way I interacted with my participants. I have racial privilege that my participants do not. It would have been easy for me to make assumptions that leadership development is harder for these women given the systems of oppression they face, that their culture and history play a role in their development, that they would not want to speak to me about their experiences. It would have been easy for me to assume that we have similar experiences because I am also a woman

and also identify as a leader. I could have assumed they experience the same sexism I have experienced. I could have assumed they have also felt empowered by their leadership as I did during my collegiate years. While I sought to give space to each participant in this study, I came to the table as a White woman, a social justice advocate, a leader, and a current student affairs administrator with my own perspectives on womanhood, race, and leadership. Yet, who I am was important to the data collection and analysis of this study, and as such, bringing these perspectives to the table was a crucial element of my research.

## Data Collection Procedure

Below I outline the procedures by which data collection occurred from conception of the study through engaging with participants. First, I describe the research sites from which I recruited participants. I discuss why these institutions were chosen and their importance to the study. Next I discuss sampling methods and participant eligibility, which is critical given the focus on Black women in this study. Then, I discuss the roll of gatekeepers at each institution who assisted me in disseminating recruitment materials to their students via email listservs and personal emails. Finally, I discuss the development of my interview protocol, the structure of my interviews, and the role of data saturation.

### IRB Approval

Upon my study being approved by my institutional dissertation committee, I sought institutional review board (IRB) approval through the institution I attend and through the three institutions from which I originally planned to recruit participants. Once IRB approval was received, I began recruiting participants from the three college and university sites outlined below. I will describe the three universities from which I intended to recruit participants then describe how my participant pool only includes participants from two of those three institutions.

**Research Sites**

Given my proximity to a number of institutions of higher education, participants were initially recruited from three private institutions: a small, historically Black college for women; a mid-size, private liberal arts university; and a small, private women's college. All of these institutions are located in the southeast region of the country and were given the pseudonyms Southeastern College, Metropolitan University, and East Coast Women's College respectively. Metropolitan University is my place of employment; access to participants and ease of recruitment made this an obvious research site. As my participants were required to identify as women, Southeastern College and East Coast Women's College were targeted as women-serving colleges whose populations are almost 100% women. Southeastern College was the most ideal institution of the three as its population is almost entirely Black and African American identifying women, perfect for this study. However, after several attempts at working with college personnel, I was unable to recruit participants from Southeastern College; therefore, my participants were only from Metropolitan University and East Coast Women's College.

East Coast Women's College served a convenient location from which to recruit participants as a local college serving only women. The college enrolled 986 degree-seeking, undergraduate women in 2019, 32.2% identifying as Black or African American according to the college's 2019 enrollment history (College Website, 2019). Metropolitan University is a mid-size, private institution serving 7,035 undergraduate students as of fall 2019. The class of 2023 had only 13.7% of students self-identify as Black or African American, and this data is not disaggregated to distinguish gender (College Website, 2019). While the Black population at Metropolitan University is smaller than the other research site, it was chosen as it is the institution at which I am employed and at which I had more intimate access to students.

While it may or may not have influenced the results of my study, I want to acknowledge that identities of gender or race may have been more salient to my participants East Coast Women's College than the average woman. It is possible that choosing to attend an all-women's college was influenced by the importance participants placed upon gender and possibly race at the time of their college decision-making process. East Coast Women's College participants did seem more reflective, introspective, or more self-aware, perhaps because their gender or racial identities were influencing factors in their choice of college. This eloquence may also be a result of institutional type and the education being received by participants. Participants at East Coast Women's College are being taught to carry themselves as empowered, strong women by being at an all-women's institution. Participants also mentioned how leadership is emphasized at East Coast Women's College from day one at Orientation, which is quite different than the student experience at Metropolitan University, where demographics and leadership education culture do not lend themselves to this type of explicit empowerment. This level of reflection was apparent in interviews for East Coast Women's College participants; however, I do not believe it overwhelmed or skewed my data. If anything, East Coast Women's College participants were simply better able to articulate the same or similar thought processes as participants from Metropolitan University.

**Participants**

Because I was interested in theory generation, I used theoretical sampling, a subcategory of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used when the study requires participants to share a specific set of characteristics (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Like purposive sampling broadly, theoretical sampling includes recruiting participants based on a specific set of characteristics (Hays & Singh, 2012). However, theoretical sampling also provides both

flexibility and structure to adding additional participants to the study over time based on the outcomes of data analysis. Strauss (1987) suggested that the theory generation itself can guide sampling strategy as necessary. As Hood (2006) described, "although theoretical sampling is a type of purposive sampling, it is different from most other kinds of purposive sampling because the theoretical categories that guide the sampling are the result of the previous stages of analysis and are analytical rather than simply demographic categories" (p. 217). Because data requires constant comparative analysis within a grounded theory, I may have seen the need for additional participants or participants with other or different characteristics, such as including campus administrators, peers, or family members (Hays & Singh, 2012). As was the case, I began to see consistency in my data throughout the process and reached a point of saturation. The data provided by participants did not lead me to believe that other participants or types of participants were necessary to understand the theoretical implications of the data.

To be eligible for the study, prospective participants had to identify as a) an African American or Black woman, b) claiming the United States as their country of origin, c) a leader in her community, d) an undergraduate student, and e) 18 to 24 years of age. Because my goal was to understand how Black women in college understand their identity as a leader, I left "leader in her community" open to interpretation during the recruitment process. Because I was interested in women in college and at a particular developmental stage, I sought undergraduate women only, particularly those who identified as traditionally aged. I define traditionally aged as 18 to 24 years old. This age range was determined by combining literature that provides both minimum (Monroe, 2006; Morris, Brooks, & May, 2003) and maximum ages (Myers & Mobley, 2004; Quimby & O'Brien, 2004) to distinguish the difference between traditional and non-traditional college students. I chose this age range because I preferred my participants to exist

within a similar range of psychosocial development so as to be able to better compare life experiences and stories.

I had originally intended on recruiting participants from three different institutions. I made every attempt to do so; however, gatekeepers at one institution were simply unable to find participants after repeated attempts. Because my study was not predicated on the home institutions of participants, and having reached saturation after interviews at the other two institutions, I felt confident in my decision to forego the third institution in light of useful interviews from existing participants.

**Recruitment**

I initially reached out to administrators I was acquainted with at each site to serve as a gatekeeper to my work. I informed these administrators of the research I planned to conduct and asked if they were willing to assist with participant recruitment. I initially gave gatekeepers one of two choices when assisting me with participant recruitment. I mentioned they could recruit participants themselves or ask other college or university personnel to assist. If the gatekeeper chose to recruit participants themselves, I told them they could provide me student contact information directly or copy me on personal emails to the students. If the gatekeeper preferred other staff to assist, I provided a recruitment email blurb, my formal recruitment letter, and a flyer of information for them to disseminate to offices or departments they felt would be most useful at their institution. The recruitment email blurb and letter included details of the study including participant requirements, data collection methods, the time commitment, IRB and consent information, and my contact information (see Appendix B). The recruitment letter specified that interested participants were to reach out to me directly via email or phone. In addition to email solicitation, I also created flyers soliciting for participants to be posted on each

campus or to be used on departmental social media sites as permitted. I also asked gatekeepers if they would be willing to post these fliers for me. Flyers were posted on Metropolitan University's campus. I do not know if they were ever posted at East Coast Women's College's campus.

My recruitment letter (see Appendix B) included my contact information asking potential participants to contact me by email if they met participant criteria and if they were interested in signing up for an interview. However, all of my participants were connected to me directly via email by campus personnel from both campuses. While I originally intended to set up a phone call to confirm participant eligibility and to create a Doodle poll to create an interview schedule, I did neither of these things. I found it much easier to communicate via email, while reminding participants that emails were not strictly confidential, though private. I sent an initial email individually to each potential participant with eligibility requirements and asked them to provide a written confirmation that they did, in fact, meet my study's criteria. If they replied that they did, we exchanged one to several more emails to set up an individual time to meet. This was the case for all participants. I tracked meeting times and locations using my Outlook calendar but did not use participant names to protect anonymity.

I aimed for approximately 8 to 12 students to participate. Recruitment efforts initially resulted in 17 interested participants; however, I was ultimately only able to schedule 11 interviews. I kept the contact information of the remaining 6 as back-up options should I have required more interviews, but since I was comfortable that I had reached saturation with the 11 interviews I conducted, I did not end up contacting the others.

**Interview Protocol**

Rooted in Womanism, my protocol questions were designed to invoke narratives of participants' lived, vernacular experiences in which they could share both joys and challenges of being a Black woman leader (Phillips, 2006). From a methodological approach, my questions were open ended and focused on processes, experiences, and personal influences from which I could build my grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). There was room and flexibility during interviews for clarifying and probing questions to better understand processes and experiences when necessary (Charmaz, 2006). Interview protocols could have been adjusted or changed based on data that emerged, which is typical in grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008); however, I did not find this to be necessary in my study. Theory generation may also require follow up interviews with participants when conducting grounded theory; however, I also did not find the need to schedule additional interviews. Because my participants identified as Black or African American and female, I asked questions related to race, gender, and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Cross & Fhagan-Smith, 2001; Jones, Abes, & McEwen, 2007; Porter, 2013). The protocol included questions such as: "What does your identity as a Black woman mean to you?, "What experiences led you to you becoming a leader on campus or in your community?", and "How do you think your conception of leadership has changed over time?" See Appendix D for the full list of questions.

Prior to using my interview protocol, I asked two Black women colleagues and two past Black female students to review my protocol to ensure the questions would be understood by, resonate with, and be received by my Black women participants. Their feedback led to me adding several questions related to racial identity development and a question about feelings of leadership within Black communities. Their feedback also contributed to personal reflection and

bias-checking by reminding me to see Black women as whole people with varying identities and not simply defined by their womanhood or Black identities.

**Interviews**

Interviews took place on the students' home campus so they would not be inconvenienced by travel. I worked with gatekeeper staff at each institution to schedule interview locations in advance to ensure a quiet and private space. All interviews began with an in-person overview of consent information and the official signing of consent forms. Participants were then asked to select a pseudonym that I used for the duration of the interview and all data analysis. While I anticipated interviews to last approximately 30 to 90 minutes, interviews had no set time frame and were allowed to continue as long as was needed. Most interviews were approximately 60 minutes, the shortest being 35 minutes, the longest being 73 minutes.

Data collection occurred in the form of semi-structured, individual interviews for which I was the primary instrument for data collection as the researcher. As the primary instrument for data collection, I had to pay close attention to methods of trustworthiness for this study; methods to increase the trustworthiness of this study are discussed below. To complete these individual interviews, I had an initial interview protocol leaving room for unscripted follow up and clarifying questions as necessary.

Audio recordings of each interview were taken via the voice recording app on my phone in addition to Zoom technology made available to me through my workplace. Upon interview completion, the audio recordings from my phone were uploaded to my computer which had two layers of password protection and remained off or locked when not being used in order to protect participant information. The recordings made on Zoom were also password protected via the

technology and downloaded to my computer as a backup. The audio recording of each interview was only used for the purpose of this research and will be deleted after final completion and submission of this project. I transcribed each of these audio recordings and the transcripts have also been kept on my computer, password protected for participant privacy.

In grounded theory, data collection is complete when saturation occurs. Saturation occurs when no new themes are found in the data and when the grounded theory has been confirmed by the data that has been collected (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). I began to see signs of saturation after seven interviews when I kept hearing some of the same concepts repeatedly among participants. However, to ensure I had, in fact, reached saturation, I continued to conduct interviews with four additional participants with whom I had already scheduled an interview time. Through these additional four interviews, it was confirmed that saturation had been reached as I was hearing consistent language and experiences across my participant pool.

## Data Analysis

As with other qualitative methods, grounded theory relies on coding as the primary means of data analysis. While there are varying types of coding and analysis within qualitative research, I primarily chose to use coding methods as outlined by Charmaz (2006). I also relied on Charmaz's concept of evaluation related to notions of trustworthiness in grounded theory research. I discuss the methods I used to evaluate my research to ensure not only its quality but its credibility and usefulness. Below I describe these methods of coding and evaluation.

### Coding

Coding is core and serves as the "bones" of data analysis within grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). To code and analyze my data, I used what Charmaz (2006) describes as initial, focused, and theoretical coding processes as a framework. Prior to beginning a full description

of my analysis, it is important to note two important aspects of my approach to coding. First, I chose not to refer to Komives et al.'s (2005) or McKenzie's (2015, 2018) codes or language related to their models while conducting my own analysis. I anticipated seeing similar themes between our studies such as identifying leadership as a concept, participating in leadership development activities, and using leadership to pay it forward or empower others. However, I was not interested in using exact codes or language from previous studies. While using a priori coding, influenced by these previous studies, may have added to the confirmability of this project, I found it more important to be entrenched in my own data and to use codes and language that best reflected the experiences and vernacular of my participants. I felt very strongly in this approach to coding because of the identities of my participants as Black women; I wanted their voices directly represented rather than pulling codes or language from studies conducted on samples where Black women were not widely represented.

Second, throughout the entire coding process I used gerunds for my codes. Charmaz (2006) describes the usefulness of gerunds as a way of staying close to the data, of helping discern processes occurring within the data, and of gaining a sense of the action occurring within the data. For example, instead of using the noun form of "Black female identity," I used the gerund, "identifying as a Black woman."

The first step of data analysis was to read through my first interview transcript in its entirety. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested completing this first reading without taking any notes to truly enter into the participant experience. The first step to begin coding is to transcribe and analyze a single interview soon after the initial reading, which I completed. This is important because the first interview serves as a foundation for the rest of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Corbin and Strauss encouraged close scrutiny of concepts emerging from the

data as sometimes researchers "don't start early in the analytic process differentiating lower-level explanatory concepts from the larger ideas or higher-level concepts that seem to unite them" (p. 8). I decided to use line-by-line coding in order to see the most microlevel pieces of data. I completed line-by-line coding for four interviews before moving on to focused coding. I was tentative about beginning focused coding after only one or two interviews because I did not want a single interview to influence my conceptions about the rest. I completed line-by-line coding for four of my 11 interviews to ensure I had enough data from which to develop well analyzed focused codes based on a larger subset of my data.

Focused coding is used to "synthesize, analyze, and conceptualize larger segments of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 138) and to condense codes from the initial coding phase. Focused coding involves making connections between initial codes, categorizing codes, and narrowing down larger themes. In a grounded theory, data collection and analysis also occur recursively. As I began to transcribe and look for connections between interviews, I used constant comparison analysis to create my list of focused codes by adding or eliminating new codes after each new transcription was reviewed (Charmaz, 2006; Hays & Singh, 2012). I used my first interview to develop an initial list of 54 codes. I used these codes as a starting place to review my second, third, and fourth interview transcripts adding codes as necessary. I added new codes when existing codes did not seem to fully capture the data or if it felt it would be too much of a stretch to assign a code to a data point. However, I also reduced my number of codes when I felt like two codes were remarkably similar or when one idea could still account for small variances in data. For example, in a memo from September 24, 2019, I wrote:

> I am eliminating "being educated". I moved data points for two participants to "recognizing maturation" and "wanting more for self". Only Alyssa had data under

> "caring about others' perceptions". Ultimately, I think that data speaks to the experience of Black woman leadership, so I'm moving all of that data to "defining Black female leadership."

This was the type of thought process I used as I continued to condense my list of focused codes. After coding my first four interviews, I went back through one more time comparing all codes with data from each interview to see where I could complete a final revision by editing the wording of codes or by adding or eliminating. Through this process I ended up with 52 codes. I used this list of 52 codes to then analyze the remaining seven interviews.

Because I had already developed a list of focused codes, I coded the remaining seven interviews incident-by-incident. By being deeply entrenched in my first four interviews and with the assistance of interview notes, I felt confident in my ability to see nuances within incidents, as necessary, in order to assign or possibly develop new codes. Through coding my final seven interviews, I added 10 more codes. Not only did these codes account for data in the final seven interviews, but I was able to connect these codes back to data from the original four interviews as well. For example, I added, "being sheltered" as a code to account for data in Kaelyn's interview, but Elizabeth, one of my first four interviews, also had data that better fit under this code than a previous code of "developing leader identity." Not only did the data point not fit as well under "developing leader identity," but I ultimately decided to expand that code into more specific codes because it felt too broad and felt more like a theoretical code or a broader theme. Upon finishing focused coding with a final list of 62 codes, I did one final review to ensure I felt comfortable with the wording of each code and that it represented my participants and their experiences.

Upon finishing focused coding, I began theoretical coding. Theoretical coding should help distinguish possible relationships between the themes developed during focused coding. The purpose of theoretical coding is to theorize the data and focus the codes so they can be used in the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser (1978) offered a number of theoretical coding "families" that can assist in developing theoretical codes for theory application. For the sake of being able to identify a theoretical process within my data, I chose to use a modification of Glaser's six Cs coding family which consists of causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions. The modified version of Glaser's six Cs is condensed to five Cs, in which contingencies and conditions are considered one in the same given the difficulty in distinguishing the difference between the two (LaRossa, 2005).

As I developed my theoretical codes, these five Cs allowed me to consider what may be impacting the leader identity development of my participants, how participants address these particular influences, and what the consequences of these influences are on my participants respectively. I began the theoretical coding process by assigning each of the 62 codes to one of the five Cs. I did this by considering the role each code played in the process of my participants' lives. For example, "being a Black woman" was assigned to causes because it is one of the primary reasons these participants experience the world and leadership the way that they do. "Facing discrimination and/or microaggressions" was assigned to contingencies/conditions because it describes a condition of being a Black woman. After assigning my focused codes to the five Cs, I grouped them by their assigned C, then began to look for similarities in the codes.

I began grouping codes together that had similar language, general themes, or consistency of any kind. For example, I grouped "being seen as a leader," "getting positive feedback as a leader," and "receiving external recognition for leadership" under the theoretical code "receiving

position feedback as a leader." I grouped things related to encouragement and support together. I grouped things related to discrimination together. I also tried to look for how the language within my focused codes could be used as theoretical codes that summarized or encapsulated more than one focused code. In this way, I ended up with 14 final theoretical codes, 10 of which used exact language from my focused codes. The 4 codes whose initial language was not identical to my focused codes had very similar language and drew from words used within my focused codes. Please see Appendix E for a list of focused codes, their categorization into the five Cs, and how I condensed them into theoretical codes.

Because I used a modified version of Glaser's six Cs, I found several core themes within each C category. Because I was looking for relationships between the Cs and seeking to identify a process within the data, I felt it critical to keep all 14 codes instead of attempting to condense them further. While some of my theoretical codes are very closely related, they represent different aspects of the process in leader identity development for Black women in college. This distinction makes each theme unique and critical.

In the last stage of data analysis, through selective coding (Charmaz, 2006), I identified a central theme that tied all codes together to create a central point from which my theory is grounded. In this case, "identifying as a leader" is the most central aspect of my theory. I chose this theme because it is identified by Glaser's Cs as a consequence of all other data points. Of all the consequences derived from the data, this is most critical to answering my research questions and directly ties to the achievement of leader identity development. Upon completion of my theoretical coding and final selective coding, I created a visual representation of what I found with the central theme highlighted in the visual model (Hays & Singh, 2012).

**Memo-Writing**

Memo-writing is a critical element in grounded theory methodology (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006). Memo-writing prompts researchers to engage in data analysis as soon as data collection begins. The process of writing memos allows the researcher to create an interactive space to engage with the self as relates to thoughts, assumptions, self-discovery, reflections, and data analysis. Memos can serve a number of purposes. However, a beneficial use of memos relates to filling in gaps of data analysis by expanding upon and filling in the gaps of formal coding (Charmaz, 2006).

I began memo writing the day of my first interview and continued to write memos during the interview process and into the phase of data analysis. Memos varied in length and can be read as a stream of consciousness during which I reflected on preconceptions of my participants and data, noted questions that arose during the research, included initial attempts at summarizing and synthesizing data, and kept a detailed record of how I completed data analysis and the thought processes behind my choices. Memos contributed to the overall development of my theory by allowing me to refer back to initial interpretations of my data while also allowing me space to critically describe and analyze my data and the selection of codes.

**Theoretical Sensitivity**

Theoretical sensitivity is directly related to the way in which a researcher generates their theory grounded in data (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher must remain sensitive to the theorizing process itself by "seeing possibilities, establishing connections, and asking questions" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 244). Glaser (1978) described theoretical sensitivity as the ability to set aside preconceived notions and to develop a theory with as little bias as possible regarding the phenomenon. Theoretical sensitivity requires the researcher to maintain an open mind and to

work diligently towards organizing participant stories into a theory that best fits the data (Charmaz, 2006). I worked as diligently as possible to maintain a level of open-mindedness throughout the data collection and analysis process. Memo writing was useful in helping stay grounded in the data. For example, from a memo on September 7, 2019, I wrote, "My natural inclination is to want to jump ahead to try to synthesize bigger picture thoughts now. I'm going to resist because I know that will then bias how I code and I'm interpreting each individual transcript." I continuously asked myself what biases I was bringing to an interview or to a particular stage of research.

**Evaluation**

In the qualitative tradition, research is considered valid when it is "plausible, credible, trustworthy, and therefore defensible" (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 299). While this remains true for grounded theory, Breckenridge and Jones (2009) also argued that grounded theory methodology is unique among qualitative methods in that "grounded theory should not necessarily be subject to generic 'qualitative' guidelines" (p. 121). Within grounded theory, transparency is arguably the most critical tool to ensuring credibility and trustworthiness. Because grounded theory is driven by the emergence of theory, distinguishing it from other methods, is it of particular importance that researchers succinctly and explicitly describe "the process through which theory has been developed" (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009, p. 123). Glaser & Strauss (1967) described this as ensuring readers feel as though they were part of the research team based on the level of detail and description provided throughout the study as relates to data collection and analysis. Charmaz (2006) supported this notion and actually seems to reject trustworthiness as a concept in favor of "evaluation." According to Charmaz, there are four evaluative categories for grounded theory research: credibility, originality, resonance, and

usefulness. These categories remain open to interpretation and allow for creative and flexible means of demonstrating the research's value. Throughout this study, I have been as transparent as possible by describing in detail my sampling method, data analysis and coding, decision-making, and other traditional methods of ensuring the data is trustworthy and grounded.

**Reflexivity**. Reflexive exercises in my memos allowed me to reflect and review my own thoughts and perceptions throughout the interview process, which also helped me recognize any assumptions or beliefs I carried that affected the research or my understanding of my participants. Because I was already writing consistent memos, I also used these memos as a sort of journal where I could reflect on interviews and emerging ideas about data and themes. For example, in a memo on May 7, 2019, I wrote about a bias I felt was impeding the research:

> I also want to quickly emphasize a bias I think I'm beginning to bring into the research and questions. I feel like both the students and myself fall into talking about leadership in terms of positions/roles even though all participants and I know that leadership is not about position. Somehow, I think it's just easiest to conceptualize when a role is involved and leadership can be justified because a role has been assumed. I'll have to make sure to pay attention to how this plays out when I analyze and write up my results.

Reflexive memos were also important because I conducted a brief pilot study on this topic in the past and have previously conceived notions of what could come to pass with this study's sample. My very first memo includes a reflexive note related to these concerns.

In addition to addressing biases or preconceptions, being able to look back on interview notes and memos also allowed me to see a pattern in thought and belief related to my participants and their development of a leader identity. The use of note-taking during each interview proved useful as I recognized things from the interview that were particularly important or salient to my

data collection that I did not write down on the interview protocol itself (Creswell, 2014; Hays & Singh, 2012; Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

**Thick Description.** To honor my participants and to ensure their voices were adequately represented, I used thick description as appropriate for grounded theory. The use of thick description allowed me to be thorough and detailed when explaining the experiences of my participants. However, thick description is not simply a detailed description of facts and events but also of meaning conveyed through actions and facts, such as hidden meaning behind body language, tone, and behavior (Hays & Singh, 2012). Within grounded theory, researchers must pay particular attention that the descriptions being shared are directly related to the emergent theory and not superfluous or unrelated to theory generation (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009).

**Member checking.** Finally, to respect and pay homage to the voices of my participants, I used member checking to ensure that participants felt appropriately represented throughout the study as I describe their experiences of leader identity development (Hays & Singh, 2012; Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Member checking does not simply mean having participants check transcripts for accuracy but is better practiced by having members review data analysis, initial findings, or the initial grounded theory (Creswell, 2014). I asked participants to review my theoretical codes with brief descriptions of each in addition to my final theoretical model. I sent this request this just prior to adding the "mothering" contextual element to the model; however, the role of mothers and othermothers was made pretty explicit through themes. Even without participants seeing "mothering" added to the model, I feel as though participants were able to glean the overall meaning and interpretations I assigned to their data. In addition, this feedback request was sent prior to determining a final name for the model, so the model name reflected in Appendix materials is different than the final version.

The request for feedback and the summary of feedback provided to participants can be seen in Appendix E and F. Participants were asked to complete a couple of Likert-type questions as well as a couple of open-ended questions asking them to provide feedback about how they felt represented or not in the final theoretical codes and model. Please see the full questionnaire in Appendix G. Six of the 11 participants completed this form. All six said they strongly agreed the themes of my study resonated with their experience. Five either agreed or strongly agreed that the model represented their leader identity development journey. The one participant who indicated they neither disagreed nor agreed that the model represented their journey did not understand the model was to represent their holistic life journey before and through college and stated the model included aspects of their development prior to college. The inclusion of developmental experiences prior to college was intentional on my part and very much necessary in order to create this model. When asked to explain why the themes and model did or did not align with her experience, Queen responded,

> *With every point that I read I could remember things that I told you in our interview that contributed to each point.*

About the model in particular, Arya stated,

> *The model as a whole resonated with me, but the statement on how being a leader is a long, uphill flight of stairs was something that resonated with me the most. It's not easy nor is it given to us, but often times black women have to work twice as hard to be reaffirmed and taken seriously as her role as a leader.*

While not every participant responded to my request to provide feedback, the feedback from those who did respond was positive and affirmed that my themes and the model adequately represented their experiences.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the use of grounded theory methodology related to the development of a theoretical model explaining the leader identity development of Black women in college. With the help of institutional gatekeepers and through intentional recruitment, I identified 11 participants from two different higher education institutions with whom I met to discuss their leader identity development journey. With a constructivist lens and through my data analysis, I delved into the narratives of my participants to see how they constructed meaning of their life experiences and to see how I might capture their stories in a theoretical model. Through a complex and thorough coding process I was able to distinguish 14 unique themes that served as a foundation of the model that is described in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 4

# FINDINGS AND THE THEORY

*Ya know, you can't just wake up and become a leader unfortunately, you have to battle what you were born into, and basically just grow out of what you were born to be into what you want to become, and it's tough, but it's just a battlefield we've been waging for I don't know how long.* - Elizabeth

In this chapter, I describe the findings of my research. First, I provide a brief overview of my participants for readers to understand the sample and basic demographic information about them. Next, I describe each of my 14 final themes. Because grounded theory requires looking for processes and relationships between data points, I next provide a table and description of the relationship between themes developed throughout the coding process. After describing these relationships, I present how the relationships between themes coalesced into the Black Undergraduate Women Leader Identity Model. Finally, I provide a more detailed discussion of the model with descriptions of each aspect of the model and of each developmental "step."

## Participants

My participants were all unique from one another but also had many similarities in the way they have experienced their leader identity journeys. I was surprised by the level of consistency in the stories among women. All women were sophomores, juniors, or seniors. The age range of participants was 19 to 22 years of age. Nine of my 11 participants have declared majors in either the natural or social sciences. Data regarding other salient identities was gathered during the individual interview process by asking participants to name additional

identities aside from their gender and racial identities. Several women did not mention additional identities when specifically prompted; however, some spoke to additional identities throughout their narrative. I did notice a deeper sense of reflection in the interviews conducted with participants from East Coast Women's College. However, it was not necessarily the stories or sentiments that differed between participants from the two different institutions, it was more the level of depth to which concepts were discussed, the level of introspection, and the communication styles. I typically found East Coast Women's College participants to be more eloquent as they described their experiences.

Earlier I discussed the ways in my which my positionality among these women may come into play. Particularly because I did not share racial identity with my participants, there were concerns on how participants might react to my inquiry, questions, and research. However, I found that my participants were seemingly unphased by my racial identity. They were excited and thankful for the opportunity to share their stories. I found participants to be extremely forthcoming about their experiences as they openly shared the hardships and challenges of being a Black woman; they appeared quite vulnerable in the way they expressed themselves. I discussed with several participants the rationale for my research, my motivations for studying Black women, and how I came to this research topic. Overall, each participant seemed comfortable in my presence, and I did not find our differing racial identities to be barriers to the study.

Table 4.1 Demographic Table

| Pseudonym | Institution | Year | Major(s) and Minor(s) | Age | Other Salient Identities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alyssa | Metropolitan University | Junior | Sociology | 21 | N/A |
| Arya | Metropolitan University | Junior | Psychology, Sociology | 21 | Heterosexual, Sister |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Denise | East Coast Women's College | Junior | Mathematics, Business Management | 20 | N/A |
| Elizabeth | East Coast Women's College | Senior | Political Science, Human Rights | 21 | Queer, Poor |
| Jade | Metropolitan University | Junior | Anthropology and Human Biology | 21 | First Generation |
| Kaelyn | Metropolitan University | Sophomore | Neuroscience and Behavioral Biology Sociology (Not Yet Declared) | 19 | N/A |
| Linda | Metropolitan University | Sophomore | Psychology, Sociology | 20 | Afro-Cuban |
| Mo | East Coast Women's College | Senior | Theater, Business | 22 | First Generation, Poor |
| Queen | Metropolitan University | Sophomore | Anthropology and Human Biology | 20 | Christian |
| Tina | East Coast Women's College | Junior | Neuroscience | 20 | N/A |
| Whitney | Metropolitan University | Senior | Neuroscience and Behavioral Biology | 21 | Christian |

## Themes

Through my analytic process, I was able to condense participant data into 14 core themes. These themes represent the holistic experience of leader identity development for my participants. Below I provide a brief summary of each theme. The themes are ordered based on Glaser's Cs previously discussed. Below, I first discuss themes identified as *contexts*: living in an oppressive system, journey to and through college, and experiencing familial influences. Next, I discuss themes identified as *causes*: being a Black woman; being supported by mothers, othermothers, or mentors; and having formal leadership experiences. Third, I discuss themes identified as *contingencies or conditions*: facing discrimination and/or microaggressions, learning to lead, and experiencing empowerment. Fourth, I discuss themes identified as *consequences*: developing racial identity; aspiring to be like mother, othermothers, or mentors; and identifying as a leader. Finally, I describe *covariances*: being a Black female leader and receiving position feedback as a leader. By ordering the Cs in this manner, one can begin to see

connections among the data that create the scaffolding for developmental phases or steps. Descriptions of each theme include quotations from participants that best demonstrate the theme. In addition, I use concepts, phrases, or summaries from focused codes, from memos and notes, and from transcripts to best illustrate the theme and its meaning.

**Contexts**

"Living in an oppressive system," "journeying to and through college," and "experiencing familial influences" were chosen as *contexts* because they set the stage and provided me with an understanding of the macrolevel influences related to the leader identity development of my participants. It is impossible to imagine leader identity development occurring for Black women without the influences of these contexts.

**Living in an oppressive system.** Especially related to leadership, seven of my participants agreed that society views leaders as having one or more of the following identities: White, male, cisgender, straight, and wealthy. Whether they specified these identities or not, most participants agreed that society's context, beliefs, and standards of leadership did not match their own. Because of this, individuals who hold marginalized identities, particularly Black women who experience double marginalization, are typically not seen as the norm for leadership. Elizabeth reflected most eloquently on her positionality within a world not made for her or Black female leadership:

> *…when you notice you're the only person in the room of a certain skin tone that's when you really realize who you are, and you're trying to wrestle with if you're a monster, or if you're supposed to belong here, or if you're an invasion of space. And um in that moment, I both realized who I represented and also who was not present in the room. 'Cause um, I met Ayanna Pressley a couple of weeks ago (she…I was in D.C. it was*

*amazing), and she said, "When someone says they are the first blank don't clap, but just be silent, because it's just pathetic that it took that long."*

Because my participants did not feel as though they meet the norms of societal leadership, six of my participants used language around working hard, working twice as hard as others, fighting, or surviving within current societal structures and norms. Linda spoke directly to this when she said,

*...something that my mom always told me…that I have to work twice as hard or three times as hard as someone as someone who was White because of me being Black and also being a woman…I have realized that that is very true, that I do have to work like twice as hard or three times as hard as someone else.*

While none of my participants directly used the term internalized oppression, Denise alluded to this in the way that she sees societal pressures and how they affect views of Black female leadership:

*Um, I feel like, I still feel like they [White men] make those rules to try to hold me back, and because these rules have been around for so long…that it's going to make it harder for not just them, but to other people, to accept me. Even another Black female will question my leadership role because of what society has made her think what a leader should be.*

Denise also noted her own internal struggles to see herself as a leader given society's views:

*I wish I could, but I still don't think of myself as a leader. And I feel like it's because of like what society has made me think. And how I need to change my views of like what a leader is. Because I have an ideal like, you know, what [East Coast Women's College]*

*has told me, what I've experienced and how it's working. But it still hasn't changed the underlying thought process that what I think leadership is.*

Not only did my participants experience the contingent effects of living in an oppressive system themselves, but they also saw others around them being overlooked. Alyssa reflected,

*...you see like these people who are seen as leaders in the community and you're like, oh, I know someone who can also do that equally as great, but may not be voted to that position, or may not be chosen, or may not be seen in the same light as this other person because they aren't the traditional or the like norm of what a leader is seen to be by society.*

The context of living in an oppressive system affects the way in which my participants viewed themselves as leaders and how they might be received as leaders. Many of the effects of this oppressive context will be described through additional themes such as "Learning to Lead" and "Being a Black Female Leader". Whitney and Queen were semi-outliers to this theme. While both disagreed with society's standards of leadership, Whitney she stated that she "didn't blame" society for the way it is, and Queen admitted that sometimes you just have to "play along" in the system.

**Journeying to and through college.** While many participants were able to identify moments in middle or elementary school when they conceptualized others as leaders or began to take on leadership roles, every participant mentioned the importance of coming to college. For all participants, coming to college was either the first time they developed a true recognition and personal definition of leadership or was when they were able to begin to see themselves as leaders, typically by taking on more influential roles for their leader identity development

journey. When asked about the most influential experience on her journey to becoming a leader, Alyssa stated,

> *I feel like Metropolitan College does pave the way, or it personally in my experiences, I feel like I have been exposed to, um…like organizations or platforms where I, I feel like I'm comfortable being a leader and people are comfortable accepting me as a leader. So that's been something that's great and I can't say everyone has, um but in my experiences that something that I've really valued and um has really started…really like ignited in me, um, wanting to be a leader in more than one way, in college.*

More broadly, speaking, Kaelyn spoke to how college transformed her as a person by exposing her to more diverse people and learning after being sheltered at home:

> *Um..I think actually coming to college was a little bit of like kind of like a defining moment only because I feel like in high school, and I was kinda just like sheltered, didn't really know like, you know like, just sheltered like in high school, your parents kind of shelter you, and so then I got to college and then you get to hear things about like other people's experiences, you learn things in your classes.*

Linda reflected on how college exposed her to opportunities and helped her increase her self-esteem:

> *…I was like thrusted into like, like important leadership positions [on campus]. And like since being in those to like now it has, I guess, in terms of like courageousness, it just shows that I'm able to do anything that I put my mind to and that like not like that, just that I am capable of whatever.*

While each participant had nuanced experiences of coming to college, some were looking for a place to grow and thrive and some felt imposter syndrome, all participants agreed that college

was a pivotal time for them to explore leadership, to learn how to lead, and to develop the confidence to self-identify as a leader.

**Experiencing familial influences.** Every participant mentioned the role family played in their life and leadership journeys. In this study, the familial influences typically referred to instilled values and empowerment based on upbringing and parental guidance. In some cases, familial influences related to the role being a sibling played in their lives, particularly for those who became caretakers for their siblings. Whitney described how her cultural upbringing influenced her:

> *Um, but being a first generation American it's really interesting like going to school in suburban Atlanta and interacting with that culture and coming back with a Nigerian culture, which is very, I would say, Eastern, very traditional, very built upon the aspect of respect and education…I think I would probably identify more as American first and then Nigerian, but the Nigerian culture is definitely influenced who I am, my personality. So I think that has resulted in me being a very respectful child.*

When asked about the role being an older sibling played in her life, Tina responded,

> *…my sister…she was the oldest girl so she always had the most responsibility, but then once I got older, you get all the responsibility! Um, my little brothers are like my kids too. I have two little brothers, and so um I take care of them a lot…So being in the middle, it's taught me a lot, it's taught me a lot of responsibility. And how to take care of things, how to um……..just handle things the way I think that my mom would. My mom is like the, my dad goes and works, but my mom is the person that like takes care of the house, and she makes everything, makes sure everything, you know, gets done the way it's supposed to so…yeah.*

Not only does this excerpt demonstrate the role of siblinghood, but it alludes to the values of responsibility and hard work demonstrated by her mother as an influential figure in her life.

**Causes**

"Being a Black woman," "being supported by mother, othermothers, or mentors," and "having formal leadership experiences" were chosen as *causes* because everything about the leader identity development of my participants is predicated on these factors. Without these causes, leader identity development may not have occurred for participants. These causes are fundamental to the leader identity development process.

**Being a Black woman.** For my participants, being a Black woman was something they loved and were proud of, while also recognizing being a Black woman naturally brings struggle and difficulty. When asked about other salient identities, most participants did not have anything additional to add, possibly given the strong salience of their gender and racial identities. Some of the exceptions were Whitney and Queen who strongly identified as religiously Christian, and Elizabeth who identified as queer. When asked what being a Black woman meant to her, Mo responded,

> *Being a Black woman means……..being a superhero. You have secret powers that people can't see, that you try to hide. And they come out when, only, only when needed…Uh, being a Black woman just means you're bound to survive, you're bound to be a fighter. You're bound to, to struggle, and have those struggles internally and externally, but you make those, you make those sacrifices that you need to make to pull yourself out and to pull others around you out. You're very nurturing, but you're also very strong-minded. Uh…you know that's kind of like a superhero.*

While most participants recognized the systems of oppression they were living in and could acknowledge very specific instances of discrimination, Queen articulated the way in which Black women are also resilient and able to face the challenges presented to Black women:

> *I also feel that there's a lot of power behind being Black woman as well, just from all the like strength and people who've come before me and overcome tremendous barriers. Um, so I feel like it's kind of a double-edged sword that I'm often underestimated, but more often than not Black women overcome a lot of things that they've been put against. So it's almost like a challenge, but it's like, "Challenge accepted." Haha!*

Elizabeth spoke specifically to the role intersectionality plays in Black womanhood, particularly when in spaces where she may be the minority:

> *Um being a Black woman, it often feels like I have to choose depending on the space. My Blackness or my womanness, or both. And it also depends on the day of the week. When I'm in majority White spaces, I make sure to encompass my womanness and be quote unquote be articulate and let the Blackness take backstage.*

From the descriptions my participants provided, identifying as a Black woman comes with layers of complexity and influences how they navigate the world in addition to how they navigate leadership.

**Having formal leadership experiences**. When asked about their personal definitions of leadership, not a single participant mentioned the need or requirement for leaders to have a formal role or position. However, all participants also named specific and formal leadership experiences from which they gained self-awareness, heard specific messages about leadership that influenced their own definition, and allowed them to learn about themselves as leaders. These types of experiences and positions included experiences such as leadership conferences or

programs, camp counselor positions, sports captain positions, internships, and officer roles in high school or college student organizations. When asked where she developed some of her views of leadership, Mo commented,

> *I did a leadership program in high school…uh I feel like I got some ideas from that program and like there was like three student leaders from like each school in [my county], um, so like hearing like their kind of perspectives and their like impacts in their own school, I feel that's kind of where I started my own like idea of like what leadership was.*

Queen had a similar experience learning how to lead within a specific organizational context:

> *Um, and then she asked me to um apprentice under her and learn how to start um, my president, last year and learn how to start, you know, leading small groups and then like two weeks before school, she's like, "Yeah you're going to be president next year." I was like, "What?!" Um, and so it, it really showed me that I'm in order to lead somebody else and something you like have to buckle down in it for yourself.*

Whitney, Mo, and Tina described how specific leadership roles on their campuses not only increased their confidence as leaders, but it also confirmed for them that others saw them as leaders and saw the work they could accomplish. Mo felt like she had become the face of her organization and said,

> *…I can definitely be a leader, because know me now. People are aware of my work, and they're aware of what I can do.*

Formal leadership roles seem to have been a gateway for participants to gain exposure to leadership and to begin developing confidence that they could identify as leaders.

**Being supported by mother, othermothers, or mentors.** When asked who the most influential person was related to their leadership journey, every participant with the exception of Denise mentioned their mother or the female caretaker they were raised by (Elizabeth was raised by her grandmother and great-aunt, whom she referred to simply as her "aunt"). Denise mentioned a female mentor who was the most important on her leadership journey, yet she still discussed her mother at length as one of the greatest influences on her leadership, how she views leadership, and who she aspires to be like. Quotations from Arya and Elizabeth best capture the feelings of support my participants received from their mothers and othermothers. Each of these statements demonstrate some of the self-doubt of my participants often seemed to feel and how this was combatted by their mothers' or othermothers' support. Arya stated,

> *And just to receive like reassurance from my own mother that I'm doing a good job and that she was very proud of me and like who've become and how independent of the young woman I've become. Also it's just a very huge message just to confirm that all of this that I'm doing this for a reason.*

Arya later commented,

> *My mom has been very encouraging and no matter what I did, and she would honestly push me to do things that I didn't think I could do…I don't know, my mom was just very reassuring that I had a lot of qualities that I didn't see in myself. And just to see that…she would just encourage me no matter what I did.*

Elizabeth remembered comments her grandmother would make:

> *My aunt for example who believed in me every day, or who believes in me every day, and my grandmother who believed in me, she um passed last year. And she used to say every day that um, "Have a super fantastic day, beautiful girl" and she would every time I*

*called her she would say that. Um, it's just when people believe in you, it makes you feel that way even though you don't want to.*

This support from women my participants saw as examples of leadership in their lives was invaluable to their leadership journey and building the confidence to see themselves as leaders.

**Contingencies/Conditions**

"Facing discrimination and/or microaggressions" and "experiencing empowerment" are themes *contingent upon or conditions* of being a Black woman and in some cases of being supported by others, which are causes previously discussed. "Experiencing empowerment" is similarly *contingent upon or a condition* of being a Black woman, being supported by others, and, in some cases, having formal leadership experiences. Empowerment is important because of my participants' gender and racial identities and occurs as a result of being supported and having leadership roles.

**Facing discrimination and/or microaggressions.** Participants articulated that being a Black woman was both powerful and a challenge. The challenges often came specifically in the form of blatant discrimination or microaggressions throughout their lives. The idea of being doubted by others strongly resonated throughout most of my interviews. Participants described how others would be surprised by their accomplishments, question why they were participating in certain activities, or doubt their ability to succeed in the future. Denise was the only participant to use the word microaggression when she stated,

*I don't appreciate that sometimes people will like be slick with what they say, or like microaggressions. That's the proper term for it. Um like, "Oh, you're smart for a black girl. Wow, I've never seen a black girl do that before." I'm like "Well you seen one do it now." You know? It's very hard.*

Arya provided a specific example of discrimination she faced in high school:

> *I was the only African American female in my AP Chemistry class. And we're in teams. And I had one of my fellow classmates prefer to switch me out with a White male because he thought that he would be much more beneficial and additional to their team. And so it kind of, that was like my first instance of, like, "Wow, I really, I don't belong here."*

When asked what being a Black woman meant to her, Denise described an instance of discrimination and reflected on how it made her feel:

> *And…honestly, sometimes it kind of makes me hard…it makes it hard for me to do more with my leadership and try to do other opportunities, 'cause I know not everyone will accept me.*

Experiencing instances of discrimination or microaggression were common among all participants and often contributed to feeling discouraged, self-conscious, or angry with the societal context in which they must exist.

**Learning to lead.** Learning to lead is a broad theme that includes many activities and the self-actualization that preceded being able to claim "leader" as an identity. Participants described a number of things including recognizing leadership as a concept, discovering and confirming personal leadership qualities, developing a reaction to being called a leader, learning lessons about leadership from people and roles, and developing a strong sense of humility related to leadership. When asked about experiences that shaped her leadership journey, Jade described what she learned from one particular internship:

> *Growing up, a lot of people I saw as traditional leadership kind of fit a mold, so I assumed that like a leader was something that was like natural, like you are naturally born with it. Until actually probably like two summers ago I had an internship where we*

*had a whole seminar on leadership and how it sort of evolved from like a hero perspective, like ancient Greek mythology to now, where it's like…and then like natural born heroes like Jesus and stuff like that, towards now that we have where it's like, anyone can follow leadership type role.*

Arya described messages she heard about leadership from others:

*And then a lot that I have heard is like "Don't take no for an answer." And then one thing that my mother kind of like grilled in me when I was little was that you have a voice, and don't be afraid to use it.*

Learning to lead often meant for participants understanding the power of not only their voice, but of then elevating the voice of others. Linda described this when she said,

*I think it's [her upbringing and identities] helped me become a better leader, not necessarily…I think it's helped me become a better leader in terms of, like, not just leading people just to lead, but leading people with the purpose and also like actually listening to other people because as like, as a Black woman, like we don't really have, or let our, we don't, our voices aren't really heard as much. But I think that by being a leader, I'm able to, I'm able to understand the position of not having someone's voice heard, so by being a leader in various views, I'm able to have other people's voices heard. I don't know if that makes sense.*

Queen spoke to the self-awareness she developed through a team captain position in high school:

*Um I've definitely grown as far as um thinking about um how, how am I, how I'm perceived. Um, so…I think before I didn't, I didn't really care, you know, what I said what I cared. But at the same time, I wasn't like going back and thinking about, you*

*know, how my day played out. Um, but I think I, I definitely feel more strongly um or I'm, I'm more aware of how I might come off to people.*

In addition to learning general leadership practices from familial influences and formal leadership experiences, several participants also took formal assessments that helped them understand their personality or leadership styles, the lessons from which have remained with them over time.

**Experiencing empowerment.** Participants did often describe at length the daily and long-term struggle of Black womanhood; however, participants also described instances of feeling inspired and claiming power for themselves. Whitney demonstrated this Black female confidence when she stated,

*Being a Black woman, I see myself as someone who um has a unique opportunity to be empowered, um because I have those two identities. So instead of using them as, viewing them from a system of oppression, I can view them as a system from empowerment, per se.*

Elizabeth had a similar sentiment and reflected,

*I remember, ya know, I was like well I am a Black woman. And Black women can stand on stages, you know they don't have to look at them all the time.*

Most often, my participants felt empowered when they saw themselves represented by leaders, and five of my participants mentioned the importance of Barack and Michelle Obama as the first time they felt inspired by a very public leader. Arya explained,

*Just seeing like someone who looked like me being…'cause like usually when we see like women in media, they're usually light skin, like very straight hair. So it's like, it's me, but*

*it's not really me. And just to see this beautiful, tall, dark-skinned woman being the First Lady, and then implementing changes.*

Several participants felt particularly empowered when others provided the feedback which helped boost their confidence and inspired them to lead others.

**Consequences**

All of the codes identified as *consequences*, "developing racial identity," "aspiring to be like mother, othermothers, or mentors," and "identifying as a leader," are seen as a result of causes and contingencies/conditions while being influenced by contexts. These consequences ultimately provide insight into what it means to establish and solidify a leader identity. Establishing codes as consequences was useful for identifying a final theoretical code by which to root the final model.

**Developing racial identity.** Because this study did not focus on racial identity specifically, this theme only touches the surface of the racial identity development of my participants. When asked about their racial identities, participants spoke to a myriad of experiences, however, one core theme seemed to be prominent. Many of them first recognized their race or developed greater racial awareness through experiences in K-12 education. Jade reflected,

*I think um in sixth grade when I went to that private school, that was the first time I had to confront the fact that I was a minority 'cause that like, I wasn't, I knew that we were minorities like outside of our neighborhood, in our school, but it was the first time I was like the only Black girl in anything, like period.*

Tina spoke to both the negative feelings and positive outcomes of her charter high school education:

*…it was predominantly White. More Black kids than it used to be but um….And then, you know, just experiencing that and um looking at how they treated my friends and I because we were coming from South [County], and, you know, they have this idea that we weren't as smart as everyone else. And it was hard, and um that just made me a lot more proud of being a Black woman and knowing that I was be able to do what everyone else did. You know, even though I had to work a little harder and lose sleep, I was, I was still able to do that.*

Participants discussed moments of feeling really comfortable about their race, while others discussed instances of discrimination or discomfort with their race. Both positive and negative moments contributed to their understanding and recognition of their racial identity. For Whitney, her religious identity superseded her racial identity for much of growing up; however, she was an outlier in this regard. For Queen, she recognized the importance of her race during an internship when she was 18 years old as people seemed to draw particular attention to her race, often in ways that were microaggressive. Hair was mentioned by several participants as being instrumental in their racial identity given the importance of hair and hair care in African American culture. Still others felt they were not perceived as Black enough; Whitney was even called an "Oreo" growing up. While having moments of revelation at different times in their life, participants recognized, usually prior to college, that they were different from White children or other White individuals.

**Aspiring to be like Mother, Othermothers, or Mentors**. Mothers, female caretakers, and mentors played a significant role in my participants' lives, and for most, this was limited just to mothers or female caretakers. My participants saw these women and individuals as examples of leadership. Often their mother, grandmother, sisters, or mentors were the very first examples

of leadership in their lives. Because of this, they all aspired to be like these individuals as leaders, to assume some of their characteristics and approaches to leadership. Arya described this desire simply:

> *Um, well just honestly seeing my mother and my grandmother kind of shaped my, my perspective on what it means to be a leader because my mom….She's like my ultimate hero, like she raised three kids on her own, and no help from anyone.*

Participants learned from their mother, othermothers, and mentors how to be leaders mostly by following their lived example. They learned lessons and values such as hard work, humility, serving one's community, and kindness as aspects of not only Black womanhood but also leadership.

**Identifying as a leader**. Ultimately, participants all identified as leaders. While this was a requirement of the study, every participant both identified as a leader yet also wrestled with being called a leader. Most were surprised when others called them leaders, others were uncomfortable being called a leader. Only two participants demonstrated confidence in being called a leader. For others, continuing to develop confidence as a leader was a desire and something that was recognized as being important. Jade stated,

> *Because like I said, like I don't tend to think of myself actually as a leader, but it's something that I force- I forced to. Because it's like, if I don't see myself as that no one else in the room is going to either.*

For some participants, being a leader meant serving as a representation for other Black women or people of color. Identifying as a leader often included notions of serving one's community and being helpful to others. Whitney said,

*I would say I consider myself a leader because I have people who I have worked with that probably look up to me in a certain way to learn from… I know people who are working alongside of me to learn from my example.*

I also saw participants wanting more for themselves or being motivated to lead through a spirit of service. Their ability to give back to their communities through leadership was an aspect of developing as a leader.

**Covariances**

The codes identified as *covariances*, "being a Black female leader" and "receiving positive feedback as a leader," influenced the way in which my participants identified or not as a leader. The extent to which they identified as a leader involved a cyclical pattern in which being a Black female leader and receiving positive feedback are critical elements. I postulate the less confident an individual felt they could function as a Black female leader, and the less they received positive feedback from others, the less they would feel confident in identifying as a leader.

**Being a Black female leader.** Not only did participants speak to their developed identity as a leader, they also spoke to the specificity of being a Black female leader. The distinction is important because race and gender play significantly into how participants felt they were received as leaders both by individuals who looked like them and those who did not. They described the inherent challenges of being a Black female leader and how all of their intersectionality of identities must be taken into account. Alyssa reflected,

*And you see how people react to yourself versus other, and sometimes that, I think, does tie back to my identifying as a Black woman. Um so it kind of stinks in some situations where you have to draw back on being a leader or um how you go about doing that role*

*just because you're worried about how others will see how you're taking on um such like that duty.*

Alyssa went on to describe how racial and gender identities also made her cautious in how she chooses to lead, a consideration that those of privileged identities might not share. She stated,

*So I'm just even small things like I was talking about earlier, just how I lead, um constantly making sure that I have my checks and balances like in place, um and that I am like doing everything correctly and constantly trying to…obviously not perfect, but do the best I can in these leadership roles so that it is not, is not in any way tied back to the fact that, like maybe I am a Black woman, like oh so someone else will think, like, "Oh, like maybe we won't like do this again because she didn't lead in the right way," or something like that.*

Kaelyn described a similar pressure:

*Like all that hard work is like great but, like, now you have that constant pressure of like everybody like looking at, like, every detail that you do and making sure that you know you're still up to par, and like, that's also a lot of pressure.*

Tina directly mentioned the differences in leadership between people of various identities:

*…because being a, being a Black woman and being a leader is completely different from being a White woman and being a leader.*

Elizabeth described the role identities play in the conception of her leadership:

*I've realized how many spaces I've been in where I was the first blank to enter the space, and that's where I really realized my personhood and my personality actually and how race defines who I am and will define my leadership for the rest of my life.*

Participants did not separate their leadership experiences and leader identity from their race or gender identities. Both racial and gender identities directly impacted their development of leadership capacity and confidence. Their race and gender were also always considerations when thinking about how they lead and how they are received as leaders.

**Receiving positive feedback as a leader**. While all participants identified as leaders, participants were typically only able to do so because of the positive feedback they received from others. Overwhelmingly they typically called themselves leaders simply because others called them leaders. Elizabeth stated,

> *I consider myself a leader because other people believed in me, when especially when I didn't believe in myself.*

Later she said,

> *I think it really takes other people believing in you to be a leader.*

Denise described how others giving feedback helped her develop more confidence, a sentiment shared by other participants:

> *And that [being encouraged to rerun for class president] was really a big, influential part 'cause that was the first year I had done something big in leadership, and getting all that positive feedback and support um kind of helped push me like, okay, keep going a little bit more. Something's working. You're doing something right.*

Often the feedback received by participants was directly related to a formal leadership role where participants were able to exercise and practice leadership with others. In some cases, participants won actual awards or received external recognition for their leadership efforts. This feedback helped participants develop confidence and confirmed their skills and leadership practices were

effective and serving others positively in their spheres of influence. This confidence building was critical for their leader identity development.

## Coding Relationships

Now that I have described each of my 14 themes, Table 4.2 provides a visual of these final codes categorized based on Glaser's six Cs, which I also refer to as a coding scheme. As mentioned in the description of my data analysis in Chapter 3, the coding process led me to these specific, 14 codes that helped me conceptualize my final model. This table shows my list of codes and their relationship to one another based on their coding scheme.

Table 4.2 Theoretical Coding Relationships

| **Coding Scheme** | **Theme** |
|---|---|
| Contexts | Living in an oppressive system<br>Journeying to and through college<br>Experiencing familial influences |
| Causes | Being a Black woman<br>Being supported by mother, othermothers, or mentors<br>Having formal leadership experiences |
| Contingencies/Conditions | Facing discrimination and/or microaggressions<br>Learning to lead<br>Experiencing empowerment |
| Consequences | Developing racial identity<br>Aspiring to be like mother, othermothers, or mentors<br>Identifying as a leader |
| Covariances | Being a Black female leader<br>Receiving positive feedback as a leader |

**Black Undergraduate Women Leader Identity (BUWLI Model)**

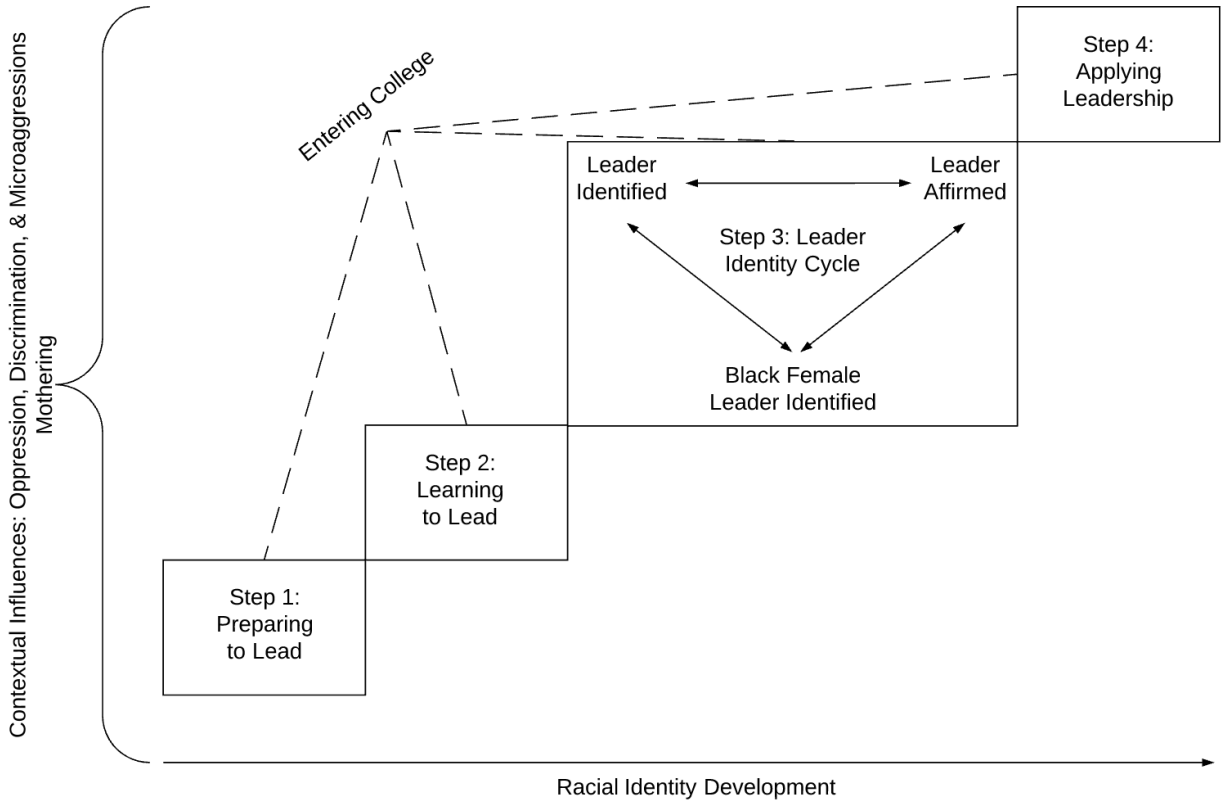


Figure 4.1 Black Undergraduate Women Leader Identity Model (BUWLI Model)

Model created by R. L. Shetty (2019)

I developed the Black Undergraduate Women Leader Identity Model (BUWLI model) by analyzing the above codes, grouping codes together in various ways, and understanding how codes and the data work together. The BUWLI model visually represents a developmental process in which individuals move from one step to the next moving upward. Because of the visual use of steps, this model may be interpreted as though individuals move through the developmental process in an upward and linear fashion. However, I want to make clear that not every individual will move through these steps in a linear fashion and in many cases may experience more than one step at the same time. It is possible for steps to be concurrent. With

that said, a step-based model was chosen for its visual, metaphorical representation of the difficulty and striving Black women face on their journey to claiming a leader identity. In many ways, developing a leader identity is like climbing or battling up a long flight of stairs, and reaching the top is a notable accomplishment. Below I describe the specific aspects of the model and how they reflect the leader identity development of Black women in college created through this study. I begin with a description of *the contexts* of the model; I next discuss *the steps* of the model. I end the description by discussing *the collegiate focus* of the model. For each part of the model and its description, I provide a visual figure to show readers which element of the model I am referring to; the element highlighted in purple is the element being referenced.

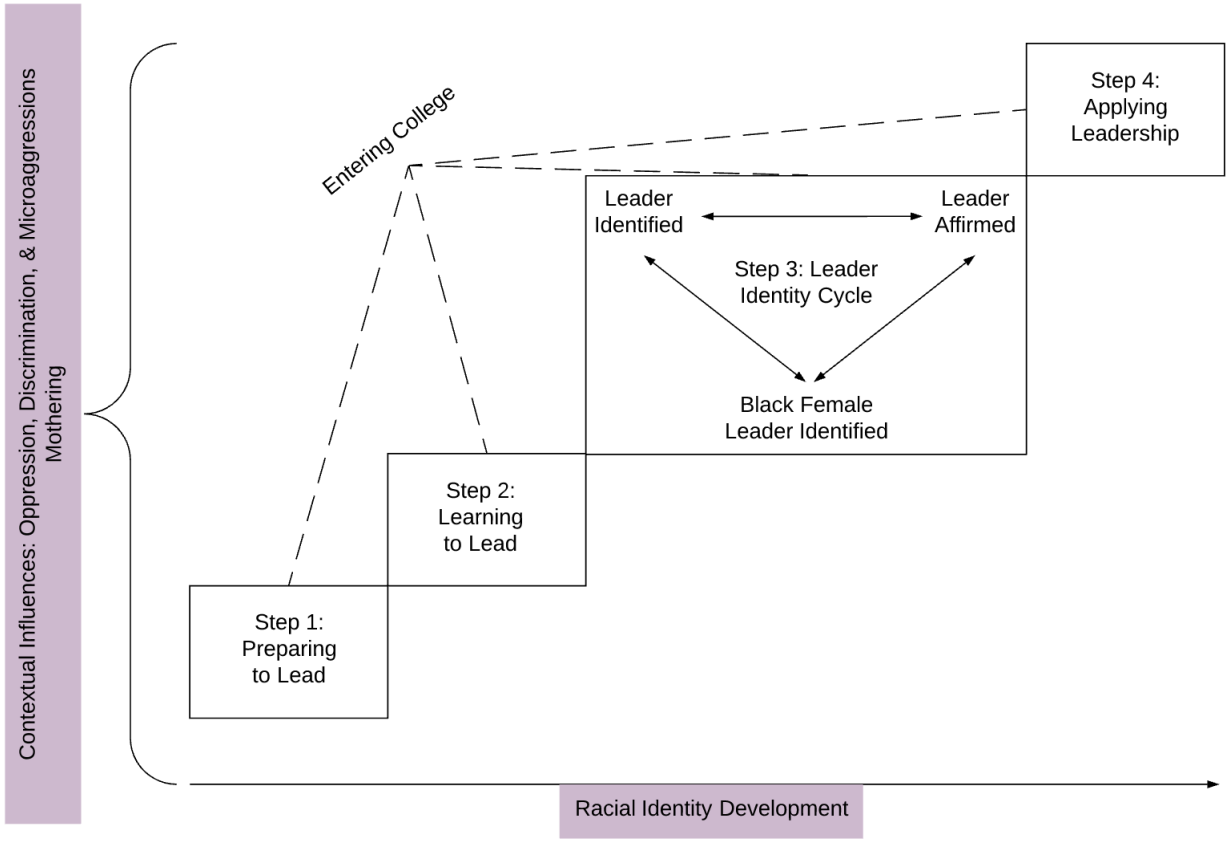


Figure 4.2 Contexts

Model created by R. L. Shetty (2019)

**Oppression, Discrimination, and Microaggressions**

As described by the themes of "living in an oppressive system" and "facing discrimination and microaggressions," my participants experience a myriad of challenges navigating the world as Black women. Particularly related to leadership and leader identity development, the contextual influences of oppression, systems of power, and discrimination cannot be overstated. Therefore, the entire BUWLI model is influenced by the context of oppression, discrimination, and microaggressions. Every step of the leader identity journey, from preparing to lead to applying leadership, can be and is influenced by this important context. The importance of this context cannot be overstated because it is particularly unique to the

experiences of Black women that other social identity groups may not face. For example, when asked what about my themes or the model most resonated with her, Arya stated,

> *The model as a whole resonated with me, but the statement on how being a leader is a long, uphill flight of stairs was something that resonated with me the most. It's not easy nor is it given to us, but often times Black women have to work twice as hard to be reaffirmed and taken seriously as her role as a leader.*

Given the double marginalization of Black women, the consistent theme of having to work twice as hard as others to accomplish the same goals, both personally and as a leader, resounds as a foundational aspect of this contextual element of the model. While the developmental process may look the same or similar to individuals with other social group memberships, the challenges faced and the experiences of a young, Black woman are often remarkably different.

**Mothering**

In the case of my participants, the person most important person related to how they saw themselves as leaders was their mother or their female caretaker growing up. I learned from and synthesized the data to reveal that young, Black women understand themselves as leaders given what they learned from their mothers. With that said, their mothers did not necessarily say or do anything specific to aid in leader identity development. Mothers and female caretakers led through their *actions*, and participants seem to have watched and learned from the actions of their mothers. Black women see themselves as leaders because they assume the actions, personas, and images of their mothers. Mothers are a reflection of self. For Black women, it is like looking into a mirror, so they seek to and continue to develop into the type of leader their mother is and represents. This is a critical aspect of leader identity development as Black women come to understand what a leader is and how a leader should act. In addition, mothers

are often the first example of leadership Black women have in their lives given the lack of Black women leaders in society. Mothers contribute to the confidence needed to assume the identity of "leader."

While seeing mothers as a mirrored reflection of self is the most critical aspect of this contextual aspect of the BUWLI model, the encouragement and support from mothers and othermothers also contribute to the contextual aspect of mothering within the model. Throughout the model, Black women can be seen to experience leader identity development through empowerment, learning lessons about leadership, receiving positive feedback, and desiring to give back to their communities. All of these aspects are infused by mothering influences, values learned through their mothers, voices of praise and constant support, and learning from how mothers lead. Ultimately, motherhood is a shining example of leadership among Black women as articulated by Arya when she said,

> *I would say that being a mother was like the most important way of like expressing leadership, because it's like…people really underestimate like be-like being a mom ….I don't know, like words cannot describe how like inspirational I think motherhood in general is such like an important leadership thing that a lot of people just tend to overlook because it's like, you don't get paid for it.*

Whether it is a mother, a female caretaker, a closer female family member, or a female mentor if no female family members exist, Black women in college rely on a mothering figure or presence to influence their development and their ability to claim a leader identity through all four steps of development.

**Racial Identity Development**

While racial identity development is not a primary focus of this study, racial identity development is critical to this model considering the role race plays in the leader identity for participants. It is possible that both racial and leader identity development occur concurrently for some individuals. Participants came to understand their race at various points in life ranging from as young as elementary school until as old as coming to college. Similarly, some of my participants were preparing to assume a leader identity by recognizing the concept of leadership at a very young age while some did not truly acknowledge the concept of leadership until college. Race and gender dictate the leadership experiences and leader identity development of participants, so like the context of oppression, racial identity development is visually represented as spanning across the model occurring as leader identity development occurs (though details of racial identity development are not present given the scope of this study as a leader identity study).

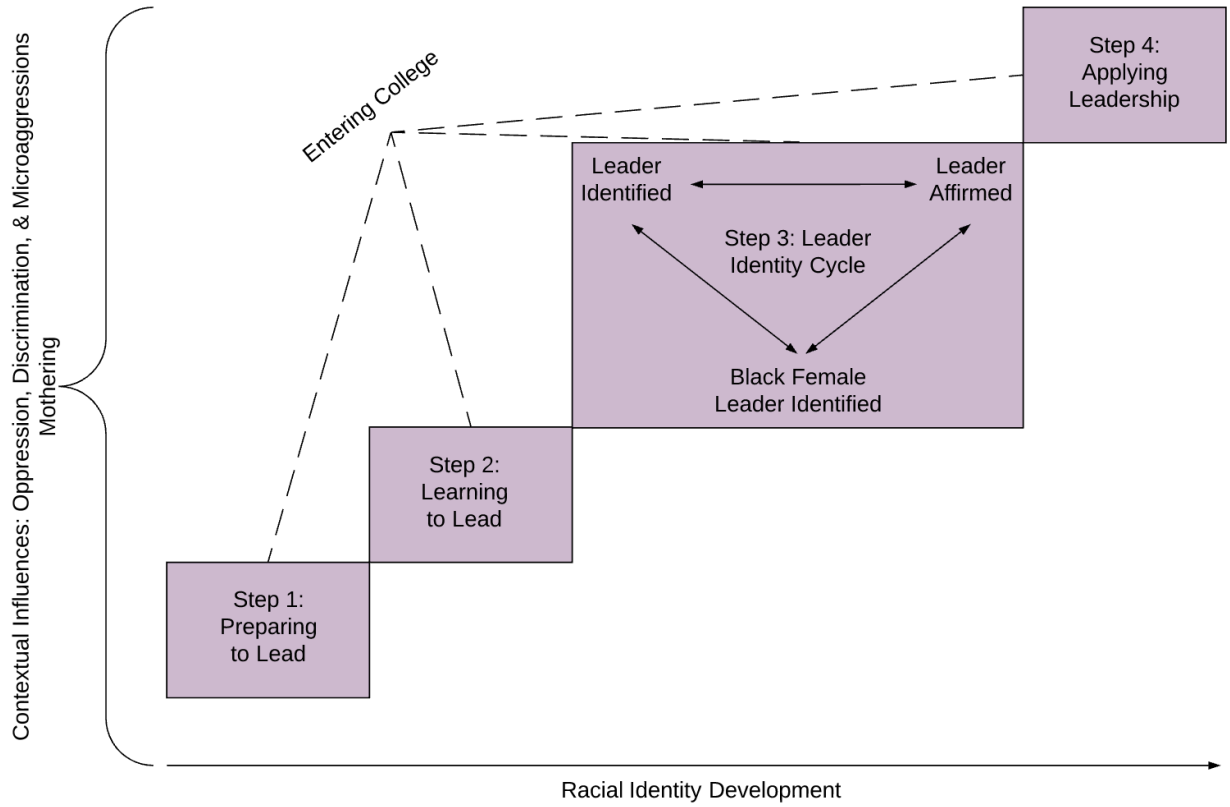


Figure 4.3 Steps

Model created by R. L. Shetty (2019)

**Theoretical Codes and the BUWLI Model**

By conceptualizing the relationships between theoretical codes via Glaser's six Cs, I was ultimately able to begin grouping codes together to create the developmental process by which Black women in college come to see themselves as leaders. Below, Table 4.3 shows how my brainstorming process led me to group codes in ways that ultimately developed into a stairstep model for the leader identity development of Black women in college. Glaser's six Cs ultimately helped me see initial relationships; however, creating the model required a more nuanced approach to analyzing the relationships between codes. Thus, I referred back to focused codes when developing the model and not every *context, cause, contingency, covariance, or consequence* is in a specific or direct sequence within the final model. For example, some codes

applied to multiple steps. With that said, the relationship between my theoretical codes and the model itself is fairly direct. Table 4.3 shows how my theoretical codes relate to the steps of the model. In this table, 10 of my final 14 theoretical codes are listed. The other four are related to the contextual influences ("living in an oppressive system" and "experiencing discrimination and/or microaggressions"), racial identity development ("developing racial identity" and "being a Black woman,"), and the entering college ("journeying to and through college") aspects of the model.

One contextual element of the model, "mothering," is a bit of an outlier in that it serves as a context; however, it is also rooted in codes that span the entire model ("experiencing familial influences," "aspiring to be like mother, othermothers, or mentors," "being supported by mother, othermothers, or mentors," and "receiving positive feedback as a leader"). The role of mother, othermothers, and mentors is a critical element to the leader identity development of Black women, so these themes are, indeed, reflected throughout its entirety. The role of mothers, mothering, and the influence of Black female support will be described further in my description of the model.

Table 4.3 Relationship Between Theoretical Codes and the BUWLI Model

| **BUWLI Model Steps** | **Step 1: Preparing to Lead** | **Step 2: Learning to Lead** | **Step 3: Leader Identity Cycle** | **Step 4: Applying Leadership** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Codes**<br><br>**Indicates a code used to conceptualiz* | Experiencing empowerment | Having formal leadership positions | Identifying as a leader* | Identifying as a leader* |
| | Experiencing familial influences* | Experiencing familial influences* | Aspiring to be like mother, othermothers, or mentors | |
| | | Learning to lead | Receiving positive feedback as a leader | |
| | | | Being supported by mother, othermothers, or mentors | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *e more than one step.* | | | | |
| | | | Being a Black female leader | |

**Step 1: Preparing to Lead**

In the BUWLI model, Step 1: Preparing to Lead should not be confused or conflated with Step 2: Learning to Lead. Preparing to lead is the distinct, first step for participants in which they cognitively process the existence of leadership and experience empowerment. The code "experiencing empowerment" contributed significantly to this particular step. Participants experienced racial empowerment or personal empowerment that increased confidence as an individual. Some women were influenced by family through instilled values and lessons such as self-love and knowing that anything is possible. Alyssa reflected on how her background helped her counteract societal messages of leadership:

> *Um, I, I feel like the ways that leadership is seen has been tainted. But I've always had the background of being told that you can do anything you want to do, so personally I…like you do hear this stuff, and like I have to be reassured uh because of that…*

In this quote, we not only see the affirmation from family; we also see an implied reference that leadership is tainted so that Black women are not regularly seen as leaders or having leadership potential. Therefore, perhaps one of the most important aspects of preparing to lead includes individuals seeing themselves represented racially by those they consider an authority figure or leader. For my participants, this included individuals as famous as the Obamas or their own mothers or family members who they viewed as leaders. For example, Kaelyn stated,

> *I think a lot of it that I've learned from her is just by like watching, like not necessarily like saying it to me but me like growing up and seeing how she holds yourself, and like what she does…I feel it's kind of like how you visualize a person, which could also like go*

*in a bad way if I didn't like necessarily have a like support system at home. But yeah, I think that was definitely influential.*

Seeing themselves represented by Black men and women in leadership is the first step for individuals to see themselves as leaders, in addition to having embraced personal values that prepared them to receive messages and lessons about leadership. This is particularly important for Black women who may not have ever seen themselves represented in leadership before, which differentiates the Black female experience from the leader identity experience of other racial and gender groups.

**Step 2: Learning to Lead**

Step 2: Learning to Lead is the next critical step for individuals to claim the identity of "leader." During this step, individuals better conceptualize leadership practices and concepts, have the opportunity to practice these concepts, and learn more about themselves as leaders in relation to others. Individuals may learn these lessons through formal leadership roles or experiences. Whitney describes a leadership conference that helped shape who she is today:

*And that [leadership conference] helped me break out of my shell because I used to be very shy…Um I used to be extremely shy when I was younger. So that helped me to, I think, be a little more vocal which is important if you're a leader. Um, it also, going through those leadership sessions, helped a lot. 'Cause one thing that we used to do, a personality test.*

Step 2: Learning to Lead may also be the step during which individuals develop personal definitions of leadership. Learning to lead may also include the beginnings of wrestling with the idea of a leader identity and experiencing minimal to tremendous self-doubt. It is overcoming this self-doubt that distinguishes Black female leader identity from other racial or gender groups.

Because of their oppression and marginalization, Black women may experience self-doubt that other social identity groups do not have to grapple with. The education a Black female receives related to leadership both conceptually and about self is a critical element of overcoming self-doubt and gaining the confidence to claim the identity of leader.

**Step 3: Leader Identity Cycle**

Unlike the other steps of the BUWLI model, Step 3: Leader Identity Cycle includes three distinct and cyclical concepts that are directly related to or dependent on one another. In this step, individuals are able to claim "leader" as part of their identity. However, this leader identity is dependent and related to two other factors, being affirmed as a leader by others and understanding the intersectionality of identities. For Black women in college, being a leader is dependent on the external validation and affirmation by others. While individuals may have existing confidence, this is only increased by hearing from others that their leadership efforts and practices are worthwhile and effective. In addition, for Black women, a leader identity is incomplete without individuals understanding how this intersects with racial and gender identity. Leader identity is directly related to Black female leader identity.

Being a Black female leader in particular is unique to this model and demonstrates how Black female leaders may be and are often treated differently than White or male peers. Participants in this study described the differences in how they feel they are perceived in spaces where they are a racial minority versus majority, and most indicated a strong difference between the two. For many, they were fearful, tentative, and discouraged when leading in spaces with individuals who did not look like them. Denise described how she feels when leading in spaces with individuals who do not look like her:

*Ha, I feel like I'm intimidating them. Uh…and it's mainly because I feel like they haven't seen anyone like me. Um, and so like they kind of don't know how to react. Um, or sometimes uh people can see my potential, um, and it scares them because they think, well, she has a possibility to take my position. And people don't wanna change. They want their…they want the high status, I should say. Um, and a lot of people don't want to give that up to a Black woman.*

Queen affirmed this notion of being doubted in leadership roles:

*But people who don't look like me are more often than not surprised. They're confused about how I'm doing what I'm doing. Um, how I got to where I am.*

Being a Black female leader inherently comes with the challenges of discrimination and marginalization that other racial and gender groups may or may not experience, as described through several themes in this study.

Given this context, the role of encouragement becomes even more important for Black women's leader identity development. Denise described the role of affirmation most clearly when she stated,

*I call myself a leader because everyone else says I am.*

Alyssa confirmed this sentiment when she said,

*.....feedback back from others. About me in these leadership roles. Um, so that's probably like bad to some sense but being once again reassured by those people that you're leading that you are doing a great job and that you should even try to be a leader of something else or being recommended for something that's something that's really driven me because if other people see me as a leader, um like I said, I also see myself as a leader.*

This sentiment was shared by many participants of this study. Jade, in particular, was able to describe the heart of Step 3 when she said,

> *I think it was like words of affirmation and encouragement from others. And also um being aware that my identity is typically not seen in a leadership role. And so being a Black woman and calling yourself a leader and making other people aware of that is just so powerful. So I think once I starting realizing that I became more comfortable in it.*

Ultimately, the combination of recognizing oneself as a leader, understanding oneself as a Black female leader, and receiving positive affirmation are concurrent and cyclical in nature as individuals finally claim their leader identity.

**Step 4: Applying Leadership**

Once individuals achieve a leader identity, the process does not end there. Step 4: Applying Leadership refers to individuals seeking to use their leadership and the power afforded to them to contribute to their communities or give back to others. In this study, almost every participant spoke to empowering others to seek leadership or helping others overcome obstacles on their way to success or to leadership. For example, Arya said,

> *Just kinda like…could also like inspire others who may also be in the same boat to just be like, "Okay, well, if she can do it, well then so can I." And then I can just kind of help and help them out and give them the tools that they need to just kind of push past those obstacles as well.*

Queen described growth she had undergone in understanding the importance of letting others thrive:

> *So not being afraid to allow other people around you to grow as well. So uh…..yeah, definitely, you know, encouraging and other people and focusing on what they're doing*

*right, rather than wrong, and, and pushing other people to step out of their comfort zones as well. Um, and being willing to step out with them.*

Tina discussed the intersection of her own confidence development with the desire to help others:

*And, you know, I'm helping people, and people are like, you know they like to listen to what I have to say. So that's helped boost my self-esteem a lot. 'Cause at first it's just like I'm doin stuff. But um, that's encouraged me to want other people to feel like you can do it too. Um, 'cause I'm always like tryin' to get my friends like you should try this. Like, you should try, you know, being on this exec board, you should try doin' that just because, like, if I can do it, you know you can do it too. And so that's helped me like from just like doing stuff like I've grown into a person that wants to lead, but like I want other people to lead too.*

The leader identity development of individuals does not necessarily have an ending point as individuals may have to cycle back through steps at various times; however, upon achieving Step 3 and being able to call oneself a leader, one of the final steps of leader identity development comes with Step 4 of empowering others to also call themselves leaders or to empower others the way they have been empowered. This step is unique in that Black women recognize the struggle of the leader identity development journey; therefore, the motivations to help others are rooted in empowerment and amplifying voices. This step is not just about helping others but about lifting others into positions of leadership and serving as a representation to other Black women and men.

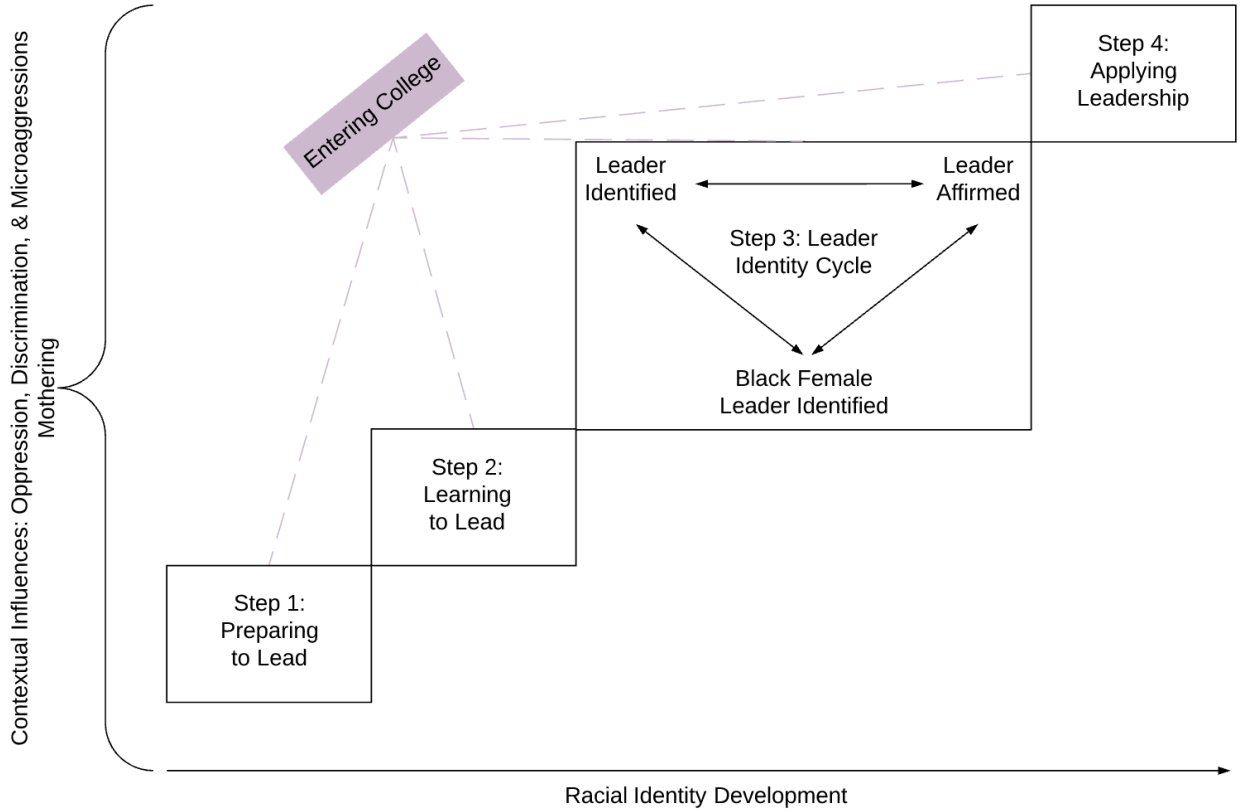


Figure 4.4 The Collegiate Focus

Model created by R. L. Shetty (2019)

**Entering College**

Through exploring the theme "journey to and through college," I saw how coming to college meant different things for different participants. However, undeniably, coming to college transformed the lives of participants. Coming to college influenced various aspects of the leader identity development process depending on the participant. Because different aspects of the leader identity development process were influenced by the entrances to and experiences in college, "entering college" is connected to every step of the model with a dotted line. The dotted line indicates the fluidity of this concept and that it is not necessarily tied directly to any one step but could be tied to one step, some steps, or all steps concurrently.

Entering college is a critical aspect of development but can influence the developmental process in different ways depending on the person. I describe each "step" of the model at length below; however, I want to take a moment to describe how "entering college" is specifically related to each of the individual steps. The relationship between "entering college" and each step may mirror the experience of many college students; however, in this case, the experiences of my participants are also shrouded by the contexts of systemic oppression and racial identity development. The way in which entering college affects them related to each step is specific and unique to their racial and gender identities.

Related to Step 1: Preparing to Lead, entering college may be the first time individuals conceptualize leadership, not having had examples of leadership in their past. While not true of a majority of participants, a couple mentioned they had not recognized the concept of leadership at all until college. In some cases, participants recalled the intersection of class and race and reported not seeing an example of Black leadership until college. This may have been due to a general lack of representation of Black leaders or due to growing up in low-income, urban areas where participants felt like everyone assumed the role of follower in a community where leadership did not exist. Depending on an individual's intersecting identities and life experiences, college may be the first time they experience the education or empowerment to understand leadership as a concept and as an option for them as Black women.

Related to Step 2: Learning to Lead, entering college allows individuals to explore leadership practices, discover personal leadership qualities, or experience leadership positions in which they learn how to better lead groups and their communities. As Black women, many of my participants described how they did not see themselves as leaders growing up and certainly did not always recognize their own leadership qualities, given the microaggressions and

discrimination they faced. As previously mentioned, some participants were held back or sheltered, or refused to seek leadership positions out of fear or pressure from others. College may be the first time in which Black female individuals are even given the opportunity to explore leadership practices or self-reflect on personal leadership styles, given the lack of opportunity in their past.

Related to Step 3: Leader Identity Cycle, entering college includes leading groups and being provided feedback about their leadership, which when positive, affirms a leader identity. Being in college may also be the context in which individuals identify as leaders for the first time, having had enough life experience to be seen as a leader, gain confidence as a leader, and finally claim that identity. For Black women, often they have not been given opportunity or the benefit of the doubt until this point. The role of affirmation from others, by having opportunities in college to lead, is absolutely critical to the leader identity development of Black women. This is also the time in which individuals may understand the intersection of their identities that make their Black female leadership both powerful and possibly threatening to others.

Finally, related to Step 4: Applying Leadership, being in a collegiate environment may be the time in which individuals not only recognize their identity as a leader but want to take action on this notion. Individuals may work to empower others to seek leadership, to give back to their communities by using the power they have in leadership, and to amplify the voices of others through their roles in campus or community organizations during college. For Black women this is even more salient because they understand the hardships faced by others who look like them. Black women seek not only to serve those around them, but also to amplify the voices of those around them and to encourage others along a leadership journey they just experienced

themselves. This is made possible through peer leadership and serving in a collegiate environment as Black women.

## Summary

As a reminder, the BUWLI model is not necessarily linear in nature, though it is possible leader identity development is linear for many individuals. This model demonstrates how individuals move from mentally, emotionally, and cognitively preparing to lead, to finally claiming a leader identity, and ultimately to using their leader identity to influence those around them. As mentioned, it is possible individuals may need to move back and between steps over time as they continue to learn about themselves, leadership, and develop confidence as a leader and with their leader identity.

Contextual influences, racial identity development, and the role college plays for individuals are also all critical elements to this model and how others perceive, conceptualize, and learn about how Black women in college develop their leader identity. In particular, the contexts of oppression and mothering completely shape and set the stage for the leader identity development of Black women in college. While Black women may experience similar development to others in learning about leadership as a concept, developing a personal leadership definition, leading others, and refining their leadership, the journey and the challenges along the way make this a more difficult path. I think this is well-represented in Step 3 of the model where we see leader identity being ultimately contingent upon positive feedback and affirmation from others while also intersecting with the specificity of Black female leader identity. Being a Black female leader comes with discrimination, microaggressions, personal pressures, and societal pressures that other racial and gender groups do not have to contend with.

Similarly, the role of mothers and female mentors also serves a unique place within the leader identity development of Black women in college. Mothers play a critical role in the way Black women learn about leadership and come to see themselves as leaders as they mirror the

actions of their mothers. The role model mothers play contributes to every step of the model. This begins in Step 1 from the way Black women are prepared to lead by being empowered through the leadership representation they see in their mothers to Step 4 in which they apply lessons learned from their mother to empower others and serve others with humility and hard work. With these things in mind, we can begin to explore how this model might be used in a higher education context to continue the work of leadership education with diverse bodies of students.

# CHAPTER 5

## DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to identify the experiences by which Black women in college come to adopt and understand their identity as a leader. Upon interviewing 11 Black women in college, I was able to review the narratives of these women and how they experienced and made meaning of their journey towards becoming a leader. Through grounded theory analysis, using various levels of coding, I developed the Black Undergraduate Women Leader Identity model (BUWLI model) to visually capture and explain the process Black women experience as they develop their identities as leaders. While I did not use specific, a priori language or concepts from Womanism (Phillips, 2006) to analyze my data, Womanism served as a theoretical lens by which I approached this study. Womanist tenets of intersectionality, resistance against oppressions, community and family values, and the importance of relationships framed the research process from the development of interview protocol through to analysis, though from purely philosophical perspective.

As I conclude narration on this study, this chapter will include a discussion on the findings from chapter 4, including responses to my research questions broadly, and additional interpretations of core themes from my data. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How have Black women in college come to understand their identities as leaders?
2. What experiences have contributed to the leader identity development of Black women in college?

Finally, I will discuss the implications for practice within higher education and recommendations for future research related to this study.

## Discussion of Findings

I begin my discussion by describing how the BUWLI model affirms existing notions of identity and leader identity development. To contextualize this study, in Chapter 2, I described existing models and literature related to general identity development, racial identity development, and leader identity development. By examining elements of the BUWLI model, it affirms existing notions of identity development through the lens of general development, race, and leadership. Even decades old models and theories are still reflected in the elements of the BUWLI model. In addition, the BUWLI model is interwoven with concepts similar to those seen in the LID Model (Komives et al., 2005) and in McKenzie's (2018) leader identity development model for undergraduate women. Therefore, I will also describe how the BUWLI model is situated related to these two other models. In addition to situating this model within existing literature, I will discuss some of the key experiences and aspects of leader identity development outlined by the BUWLI model worthy of interpretative comments and further discussion.

### The BUWLI Model and Identity Development

When exploring identity development broadly, Erikson (1959/1980), Marcia (1980), and Josselson (1987/1989) all described the role of values, interpersonal relationships, and commitment to a self-concept as part of the identity development of adolescents and young adults. Marcia and Josselson spoke specifically to the development of women. The development of self-concept includes coming to various crossroads, beginning to listen to one's inner voice versus external voices of authorities, and committing to living by one's internal

values and voice. While some of these concepts may not seem explicit within the BUWLI model, they are certainly present. In the contextual element of familial influences, Black women found guidance through family authorities and also began to establish value systems through family influences. The foundation of values is also seen through the mothering relationship Black women have with female caretakers, also a contextual element of the model. While I did not necessarily see my participants experience a full commitment to a finalized sense of self, I did identify a focused code "recognizing personal maturation" in which participants saw themselves growing as individuals, becoming more autonomous, and learning to rely on themselves, perhaps in addition to mothers and authority figures.

In addition to committing to an internal voice and self-concept, participants spoke at length about navigating interpersonal relationships, serving as a follower and a leader, and managing individuals in groups and organizations. In Step 2 of the BUWLI model, Black women are learning about themselves as leaders, adopting the skills to lead others, and beginning to practice those skills more regularly. In Steps 3 and 4, Black women are able to employ those skills more artfully and actually begin to serve as mentors and advocates for others. This type of development affirms the importance of interpersonal relationships as seen in various identity development models.

Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) and Sue and Sue (1999) developed racial and cultural identity development models that contextualize this study. In both models, racial identity development typically begins with assimilation into White society and culture followed by the budding understanding of difference, appreciation for one's racial culture, and a commitment to one's racial identity and culture. Racial identity development serves as a contextual of the BUWLI model given the important and salience of race in leader identity development. While

racial identity development was clearly important, I did not get the fullest sense of the racial identity development process for participants; I heard most about moments of revelation when racial differences were first noticed and when discriminatory or microaggressive experiences surfaced and a combination of frustration and pride related to racial identity. It is clear that my participants were farther along on their racial identity development journey, had fully embraced their Blackness, and were often very proud of their racial identity. Because many were able to articulate the challenges of being a Black woman, this leads me to believe they were journeying along a parallel racial identity development process that aligns with the theories developed by Cross and Fhagen-Smith and Sue and Sue.

Unlike general or racial identity development, there are fewer models of leader identity development that affirm or confirm a consistent process for professionals to consider. With that said, ample literature exists related to the notion and importance of leader identity development (Day & Harrison, 2007; Hall, 2004; Ibarra, Snook, & Ramo, 2010; Komives et al., 2013; Nohiri & Kurana, 2010). These scholars describe leader identity development as a coalescing of life experiences that contribute to adding leader to one's self-concept, much like one might experience other types of identity development. Leader identity, like other identities, also has more or less salience for individuals depending on the context. Ibarra, Snook, and Ramo (2010) addressed the importance of leader identity development as stronger leader identity contributes to the likelihood individuals will seek out opportunities to actually employ their leadership skills and for continued leadership growth. In other words, the more salient a leader identity, the more likely a person is to intentionally enact and practice leadership.

Steps 3 and 4 of the BUWLI model most directly align with these notions of seeking additional opportunities for employing leadership skills and further self-growth. In Step 3 of the

model, Black women are comfortable identifying as leaders and recognize the talents and skills they bring to groups, organizations, or communities; they are prepared to enact their leadership talents. While they still need confidence boosting, perhaps more than other identity groups, their confidence has grown and "leader" has certainly been adopted into their self-concept. Not only that, but they are also able to articulate how being a Black female leader has been assumed into their self-concept. Step 3 was also developed by considering a focused code "wanting more for self." I saw that as participants gained confidence and began calling themselves a leader, they aspired to more and wanted the opportunity to grow as an individual and as a leader. Denise described this broadly when she said,

> *I just know because I've done so much in just these few years……Honestly, the possibilities are like limitless for, for me after this. Like, I literally can't even imagine what I can do next.*

Other participants articulated wanting to be more than "second." Instead of vice president, they wanted to go for president. They wanted careers in which they would find happiness and success. They expected more of themselves in terms of giving back to their home and local, college communities through leader roles, which is seen in Step 4 of the model through empowering and serving others. While a large body of leader identity development models does not yet exist in which to situate the BUWLI model, it aligns with notions of leader identity development currently in the literature. In addition, while there are not many models explaining the leader identity development of college students, the couple of models that do exist are important launching points for additional discussion on the BUWLI model and its contribution to existing literature.

**Comparing Undergraduate Leader Identity Development Models**

The purpose of this study was not to compare my model to Komives et al.'s (2005) original LID model or to apply the LID model to a Black female population; however, I would be remiss if I did not mention some comparisons between the BUWLI model and the original LID model and McKenzie's (2018) model for the leader identity development of undergraduate women. This comparison allows me to situate the BUWLI model within a larger body of literature. Elements of the LID and McKenzie's models are implied by or directly congruent with the BUWLI model. These similarities are briefly addressed below. It is also important to note that the similarities listed below are not completely exhaustive but represent the primary aspects of the models which I felt were most congruent.

Key aspects of the LID model that can be compared to aspects of the BUWLI model are three of the four developmental influences (adult influences, peer influences, and meaningful involvement) and three of the five elements of developing self (deepening self-awareness, building self-confidence, and applying new skills) (Komives et al., 2005). Of these elements, I want to highlight three that are perhaps the most similar to concepts found in the BUWLI model, which are the ways in which adults influence leader identity development, the notion of building self-confidence, and meaningful involvement.

Similar to the experiences of my participants, Komives et al. (2005) described the role of adults related to confidence building: "Adults played different roles in influencing student movement through the leadership identity development stages. In the family, adults were very important in building confidence and being an early building block of support" (p. 596). Later Komives et al. go on to say that often adults were the first to see leadership potential in students. I find these notions are comparable to the experiences of my participants and are reflected in

Step 2 of the BUWLI model in which Black women are learning to lead. Step 2 includes Black women seeing their leadership potential, being supported by mothers and mentors, and learning from mothers, mentors, or other influential figures. Komives et al. describe the confidence-building their participants went through and that often family and close adults were the first to offer support on the leader identity development journey. This is certainly similar to my participants who had mothers and mentors close to them encouraging them to engage in various activities and learn more about themselves as leaders, and who contributed to their increased confidence over time. Mothering and the role of mothers serves as a contextual element of the BUWLI model but this idea of building self-confidence is seen generally in Steps 2 and 3 of the model as Black women both learn about leadership and begin to self-identity as a leader. The concept of "meaningful involvement," though I coded this as "having formal leadership experiences," directly influenced the overall development of the BUWLI model and directly informed Step 2 of the model. It is through meaningful involvement or formal leadership experiences that individuals "clarify personal values and interests, and helped students experience diverse peers, learn about self, and develop new skills" (Komives et al., 2005, p. 598). This is congruent between both the LID and BUWLI models.

Related to McKenzie's (2018) leader identity development model for undergraduate women, the elements most closely related to the BUWLI model are "expanding views of leadership" (found in Phase 1 of McKenzie's model), the transition from Phase 1 to 2, and "changing views of self as leader" (found in Phase 3 of McKenzie's model). The concept of expanding views of leadership is congruent with the BUWLI model, and McKenzie describes the ways in which her study's female participants felt a lack of confidence as leaders given societal standards of leadership. This was a common theme for my participants as well and is reflected

most heavily in Steps 2 and 3 of the BUWLI model where participants continue to develop confidence. The transition from Phase 1 to 2 in McKenzie's model emphasizes the growth in self-confidence for women through hearing others call them leaders. This is directly related to the "leader affirmed" aspect of the Step 3: Leader Identity Cycle in the BUWLI model. It is only through having repetitious and consistent external affirmation that Black women are able to conceptualize themselves as leaders. Finally, the changing views of self as leader in McKenzie's model speaks to the ways in which female leaders ultimately see a responsibility in helping others and ensuring others feel empowered. This is directly aligned with Step 4 of the BUWLI model in which Black women apply their leader identity and leadership skills towards giving back to others, empowering others, and serving as representation for others in leadership.

While the BUWLI model is congruent, in many instances, with these existing models, the contexts and influences shaping leader identity as explained by these other models do not capture the nuances of varying identities. The BUWLI model includes specific, cultural elements that are specific to Black women that would be impossible to capture in a one-size-fits-all model. This is important because the BUWLI model demonstrates the need for more targeted programs, services, or considerations for the Black women being served at colleges and universities nationwide. The leader identity development experiences of Black women in college may differ greatly from White peers or peers in other social identity groups. Therefore, approaching leadership education, development, and training for Black women must be approached with careful consideration of the developmental needs of this population. There are four primary ways in which I see the BUWLI model differing from the work of Komives et al. and McKenzie. These four core concepts (mothering; confidence, imposter syndrome, and internalized oppression; humility; and identity development and intersectionality) are described below and

contribute to the significance and usefulness of the BUWLI model for higher education professionals.

**Black Female Leader Identity Development**

The BUWLI model provides a staircase developmental model for understanding the general process by which Black women come to understand their identities as leaders. While each step can be summarized based on the learning and development occurring, several key aspects of this developmental process warrant additional discussion. Below I describe several key themes found within the data that stood out to me throughout the data collection and analysis process and are worthy of considerable attention for those intending to use the BUWLI model to its fullest potential. In addition, the concepts described are the four key elements of the BUWLI model that differentiate the model from current, existing models. The themes below were captured by focused or theoretical codes though I am using more broad language to describe my interpretation of the experiences of Black women experiencing leader identity development.

**Mothering.** Mothering serves as a contextual element of the BUWLI model given my participants' emphasis on mothering relationships. As I conducted my interviews, mothers or female caretakers came up in every interview and often repeatedly in every interview. The very specific role of mothers or othermothers is a unique factor of the BUWLI model not seen in other models. This theme is not surprising considering the importance of mothers and the motherline in Black and African American culture. Black mothers and othermothers pave the way for their daughters and younger generations by serving as examples of leadership in the home, in their careers, and in society. Because of the lack of representation of Black women leaders, seeing their mothers as leaders in these contexts was critical for my participants and for the development of leader identity as Black women. In addition, Black mothers also shelter their

daughters and teach them about the marginalization and oppression they may face. Black motherhood is not just about raising daughters but about raising daughters for survival (Narcisse, 2013). In the case of my participants, several felt sheltered by their mothers or caretakers or felt their mothers provided somewhat aggressive messages of having to work twice as hard as others to succeed. These messages certainly influenced how my participants approached leadership roles and how they saw themselves as leaders. As higher education professionals and leadership educators consider the unique needs of Black women, mothers or female caretakers and mentors should be part of the equation as programs and services are created.

**Confidence, imposter syndrome, and internalized oppression.** An important difference between the BUWLI model and the aforementioned leader identity development models is in the development of confidence. While I mentioned similarities in this area, the differences lie in how, when, and if students develop confidence as a leader. Komives et al. (2005) asserted, as depicted in their model, that students eventually reach a place of confidence with their leader identity. McKenzie's (2018) model also assumes this; however, she does admit "students who struggled with self-confidence took longer to move into later developmental phases of leadership identity; some were still developing their confidence even as they concluded their college years and thus remained in this early phase of leadership identity development" (McKenzie, 2018, p. 5). Unlike these other models, the BUWLI model does not assume Black women will ever be fully confident in their leader identity or that they will ever be accepted by others as a leader. Among my participants, not one had developed consistent feelings of confidence and several even mentioned they were very much still working on developing confidence. Meriwether (2018) spoke to the differences in confidence between Black women

and others: “Among Black female student leaders, self-efficacy, while present, may look different from their White or male counterparts, even in similar environments” (p. 105).

While the terms “imposter syndrome” and “internalized oppression” were not actually named by my participants related to leader identity, several alluded to these notions. Participants described and how they, and society in general, have been socialized to believe and accept society’s definitions and norms of leadership. Many of my participants spoke to the self-doubt and the struggles they faced once they did assume leadership roles and positions. Several spoke to being afraid or not knowing what to do as leaders. They spoke to feeling like they had to work independently without help, consistently prove themselves, and affirm for others it was not a mistake to trust them as a leader. The imposter syndrome feeling was consistent. The internalized oppression of believing they may not be worthy or accepted as leaders makes developing confidence even more difficult for Black women. The conversations with my participants included lengthy discussions of how societal norms and definitions of leadership did not match their own nor were they represented by societal norms of leadership. While this may also be true for women broadly, the double marginalization of Black women makes their positionality within society even more precarious than women at large.

**Identity development and intersectionality.** The double marginalization of Black women inherently makes this population unique compared to others and the intersection of Blackness, womanhood, and leader identity must be taken into account for the context of this study. The leader identity for Black women is directly intertwined with, determined by, and influenced by their Black womanhood. Step 3 of the BUWLI model: Leader Identity Cycle is perhaps the most unique point of the model worthy of additional attention. The leader identity of Black women is not just leader identity but rather ebbs and flows with an individual’s

understanding of their identity as a Black female leader. The Black female leader identity is just as critical to this model as leader identity broadly. Being a Black female leader means something different than being a White female leader, a male leader, or a leader with other identities. For these women, they could hardly separate notions or experiences of leadership from their identities as Black women. How they were treated as leaders was dependent on their combined racial and gender identities. Many discussed the constant struggle of having to prove themselves as leaders both to other Black individuals but also with individuals of differing identities. Leadership rarely came easily and was always shrouded by tentativeness and fear of doing or saying the wrong thing, not only as women, but as Black women who serve as representatives of a specific racial group.

**Humility.** I have not yet directly touched on the notion of humility as I did not find it an independent factor worthy of explicit inclusion in the final BUWLI model. However, I think it is important for scholars and researchers to understand the role and development of humility in Black women through the leader identity development journey. "Having humility" was a focused code that I ultimately grouped under "learning to lead". With that said, humility is a characteristic I found participants exhibiting as they learned to lead and throughout their experiences leading others. At first, I thought this sense of humility was a residual effect of internalized oppression or a lack of confidence. I sensed the discomfort in being called a leader and the disbelief that they, as Black women, could be leaders at all. While the discomfort and disbelief were often rooted in a lack of confidence, I also started to notice sincere humility shining through in participant narratives. Even when participants did accept awards, praise, or positive feedback from others, they felt truly blessed and humbled. They sought to learn more about the needs of others in order to be even better leaders. They often did not want praise or

recognition but rather wanted to uplift their communities, mentors, and friends who also contributed to their success. When asked about why she considered herself a leader, Elizabeth spoke to these ideas:

> *'Cause I'm, I've always tried to be as humble as I could, and I'm, I still consider myself a very humble person, and that's ha why I hate to receive accolades 'cause I'm like I didn't do this. Y'all either voted me or believed in me and things like that. I think it really takes other people believing in you to be a leader.*

In many ways, they saw their own success as the success of a full cohort of individuals who helped them get to where they are. While none of my participants mentioned this, I interpret this humility to be a result of the struggle and challenges of becoming a Black female leader. These women do not take leadership opportunities for granted; therefore, their sense of humility is a real and honorable characteristic they exhibit in light of the marginalization they face.

**Summary**

The development of leader identity for Black women is certainly complex. Ultimately, Black women come to understand their identities as leaders over time and with ample encouragement. The understanding and acceptance of a leader identity is a process, a process which includes learning about leadership and how to enact leadership practices in addition to receiving feedback about their leadership skills. Most important to this process is the affirmation that enables Black women to feel empowered and to more fully embrace their leader identity. Specific experiences also contribute to the development of a leader identity for Black women. First, interactions with family, mothers, or mentors leads to inherited shared values and the development of self-love and confidence. In addition, formal leadership roles, camps, or educational experiences are meaningful as these opportunities create learning environments

during which Black women can explore their beliefs and the beliefs of others related to leadership and practice leadership among peers. Finally, specific interactions with family, mothers, or mentors in which they receive support, encouragement, and affirmation, typically through verbal communication, are meaningful to the leader identity development of Black women.

## Boundaries of Study

Those wishing to use this model should keep in mind the context in which the model was developed. The BUWLI model was developed by considering the experiences of eleven individual and unique women. The life experiences of these women were and are certainly shaped by attending private institutions of higher education in the southeast region of the United States. In addition, each woman had a unique story about family, primary and secondary education, and other individualistic experiences contributing to their leader identity development. While the intention was to develop a model and a resource for professional use at institutions across the United States, practitioners must consider if and how this model applies appropriately to the population of Black women they may be working at in different regions of the country at various types of institutions.

When considering the demographic breakdown of study participants, one will notice that nine of the 11 participants have declared or intended majors in the social or natural sciences. While this may or may not have influenced the responses of participants, professionals might keep in mind these participants may have responded to certain questions in ways that were influenced by their experiences as Black women in science or with a lens influenced by their academic coursework.

## Implications for Higher Education

The primary problem being addressed, as well as the significance of this study, related to the lack of resources for understanding the experiences of Black women's leader identity development. The BUWLI model is currently one-of-a-kind and unique to the experiences of Black women and their leader identity development. Combined with other literature on leader identity development and Black female leadership experiences, the BUWLI model is a foundational launching point from which higher education professionals and leadership educators can develop or improve upon services offered for Black women in college. The BUWLI model provides practitioners with the understanding of the *process* by which and the *experiences* that contribute to Black female leader identity. The model can be used to understand current college students as well as rising college students given the influence of families, mothers, and the role entering college plays in this development. In this section, I briefly discuss the use of the model, then I make two recommendations for practitioners to consider related to programs and services for Black women in college.

### Use of the BUWLI Model

While the use of developmental theories increases the risk of limiting our perspectives, theories also provide a grounding and launching point by which to understand human development (Patton et al., 2016). The BUWLI model is meant to serve as a launching point and a tool for understanding the leader identity development of Black women specifically. Because there are so few models related to the leader identity development of college students, the BUWLI model is certainly unique. However, given its overlap with the original LID model and the work of McKenzie (2018) and her leader identity development model for college women, the BUWLI model can be considered in tandem with these models as needed.

Practitioners and student affairs educators should consider the specificity of the model when deciding when to use or to teach the model. This model could be introduced in a student development theories course, a socially just leadership course or program, courses on pedagogy, or diversity and inclusion related programs and courses. Because of the intersection of college student development, identity development, race, gender, and oppression related to the model, it is well suited to be appropriately used in discuss in a number of settings. I most imagine this model being used among leadership educators who seek to create inclusive programs or developmental opportunities for Black women, which I will discuss next.

**Black Female Leadership Education and Programs**

Given the natural differences in the way Black women experience leader identity development, I recommend student affairs professionals and leadership educators develop specific programs, organizations, or opportunities for Black women only. Meriwether (2018) affirms the importance of leadership educators recognizing the importance of catering to the racial identity of Black female leaders:

> Socially just leadership educators understand each of our students is different, even if we are not always privy as to how…While they [study participants] all identify it as the first thing other people see, being Black meant something nuanced to the Black female student leader participants. Therefore, helping members of this population the meaning of Blackness is critical to their overall, and leadership, development. (p. 100)

Meriwether went on to state the importance of addressing intersectionality with Black female students in order to accurately understand how varying identities influence students and their lived experiences with leadership.

Examples of targeted programs could be a weekend leadership retreat, a series of leadership workshops throughout a semester or a year, a university-sponsored student group or organization, or a pre-orientation, alternative break program, or a mother-daughter program. This list is not exhaustive but simply provides initial ideas. Targeted programs for Black female leaders allow for the time, space, and safety for Black women to share their unique experiences. In addition, educators can provide useful tips and tricks for leadership specific to the needs of this population. Finally, targeted programs open the door to for exploring self-care strategies and healing when leading is or is perceived as difficult.

Haslam et al. (2011) discuss how group contexts and environments shape the success of a leader. How the leader integrates into the group from a social and identity perspective matters for the success of the group. When we combine the importance of ingroup interactions with what we know about the challenges of Black female leaders being socially accepted, it is important to consider how to support women through targeted programs to improve their experiences with leading different kinds of groups. Meriwether's (2018) study on Black female leader development argued that racial and gender identities contribute to the way Black women perceive others and are perceived by others, a notion confirmed by my study. Specific programming for Black female leaders in college may be able to mitigate some of the issues Black women may face as leaders but can also provide a source of support if and when things do not go as student expect. Helping students find the integration and acceptance discussed by Haslam et al. (2011) is a role of leadership educators that can be accomplished through a number of programs or services.

If and when programs are hosted for large groups of students, including students with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, practitioners might consider a pre-program discussion for

individual racial subgroups. This would allow space for members of those groups to engage in initial dialogue about leadership influenced by their racial identity that may be different from the White norms at their college or university. In addition, administrators or facilitators could use that time to empower marginalized groups, such as Black women, prior to entering into a space with a mix of racial and ethnic identities.

**Mentoring**

One of the key understandings I gained from this research was the importance of Black women seeing themselves represented in leadership or having strong mentors as examples of leadership. Mentoring programs for Black female leaders can include pairing undergraduate students with faculty, staff, or alumni. Mentoring programs can also be established with peer-to-peer mentoring. Ideally, these mentoring relationships would be with other Black females serving in leadership roles or capacities. To quote Sally Ride, "You can't be what you can't see", and young, Black women need to see the possibilities of Black women in leadership in their communities. As a higher education professional, this may mean rallying Black women willing to give of themselves in this capacity and using personal relationships to develop a mentoring program. I also recommend programs in which self-identifying Black female students serve as peer mentors. Several of my participants shared the growth and confidence-building they experienced by serving as a mentor to others and by passing down their wisdom to others.

Studies by Borum and Walker (2012), Daniel (2009), and Simon, Perry, and Roff (2008) describe the lack of Black female leaders and mentors in fields such as mathematics, social work, academic, and psychology. Practitioners in the field should keep in mind that access to Black female mentors may be more limited than imagined. In these cases, administrators should consider developing relationships with local alumni and community members from which to

draw potential mentors. In the case that Black women are difficult to find as mentoring volunteers, examining student needs and considering female mentors of varying racial identities may have to be a solution with permission or input from Black female students. Daniel (2009) described the challenges of interracial mentoring: "Race can matter in the mentoring relationship. Internalizing the overwhelmingly negative stereotypes so prevalent in popular culture can inhibit mentors in initiating and maintaining solid mentoring relationships when the mentees are Black women. Stereotype threat may compromise mentees' behavior and consequently their achievement" (p. 300). Any mentoring program should include ongoing training for mentors, so some of the interracial concerns may be mitigated by ongoing training, support, and assessment from both mentor and mentee. With that said, in spite of the concerns related to interracial mentoring, some of my participants did speak to women outside of their racial identity they trusted, wholeheartedly cared for, and looked to as mentors. It is possible for positive interracial mentoring to occur as long as Black female student input is sought.

Finally, given the role mothers play in the leader identity of Black women, practitioners might consider programs that ask students to reflect on how their mothers or othermothers have served as mentors. This type of reflection might help students clarify how they define leadership as seen through their mothers' words and actions. In addition, students may find empowerment by explicitly recognizing the leadership example their mother or othermother serves for them. A program may also include specific activities or conversations students can have with their mother or othermothers that might further their leadership journey. For example, a mother-daughter retreat, a video or teleconferencing workshop with mothers as guest speakers, or a structured leadership workbook for mothers and daughters might be beneficial for institutions to consider.

## Recommendations for Future Research

Through the analysis of interviews from eleven individual and unique women, the data allowed me to develop a model explaining the leader identity development of Black women currently enrolled in college. The development of this new model opens the door to many possible waves of research related to the leader identity development for college students and for Black female leader identity, specifically. Additional confirmatory studies could be conducted at different types of institutions in different locations across the country to affirm the usefulness and generalizability of the BUWLI model. Specifically, I recommend studies be conducted at larger, public schools, historically Black colleges and universities, and other institutional types given my participants attended small to mid-size, private institutions. In addition to confirmatory studies, I provide more specific recommendations below given the nuances in the data I was unable to explore thoroughly in a single study. These topics range from diving deeper into specific themes to topics that emerged through reflecting on next steps and how to increase the usefulness of the BUWLI model through additional research.

### The Role of Mothers

The influence and role of mothers was a consistent theme of my study, and participants all spoke to the importance of mothers or female caretakers during their interviews. With that said, many participants had difficulty putting into words how and why their mothers were influential. While I was able to conceptualize a general understanding of the role of mothers through inferential interpretation, additional research might further explore the specific words, actions, behaviors, messages, and influences of mothers for the leader identity development of Black women. Further inquiry might allow study participants to better reflect on this particular relationship or unlock key understandings for professionals to consider and use.

**Black Female Leaders and "Working Twice as Hard"**

Many participants of this study discussed the idea of working hard, working twice as hard, or having to prove themselves as leaders in ways students of other social identities might not. When seeking feedback related to my findings, I asked participants to provide any additional comments related to their interview and their experience with the study. In her feedback, Denise spoke to the particular concern of proving oneself and its ramifications for Black women:

> *I also think a good point to mention is that Black women who want to be leaders or who already identify as leaders are negatively impacted by trying to prove themselves worthy. By this, I mean that we usually push ourselves past our limits to show others (and ourselves) that we are capable of what we want to accomplish. We're trying to diminish the thought of 'imposter syndrome', but in doing so we are hurting ourselves, either physically, mentally, emotionally, or some combination of the three.*

In their attempt to prove themselves worthy of leadership, the behaviors and responses to these behaviors would be worthy of additional study. The emotional, mental, and physical health of young, Black female leaders may warrant attention in the context of leadership, pursuing leadership, and leader identity development.

**Leader Identity Development Models for Other Marginalized Populations**

While an honor to study the experience of Black women specifically, the question still remains if specific leader identity development models should be created for other marginalized groups. Depending on the social identities held by an individual, these identities may influence their leader identity development. While the LID has been applied to several specific populations, many of these studies did not seek to develop new models based solely on the

experiences of individual social groups. While overwhelming to consider, professionals who work with very specific populations of students may appreciate the creation of individual leader identity development models applicable to specific identity groups. If not new models, additional research can be explored examining the applicability of the LID model, which is meant to be broad, to specific identity groups. For example, Renn and Bilodeau (2005) applied the LID model to LGBT students and found that the LID model well-explained the leader identity development of study participants. However, at this time, their study is one of the only of its kind applying the LID model to a specific population. I recommend researchers seriously consider developing new leader identity models for various populations as well as consider targeted leadership programming for specific, marginalized populations.

**The Intersection of Racial and Leader Identity Development**

The BUWLI model acknowledges the role racial identity plays in leader identity development, as the two developmental processes may happen concurrently. However, this study did not directly address the intersection of these two processes. For the purpose of better understanding Black women or individuals of other racial and ethnic identities, future research might explore how racial and ethnic identity development influences or is influenced by leader identity development and if there is any relationship between these developmental processes. Renn and Bilodeau (2005) found the sexual identity development and leader identity development of LGBT students did, in fact, intersect, so it may be worth replicating a similar study focusing on different racial or ethnic groups.

**Influence of Leader Identity**

This study established the leader identity development process Black women experience. However, further research is needed to understand the impact or influence of a leader identity on

other facets of life and how this identity, once fully integrated into sense of self, manifests. Future researchers might explore how leader identity intersects and influences racial identity, sexual identity, religious identity, or other identities for individuals or college students. In addition to how a leader identity might influence the development of other identities, further research might explore how a leader identity influences or effects behaviors, relationships, intrapersonal, or interpersonal aspects of life.

## Conclusion

This grounded theory study explored the importance of acknowledging the unique experiences of Black women and their leader identity development. Through interviews with 11 Black women in college, I was able to conceptualize a specific process by which Black women come to understand and embrace their identities as leaders. In addition, I was able to glean and name key experiences that contribute to this leader identity development process. I developed the Black Undergraduate Women Leader Identity model which visually represents the process and experiences by which Black women in college come to see themselves as leaders.

The BUWLI model is made up of four distinct yet, at times, overlapping steps and couched in contexts related to the experiences of young, Black women. Generally speaking, Black women are heavily influenced by their families as they grow and learn community values. It is also through family and through growing up that they experience empowerment that makes leadership possible. Eventually Black women go through a process of learning to lead by recognizing their own potential, defining leadership, and practicing leadership skills. This learning process ultimately leads to Black women claiming *leader* as part of their identity, an identity that must be affirmed and confirmed by external sources. During this process, Black women also realize the intersectionality of their identities and recognize their *Black female*

*leader* identity as unique and distinct given their racial and gender identities. Given the difficult nature of being a Black leader, the final stage of leader identity development for Black women is applying their leadership skills by empowering others and serving their communities.

This model is new and unique to the research on leader identity development and related models; it offers higher education professionals and leadership educators with a new tool by which to understand Black women. This study shows that while similar to existing models and literature, the BUWLI model is, in fact, unique and offers new data and analysis related to the specific population of Black women. Practitioners can use this model to inform promising practices for the leadership and leader identity development of Black women, possibly in the form of targeted leadership retreats and workshops or mentoring programs.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates the remarkable resilience, will, talent, and brilliance of Black women, particularly as leaders. In the face of a society that finds them outside the norms or standards of leadership, Black women will rise and prevail. Black women combat and resist the societal norms that have been established for centuries. In being empowered to lead, Black women, in turn, empower others to lead. Black women become leaders who care about their communities, desire to give back, and do so with an air of humility. It is time and it is now our chance, as higher education practitioners, to use what we know about these women to further their leadership journeys and to guide them from simply preparing to lead to actually identifying as leaders and applying their leadership knowledge in a world that desperately needs Black female representation in leadership.

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# APPENDIX A

## SOLICITATION LETTER TO GATEKEEPERS

Dear [INSERT NAME AND TITLE],

My name is Becka Shetty, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services. I am seeking assistance in recruiting participants for my dissertation titled "The Leader Identity Development of Black Women in College: A Grounded Theory". I am hoping that you or another colleague might be willing to help me by serving as a gatekeeper to share information with students on your campus.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and influences that have contributed to the leader identity development of Black women in college and to develop a theoretical model for this process.

My first formal request is that you (or one of your colleagues) assist in distributing solicitation emails to any email listservs your institution has to recruit Black undergraduate women as potential participants for this study. You may have direct access to these lists; however, please feel free to forward this information to other staff members with access to students. My contact information will be included in the email message. I will ask that students contact me directly to schedule interviews. My second formal request will come in a follow up email in which I will ask for your assistance in scheduling a private space on campus where I can conduct interviews. This is the extent of my request.

All information I discuss with your students will be private and their identity or their institutional affiliation will not be revealed on any documentation associated with this study. The only identifiers that will be used relating to the participants will be a self-chosen pseudonym and documentation of their demographics (age, year in school, etc.).

For your awareness, participation in my study will include the following:

- Individual interviews (approximately 30-90 minutes) with questions related to their development as a leader and its intersection with their identity as a Black woman.
- Participants will be asked to review and comment on my initial research findings via a brief online form.

Please let me know if you are willing to serve as a gatekeeper or if you have a suggestion of who may be a better point of contact. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at 512-966-3484 or to email me at rebecca.shetty@emory.edu. My faculty advisor is Dr. Laura Dean (ladean@uga.edu), and this study has received approval through the UGA IRB process.

Please let me know if you have any additional questions.

Best,
Becka Shetty

## APPENDIX B

## SOLICITATION EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Good morning/afternoon/evening,

My name is Becka Shetty, I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia, and I am seeking Black female participants for my dissertation research study. My study is entitled "The Leader Identity Development of Black Women in College: A Grounded Theory". You are receiving this message through an email or listserv from a staff member on your campus.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and influences that have contributed to the leader identity development of Black women in college and to develop a theoretical model for this process.

I am seeking participants who have the following characteristics:

a) Identify as Black or African American
b) Identify as a woman
c) Claim the United States as their country of origin
d) Identify as a leader in her community
e) Is an undergraduate student
f) Is 18-24 years old

Participation in my study will last approximately two hours total. Participation will include the following:

- Individual interviews (approximately 30-90 minutes) with questions related to your development as a leader and its intersection with your identity as a Black woman.
- Participants will be asked to review and comment on my initial research findings via a brief online form that should take no longer than 45 minutes.

The benefit for participating in this study is the opportunity to contribute to a lacking body of research related to Black women, particularly in the field of leadership studies. In addition, the results of this study may result in a theoretical model that can be used widely at universities and colleges to benefit the growth and development of Black women as leaders. By participating in this study, you will not receive any compensation, financial incentive, or other payment for completing the interview and feedback process.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me directly at rebecca.shetty@uga.edu or at 512-966-3484. I will then provide you with additional information and provide you the link at which to sign up for your interview.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you consider participating.

Best,
Becka Shetty

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Researcher's Statement**

By reading and signing this document, you are agreeing to participate in a study entitled: "The Leader Identity Development of Black Women in College: A Grounded Theory" conducted by Rebecca Shetty, Investigator from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Laura Dean, Advisor and Professor, Department of Counseling and Human Development Services, University of Georgia. Investigator and Advisor contact information can be found at the bottom of this form. This form is designed to give you the information you need to decide whether or not to participate. Please take time to read the following information carefully, and please feel free to ask the researcher any questions if something is unclear or if you need more information. A copy of this form will be given to you for your records.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to develop a theoretical model for how Black women in college have come to see themselves as leaders. The researcher is seeking to explore the processes, experiences, and influences that have contributed to the leader identity development of Black women in college. Women being asked to participate identify as college students enrolled at a college or university, leaders in their communities, as Black women between the ages of 18 and 24 years old, and as claiming the U.S. as their country of origin.

**Study Procedures**

If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be asked to answer questions in one, audio-recorded interview. While interviews are expected to last approximately 30-90 minutes, interviews will not be cut off, and you will be able to continue answering questions as long as desired or necessary. Questions during the interview will be about your conceptions of leadership, how you came to see yourself as a leader, and how race, gender, or both have affected your leader identity development. After finishing interviewing participants, the researcher will develop an initial theoretical model to explain Black female leader identity development. After this time, you will be asked to participate in a feedback process. You will be asked to complete a brief online form to ensure you agree with what has been interpreted and portrayed in this theoretical model. This feedback process and online form should last no more than 45 minutes. The total duration for a participation in this study is approximately two hours.

**Risks and Discomfort**

While there are no foreseeable risks associated with this research study, some questions pertain to race and gender, which may result in reflecting on experiences of marginalization because of your identity as a Black woman, which may cause discomfort. Experienced staff members are available on your campus to discuss any discomfort you may experience. Their phone numbers

and locations can be found on your institution's website. However, if you experience discomfort at any time during the interview, you may ask to skip questions, take a break, or end the interview.

**Benefits and Incentives**
The benefit for participating in this study is the opportunity to contribute to a lacking body of research related to Black women, particularly in the field of leadership studies. In addition, the researcher also hopes to develop a theoretical model that can be used widely at universities and colleges to benefit the growth and development of Black women as leaders. By participating in this study, you will not receive any compensation, financial incentive, or other payment for completing the interview and feedback process.

**Audio Recording and Privacy**
Audio recording will be taken via an app on the researcher's phone. These audio recordings are necessary in order to transcribe your interview into written form for the research to examine, analyze, and find themes among participant comments. Upon interview completion, the audio recordings will be uploaded to the researcher's computer which has two layers of password protection and will remain off or locked when not being used by the researcher. At that time, the recording will be deleted from the researcher's phone. The audio recording of your interview will only be used for the purpose of this research and will be deleted after a correct transcription of the audio recording has been obtained or created. Transcriptions of these audio recordings will also be kept on the researcher's computer.

The only people who will know that you are a study participant are the researcher and any transcribers hired by the researcher. No individually-identifiable information about you (including your name) or information provided by you during the research will be shared with others without your written permission, except if necessary to protect your rights or welfare or if required by law. If the researcher uses any direct quotes from your interviews in any professional presentations or publications, the researcher or transcribers will remove or alter any information that could identify the quotation as yours. You will choose a pseudonym that will be used on all individually-identifiable written and verbal communication.

Internet and email communications are insecure, and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology. However once the materials are received by the researcher, standard confidentiality procedures will be employed. All individual information obtained will be treated privately.

**Future Use of Data**
It is possible that this data may be used in future research without additional consent requested from you. While the purpose of the use of this data may vary, I would anticipate it to be used for furthering research on the experiences of Black identifying women and leadership. Any data would be used in a de-identified format (your name would not be linked to the study). In addition, the data used would be in the format of transcripts, not the audio recordings. As such, there would be no direct links to your identity aside from what may be provided in your responses.

**Voluntary Participation**
I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without reason and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. If I decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as mine will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless I make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

**Contact Information for Questions**
The researcher conducting this study is Rebecca Shetty under the guidance of Dr. Laura Dean. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact us at any time. Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant can be addressed to the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board.

Rebecca Shetty, M.S.
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The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board
University of Georgia
Telephone: (706) 542-3199
Email Address: IRB@uga.edu

**Participant's Consent to Participate**
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form and have had all of your questions answered.

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| Name of Researcher | Signature | Date |

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| Name of Participant | Signature | Date |

Please sign both copies. One will be returned to you. The other will be kept by the researcher.

# APPENDIX D

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Good morning/afternoon/evening,

My name is Becka Shetty, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services. The purpose of this study is to develop a theoretical model for how Black women in college have come to develop their identities as leaders. Today's interview will include questions related to the specific experiences, processes, and influences that have led to your leader identity development. Some questions will be related to your conceptions of leadership. Some questions will be related to your gender, race, or both.

All content we discuss will be confidential. Your identity will not be revealed at any time and will not be included on any notes or documentation related to this study. To ensure the confidentiality of your identity, I will only use your chosen pseudonym when referencing you directly in this study.

I anticipate this interview will last between thirty and ninety minutes; however, I will not cut off conversation or limit your answers in any way. If our conversation runs longer than 90 minutes, that is ok. I will be audio-recording our interview as well as taking handwritten notes throughout our conversation. I will transcribe this interview verbatim and develop initial findings. After that time, I will send you my findings for feedback and critique.

Please keep in mind, that you may ask for the recording and/or interview to be stopped at any time. You may decline to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. Please feel free to indicate that you would like a break at any point. Please let me know if you need any clarification or repetition of the questions. I will begin recording when you are ready. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Pseudonym: _____

1. Tell me about yourself as a person. (RQ1)
    a. What does being a Black woman mean to you?
    b. Are there other identities that are particularly important or salient to you?
    c. Please share with me key experiences that have shaped or helped you define your identity as a Black woman.
    d. How have these experiences shaped the way you view leadership?
2. Share with me how you define leadership. (RQ1)
    a. What does leadership mean to you?
    b. Who or what comes to mind?
    c. Why do you consider yourself a leader?

    d. What messages have you received about what makes a leader?
3. Share with me how you think society defines leadership. (RQ1)
    a. What do you make of this definition?
    b. What do you make of the Eurocentric and patriarchal notions of leadership (that are the norm)?
    c. How does society's definition of leadership compare to your experiences with leadership?
    d. How does this definition shape how you "show up" as a leader?
4. Tell me how you have grown and changed over time as a leader. (RQ2)
    a. How did you begin to learn about yourself as a leader?
    b. When was the first time you realized that you were a leader?
    c. What messages did you receive about yourself as a leader?
    d. Do you recall the first time you thought about leadership generally (not about yourself as a leader, but being aware that people around you were leaders)?
    e. How do you view leadership now versus how you thought about it when you first became aware of leadership?
    f. What specific experiences led you to you becoming a leader (on campus or in your community)?
    g. Who has been most influential on your journey to becoming a leader?
    h. How did this person (or persons) contribute to the way you saw yourself becoming a leader?
    i. What experience has been most influential on your journey to becoming a leader?
    j. How did this experience(s) contribute to the way you saw yourself becoming a leader?
    k. Of all the things (people or experiences) that have influenced your understanding of being a leader, what is the most important?
    l. How do you react when people call you "leader"?
    m. How do you believe you are received as a leader in spaces with people who look like you?

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK REQUEST

Good afternoon!

While it has been many months, I am finally circling back around to share with you my final findings for my dissertation related to the leader identity development of Black women in college. I could not be more excited to share with you. By sharing, I am also seeking important feedback from you to see if you feel you are adequately represented by my findings and the final model that I have developed.

**Attached you will find a document for review titled "Summary of Findings". The content is about 4 pages long but includes the summary of all of my data and a brief description of the model I have created based on your interviews! If you would look over this document and complete THIS GOOGLE FORM, that would be amazing.** Please **complete the form at your earliest convenience and no later than next Monday, November 4th.** This tight turnaround ensures I can include any feedback you have in the final draft of my dissertation which is due by the end of November. I have left the form intentionally broad and vague in order for you to give overall impressions without forcing certain types of responses.

In case you're interested in my full findings, I have also attached the entire chapter dedicated to my research findings, though this is closer to 30 pages long.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns at this time.

Sending my best and all of my gratitude to you,
Becka Shetty

APPENDIX F

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR PARTICIPANTS

*After speaking with 11 participants, below are the major themes I found in the stories and narratives told by all 11 women.*

*Please read the summaries of these themes and reflect on whether or not you feel they reflect your experiences and what you remember sharing with me. Keep in mind these themes, in combination, may not completely resonate with you, which is ok. I am combining the stories from 11 different people. However, I do want to make sure that you feel like you are **generally** represented by these themes and that they don't significantly differ from how you have experienced your leadership journey. You may also draw upon your knowledge of other Black women's journeys and how they might resonate with these themes. I ask you to complete the same reflection for the actual model I created.*

*Most of the content below is drawn directly from my dissertation writings and will be included in the final version (dependent on the feedback from participants, of course).*

## Theme Summaries

**Living in oppressive system** – Most participants agreed that society's context, beliefs, and standards of leadership did not match their own. Because of this, individuals who hold marginalized identities, particularly Black women who experience double marginalization, are typically not seen as the norm for leadership. Many participants described being taught to and having to work twice as hard as others. The context of living in an oppressive system affects the way in which my participants viewed themselves as leaders and how they might be received as leaders.

**Journeying to and through college** – While many participants were able to identify moments in middle or elementary school when they conceptualized others as leaders or began to take on leadership roles, every participant mentioned the importance of coming to college. For all participants, coming to college was either the first time they developed a true recognition and personal definition of leadership or was when they were able to begin to see themselves as leaders, typically by taking on more influential roles.

**Experience familial influences** – Every participant mentioned the role family played in their life and leadership journeys. In this study, the familial influences typically referred to instilled values and empowerment based on upbringing and parental guidance. In some cases, familial influences related to the role being a sibling played in their lives, particularly for those who became caretakers for their siblings.

**Being a Black woman** – For my participants, being a Black woman was something they loved and were proud of, while also recognizing being a Black woman naturally brings struggle and difficulty. Some participants spoke to the role of intersectionality and the difficulty of "having to choose" different sides of one's identity depending on the context. Many described particular

instances of discrimination yet also described the resilience and strength of being a Black woman.

**Being supported by mother, othermothers, or mentors –** When asked who the most influential person was related to their leadership journey, every participant with the exception of one mentioned their mother or the female caretaker they were raised by. One person mentioned a female mentor who was the most important on her leadership journey, yet she still discussed her mother at length as one of the greatest influences on her leadership, how she views leadership, and who she aspires to be like. Much of the self-doubt participants often seemed to feel was combatted by their mothers' or othersmothers' support. Being a leader seemed to be heavily influenced by this support, and without it, I am not sure where on their leadership journey participants would be.

**Having formal leadership experiences** – All participants also named specific and formal leadership experiences from which they gained self-awareness, heard specific messages about leadership that influenced their own definition, and allowed them to learn about themselves as leaders. Having formal leadership positions was a gateway to understanding self as leader and increased confidence for many participants.

**Facing discrimination and/or microaggressions** – Participants articulated that being a Black woman was both powerful and a challenge. The challenges often came specifically in the form of blatant discrimination or microaggressions throughout their lives. The idea of being doubted by others strongly resonated throughout most of my interviews. Participants described how others would be surprised by their accomplishments, question why they were participating in certain activities, or doubt their ability to succeed in the future.

**Learning to lead** – Learning to lead is a broad theme that includes many activities and the self-actualization that preceded being able to claim "leader" as an identity. Participants described a number of things including recognizing leadership as a concept, discovering and confirming personal leadership qualities, developing a reaction to being called a leader, learning lessons about leadership from people and roles, and developing a strong sense of humility related to leadership.

**Experiencing empowerment** – In the midst of struggle, many participants also felt empowered by their racial and gender identities, by seeing themselves represented by famous figures (ex: the Obamas, other local politicians, Meghan Markle, etc.), or being encouraged by family and friends related to their leadership skills and effectiveness.

**Developing racial identity –** Because this study did not focus on racial identity specifically, this theme only touches the surface of the racial identity development of my participants. Many of them first recognized their race or developed greater racial awareness through experiences in K-12 education. Both positive and negative moments contributed to their understanding and recognition of their racial identity. Hair was mentioned by several participants as being instrumental in their racial identity given the importance of hair and hair care in African American culture. Still others felt they were not perceived as Black enough. While having

moments of revelation at different times in their life, participants recognized, usually prior to college, that they were different from White children or other White individuals.

**Aspiring to be like mother, othermothers, or mentors** – Mothers, female caretakers, and mentors played a significant role in my participants' lives, and for most, this was limited just to mothers or female caretakers. My participants saw these women and individuals as examples of leadership. Often their mother, grandmother, sisters, or mentors were the very first examples of leadership in their lives. Because of this, they all aspired to be like these individuals as leaders, to assume some of their characteristics and approaches to leadership.

**Identifying as a leader** – Ultimately, participants all identified as leaders. While this was a requirement of the study, every participant both identified as a leader yet also wrestled with being called a leader. Most were surprised when others called them leaders, others were uncomfortable being called a leader. Only two participants demonstrated confidence in being called a leader. For others, continuing to develop confidence as a leader was a desire and something that was recognized as being important.

**Being a Black female leader** – Not only did participants speak to their developed identity as a leader, they also spoke to the specificity of being a Black female leader. The distinction is important because race and gender play significantly into how participants felt they were received as leaders both by individuals who looked like them and those who did not. They described the inherent challenges of being a Black female leader and how all of their intersectionality of identities must be taken into account.

**Receiving positive feedback as a leader** - While all participants identified as leaders, participants were typically only able to do so because of the positive feedback they received from others. Overwhelmingly they typically called themselves leaders simply because others called them leaders.

## Model Summary

**The Model of Leader Identity Development for Black Women in College (LID-BWC)**

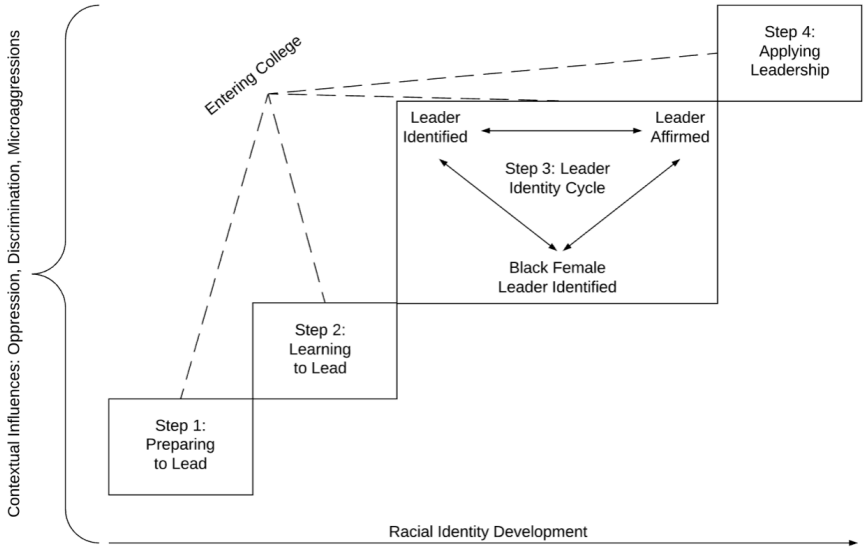


Figure 4.1 Model of Leader Identity Development for Black Women in College (LID-BWC)

Model created by R. L. Shetty (2019)

**General Description of the LID-BWC -** The LID-BWC visually represents a developmental process in which individuals move from one step to the next moving upward. Because of the visual use of steps, this model may be interpreted as though individuals move through the developmental process in an upward and linear fashion. However, I want to make clear that not every individual will move through these steps in a linear fashion and in many cases may experience more than one step at the same time. It is possible for steps to be concurrent. With that said, a step-based model was chosen for its visual, metaphorical representation of the difficulty and striving Black women face on their journey to claiming a leader identity. In many ways, developing a leader identity is like climbing or battling up a long flight of stairs, and reaching the top is a notable accomplishment. In addition, this model does not necessarily represent the leader identity development process for every Black woman in college. Because of the intersection of identities, the various life experiences, and difference in personality, some Black women may or may not identify with this model.

**Contextual Influences** - My participants experience a myriad of challenges navigating the world as Black women. Particularly as related to leadership and leader identity development, the contextual influences of oppression, systems of power, and discrimination cannot be understated. Therefore, the entire LID-BWC model is influenced by the context of oppression, discrimination, and microaggressions. Every step of the leader identity journey, from preparing to lead to applying leadership, can and is influenced by this important context.

**Racial Identity Development -** While racial identity development is not a primary focus of this study, racial identity development is critical to this model considering the role race plays in the leader identity for participants. It is possible that both racial and leader identity development occur concurrently for some individuals. Race and gender dictate the leadership experiences and leader identity development of participants, so like the context of oppression, racial identity development is visually represented as spanning across the model occurring as leader identity development occurs

**Entering College -** Coming to college transformed the lives of participants. Coming to college influenced various aspects of the leader identity development process depending on the participant. Because different aspects of the leader identity development process were influenced by the entrances to and experiences in college, "entering college" is connected to every step of the model with a dotted line. The dotted line indicates the fluidity of this concept and that it is not necessarily tied directly to any one step but could be tied to one step, some steps, or all steps concurrently.

**Step 1: Preparing to Lead**…is the distinct, first step for participants in which they cognitively process the existence of leadership and experience empowerment. Participants experienced racial empowerment or personal empowerment that increased confidence as an individual. Some women were influenced by family through instilled values and lessons such as self-love and knowing that anything is possible. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of *Step 1: Preparing to Lead* includes individuals seeing themselves represented by those they consider an authority figure or leader.

**Step 2: Learning to Lead**… is the next critical step for individuals to claim the identity of "leader". During this step, individuals better conceptualize leadership practices and concepts, have the opportunity to practice these concepts, and learn more about themselves as leaders in relation to others. Individuals may learn these lessons through formal leadership roles or experiences.

**Step 3: Leader Identity Cycle**… includes three distinct and cyclical concepts that are directly related to or dependent on one another. In this step, individuals are able to claim "leader" as part of their identity. However, this leader identity is dependent and related to two other factors, being affirmed as a leader by others and understanding the intersectionality of identities. For Black women in college, being a leader is dependent on the external validation and affirmation by others. While individuals may have existing confidence, this is only increased by hearing from others that their leadership efforts and practices are worthwhile and effective. In addition, for Black women, a leader identity is incomplete without individuals understanding how this intersects with racial and gender identity. Leader identity is directly related to Black female leader identity.

**Step 4: Applying Leadership**…refers to individuals seeking to use their leadership and the power afforded to them to contribute to their communities or give back to others.

## APPENDIX G

## PARTICPANTS FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

*This questionnaire was converted to a Google form for ease of use.*

1. Where do you attend college?
    a. Metropolitan University
    b. East Coast Women's College
    *Actual university or college names were used in the form.

2. What was the pseudonym you used for this project?
    a. Alyssa
    b. Arya
    c. Denise
    d. Elizabeth
    e. Jade
    f. Kaelyn
    g. Linda
    h. Mo
    i. Queen
    j. Tina
    k. Whitney
    l. I don't remember

3. If you don't remember your pseudonym, please provide your real first name (your name will not be used anywhere, ever. I will simply be using this to connect your identity to your pseudonym per my interview notes).

4. I feel like the themes of this study generally represent my life experience.

    Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

5. I feel like the LID-BWC model generally represent my experience of leader identity development.

    Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

6. Please describe why you do or do not feel the themes and model of this study represents your life experiences?

7. What about the themes or model resonate with you most?

8. What about the themes or model resonate with you least?

9. Do you have anything else to add related to this study or the findings that would be useful for me to know?

APPENDIX H

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CODES AND SCHEMES

| Focused Code | Coding Scheme | Theoretical Code |
|---|---|---|
| Describing Black Womanhood<br>Identifying Personal Identities<br>Identifying Personal Qualities | Causes | Being a Black Woman |
| Having Mentoring Relationships<br>Being Supported by Mentor Figures | Causes | Being Supported by Mother, Othermothers, or Mentors |
| Hearing Messages About Leadership<br>Having Formal Leadership Roles or Experiences | Causes | Having Formal Leadership Experiences |
| Developing Racial Identity<br>Challenging the Educational System<br>Breaking the Cycle<br>Fighting Stereotypes | Consequences | Developing Racial Identity |
| Aspiring to be like Mother or Othermother<br>Learning Lessons from Mother or Othermother<br>Viewing Mother or Othermother as Example of Leadership | Consequences | Aspiring to Be Like Mother, Othermothers, or Mentors |
| Recognizing Personal Maturation<br>Changing Beliefs about Leadership<br>Identifying as a Leader<br>Developing Confidence as a Leader<br>Being a Representative for Others<br>Being Motivated to Lead<br>Helping Others and/or Community<br>Wanting More for Self<br>Wanting to be Recognized as a Leader | Consequences | Identifying as a Leader |
| Identifying Home/Hometown | Contexts | NONE - Any importance assigned to hometowns or home is typically covered by other contingencies/conditions variables |
| Being in an Oppressive System<br>Working Hard<br>Reflecting on Society's View of Leadership<br>Being Influenced by K-12 Education | Contexts | Living in an Oppressive System |
| Journeying to and through College | Contexts | Journeying to and through College |
| Identifying as a Sibling<br>Being Shaped by Family<br>Learning Lessons from Background<br>Being Sheltered | Contexts | Experiencing Familial Influences |
| Being the "Only"<br>Facing Discrimination and/or Microaggressions<br>Being Doubted<br>Needing External Validation | Contingencies/Conditions | Facing Discrimination and/or Microaggressions |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Recognizing Leadership as a Concept<br>Being Exposed to Diversity<br>Defining Leadership<br>Discovering Personal Leadership Qualities<br>Identifying Personal Leadership Qualities<br>Emotionally Reacting to Being Called Leader<br>Doubting Self<br>Learning Lessons from Leadership Roles<br>Looking Up to Public Figures<br>Being Recruited into Leadership<br>Having and Giving Voice<br>Having Humility | Contingencies/Conditions | Learning to Lead |
| Experiencing Racial Empowerment<br>Seeing Self Represented<br>Admiring Mentor(s)<br>Having Confidence<br>Admiring Mother or Othermother<br>Being Reminded of Personal Potential | Contingencies/Conditions | Experiencing Empowerment |
| Defining Black Female Leadership<br>Being a Leader Among People Who Look Like You<br>Being a Leader Among "Others" | Covariances | Being a Black Female Leader |
| Being Seen as a Leader<br>Getting Positive Feedback as a Leader<br>Receiving External Recognition for Leadership | Covariances | Receiving Positive Feedback as a Leader |
| Recognizing the Role of Race in K-12 Education | Covariances | NONE - Descriptions of this usually included the role of discrimination/microaggressions or possibly racial empowerment described in other codes |