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Threshold concepts are new understandings within a discipline that create a significant shift in awareness. They are transformative, troublesome, irreversible, integrative, and bounded. Grasping a threshold concept leads to an epistemological shift and students move into a deeper understanding of a specific subject. It also results in an ontological shift as students come to personally identify with the discipline. Within the Leadership Identity Development model of leadership studies, a key transition occurs when students start to see leadership as a relational process rather than a position of power or authority. The literature is ripe with studies exploring the experiences that lead to this new understanding. While this knowledge is useful for leadership educators there is a gap in the research identifying the more complex concepts that students struggle with along their journey. This study explored the specific concepts that students themselves identified as transformational in their understanding of leadership and their subsequent identification as a relational leader. The phenomenological study utilized student interviews and reflections to explore the threshold concepts within leadership development that moved them along the path.

THRESHOLD CONCEPTS IN RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND
LEADERSHIP IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family – my parents and brother, my husband, my sons, and those friends that are family. This has been a long haul and the love, grace, support, and patience you've shown over the years have been incredible. You mean the world to me, and I cannot thank you enough for helping make this a reality.

Especially to my sons, Jacob and Garrett – you are my inspiration. May the world you inherit be a bit more just, compassionate, and peaceful because of the work I do.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by JODEAN KAY SCHMIEDERER has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The 1960s and 1970s were turbulent times. President Kennedy was elected on promises of creating a more just society. Lunch counter sit-ins were spreading across the country, a resurgence in feminism was underway, Dr. King and his followers were working for civil and voting rights through a non-violence movement, and Malcolm X was fighting oppression and discrimination with more aggressive methods. By the end of the 1960s, President Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Dr. King had all been assassinated; five days of riots ensued after police raided the Stonewall Inn; and four students were killed at the hands of the National Guard during a protest of the Vietnam War at Kent State University. College students were both searching for dramatic change in their communities and feeling the pain of unrest. In response to this sense of a fractured society, in 1977 higher education was called out by Robert Greenleaf in his seminal publication, *Servant Leadership*. In it he identified an alarming lack of attention given to leadership education throughout the country. This same concern was expressed by other important leadership scholars (Astin & Astin, 2000; Burns, 1978; Gardner, 1990; Wren, 1995), which spurred a new commitment to leadership studies within academia and resulted in a redefining of the concept of “leadership.”

As scholars were studying leadership and our understanding of it evolved, institutions themselves also responded to Greenleaf’s challenge. Mission statements all

over the country began referring to the responsibility of developing students into the leaders our world needs (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007; Astin & Astin, 2000; Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2003). A study published in 2001 showed that leadership education resulted in students' "growth in civic responsibility, leadership skills, multicultural awareness, understanding of leadership theories, and personal and societal values" (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001, p. 15). However, leadership and leadership development are concepts that have evolved dramatically over the last few decades. Before educators can successfully prepare leaders for their post-graduate roles in society, they must have a solid understanding of (1) how leadership is currently being defined within higher education; (2) what distinguishes the difference between leader development and leadership development; and (3) how students come to identify as leaders.

During my twenty years of working with largely traditionally-aged college students related to leadership development and their focus on creating change for the common good, I have often wondered how students can have the same learning experience and appear to be engaged at a similar level, yet have very different learning outcomes. When they talk about leadership, most students focus on their specific task-oriented responsibilities as a leader within a student organization or campus program, but others are able to discuss the complex process of working with their fellow students to solve complex problems. Most talk about the leadership skills or competencies they've developed during their time in college, yet others center their time on working to develop

the leadership capacity of others so their group can continue to find success even after they graduate.

These differences may be rooted in varying levels of cognitive development and students' abilities to make meaning of new experiences (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; King & Kitchener, 1994), but this does not explain all situations. On a regular basis I observe students who demonstrate high levels of cognitive understanding related to their academic disciplines, but still have simplistic understandings or personal philosophies of leadership. Popular leadership textbooks explore the complexity of the subject in a manner that is easy for students to digest (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998; Komives & Wagoner, 2009), but even those who have taken leadership courses or are engaged in co-curricular programs often struggle with applying this knowledge in their lived experiences.

In 2005, Komives and a team of researchers developed the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model that chronicles the stages students go through in their understanding of leadership as a relational process and their identity as a leader (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). Around that same time, the Multi-institutional Study of Leadership started assessing students' development of socially responsible leadership skills on a national level (Komives, Dugan, & Segar, 2006). This data set and the LID model have been utilized by a number of researchers to better understand students' experiences or pedagogical approaches that improve students' leadership development as well as how different populations are impacted by them. However, there

appears to be a gap in understanding the specific concepts or the learning that is occurring during those experiences that students themselves find transformational in their journey. Additional research is needed to better understand those concepts and students' leadership identity development.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to more deeply explore a key transition within the Leadership Identity Development model (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006) when students start to think about leadership as a process rather than simply holding a position of authority. This phenomenological study utilized student interviews and reflective writings to explore the threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2003) that challenged their understanding of leadership and led to their understanding of it as a relational process rather than a position of authority (Komives et al., 1998) and their subsequent self-identification as a leader in this context.

Background and Context

Inherent in understanding the context of this study is the need to better identify what is meant by *leadership*, *leadership identity*, *leadership development*, and *threshold concepts*, which are key factors in the conceptual framework undergirding this study. The literature on these subjects is vast. Below is a brief explanation of how these concepts are applied in this study.

Leadership as a Process

As society has evolved, our understanding of the terms *leader* and *leadership* have also changed. The *great man* theory believed that select men were born with the

natural ability to lead. These remarkable individuals were viewed as heroes in society (Northouse, 2009). As we moved to an industrial society and focused on ensuring our country's future success, the *trait-based* model emerged. Leaders were still believed to have largely been born with the ability to lead, but rather than relying on lineage or established social position, the focus shifted to identifying the traits these individuals possessed or mastered that allowed them to influence others (Northouse, 2009; Roberts, 2007; Rost 1993). In the 1940s, as the middle class grew and that model no longer fit our lived experiences, the *behavioral* approach went beyond looking at traits to include the behaviors a leader employed. Because these behaviors could be learned, it was now believed possible for the average person to improve their position in society (Northouse, 2009; Roberts, 2007; Rost 1993). Over time, researchers came to realize that not all successful leaders employed the same behaviors, and the specific situation in which the leadership was happening often impacted the results. Subsequently, the *situational* or *contingency* models developed (Northouse, 2009; Roberts, 2007; Rost 1993). All of these approaches focused on the individual leader's actions or what was done with followers when leaders were in a position of authority.

A significant shift occurred when Greenleaf (1977) moved away from focusing on the leader's power or authority and defined the *servant-leader*. While still centered on the positional leader, from this unique lens the individual was a servant first and then sought to lead. Even in leadership, their primary goal was to assure those being served were also being elevated and those least privileged in society were, at the very least, not

being further harmed. Servant-leaders were not concerned about their own advancement, but rather, ensuring the advancement of others or society.

Then in 1978, instead of looking at the individual leader, Burns presented a significant ontological shift and identified a *transformational leadership* model that focused on the process through which leaders and followers engage with each other and change occurs (Burns, 1978). “(T)he task of leadership is to accomplish some change in the world that responds to... human wants: liberty and equality, justice and opportunity, the pursuit of happiness” (Burns, 2003, p. 2). Leaders and followers work in a reciprocal manner, ensuring the morality of their actions, and, in the process, motivate and transform each other.

Burns’s (1978) concept of leadership as a process and not just the actions of the hierarchical leader resonated with those in higher education. With that theory at the center of their work, a team of leadership educators came together to develop the Social Change Model of Leadership (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). They defined leadership as a collaborative and values-driven process through which all students could create positive social change. Designed specifically as a guide for educators, the model posited that by understanding themselves, how to work in a diverse group, and the responsibility we each have for advancing our community, students would graduate more prepared to create a better society. While the model is keenly focused on leadership as a process, it does not ignore the leader. It addresses the individual’s need to develop strong self-awareness and specific skills in order to function effectively within the context of the group and community.

Komives et al. (1998) then used the Social Change Model, the concept of socially responsible leadership, and a commitment to civic responsibility to identify a new *Relational Leadership Model* (RLM). Through this framework, leadership is identified as “a relational process of people together attempting to accomplish change or make a difference to benefit the common good” (Komives et al., 1998, p. 21). Value is placed on being inclusive of people and ideas, empowering all members of the group, being purposeful in one’s commitments and interactions with others, being ethical, and giving significant attention to the group process. It highlights the knowledge, attitudes, and skills (knowing, being, and doing) inherent in each of those five important components, and elevates the belief that both positional leaders and followers are full participants in the leadership process. The relational leadership model, identifying it as an inclusive and ethical process of working with others to create change, is the working definition of *leadership* utilized in this study.

Leadership Identity Development

In 2001-2002 a team of researchers explored the leadership development process and subsequently published the results of a grounded theory study on Leadership Identity Development (LID) (Komives, Longerbeam, Mainella, Osteen, Owen, & Wagner, 2009; Komives et al., 2005). Through a series of three in-depth interviews with thirteen students, these researchers identified a six-stage model. The LID model posited that as students move from one stage to the next and through interactions with adults and other peers, they discover new things about themselves, leadership, and their relationships with others. The stages include:

- *Awareness* (Stage One): becoming aware that there are leaders “out there” who are external to self like the President of the United States, one’s mother, or a teacher;
- *Exploration/Engagement* (Stage Two): a period of immersion in group experiences usually to make friends; a time of learning to engage with others (e.g., swim team, boy scouts, church choir);
- *Leader Identified* (Stage Three): viewing leadership as the actions of the positional leader of a group; an awareness of the hierarchical nature of relationships in groups;
- *Leadership Differentiated* (Stage Four): viewing leadership also as non-positional and as a shared group process;
- *Generativity* (Stage Five): a commitment to developing leadership in others and having a passion for issues or group objectives that the person wants to influence; and
- *Integration/Synthesis* (Stage Six): acknowledging the personal capacity for leadership in diverse contexts and claiming the identity as a leader without having to hold a positional role. (Komives et al., 2009, p. 14)

There is a significant personal transformation that occurs at the end of Stage 3, Leader Identified, that moves students into Leadership Differentiated (Stage 4). Komives et al. (2005) posited that due to an increased workload, an understanding of leadership language, and a greater appreciation of diversity, students recognize the need to give up authority and work more collaboratively. This shift toward interdependence (Kegan,

1994) aligns with an advanced understanding of relational leadership as a process and not just the work of positional leaders; however, what students are learning that accompanies that cognitive shift and more complex understanding of leadership is still unclear.

This key transition is where the greatest shift in students' leadership development occurs, where they start to value the idea of working collaboratively (Komives et al., 2009). This is also where they are likely to struggle with complex cognitive concepts. Exploring that liminality or the stage where they are troubled by a changing understanding of leadership through the lens of threshold concepts is critical to understanding their development. It is at the core of this research study.

Threshold Concepts

Meyer and Land (2003, 2005) utilized interviews and observations related to the teaching and learning of economics to develop the theory of *threshold concepts*. Within a discipline, threshold concepts are new understandings that create a significant and fundamental shift in awareness. They are *transformative, troublesome, irreversible, integrative, and bounded* within the discipline. When grappling with threshold concepts, students struggle with the unique language of the discipline and can often talk or write about the concepts in a way that mimics but does not reach true understanding. The journey often involves a messy process of reflection and self-doubt, referred to as being in a state of *liminality*, before the concepts are truly understood. When students fully understand the threshold concepts, a dramatic change occurs in both their understanding of the discipline and their identity. A student of economics develops a rich understanding of the subject and begins to identify as an economist; and, when applied to the study of

leadership, one will no longer be able to think of it as purely a position of authority but will understand and appreciate it as a relational process and own the identity of a relational leader.

Research Questions

In 2011, Wagner's dissertation research validated much of the Leadership Identity Development model. The model has been included in multiple textbooks (Day, Harrison & Halpin, 2009; Guthrie, Jones, Osteen, & Hu, 2013; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Roberts, 2007) and used as one of the foundational theories in the International Leadership Association's (2009) guidelines for developing or assessing curricular and co-curricular leadership education programs. A growing body of research is exploring the different kinds of experiences or pedagogical approaches that improve students' leadership development as well as well as how different populations are impacted by those experiences. But, a gap exists in identifying the transformational threshold concepts in that journey. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to identify those threshold concepts within leadership education with which college-age students struggle and may subsequently move them along the path toward understanding leadership as a relational process and identifying as a relational leader. In order to better understand or identify those threshold concepts, I specifically aimed to answer:

1. What prior beliefs or understandings of leadership did students bring with them to college?
2. What were the encounters or experiences that led them into a state of liminality?

3. What specific meaning making shifted the students' ontological understanding and self-identification as a relational leader?
4. What new meaning did the students make that moved them (out of liminality and) across a threshold toward understanding leadership as a relational process?

Summary of Methods

In addition to the conceptual framework described above, the research design for this study was predicated on the philosophy that one's leadership identity is socially constructed and that critical reflection is inherent to the meaning-making process (Komives et al., 2005). The phenomenological approach aligns well with this worldview through the collection of data from interviews with students and reflective writings. This methodology focuses on the meaning participants have made from personal experiences and, in this study, their learning processes (Creswell, 2013). A series of interviews and written responses to intentional prompts were employed to achieve the data desired and necessary for validity (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). These interviews and targeted reflections focused on students' past experiences with and preliminary understanding of leadership, exploration of leadership experiences while in college, and the meanings they made related to troublesome concepts and coming to identify with relational leadership (Seidman, 2013). According to Kegan (1994), when students are able to reflect back on experiences, clearly describe their struggles, and identify how they previously thought about leadership they demonstrate a shift in consciousness and progression into the next

stage of development. It is in those liminal learning moments that the threshold concepts exist.

Summary

In order to develop high-impact leadership development programs, we must better understand higher education's contemporary definition of leadership and how students develop both an identity as a leader and an understanding of leadership as a relational process. As Komives et al. (2005) shared, "(m)ost leadership development scholarship focuses on skill-building or short-term interventions such as retreats or courses, rather than on the process of how leadership capacity or leadership identity is created or changes over time" (p. 594). This is a critical component in higher education's work toward preparing leaders. If we believe that everyone is capable of leadership and has a civic duty to work toward positive change in our communities, students must both understand this relational and collaborative work as leadership and recognize their role in that process (Gardner, 1990). In order to fully realize their mission of developing students into the leaders our world needs, higher education must continue the research on student leadership development.

This study supports our better understanding of the concepts students find transformational. A deep awareness of these concepts leads to an advanced understanding of leadership as a relational process and results in their self-identification as confident and competent leaders within that framework. This information can be used to strengthen curricular efforts, design co-curricular activities, and scaffold learning opportunities. Intentional planning based on the identified threshold concepts of

leadership will further the discipline's inherent goals of educating students to work collaboratively toward positive change both within our institutions and in their communities or the world after graduation. And, as leadership development is overlaid with students' experiences, there are additional recommendations or considerations for the Leadership Identity Development model (Komives et al., 2005).

Chapter Two provides a deeper review of the literature related to leadership and leadership development, leadership development as a form of student (identity, cognitive, and psychosocial) development, the Leadership Identity Development model and relevant research, and threshold concepts. Chapter Three presents the intended methodology and data collection process. Chapter Four shares the profiles of the student participants and their experiences. Chapter Five presents the data analysis and identifies the key threshold concepts experienced by student participants. Chapter Six discusses those key findings, identifies implications for our work as leadership educators, reviews the methodology with limitations of the study, and presents opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of the literature grounds the study by identifying concepts that support students' developing understanding of relational leadership and their identity as a leader. Divided into four sections, it begins by exploring the evolution of and current understanding of the terms *leader* and *leadership*, followed by leadership development as a form of student (cognitive, psychosocial, or identity) development. Next, it includes a detailed explanation of the Leadership Identity Development model with relevant research. And finally, a review of the theory of threshold concepts illustrates the framework that will be used to explore students' challenges and transformation.

Evolving Understanding and Definition of Leadership

Inherent in the challenge accepted by higher education is the need to better understand what is meant by *leader*, *leadership*, and *leadership development*. Over the last century our conceptualization of leadership has evolved dramatically and the literature on the subject is vast. It ranges from easily accessible self-help proclamations found in bookstores and airports to complex academic research. It varies widely depending on the author's context and experiences. And even within the academic arena, different disciplines such as business, sociology, psychology, or education have their own definitions and understandings of leadership and related terminology (Northouse, 2009). New definitions or paradigms are developed in response to identified flaws, evidence of

inadequate or incomplete theories, or the application of different disciplinary lenses or philosophical approaches (Rost, 1991). As society has evolved, so too has our perception of the terms *leader* and *leadership*, and an understanding of leadership's evolution is integral to the advancement of leadership studies and the role of higher education in developing leaders. In the following sections, I review the initial focus on individual leaders and then the shift to understanding leadership as a group process.

Leader-Centric Understandings of Leadership

Within the context of higher education, the frequently chronicled history of leadership begins with the *great man* theory (Bass, 1990; Guthrie et al., 2013; Komives et al., 1998; Northouse, 2009; Roberts, 2007; Rost, 1991, 1993). Celebrated throughout history, the idea that select men were born as leaders stemmed from the notion that royalty served as a society's leaders. These remarkable men possessed the innate characteristics necessary to lead and the power or authority was passed down from generation to generation. They were considered superior to others due to their unique or intrinsic ability to lead and their profound impact on society (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2009).

The rise of industry and a paradigmatic shift in society resulted in a new group or class of leaders, a parallel shift in our thinking of leadership, and the emergence of the *trait-based* model. In the early 1900s, leaders were still believed to be different than followers in that they were born with the ability to lead; but, rather than relying on lineage or pre-established social position, in this model attention was placed on identifying the inherent traits these individuals possessed that allowed them to influence

others (Bass, 1990; Komives et al., 1998; Northouse, 2009; Roberts, 2007; Rost 1991, 1993). These characteristics, such as intelligence, attractiveness, charisma, and creativity were believed to be important (Roberts, 2007). However, the model was also criticized as it became clear that just possessing these traits did not make someone a leader (Roberts, 2007). In 1948, Stogdill published a study in which he explored 124 different traits in an attempt to find a pattern that aligned with successful leaders. He identified eight traits which were unique to leaders when compared to followers, but he also recognized that distinctly different situations required unique traits in their leaders (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2009). In a subsequent study published in 1974, Stogdill expanded his list of traits that positively correlated with leadership and addressed both personal and those situational factors. These traits included responsibility, persistence, risk-taking, insight, initiative, self-confidence, tolerance, and influence (Northouse, 2009). Throughout his years of research, Stogdill maintained that traits alone did not account for leaders' level of success, but the specific context in which the leader was engaged played a significant role in determining the necessary traits (Bass, 1990; Chemers, 1995; Northouse, 2009).

Research on trait models was heavily focused on leaders in managerial roles. It was criticized for both trying to identify simple explanations for a complex concept, paying little attention to the impact different situations and contexts had on leadership, and the lack of attention on followers in the leadership relationship (Komives et al., 1998; Northouse, 2009). The trait models identified characteristics that were still largely innate and not capable of being learned, which was problematic for an evolving society.

As the middle class continued to grow and move into positions previously reserved for the elite, neither the great man nor the trait model were adequate any longer. Aligned with the post-industrial movement and research being conducted in psychology, the *behavioral* model looked at the actions or behaviors a leader employed or the things leaders did when they were in leadership roles. The previous list of traits evolved to include those behaviors that came naturally to some but could also be enhanced or learned with regard to accomplishing tasks or building relationships within the leadership exchange (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2009; Roberts, 2007; Rost, 1993). Because these behaviors could be learned the average person was capable of improving their position in society (Northouse, 2009; Roberts, 2007; Rost, 1991). Two well-known studies out of Ohio State and the University of Michigan focused on this behavioral approach to leadership through a managerial lens (Yukl, 2006). The group at Ohio State explored the behaviors leaders employed related to “consideration” and the degree to which they demonstrated concern and support for their employees along with the “initiating structure” or the degree to which leaders arranged roles and responsibilities connected to intended goals (Yukl, 2006). In the Michigan study, researchers explored the behaviors effective leaders employed related to the completion of tasks, the development of relationships, and their engagement in participative leadership. They concluded that greater attention to the employee rather than the task, including a less controlling form of supervision, was a more successful form of leadership (Yukl, 2006).

A number of additional studies began to identify *leadership styles*, and the models and self-assessment tools that resulted from these studies have proven helpful for

individuals attempting to evaluate their own leadership. However, these approaches were also criticized for falling short in their attempts to clearly articulate the full breadth of what is required of leaders or for having identified rather simplistic models for a complex concept (Chemers, 1995; Komives et al., 2013; Northouse, 2009; Yukl, 2006).

Researchers came to realize that not all successful leaders employed the same behaviors, and the specific situation in which the leadership was happening often impacted the results. Building on trait-based research, the *situational* and *contingency* models emerged in the 1970s (Northouse, 2009). They were established on the idea that within each situation there are varying degrees of both support and direction required in order to effectively lead others. These approaches addressed the attention that must be given to the relationships in the leadership exchange as well as the tasks the group is attempting to accomplish. They explained the importance of adjusting one's approach to leadership based on the specific situation and provided tools for training new leaders (Northouse, 2009; Roberts, 2007; Rost 1991).

However, situational theories were largely based on personal experiences rather than research and were accused of being superficial (Northouse, 2009; Rost, 1993). And while contingency theories had a larger research base and slightly broader scope, they still provided little direction or guidance on development for individuals, as they focused on a leader's personality which was not likely to change (Northouse, 2009). Both situational and contingency theories found their place in management, but because they did not address the greater purpose of advancing the group, they have struggled for broad acceptance within higher education (Gardner, 1990; Northouse, 2009; Rost, 1993).

This greater purpose for leadership was at the heart of Greenleaf's (1977) seminal publication, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. As referenced earlier, it came in response to the turbulent 1960s and 1970s and "out of concern for pervasive student attitudes which then, and now... seemed devoid of hope" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 3). While still focused on the positional leader, from this unique and *values-based* model, the individual was inherently a servant first and then granted the power or authority of a leader by those served and led (Greenleaf, 1977). Even in those leadership roles, servant leaders ensured followers were also being elevated to "become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13-14). With the infusion of a moral imperative to leadership, servant-leaders were not concerned about their own advancement, but rather, worked to ensure the advancement of others or society. They repeatedly reflected broadly on their actions and goals, attempted to make sure the least privileged in society were not being further harmed, and recommitted to the work of serving others in their leadership (Greenleaf, 1977).

The importance of values within the servant-leader model has been reflected in other more recent leader-centric models as well. The *authentic leader* (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) was defined as someone who knows their values and lives them, is passionate and caring yet capable of making difficult decisions, has strong relationships with those around them, and is disciplined in their commitments. In 2007, Roberts challenged higher education to pay closer attention to deeper learning in leadership, which he quite simply defined as *conviction in action*. From this perspective, he included

seven key values: inclusivity, reflection and learning from others, commitment, honesty and openness, courage, encouraging others, and creating reciprocal relationships.

While the theories on individual leaders have evolved and are presented in the past tense, neither the field of leadership studies nor society have completely abandoned these models. Highly skilled athletes, actors, musicians, and business men and women are still routinely referred to as “leaders” even when they may or may not have anything to contribute to society other than their craft (Roberts, 2007). The great man and trait theories are employed every time we refer to a sports hero, popular actor, or politician as a leader. And even within higher education, the popular and charismatic student leaders are often those elected to leadership positions and subsequently appointed to serve on additional decision-making committees around campus (Guthrie et al., 2013). Kouzes and Posner’s (1987) Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), which identified five specific extraordinary behaviors common to successful leaders, is employed in many leadership development programs around the country (Guthrie et al., 2013) to help students identify their strengths and areas of growth around the individual’s practices to “challenge, inspire, enable, model, and encourage” (Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p.1). Seemiller’s (2014) recent publication identifies 60 knowledge, value, ability, and behavior competencies that are considered critical in the development of a leader. Her study and a free online tool through Jossey-Bass align these competencies with a number of academic disciplines and professions (<http://www.wileyvws.com/jbstudentcompetencies/index.php>).

Leadership as Process

While one group of researchers was focusing on the individual leader, in the 1970s a parallel and monumental shift in leadership studies materialized as well. Instead of focusing on the individual leader, in 1978 Burns identified a *transformational leadership* model which was also values-centric but focused on the process through which leaders and followers engaged with each other and change occurred. “(T)he task of leadership is to accomplish some change in the world that responds to... human wants: liberty and equality, justice and opportunity, the pursuit of happiness” (Burns, 2003, p. 2). Through this lens, leaders and followers work in a reciprocal manner, ensuring the morality of their actions, and in the process, motivate and transform each other. Unlike transactional leadership in which a leader provides rewards or incentives in exchange for achieving specific goals, transformational leaders work with followers to inspire and motivate all to achieve higher levels of success with a clear sense of moral responsibility (Burns, 1978).

Although more focused on the process, Burns’ model still lacked clarity around how a person could develop the essential factors of transformational leadership and paid little attention to how the leader is impacted by followers (Northouse, 2009). Since then, additional research and transformational models have evolved to address some of these concerns. The functions of a transformational leader were identified by Bass and Avolio (1994) as idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Kouzes and Posner’s (1987) *Leadership Practices*, “challenge, inspire, enable, model, and encourage” (p.1), were presented within

a transformational context. And, in *Learning as a Way of Leading: Lessons from the Struggle for Social Justice* (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009), transformational leadership was explored from the perspective of better understanding and showing “how leaders learn, how [leaders] support other people’s learning, and how all of this deepens [leaders’] social impact” (p. ix).

Transformational leadership focused attention on values, the shift away from a positional leader to the concept of leadership as a process, the reciprocal nature of the leader-follower relationship, and creating change for the greater good. This approach resonated with those in higher education and triggered significant work aligned with this new paradigm (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996; Rost, 1993). In *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, Rost (1991) described choosing his words very carefully and defining leadership as, “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p. 102). He required that all elements of his definition be present in order for true leadership to be occurring. In his model, followers were fully engaged in the leadership process as active collaborators also doing leadership (Rost, 1991, 1993). And, in Heifetz’s (1994) model of *adaptive leadership*, that relationship was also critically important to “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009, p. 14). Leadership was clearly seen as a process that takes time, but focused on addressing complex challenges or problems for which no solution currently exists (Guthrie et al., 2013; Heifetz, 1994).

Then, in 1993, an ensemble of leadership educators was brought together by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) under a grant provided by the Eisenhower Leadership Development program of the U.S. Department of Education. They were charged with creating a model of leadership development for undergraduate students and, through a highly collaborative process that very intentionally mirrored the model they published, the *Social Change Model of Leadership* (SCM) was created (HERI, 1996). This model defined leadership as a collaborative and values-driven process through which all students could create or work toward positive social change. Designed specifically as a guide for educators and students, the model posited that by understanding themselves, learning how to work in a diverse group, and accepting the responsibility we each have for advancing our community, students would graduate more prepared to create a better society. Within those three domains, the model identified specific values that are commonly referred to as the seven Cs: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment; collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility; and citizenship. The model was keenly focused on leadership as a process of working toward change (the eighth C), but it did not ignore the leader. It addressed the individual's need to develop a strong self-awareness and skills in a number of related competencies in order to function effectively within the context of the group and community. By giving attention to both the individual leader and the process of leadership, this model clearly differentiated between leader development and leadership development. This was an important and complex paradigm shift, as it has been highly influential in the

development of subsequent higher education leadership development programs and initiated a significant path for the future of leadership education (Day, 2000).

Relational Leadership Model

Komives and Lucas, members of the Social Change Model research ensemble, believed there was further work needed to frame or define leadership for audiences outside of higher education. Together with their colleague, McMahan, they utilized the work done with the Social Change Model, the concept of socially responsible leadership, and a commitment to civic responsibility, to identify a new *Relational Leadership Model* (RLM) (Komives et al., 1998). It differed from the SCM in that it more broadly included any change and not just change focused on social issues. Through this framework, leadership was identified as “a relational process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change” (Komives, Lucas, & McMahan, 2013, p. 95). It was not intended to be a theory, but rather, an aspirational model for guiding how individuals and groups engage with each other in a reciprocal manner. It focuses on the interconnectedness of a group’s purpose with its inclusivity, empowering environment, and ethical decision-making within the leadership process. These five critical elements support the development of knowledge (knowing), understanding themselves and others (being), and acting to create change (doing). This “knowing-being-doing” model deepened the complexity of our understanding of leadership; and, by elevating the belief that both positional leaders and followers are full and equal participants in the leadership process, the RLM bridged the developmental needs of both the individual leaders and the process of leadership (Komives et al., 1998) in broadly applicable contexts.

Rather than a single leader identifying a vision, being *purposeful* calls on the group to develop a common goal or mission that guides and inspires all members to fully engage in the process. Change can be difficult, and centralizing the group's actions around a common purpose provides motivation and the willingness to think and act differently to identify solutions (Komives et al., 2013).

Komives et al. (2013) defined *inclusive* as “understanding, valuing, and actively engaging diversity in views, approaches, styles, and aspects of individuality, such as gender or culture, that add multiple perspectives to a group's activity” (p. 108). It involves seeing the complexity of situations and the web of systems influencing both the status quo and push for change. It requires demonstrating empathy, communicating with civility, and ensuring the strengths of all members are utilized in the process. This “breeds new leadership and creates a positive cycle that sustains the quality of the organization over time” (p. 110).

An *empowering* environment is one that recognizes the importance of shared power and creates a climate in which all members believe they belong. It is learning-centric, recognizing that failure is inevitable when significant change is being sought, but also identifying the positive lessons that can come from those experiences. It operates on trust and admiration for the unique contributions of its members, and consciously acts to center those society typically pushes to the margins (Komives et al., 2013).

The *ethical* component in the RLM refers to the principles, values, and standards that guide the group's attitudes and actions. Overlapping with the purpose and functioning within the process of leadership, it involves doing the right thing along the

way toward positive change and intends no harm to others (Komives et al., 2013). This required component answers the common question of whether or not Hitler, an admittedly powerful historical figure, was a leader. Although he was able to accomplish significant progress toward his goal, murdering millions of people was highly immoral and unethical. By this definition of leadership, Hitler may have been a dictator but he was not a leader, as his goals centered on the genocide of whole groups of people (Burns, 1978; Komives et al., 2013).

The final element of the RLM is the overarching *process* orientation of leadership. The focus shifts from the actions of the individual leader to the intentional group actions that ensure they are diverse and inclusive, involve all members in their decision-making, develop a shared purpose, and engage ethically toward positive change. How group members interact and relate to each other is critical. Fostering cooperative and collaborative efforts, remaining open to learning from each other, and reflecting on the group's actions are as important as the actual change that is sought (Komives et al., 2013).

This Relational Leadership Model situates leadership as a process that continually develops an individual's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and ability to effectively engage with others toward creating positive change. As a highly interdisciplinary subject, it is unlikely there will ever be one broadly agreed upon definition of leadership. However, within the context of higher education and the shared goal of developing students into leaders who can work together to solve society's significant challenges, this model provides a solid framework on which student leadership development efforts can be built

and is widely accepted as the model colleges and universities should be using as the basis for their leadership education efforts (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2003; Eich, 2008). Therefore, it is the definition or understanding of leadership used in this research study.

Leader Development and Leadership Development

Inherent in the evolving understanding of leadership also came different notions of what constituted *leadership development*. The phrase was often used within the literature to refer to three very different concepts: individual leader and skill development, the development of one's identity or self-efficacy as a leader, and coming to understand leadership as a process.

With the great man theory, leaders were born and not made or developed, which meant that there was no leadership education or development needed. When the paradigm shifted to trait, behavioral, situational/contingency, and other leader-centric models, the field also began deviating to include training or educational opportunities for leaders to improve their personal skills or competencies that would make them more effective. This individual *leader development* remains a critical and prominent part of the training that happens on many college campuses today (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2003; Dugan & Komives, 2007; HERI, 1996; Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, & Wagner, 2011). We continue to use assessments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) and Kouzes and Posner's (2008) Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI) to help students better understand themselves and explore behaviors that will make them more successful in leadership roles or when working in groups. And

very recently, Seemiller's (2014) work on identifying 60 leadership-related competencies has given higher education a framework for understanding and developing the relevant leadership skills for students within many of our academic disciplines or career fields. When students understand themselves and develop leadership skills, their identity as a leader is solidified and their self-efficacy is improved (Day et al., 2009).

When the paradigm shifted and greater attention was placed on understanding leadership as a process, the term leadership development took on an additional meaning as well. Individual leaders must have a deep understanding of who they are and be capable of working together toward achieving common goals or change. They must also understand leadership as more than their actions within a position of authority. For clarification purposes, *leader development* was recognized as helping individuals better understand their values, beliefs, attitudes, and passions along with developing the competencies necessary to work with others (Day, 2000; Guthrie et al., 2013; HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2013). Comparatively, *leadership development* was identified as coming to understand leadership as a complex process and interdependent relational interaction (Day, 2000; Komives et al., 2013; Rost, 1993). Day (2000) framed this difference by stating, "(l)eadership development can be thought of as an *integration* strategy by helping people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives" (p. 586).

Student Development

This concept of leadership development is inherently based in foundational cognitive and identity development theories. Their intersections are reviewed below to understand how the concepts work together.

Cognitive Development

In order for individuals to understand leadership as a complex and relational process, they must also be able to make meaning of situations or experiences in more complex ways. Kegan (1994) presented two distinct subject-object modes of understanding. He posited that when individuals are in the middle of an experience they are fully *subject* and not capable of making complete meaning of that experience. It is only when they are able to reflect back and see themselves as *object* that they are able to construct their own genuine meaning from an experience. Kegan (1994) also identified five distinct “orders of consciousness” that begin with infancy and progress through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Most college students are in the process of moving into his fourth order, *self-authorship*, where they are capable of constructing their own meaning around complex issues or ideologies. Baxter Magolda (2001, 2004) conducted extensive longitudinal research on the concept of self-authorship and added to Kegan’s (1994) understanding of meaning making. She theorized that in the transition from the third to the fourth order, traditional-age college students were beginning to shift from making meaning based on external influences (what others or the prevailing culture or climate believed) to allowing a greater dominance of their internal voices. As self-authorship is developed, students are able to reflect on prior experiences, see themselves

as object, and understand complex subjects or systems differently (Baxter Magolda, 2001). In this stage of cognitive development, students are able to reflect on their collegiate experiences, make meaning from them, and reconstruct their understanding of leadership as a relational process.

Identity Development

The process of coming to identify as a leader – either as a position or in a relational context – is complex and multifaceted. As originally posited by Erikson (1968), one’s identity is socially constructed through their deepening cognitive development, interaction with society or their environment, and the awareness and acceptance of their unique personal characteristics (Jones & Abes, 2013). Building on Erikson’s work, Chickering and Reisser (1993) identified seven vectors of student development and described “establishing identity” as their fifth area of concern. As students work to develop a strong sense of self, they wrestle with becoming fully aware of the groups to which they belong and understanding how those various sub-identities interact to form a greater and intersectional identity (Jones & Abes, 2013; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Multiple layers or sub-identities are discovered through periods of crisis, reflection, and decision-making. As individuals are challenged by different experiences, they struggle to make meaning of them and eventually (in a positive and healthy resolution to the crisis) integrate this new understanding or commitment with the self (Erikson, 1968; Jones & Abes, 2013; Jones & McEwen, 2000). That developmental process “grounds individuals in understanding who they are, what are their major goals

and aspirations, and what are their personal strengths and challenges” (Day et al., 2009, p. 57).

As it relates to leadership, owning a leadership identity is then the degree to which individuals think of themselves as leaders (Lord & Hall, 2005). Owning this identity is vital to both leader development and leadership development as, “increasing one’s repertoire of leadership skills requires a concomitant change in the developing identities and an increased willingness to voluntarily assume a specific social role” (Lord & Hall, 2005, p. 594). Thus, the more committed individuals are to their identity as a leader, the more likely they are to engage in leadership work and further leadership development (Day et al., 2009).

Leadership Identity Development

Shortly after the Relational Leadership Model was developed, Komives and a team of researchers identified a gap in the literature integrating student development theories and leadership development. Building on the RLM, they chronicled the stages students go through in their understanding of leadership and their social identity development as a leader (Komives et al., 2005) and created the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model (Komives et al., 2006). The LID model reflected a new and more complex paradigm of leadership development that pays careful attention to students’ ways of thinking, knowledge, and perception of themselves as leaders, and their interaction with others (Wagoner, 2011).

Through a series of three in-depth interviews with thirteen students, these researchers engaged in a grounded theory study and identified a six-stage model. As

described in the previous chapter, the stages of leadership identity included: *Awareness* (Stage 1), the most basic understanding that there are leaders in the world, but the focus is highly peripheral and there is no notion that they could be a leader; *Exploration/Engagement* (Stage 2), beginning to engage with groups, make new friends, and try different things; *Leader Identified* (Stage 3), believing leadership is having the abilities, skills, or competencies necessary to be successful in a position of authority with followers and then beginning to hold these leadership roles; *Leadership Differentiated* (Stage 4), viewing leadership as including both positional and non-positional roles involved in a relational group process; *Generativity* (Stage 5), identifying personal passions around an issue, serving as a mentor, and committing to the leadership development of others to ensure continued group success; and *Integration/Synthesis* (Stage 6), fully owning the identity of a relational leader and believing in one's competency in the leadership process regardless of the context (Komives et al., 2006).

As students moved from one stage to the next, they discovered new things about themselves, leadership, and their relationships with others. Not only were they broadening their understanding of the concept, but they were also developing their identity as a leader in a cyclical manner. The complex process of deepening of their self-awareness was influenced by interactions with other peers or group members, adults, and mentors, being involvement in meaningful activities, and reflection on their past experiences. As their self-awareness evolved, so did their level of dependence on others and their view of leadership in relation to positionality or process. "This changing view

of self in relation to others shaped the student's broadening view of what leadership is and created a leadership identity" (Komives et al., 2005, p. 596).

The significant transformational point for college students in this model was between Stages 3 and 4, *Leader Identified* and *Leadership Differentiated*. In the emerging phase of Leader Identified, students viewed leadership as purely positional, were beginning to take on new responsibilities, and looked to role models within their groups for how they should lead. Then within the immersion phase of this stage, students were comfortable being in either leadership roles or followership roles and were working to improve their leadership skills. They viewed themselves as being independent of others when leading, and believed they were ultimately responsible for the direction and success of the group (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006).

The transition at the end of Leader Identified marked a significant and paradigmatic shift in students' understanding of leadership. They discovered that as students started taking on more complex or difficult leadership roles, they also realized that they could not do all of it on their own. Their identity as the leader – the person in charge and responsible for the group – was challenged as they realized the need to look to other group members for their expertise and leadership (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006). Through reflection and resolution of this crisis (Erikson, 1968; Jones & Abes, 2013; Jones & McEwen, 2000), the students began to abandon the notion of a leader as the person in a position of authority. They moved into the leadership differentiated stage and started to view leadership as an interdependent process that could come from anywhere within the group (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006). This shift in

understanding involves an awareness of leadership beyond a hierarchical model and opens the door to understanding it as a systems approach to addressing complex challenges (Komives et al., 2009; Wielkiewicz, 2000).

Current Research

Around the same time the research team was developing the LID model (Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2005), the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) released the joint publication *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (2004). In it they challenged student affairs professionals to more intentionally and deeply explore how they were engaging students in the learning process. The field was charged with being “accountable to students and society for identifying and achieving essential student learning outcomes and for making transformative education possible and accessible for all students” (p. 1). Subsequently, both curricular and co-curricular leadership development and civic engagement programs around the country grew exponentially (Eich, 2008). These efforts were a positive step toward accomplishing this challenge; however, there was also a need for significant assessment of both student learning within these programs (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Eich, 2008; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000) and the theories on which these efforts were based.

Consequently in 2006, a group of 52 schools participated in the first Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) (Dugan & Komives, 2007). It utilized the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (Tyree, 1998) which reflected the competencies

and understandings of leadership related to the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (HERI, 1996), the Relational Leadership Model (Komives et al., 1998), the Servant Leadership Model (Greenleaf, 1977), and Kouzes and Posner's *Leadership Challenge* (2002). Over 63,000 students participated in that original study (Dugan & Komives, 2007), which to date has been administered five additional times at more than 250 college campuses (<http://leadershipstudy.net/about/>).

That original MSL study identified community service as the most influential form of involvement toward socially responsible leadership development, followed by holding a leadership role, organizational membership, and participation in formal leadership development programs (Dugan, 2006b; Dugan, Komives, & Segar, 2008). Subsequent and more detailed studies have identified the positive impacts of certificate programs (Fischer, Wielkiewicz, Stelzner, Overland, & Meuwissen, 2015) and other relatively short educational opportunities (Dugan, Bohle, Gebhardt, Hofert, Wilk, & Cooney, 2011; Dugan & Komives, 2007). Successful programming and socially responsible leadership development was shown to be more aligned with intentional and complex content than with administratively heavy structures. These studies identified that when careful attention is given to critical self-reflection, deep and substantial learning is possible through programs lasting no longer than a semester (Dugan et al., 2011; Eich, 2008).

As posited by Komives et al. (2005) in the LID model, mentorship has also proven to be an important part of the developmental process. Both student affairs staff and faculty (especially those mentoring outside the formal classroom environment),

appear to be influential in students' development of socially responsible leadership capacities (Campbell, Smith, Dugan, & Komives, 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2007, 2010; Komives et al., 2006). Researchers have suggested that the mentoring relationship and students' related reflection or meaning-making experiences appear to impact students' abilities related to *social perspective taking*. Defined as the capacity "to take another person's point of view and accurately infer the thoughts and feelings of others" (Dugan, Bohle, Woelker, & Cooney, 2014, p. 3), these studies have identified community service, multicultural education, and other experiences that facilitate authentic interaction with others as being influential in supporting both group leadership values and students' commitment to citizenship and social change (Dugan et al., 2011, 2014; Dugan, Kodama, & Gebhardt, 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2010).

Because the MSL captures a significant amount of demographic data, it has allowed researchers to also explore the intersections of student experiences and social identities. A number of studies have theorized that students of color did not readily identify with the term "leader" but actively engaged in leadership activities that worked toward social change (Arminio et al., 2000; Balón, 2004; Komives et al., 2005). In a study using the original MSL data, Black students were shown to score higher than White students in understanding themselves, engaging in controversy with civility, and focusing on leadership for change (Dugan et al., 2008). That was "consistent with the cultural value orientations that stress the importance of collectivism" (Dugan et al., 2008, p. 489). And, while some studies identified no discernible difference on leadership development connected to race (Cress et al., 2001; Dugan & Komives, 2010), when MSL data were

explored more deeply and disaggregated related to specific leadership development experiences, race did appear to influence students' experiences, both positively and negatively, within a number of leadership related activities and subsequent leadership development opportunities (Dugan et al., 2012; Dugan, Kodama, Correia, & Associates, 2013; Kodama & Dugan, 2013). These different study outcomes demonstrate how critical it is for institutions and educators to not simply adopt educational programs that work at other institutions but also to consider carefully their unique student body, institutional climate, and the local community to develop learning opportunities that best fit the needs of their students (Dugan et al., 2013).

Gender is another lens through which leadership understanding and development can be assessed. Early literature identified that men and women define leadership differently (Astin, 1993). Men tended to define it in more hierarchical or traditional ways and women more readily viewed leadership as a collective or relational process (Fischer, Overland, & Adams, 2010; Dugan, 2006a; Haber, 2012; Wielkiewicz, Fischer, Stelzner, Overland, & Sinner, 2012). Studies using the MSL data show that women tend to score higher than men on all values associated with socially responsible leadership, but do not experience the same level of leadership self-efficacy as their male counterparts (Dugan, 2006a; Dugan et al., 2008). These studies, based on various and intersectional identities, are critical to leadership educators and the experiences they create and promote to students. Recognizing that different populations identify differently with the term "leader" and demonstrate varying needs in their developmental process is essential for

leadership educators who are trying to engage, appropriately challenge, and support a broad and diverse group of students (Komives et al., 2011).

Gap in Theory or Research

In the last decade, leadership educators have begun to develop a better understanding of effective experiences or high-impact practices for leadership development and how different populations are influenced by them. However, there is still a gap in the research related to the leadership development theories themselves. The Leadership Identity Development (LID) model started this process with a grounded theory in the development of a leader identity and understanding of leadership as an interdependent relational process (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009). Although based on a relatively small number of study participants and without much scrutiny, the LID model has been included in a number of leadership publications (Day et al., 2009; Guthrie et al., 2013; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Roberts, 2007). The International Leadership Association (2009) used it as a framework for determining the guidelines for leadership education programs, and subsequently, it has been adopted by higher education institutions as a framework for developing and assessing their leadership development initiatives. Additional studies have found that most students enter college in Stage 3, *Leader Identified*, and through multiple different leadership experiences and the meaning-making process, many move into the next stages (Fischer et al., 2016; Haber, 2012; Sessa, Morgan, Kalenderli, & Hammond, 2014). Holding leadership positions and identifying as a leader often results in students being more engaged in leadership-related education and activities (Day et al., 2009). Faculty,

staff, and peer mentors were shown to impact both personal and leadership development especially when students were cognitively still relying on others to help them make meaning of experiences (Campbell et al., 2012; Sessa et al., 2014). Students need to experience some level of crisis or period of disequilibrium with their understanding of leadership as a position of authority before they can understand it as a process (Sessa et al., 2014). Teaching students how to reflect deeply on their experiences, including setting aside time to intentionally engage in the reflection process, was shown to be a critical component in students' ability to make meaning from their experiences and to the leadership identity development higher education seeks to develop (White & Guthrie, 2016).

In 2011, Wagner sought to validate the LID model. Through her study using Q methodology, the first four LID stages were clearly identified as being experienced by the participants, but she found it difficult to clearly differentiate between Stages 4, 5 and 6. This was not surprising, as the original research teams (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009) recognized that as students moved through the developmental process they regularly returned to previous stages. And in a case study on the leadership development of Hispanic women (Onorato, 2010), it was shown that, depending on the context or life situation, leaders could be positioned in more than one stage at the same time.

Since Wagner's study, a handful of qualitative studies have applied or further explored the Leadership Identity Development model related to more narrow special populations or experiences. Two studies looked more closely at women. First, Damell

(2013) investigated the leadership development of women who had served as student government presidents at their institutions and used LID as a theoretical framework to better understand how the study participants developed leadership identities over time. Then, McKenzie (2015) utilized a grounded theory study to look at traditional-aged undergraduate women and their leadership development. Using LID as a reference model, the result was a four-stage model very similar to that of the Komives's teams (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009). While the first two stages and last two stages were merged, Leader Identified, Leadership Differentiated, and Generativity remained at the core of the developmental process. In a very different study, Lawhead (2013) explored the impact the LID model's four developmental influences (adult advisors, peers, meaningful involvement, and reflection) (Komives et al., 2005) had on students' leadership identity development through involvement in a Greek student organization. In 2014, Beatty used LID as a theoretical framework, along with critical race theory, to explore how a sample of students of color, who were considered relational leaders, constructed their identities as leaders at a predominantly White liberal arts institution. In 2016, Olive very specifically explored the role of friendship for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer students, and found it to be an important influencing factor at each of the six LID stages.

Since Wagner's (2011) study, the Leadership Identity Development model itself has experienced very little attention or further exploration. The movement from Leader Identified (Stage 3) to Leadership Differentiated (Stage 4) in the LID model is where a significant paradigm shift is believed to occur (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al.,

2006; Komives et al., 2009), but what students are experiencing, making meaning of, and cognitively understanding at a deeper level during this transition is still not fully evident. And, whether additional studies validate the LID model or not, a deeper insight into this transformation in embracing leadership as a relational process is imperative to advancing our understanding of students' leadership development.

Threshold Concepts

As described earlier, Meyer and Land (2003, 2005) developed the *threshold concepts* theory in an attempt to understand students' deepening awareness of a discipline and the process of coming to personally identify with it. They suggest that within a discipline, threshold concepts are: *transformative*, creating an entirely new perspective of the discipline; *troublesome*, causing the student to truly struggle on multiple levels to fully comprehend; *irreversible*, not easily ignored or forgotten, and leave the learner unable to return to a prior level of understanding; *integrative*, entwining concepts or elements that were previously seen as disparate; and *bounded*, uniquely inherent to the discipline. When students master or make meaning of them, a new understanding of the discipline is achieved that results in a significant and fundamental shift in awareness and identity.

The model posits that students in the *preliminal* state come with a prior history of experiences, identities, and hegemonic ideologies that have not been consciously evaluated or confronted. The individuals then exposed to an instigative event or intentional lesson, or crisis (Jones & Abes, 2013; Erikson, 1968), can move into a state of *liminality* or uncertainty. As they engage more deeply, students grapple with the unique

language of the discipline and often mimic its use without truly understanding the complexity of the concepts. They wrestle with the messy journey of making meaning of complex and troublesome concepts and often experience a level of self-doubt before new information is integrated. Their prior understandings are reconsidered and discarded as epistemological and ontological understandings shift. During this state of liminality, students' identity and ability to make meaning of new experiences are affected. Crossing the threshold of understanding and moving into the *postliminal* state, the transformation includes looking at themselves and their relationship with the subject, in this case leadership, in fundamentally different ways (Land, Meyer, & Baillie, 2010; Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005). Postliminally, students see their world very differently and are able to engage in ways that would have eluded them prior to this transformation (Land et al., 2010; Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005). As they step into the next learning experience, they cycle back into a state of liminality and the meaning-making process.

Initial research using the threshold concepts model was conducted on disciplines in the hard sciences or professional subjects such as physics, biology, economics, engineering, or medicine (Land et al., 2010). Since then the theory has been applied more broadly and now includes some of the liberal arts disciplines such as history, art history, and writing (O'Mahony, Buchanan, O'Rourke, & Higgs, 2014) as well as educational development and faculty members' understanding of the teaching and learning process (King & Felten, 2012). In this context, it seemed appropriate to explore the threshold concepts related to the study of leadership and identify those new

understandings that shift students' understanding of leadership from simply being a position of authority to understanding it as an interdependent relational process.

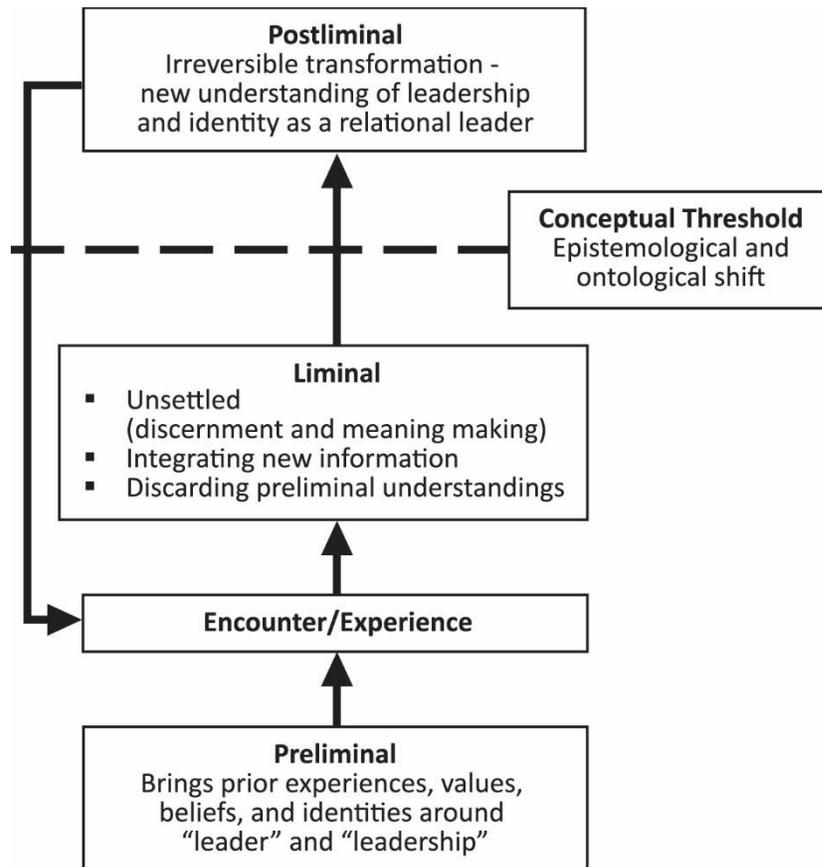


Figure 1. Threshold Concepts for Relational Leadership.

The map in Figure 1 illustrates the theory of threshold concepts as it may be applied to developing an understanding of leadership (an epistemological shift) and identifying as a relational leader (an ontological shift). Based on the seminal publication by Meyer and Land (2003) and the relational illustration by Land, Meyer, and Baillie (2010), this map demonstrates students' journey as they grapple with the crisis or

troublesome new ideas, discover a new understanding of leadership as a relational and interdependent process, and begin to shift their identity.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature on the evolution of our understanding of what it means to be a leader and the newer appreciation of leadership as an interdependent and relational process. It clarified the difference between leader and leadership development, then situated them within the context of both cognitive and identity development. It provided a detailed explanation of the Leadership Identity Development model with relevant research and identified a gap in our understanding of that process. And finally, it explained of the theory of threshold concepts as a framework for exploring students' transformation in their understanding of leadership and their identity as a relational leader. The next chapter will describe the methodology used for identifying these threshold concepts in that key LID transition.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The transformation in students' understanding of leadership as an interdependent relational process is something we do not yet fully understand. Although there are developmental theories related to this shift in understanding and the adoption of a leader identity, it is complex and more research is needed. The primary purpose of this study was to explore students' experiences around this phenomenon. It served to identify threshold concepts within leadership education that college-age students found troublesome and, after understanding more deeply, moved them along the path toward understanding leadership as a relational process and identifying as a leader within this new context. The following research questions framed the study:

1. What prior beliefs or understandings of leadership did students bring with them to college?
2. What were the encounters or experiences that led them into a state of liminality?
3. What specific meaning making shifted the students' ontological understanding and self-identification as a relational leader?
4. What new meaning did the students make that moved them (out of liminality and) across a threshold toward understanding leadership as a relational process?

This chapter will identify the study design, site selection, participant selection, methods of data collection, methods of data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Study Design

This study grew out of a compelling interest to better understand students' varying levels of learning connected to leadership development experiences and their identities as leaders. In a purposeful manner, the study was guided by epistemological, theoretical, and methodological frameworks. It focused on giving voice to students' unique lived experiences, the thoughts and reflections related to the concepts most salient in their meaning-making process, and their construction of a leader identity. This constructionist approach, the belief that knowledge and one's identity is constructed rather than created (Crotty, 1998), served as the epistemological framework that guided how both the participants made meaning of their experiences and how the researcher discerned the study's findings (Creswell, 2013; Crotty, 1998; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014).

From a theoretical perspective, the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model and threshold concepts provide the framework for exploring student experiences, analyzing their learning, and identifying their identity construction. Within LID and the transition from *Leader Identified* (Stage 3) to *Leadership Differentiated* (Stage 4), it was posited that students come to understand and value leadership as an interdependent process and develop a commitment to the community or group (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009). Along this LID path they come to believe that leadership is an inclusive, empowering, ethical, and purposeful process; however, the

knowledge students are constructing that results in this epistemological and ontological transformation is not well understood. Exploring that phenomenon to discern those critical concepts, or threshold concepts, was the purpose of this study. As described in the previous chapter, threshold concepts are troublesome, irreversible, integrative, and disciplinarily bounded bits of knowledge that students chew on and struggle to fully comprehend. As students attempt to more profoundly understand and construct new meaning around a concept, they move through a period of liminality and may then cross a threshold within the discipline. The result is a transformation in their ability to deeply engage in the field and develop an identity connected to the field of study (Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005). Employing these two theoretical frameworks served as the foundation for exploring the participants' lived experiences. In a reciprocal manner, the study also added to the body of literature around these two theories.

And finally, aligned with the constructivist epistemological approach, a phenomenological study methodology guided the process of collecting data and engaging with students. A relatively small number of participants who had experienced the phenomenon – a change in their understanding of leadership as a relational process and the development of a related identity – engaged in the study. A series of interviews asked them to reflect on their experiences, offering the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of their meaning making around leadership and their subsequent transformation (Creswell, 2013; Jones et al., 2014).

Site of Research

The study was conducted at a private, selective, and predominantly White institution of higher education. It is located in the Southeast, but nearly half of the 6,000 students come from the Northeast. The university's mission includes being committed to the development of civically engaged and ethical leaders, while fostering respect for a diverse world, integrity, and concern for the common good. This foundational attention to student development with values aligning with relational leadership was important. It meant that while students may not have entered with that understanding of leadership, at the conclusion of their four years they should at least have a more advanced appreciation of it. Additionally critical to this study was the inclusion of student participants who had opportunities for leadership development and time at the institution to engage with others or with issues in a way that fostered deep learning and a shift in their personal identity. There may be similar institutions where this same study could be conducted, but this university's strong focus on engaged learning provided significant opportunities for students to participate in leadership activities and work to make meaning of those learning experiences (Seidman, 2013).

Participant Selection

To identify participants for this study, a purposeful sampling process looked for current students in at least their sophomore year at the university or recent graduates (out no more than a year). At this level they should be less authority dependent and engaging in more self-authorship (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). Their leadership development opportunities (either formal or informal) at the collegiate level were relatively recent and

memories of those experiences should be vivid. Assistance in recruiting participants was requested by sending select student affairs professionals and faculty members from across campus an email (Appendix A) with information on the study and a description of the student qualifications. They were asked to forward the study information to students they had observed engaging in collaborative leadership activities in or outside of the classroom and expressing an appreciation of the relational or interdependent process of working toward positive change. If those students contacted me to volunteer for the study, the information sheet (Appendix B) was emailed to them with suggestions for possible first meeting times (Appendix C).

Current research indicates that many non-White or marginalized cultures tend to engage as leaders and view leadership differently than their White peers; they may move to an interdependent process more quickly and be less willing to own a leader identity (Beatty, 2014; Guthrie et al., 2013). This highlighted the importance of a diverse pool of participants related to racial and gender identities. If the target populations of 6-8 participants did not yield adequate diversity or a level of saturation in data, I acknowledged the potential need to include additional students (Seidman, 2013).

Methods of Data Collection

Two 60- to 90-minute, semi-structured interviews were conducted, followed by a participant profile check and responses to additional reflection questions sent via email or through a third interview (depending on participant preferences). The goal was to move each participant through the study within a two-month period. Student schedules are often quite full, and this timeline allowed for challenges in scheduling but kept the

meetings close enough that rapport with the participant was not compromised (Seidman, 2013). To help students feel comfortable and reflect in meaningful ways, careful attention was paid to the environment. In-person interviews took place in a room relatively free from distractions and in a comfortable location to build and maintain a rapport as the questions became more personal or required deeper reflection (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). If online interviews had been needed (for recent graduates or students studying away from campus), the same type of environment would have been sought for both the participant and me as the researcher. The established protocol (Appendix D) was followed for each interview, with time in the first meeting allotted for introductions and getting to know each other, an explanation of the study and interview process, and completion of the participant questionnaire (Appendix E).

The phenomenological interviews had distinctly different goals and questions (Appendix F). The initial meeting gathered information related to the student's preliminal knowledge. Asking, "What prior beliefs or understandings of leadership did you bring with you to college?" was integral to analyzing the student's experiences while in college and identifying possible threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005). Interview questions were first directed at determining participants' salient understandings of leadership and identity as a leader prior to college, then shifted to explore their collegiate experiences and new understanding of leadership. The second interview focused on exploring the shift, prompting students to think more specifically about their meaning making processes and the concepts with which they struggled. Individualized questions were frequently tied to answers each participant provided in the previous

session, and listening intently and finding ways to encourage deep thought or critical reflection by the participants was important as they discussed this inherently complex meaning making process (Seidman, 2013). The final questions were emailed along with their participant profile. They were more direct than previous interview questions and used to get final clarification on the meaning they seemed to have made from experiences.

Each interview was recorded using more than one device, with the intentional redundancy aimed at preventing the accidental loss of data. As the interviews progressed, memos were written regarding needed follow-up questions, observations of participant behaviors, and thoughts on the participant's comments or the process. Immediately after the interview, unrecorded thoughts were added to the memos to help ensure a detailed understanding from the conversation. Realizing that relevant information may be identified by the participant after they left the interview and not wanting to lose that data, a follow-up email was sent inviting the students to reply with any additional thoughts or reflections (Seidman, 2013). This data, along with the interview transcripts, was then added to a qualitative data analysis system, Dedoose, and included in constructing meaning out of the student experiences.

Methods of Data Analysis

Because both the process and the subject matter are complex, writing notes or memos to capture critical thoughts throughout the analysis was essential. This started in the note-taking during and immediately following the interviews, but continued when listening to the recording, reviewing the transcripts, and listening again for the

participant's tone and meanings that could not be captured by the transcript alone (Jones et al., 2014; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These memos were an important opportunity to start making meaning of the data, creating a thought trail, and building multiple layers of understanding.

These memos were also integral to the iterative nature of analyzing qualitative data. It is a complex process, and Maxwell (2013) identifies three different categories for sorting, coding, and differentiating that data: organizational categories, substantive categories, and theoretical categories. The organizational categories are largely pre-established and include the broad topics from the research literature. In this study, these organizational categories included: early definition of a leader and leadership, later understanding of leader and leadership, leadership experiences, and threshold concepts. The substantive category represents a second level of data coding, and these items fall within each of the organizational categories. They were not identified *a priori*, but emerged emicly and were identified from the participants' voices (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). And finally, the theoretical category provides an etic perspective. It is more abstract and deducted by the researcher from the information provided by the students (Maxwell, 2013).

Within the organizational categories of "concepts causing liminality" and "conceptual thresholds," Spradley's (1980) suggestion to look for places related to cause and effect was a useful way to further analyze the data. In a sample interview, one student discussed an expanding definition or understanding of a diverse group beyond race or ethnicity (the "cause" within "concepts causing liminality"). Through other

information shared in the interview, it was also apparent that she had not yet operationalized that new understanding, achieved an “effect,” or reached a “conceptual threshold” to be coded.

As transcripts and any additional email data were collected they were entered into Dedoose on a regular basis. The analysis process involved regular review of the data, minor adjustments or additions to the interview questions, and changes to coding categories along the way. A preliminary review of the analysis identified shared experiences of the phenomenon (the shift in understanding leadership) between the students and it was determined that saturation had occurred. At that point, the recruitment of additional interviewees stopped (Creswell, 2013; Jones et al., 2014). The process of discerning meaning from the data continued by reading through all of the transcripts again, bracketing the data within the identified categories, developing and refining a coding dictionary, combining codes where there was overlap, and reviewing data from combined codes to ensure they still fit within the new ones (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).

The final aspect of data analysis at this stage was also a way of ensuring trustworthiness of the research. Allowing the participants to engage in member checking (Maxwell, 2013) was done by sending each participant their profile, asking for any corrections and feedback on my analysis of their experiences, and giving them an opportunity to add clarifying details or additional information they felt was relevant. Recognizing that the interviews themselves may have served as a source of additional

reflection and meaning making (Jones et al., 2014), this follow up and level of participant involvement in the research process allowed for rich study data.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative studies, the researcher's theories, beliefs, or worldviews will undoubtedly influence the work, and while subjectivity cannot be eliminated, researcher bias can be acknowledged and addressed (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). In relation to this research proposal and my own bias, I grew up in a predominantly White, Catholic, rural farming community in the Midwest with middle-class, college educated parents. My family's values included civic responsibility, social justice, and working to ensure all members of our community had the opportunities they needed to live full and rewarding lives. I held many leadership roles in high school, but was not involved in any formal leadership roles or activities while in college. At the time, my definition of leader involved an ethical individual in a position of authority. In graduate school my assistantship included work in leadership education and I was exposed to the (then new) Social Change Model of leadership (HERI, 1996). As my theoretical understanding of the discipline grew, I engaged in multiple and varied leadership activities, and my identity as a leader evolved. I have come to understand and personally identify with the relational leadership model.

I am a heterosexual, cisgender, 49-year old White woman with a husband of 25 years and am the mother of two young men. I have spent more than 20 years in progressively responsible administrative positions in higher education and student affairs, and my interests in leadership studies along with the cognitive and moral reasoning

development of college-age students have influenced my research interests. I have explored the theory of threshold concepts and through the development of this proposal, also reflected on the troublesome understandings that may have moved me through a change in understanding and identity.

When analyzing my data, I consciously set my own experiences aside, listened openly to the student participants, and constructed meaning of the data without privileging my own experiences. While not easy, learning to acknowledge and then not privilege one's own culture or beliefs is a critical skill in leadership and social change work (Johnson, 2006; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Routinely questioning my privileged voice in the analysis and engaging in member checking served to minimize researcher bias (Creswell, 2013).

Another common validity concern involves reactivity or the influence of the researcher on the participants and the actual data collected (Maxwell, 2013). Again, due to the nature of qualitative research, this cannot be completely eliminated, as simply interacting with the participants will influence what is shared in the interviews (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). To minimize this influence and avoid negatively impacting the trustworthiness of this study, the first consideration given was on the participants and the interview environment. I hold a mid-level administrative position at the university, and although some students may see this as a position of influence, we also have a very engaged community with strong student, faculty, and staff working relationships. Most students refer to me by my first name, and this collegial environment helped reduce potential concerns over power or authority. The comfortable space,

beginning the first interview with a little personal information about myself, and an intentional effort to maintain a conversational tone in the interviews helped reduce the inevitable formality of the interview. The goal was to put the participant at ease and communicate my honest desire to simply hear what the students – who are the experts on themselves and their experiences – had to say (Seidman, 2013). The interview questions were carefully designed (see Appendix F) to gather answers to the research questions but also to avoid steering the conversation in any specific direction. When additional information was needed, prompts such as “tell me more about that” were used instead of more pointed questions. Together, these considerations led to rich data without significant concerns around trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations

This study explores the understanding students have of leadership and their complex and sometimes difficult journey through identity development. By sharing this information they may have revealed personal experiences that readers could connect back to them as individuals. To minimize this concern, each participant was given multiple opportunities to identify a pseudonym. Transcripts and all documents with personal information were saved with only the desired names or pseudonyms. All data with real participant identities was kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office. And unless they were with me, all other data and documents were locked in my office.

Because all participants were volunteers and involvement was not tied to an academic requirement, there was no ethical concern around grading or their status at the institution. However, simply due to the size of the institution and the nature of the

research topic, it was possible that I would know many of the students suggested for the study. To mitigate the potential feeling of obligation to participate, faculty and staff nominators sent the study information to the students. That information was not shared with me, and students were then able to make the choice as to whether or not they were interested in participating without concerns over potential consequences if they elected not to respond.

For those students who participated and shared ideas or perspectives that did not align with my personal beliefs around leadership and related responsibilities, there was the possibility I might form opinions of them based on this information, and I admittedly have access to a number of other influential people within the institution. That being said, professionally I have spent a number of years in a student conduct role, determining if they have violated the code of conduct, and assigning sometimes significant consequences. My personal philosophy, and I believe my reputation on campus, demonstrates a history of addressing the behavior but not judging the student. The focus of this study and my professional life is on educating and supporting students in their development. I did not expect they would fully identify with the later stages of leadership identity, but I was curious about their experiences and what has been meaningful in their journey. Further, my focus was on identifying the threshold concepts in relational leadership, and not on evaluating any student's personal journey. This was clearly communicated in the interview process, and I believe resulted in rich and valuable data.

Summary

Chapter Three focused on the methodology for this proposed study. Chapter Four will share participant profiles. An analysis of the students' experiences and identified threshold concepts will be presented in Chapter Five, and Chapter Six will offer a discussion of the findings with a summary and related recommendations.

CHAPTER IV

RELATIONAL LEADERS

Relational leadership is the “relational process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 95). It is purposeful in its development of a common goal, inclusive, empowering, and ethical. This is a definition of leadership that the study’s student participants are not only able to talk about, but with which their actions are also aligned. They acknowledge the challenges inherent in this more complex understanding, but also genuinely value the inclusiveness, respect what each member of the group brings, and find great satisfaction when the group’s goals are accomplished.

Within the Leadership Identity Development model, a significant transformation occurs when someone begins to see leadership as more than a position of authority and, instead, involving a group process. That evolution continues when they recognize the importance of developing the leadership abilities in others and find a personal passion or purpose for their leadership (Komives et al., 2005). All participants in this study left high school identifying a leader as someone who held a position of authority. They may or may not have seen themselves as a leader. Now, each of these students has undergone a transformation and identifies as a relational leader whether or not they have a formal position on campus. Many have found areas, issues or causes they are passionate about

and are working to identify what their leadership will look like when they leave the collegiate environment.

The first two research questions in this study centered on how students understood leadership as they came into college and explored the collegiate experiences that nudged them along in their transformational journey. To accomplish this, the semi-structured interviews were designed with broad open-ended questions, allowing the student voices to identify what was viewed as most relevant in their development. Follow up questions encouraged them to reflect more on their experiences and how they changed or thought of leadership differently as a result of their engagement in college.

Respecting the nature of a phenomenological study, the eight narratives below introduce the students, their experiences, and their past and present understanding of what it means to be a leader or involved in leadership. Their stories are compiled from two separate interviews and subsequent emails or in-person conversations. They are presented with as little researcher interpretation as possible.

It is important to note that a ninth participant was interviewed, but is not included in these profiles. Although he was an active campus leader and often alluded to a definition of relational leadership, all of his examples and lived experience of leadership involved only a positional understanding. As a junior, he is likely in the liminal state of struggling to make meaning of his experiences, but has not yet crossed the threshold to be truly transformed in his understanding of leadership. Because of this, his participation was appreciated, but he is not included below.

Within the eight student participants, three identify as male and five are female. Six are White, one is Black, and one is bi-racial. One is Buddhist, two are Catholic, one is Baptist, and the rest either did not identify a particular faith or are still questioning their religious identity. One identifies as gay, and one identifies as demi-sexual.

Alicia

Alicia is a senior majoring in both management and marketing with a minor in Spanish. She grew up outside of Chicago in a Polish Catholic family that believed in the value of hard work and service. Her older brother experienced a number of health challenges that began in infancy and currently still manages a significant hearing loss and diabetes. Even as a young child Alicia observed discriminatory actions taken against her brother because of that hearing loss, and as a result, identifies as an “advocate for people who are often differentiated in some way.”

Alicia started kindergarten with her brother at a Montessori elementary school. It provided a positive learning environment for children with differing abilities, but also exposed them to racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic diversity. The switch to a more structured Catholic school in late elementary school was a challenge, and although Alicia no longer practices or identifies as Catholic, she recognizes its positive influence on her values and leadership opportunities throughout middle and high school.

As a member of a regional youth choir, Alicia had the privilege of singing for some impressive audiences including the United Nations and patrons of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. She became a Girl Scout in fourth grade, remained involved with the support of her good friends in the group, and completed her gold award as a senior in

high school where she was also the class secretary and regularly served as a tutor with Catholic Charities.

However, it was her involvement in the youth ministry where she found both a leadership role model in the group's youth minister and began identifying as a leader herself. The youth minister created a welcoming and inclusive community, open to anyone that wanted to join, and made her feel comfortable and accepted during the awkward stage of middle school. And in high school, he empowered her and others to take responsibility for planning many of their large fundraising and community building activities. Alicia talked extensively and with great pride about the work she did to ensure the success of these events.

As a freshman in her Catholic high school they were shown a video on Bolivia's clean water crisis and need for water filtration systems during religion class. The purpose was to demonstrate how much good could be done if people spent less on Christmas gifts and instead donated those funds to make a difference. This resonated with Alicia, so she approached her youth minister about the possibility of doing something to support Bolivia's need for clean water.

We had a contact down there, a missionary... We collected money after mass for a couple of months and then we sent it to him. He sent us pictures back and videos back of people with their filtration systems. It was just really nice to see the impact.

When Alicia started college, she joined the campus's Catholic student organization, served as a reading tutor for local children whose first language was not

English, was a member of Model UN, participated in a co-curricular leadership development program, attended other student organization meetings or activities with friends, and was a frequent visitor to the Spanish language center. Although involved in a number of activities, she didn't feel connected to the university or community. After getting advice from a staff member in the school's leadership center, she decided to focus on just a couple of passions and get more deeply engaged in those areas: the Spanish center and tutoring.

Although that first year her involvement was scattered and left her missing a sense of being "rooted," she now sees that time as critical to her leadership development and personal transformation. Alicia grew up valuing service and differentiating it from volunteering. Service included the responsibility of getting to know people or situations, understanding the underlying problems they were facing, and appreciating why volunteerism or change was needed. She believed that must then be followed by action or working to have a positive impact on the identified problem. Alicia loved Spanish, but it took a bit of time to figure out how she could use it to serve and make an impact. She found it with the two things with which she chose to remain involved in her sophomore year: the Spanish center and tutoring.

[The Spanish center] is a place where I feel like I can do what I love without having any hesitancy, because people just respond back to me in the language. I can be learning about a different country or culture in another language and I just love that.

Then [the tutoring program] was fulfilling for me because I was working with one child consistently. She is bilingual and her mom, who only spoke Spanish, sat with us every session. I had to figure out how to include her because I didn't want

her to just sit there. I was constantly using Spanish as well... I always came back really happy. [The little girl] just made my day, because she was just so positive. It just makes you forget about anything else... I think we mutually appreciated each other.

It was during her second year of college that Alicia also took the foundational theory course in the leadership studies minor. She talked extensively about how much it and the professor impacted her and her understanding of leadership. When asked how she might define leadership now, she responded very quickly and articulately with something that closely resembled the formal relational leadership definition. She said, “leadership is working towards positive change, because I think that's why people take on positions of leadership, they want to be changing something for the better.” The final paper for that course required that she analyze herself and her leadership through the context of the leadership lessons or theories they'd studied that term, including the development of a personal mission statement.

That paper was so long, but it was really good to have, honestly. One part of the paper that was my biggest takeaway and I always think about is my mission statement. We had to create our mission statement. I've shortened it now, but it's just constantly thinking about my relation to self, others, and the world. I always think about how am I doing with myself, am I okay? Are my friendships and my relationships where I want them to be, or can they be improved? And then with the world, am I doing what I want to work towards a positive change?

Since then, Alicia has continued to deepen her involvement with the Spanish center even more and is now working with the professional staff members to create a “conversation leader” student staff position. Their shared goal is to make the space more welcoming to non-native speakers. She is conducting research with a faculty member to

explore the impact speaking a second language has on the development of empathy or perspective taking on business leaders. She continues to tutor her peers in Spanish and served as a Spanish translator for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program run on campus by professors and students in the accounting department. And, most recently, she presented at a large multi-faith conference on how Judeo-Christian traditions have impacted our society. None of these roles include formal leader titles or positions, yet she views each of them as forms of leadership as she and others around her work to create a positive change in their own and others' lives.

As she prepares to graduate and start the next chapter of her life, Alicia was reflecting on her leadership and goals for the future. Although she has been involved in more than a couple things these last two years, threaded throughout her activities were values of service, an appreciation for different perspectives or experiences, and working to create positive change. She has found meaningful ways to engage her passions, identified a purpose for her leadership, and has had an impact on others. It is not surprising that she is considering a position with Teach for America or another similar program and ultimately hopes to find a way to help small Latin American businesses succeed.

Alonzo

Alonzo is a senior statistics major with a sport management minor. He identifies as biracial, with a White mother from Switzerland and a Black father. He grew up in Harlem, a predominantly Black community, but went to a private and predominantly White school from kindergarten through his senior year in high school. His parents

divorced during his pre-teen years, and without his father's presence in his life, struggled with making sense of the two very different worlds as well as his Black identity. He recalls seeking out teachers or coaches he could trust and that could serve as (what he would now identify as) mentors, but there were very few people in this role for him.

Outside of school, athletics were his primary form of engagement. Alonzo's greatest love was baseball. He began playing t-ball as a young child, then continued to play in competitive leagues up through high school. He was being scouted to play Division I collegiate ball as a pitcher, but an injury his junior year meant that was not likely. Baseball and being an athlete were salient aspects of Alonzo's identity. His social and support networks were wrapped up in the sport, and as he struggled to find his new identity, being a leader was not initially a part of it. Having routinely "played up" with older kids where the competition was greater and more aligned with his skill level, he didn't see himself as a leader. To him, leaders were people he looked up to – some of his coaches and older players – but only those who accepted and supported him for who he was.

When deciding where to go to college, one of Alonzo's priorities was to find a place where he could have a fresh start where nobody knew his "baggage" and he didn't know theirs. He wanted to "be open and be myself" so he chose a school where no one from his high school had gone. Still having a significant part of his identity wrapped up in baseball, he also chose a school that had originally been recruiting him with the hope that if he was able to recover from his injury he might still be able to play for them. When he arrived on campus, he got involved with the two things he was connected to

previously: the club baseball team and the campus radio station. He had been a DJ in high school and was excited to continue his passion for music. Unfortunately, he quickly learned that without the direct audience interaction, being a DJ on the radio was not something he enjoyed. Engaging with others and watching them enjoy the music was one of the things that excited Alonzo, so that involvement did not last long.

Like his high school, his college is predominantly White. That first semester, Alonzo found himself in many situations or conversations where he felt his peers did not value or respect his very different experiences as a Black man on campus. He found himself defending people of color or feeling the need to represent them in ways he also felt unprepared to do. Alonzo recalled one specific encounter where, after an intense discussion with roommates, he ended up walking out of the room, climbing into bed, pulling the covers up over his head, and feeling very defeated. In that moment he knew he needed to do something different – he needed something more. That next term he registered for a course called “Rap, Race, Gender, and Philosophy.” It was taught by a White male philosophy faculty member who preferred to go by his rap name in class. Alonzo described that course as being transformational on many levels, and in hindsight, started influencing his deeper understanding of leadership.

That was absolutely one of my favorite classes I've ever taken. To be able to have those conversations every single day... about music, which I love, and then integrating racial talks and gender issues. It was good because it forced us to have very tough conversations. The class dynamic was so diverse. It was pretty much split half and half, gender and racially. It just put everyone in a situation where you're going to be talking with someone who has a different perspective from you.

In addition to taking that course, Alonzo also started regularly visiting the campus's multicultural center. It was a place he could process what they were discussing in class with other, often older, Black students. He felt supported, but also challenged to think more deeply about the issues. He listened intently, gathered others' stories, and took them back to the class. He began to understand the importance of seeking out others' perspectives.

I sort of understood that also being a minority in that context, people are going to look to you for those conversations, but I didn't try to let that mean that I had to be the spokesperson for my race and Black people. I think that was one of the first steps that I took in terms of leadership.

It was in the multicultural center that he met a senior, the president of the Black Student Union (BSU), who served as a mentor to Alonzo. That mentor and others who frequently hung out in the center, repeatedly told him he was going to do great things as a campus leader. But Alonzo recalled thinking, "I don't know what that means because I've never really been in leadership positions ever besides sports." Over the course of that spring semester, a couple of racially charged and rather public incidents happened on or near campus. Alonzo's mentor and a number of other Black student leaders began meeting with campus administrators to voice their concerns. Alonzo was included in those discussions, which, among other things, resulted in a campus rally. The goals of that event were to "wake people up" to the challenges students of color were facing at their institution and to work toward a more inclusive community that genuinely respected all of its members. Alonzo's mentor tapped him to give a speech at the rally. Although

he was nervous, wanting to make sure his words were impactful and hopefully made a difference, he was also appreciative of his mentor's faith in his abilities.

Over the course of the next year, Alonzo began "collecting" leadership positions. His mentor had challenged him to "be a leader where he was needed." At that time, he thought that meant that anytime someone encouraged him to take on a new role, he should (and did) do it. He continued his work with BSU as the Director of Special Events and planned programs like Black Solidarity Day, town hall discussions, and "The N-word Forum." He joined a historically Black fraternity, became vice president of that chapter, and then became president of the National Panhellenic Council (NPHC), the campus governing body for all historically Black chapters. He was overcommitted and recalls finding himself in a place where he was burned out and often not very effective in his roles.

Through this experience, and with the help of a campus counselor, Alonzo realized the difference between being wanted and being needed. He gradually stepped away from positions where he was simply wanted, and started to be more discriminating with his time. Like the work they did after the racial incidents, he then believed leadership to be more about standing up and taking action. Thinking about that time, he shared,

[There are] a bunch of junior and seniors who are really coming out on their own and taking it upon themselves to go against the grain. Sometimes that's where you find a lot of leaders... When times are not the best, everyone is trying to find the path of least resistance but you have certain people who go against that grain and really try to make a stand for what they believe in...I admire that courage.

He began focusing on issues or work where he felt change was genuinely needed and where he found purpose in his leadership. He no longer feels the need to be the president or face of the organization, and prefers to work more behind the scenes to support the positional leaders, advance the group's common goals, and serve as a mentor or advisor for those coming behind him.

I literally just had one text me a couple days ago to be like, "Hey, I feel like people around me are just being lazy. I know there are a bunch of social issues that need more people to help with. I feel like I'm just being lazy around the people I'm with. I want to talk to you about that." I thought that was very courageous of them to come and ask me... By having those conversations with other people, they're going to feel valued, which is something I know I would want. I feel like it's giving a little bit back, which is being, I would say, that's being a leader.

Last summer Alonzo did an internship at his fraternity's national office and researched the importance of Black support systems for men of color on college campuses. When he returned this fall, he got a group of Black male student leaders together to discuss what was needed on campus in order for all Black men to be successful. They subsequently started a "Black Men of Distinction" group for students, faculty and staff. Their goal is to involve Black men from all across campus and create a mentoring, networking, and support system that will serve to benefit all of its members. Although he recognizes the need for positional leaders to keep the group going, he is also enjoying the way they are working collaboratively.

I think the best part about this organization is that we listen to everyone's input and that even though we have an executive board and those are the people who

are going to be doing the "work" everyone has been putting in. It has not just been solely on one person.

Alonzo identified his transformational journey as beginning by leaving home, stepping out of his comfort zone, and going someplace new for college. It continued in his rap class and engagement with student leaders in the multicultural center, then by jumping in and taking on a number of leadership positions where he learned more about himself and others, his journey shifted again as his leadership focused on serving as a mentor and supporting group goals while away from the spotlight.

Throughout his time at the university, one thing that has remained constant is Alonzo's focus on building relationships with others, learning from them, and using his strengths to help make a difference. He has recently been accepted into graduate school and plans to study higher education where he can continue to create positive experiences for other students of color.

Bernadette

Bernadette is a senior psychology major with minors in criminal justice, neuroscience, and leadership studies. She grew up in Durham, NC as an only-child with her mom and grandparents. Her granddad passed away as she was beginning high school and since then a strong Black matriarchal home has taught her to not depend on others and to "dream big, and not let society hold you back." She was raised in the Baptist Church where "the pulpit and church people were my lullabies and family members."

Bernadette's mother worked multiple jobs to so she could attend a private school from kindergarten through high school. It was predominantly White, and she often felt

pulled between her Black church community and her White school community. She struggled to find a sense of belonging or full acceptance in either one.

I was in a very White school, my church was very Black, so me trying to figure out how to merge those two worlds was really, really hard. I probably did not fully figure it out until junior year of high school... I was born a Black woman. Because I articulate does not make me White or because I want to pursue higher education does not make me White, or because I do this or that does not make me less Black or more Black. We have to stop defining races as having certain things... you just have to be the best you you can be.

As she came to better understand herself, she also seems to have understood the value and need for advocacy – for herself and others who are also struggling:

I feel like the values that were pushed [at school] did not always consider me as a person of color and that I was supposed to just accept it and be okay. “But Bernie, you are different. You act different. You talk different. You are not like those other Black folks.” And that was hard, too, because I am like, “Okay, but these are still people of color. It still affects me. I get that you see me different, but not everybody does... if you cannot see us the same, then do not see me... The system may not see me like you see me.” ...I have always been about advocating for people, for humans, for women, for women of color, but also always trying to explain to my friends that, “I am fighting for you, I need you to fight for me too.”

As a child, Bernadette was involved in her church choir and youth group, but found greater enjoyment in athletic activities. She played volleyball and in high school was named captain for both her junior varsity and varsity teams. Having grown up surrounded by adults and developing strong communication skills as a result, she felt quite comfortable in that leadership role. Her responsibility as a leader was to motivate the team, recognize when problems were emerging, listen and understand the different perspectives related to a situation, manage or confront problematic behavior, and look out

for the team. She did not (and still does not) think of leadership as a skill, but as a responsibility and reflective of one's character.

When making the decision of where she wanted to continue her education, she explored historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) but, after receiving a full scholarship at a predominantly White institution (PWI) that covered all costs of attendance, including textbooks and a grant to study abroad while in college, she chose there instead. By this point she had figured out how to navigate between and within her different Black and White worlds and wanted the networking and other opportunities she believed the institution could provide for her.

Once she got to college, Bernadette did not just sit back and expect doors to open for her. She got involved with club volleyball and the gospel choir, is a member of the Black Student Union (BSU), got a job in admissions and advanced in responsibilities there, joined a historically Black sorority and took on a leadership role within that organization, and has served as a Resident Assistant (RA) or on-campus Apartment Manager (AM) for three years.

Her sophomore year in college, Bernadette struggled to manage all that was on her plate. In her role as an RA, she did not anticipate how needy her residents would be and, no matter how much training she was given, discovered that there are some lessons you need to learn or practice on your own.

The process for me, sophomore year... failed. Terrible. But I've gotten much better. I think I've learned, not necessarily from the trainings but more in experience, how to communicate with diverse groups of people, how to view different people's opinions and problems, how to take different points of view, I

guess. Things that I don't see as issues are issues for somebody else. How do I put myself in their shoes and understand the root of the problem? ...As an RA, they [Residence Life staff] can suggest how to deal with conflict, but until you have to actually resolve somebody stressed over somebody eating somebody else's broccoli, you don't know how to do that. You can't teach that.

Over the last few years, Bernadette's understanding of leadership, her personal skills to lead, and her identity as a leader have evolved. Her work with Residence Life has helped her become more confident managing challenging situations and conflict. She has experienced the value of collaboration and centering those closest to the situation in the problem-solving process. And, she is a strong advocate for herself as well as others in need.

Bernadette crossed as a member of her sorority in her junior year. As a small organization with less than ten members, they are close and serve as a source of support for each other. There is also no room for anyone to sit on the sidelines. Everyone is involved in the leadership of their group and she currently serves as the group's vice president. They have clearly identified values and high expectations of themselves as well as their NPHC community. In addition to their typical student organization goals and activities, they are also held to even higher standards from their national organization. Accomplishing everything they set out to do each semester can only happen if every member of the group works together and remains committed to their shared goals.

As a senior, Bernadette applied for and received a highly competitive executive intern position at the university and served in the Center for Access and Success. This

office was instrumental in her success at the institution and she wanted to not only give back to them, but learn more about how it ran and find ways for others get the opportunities they needed to succeed. After a local high school reached out to ask about pairing some of their students with college mentors, Bernadette took on that project as a part of her internship. She had a number of ideas related to what might be helpful for these students, but quickly discovered many complex and challenging forces holding everyone back. The teachers and administrators at the high school were overworked and slow to respond. Because the community lacks a strong bus system, transportation to the college campus and back (or to their homes) was needed for the students. And, the schedules of the mentees and mentors did not easily line up considering afterschool jobs or caring for siblings often needed to be a priority for the high school mentees. Although frustrated by many of those hurdles, Bernadette recognized and appreciated the need to learn from those she was trying to serve.

I think leadership is also a big learning thing, it is learning when to go and when to stop, when to listen and when to just take pauses. It is really kind of like driving a car. I feel like you have got to know when to press the gas, got to know when to hit the brakes, got to know how to slow down and balance that speed depending on what environment you are in. You are not going to just fly by a school and you are not going to go 35 on the highway, so it is all about meeting whatever needs that are surrounding you.

She adjusted her approach with the school administrators and went to work solving the transportation challenges, securing donations, and finding additional funds to provide meals for the students.

Bernadette's passion for helping others is also evident when she talks about her plans for life after graduation. She has applied to a number of schools for a master's degree in social work. Adding to her undergraduate major in psychology and minors in criminal justice, neuroscience, and leadership, she believes this will prepare her well to accomplish her goals for life and leadership.

I want to eventually open up my own clinic and help individuals transition out of the criminal justice system. I feel like our criminal justice system is so focused on punishment and no treatment and we have a lot of people with mental health issues that end up in a cycle of recidivism because they are never treated for their issues... I get people do bad things, but some people do bad things out of desperation or even homeless people are being criminalized. People would literally commit crimes to go to jail because they have a bed there and food. That is so scary to me that you would rather be in jail than on the street. So that is somewhere I get a lot of passion from and something that I really want to do. I think social work school is a great way to start.

Leadership is understanding the circumstances of an environment, and doing what you can, using your influence for the good to improve that environment or group, I believe. I think leadership could emerge from anyone, but it takes the initiative and the motivation of that one person to stand up and not be afraid to emerge as a leader.

Drew

Drew is a first generation college student and senior majoring in political science and minoring in leadership studies. He is from a small rural town in central North Carolina, and his parents were divorced while he was in elementary school. Although he has remained close with his mother, he and his younger sister grew up primarily with his father. He was not particularly athletic, but seemed to be a curious child and enjoyed understanding how or why things happened the way they did. He happily shared the

childhood memory of wanting to be the mailman because he was truly intrigued by how the whole postal system worked.

Drew attended an “early college high school” which not only meant he graduated from high school with a high school diploma and an associate’s degree, but was also surrounded by peers who were all honors students. It was an environment in which he thrived and was afforded a number of unique co-curricular opportunities. He served as a page for the state’s House of Representatives and as a “prosecuting attorney” for the county’s Teen Court system. Instead of being charged for misdemeanors, sent to juvenile court, and risking a formal conviction, Teen Court was an alternative option for the school resource officer. Cases were heard more quickly by (mentored and trained) high school students and a jury that was truly “of their peers.” Drew enjoyed the opportunity to learn about the court and legal systems, serve as an attorney in that process, and be trusted with this important responsibility, but he also learned much more than he expected that from the experience.

It woke me up. It reminded me that the world is a cold place sometimes. It humbled me as well. I think that experience really shaped who I am today. It opened my eyes to a lot of things that a regular high school student could be oblivious to. This program taught me how important education was, because all of the things that these students were in front of us for were very much related to their education... they got in trouble at school, or it impacted their ability to graduate on time, or they were doing poorly in school because mom is a drug dealer and dad’s never been around, and the only stable thing in their life was school. It was consistent. It was something they had to go do. If home is not safe, or home isn't enjoyable then we should really focus on making school and education the one thing that is stable in many children's lives... as meaningful and impactful as we can.

Drew was involved with Teen Court for three years, including his senior year. That year he was also the president of his class, started a chapter of the National Honor Society, served as a special advisor to the student body president, and was applying to colleges. He was overwhelmed with the workload and struggling with how he was going to accomplish everything connected to those commitments.

I learned to value the power of delegation, and that's hard for me. I'm a Type A guy. I like to see things through to the end. I actually had a problem with trusting others, even with simple stuff, because I was so used to doing it my way and knowing it was getting done... But I was like, "I can't do all this. I have to trust someone else to do it." So, I delegated stuff. ... This was a change in the sense that I went from being power happy and having the roles and the titles and doing everything, to understanding that [as a leader] you don't have to do everything.

In college, Drew continued his pattern of involvement in a number of activities but the change in schools – the new environment – gave him the opportunity to try new things. He got a job in Admissions and then later the provost's office. He was appointed by the student body president to serve on the honor board, was a volunteer for the weekend late-night safe ride program, joined the residential student association, and then served as a teaching assistant for the freshman seminar course.

Deepening his work with his residential neighborhood, Drew became a member of its leadership team along with a lead resident assistant (RA), a residence life staff member, and a residential faculty member. Their role was to plan programs for and build a sense of community among the residents of five neighboring halls, then work with the larger group of student leaders in the neighborhood to implement the plans.

[The] four of us get together every Wednesday at 2:30 and we talk about everything. I know what's happening over here, and they know what's happening over here, so then we can all effectively work together as a team. When I came into this role last year we had a lot of conversations about what didn't go well last year. And, "How can we improve that?" This weekly meeting was one of the things we implemented to improve that.

I think it's [also] that the people [RAs] didn't recognize they were participants in the structure before. And so, I think that in order to be a significant role player in it you must recognize that you're actually part of it in the first place... We're kind of the model now for how neighborhood associations and RA structures should work compatibly together, and we are trying to implement that university-wide.

The other significant leadership position Drew held was through the student government association. Along with nine others, he was appointed by the student body president to serve as a member of the academic relations committee. They began meeting and a loosely defined leadership team evolved. Drew was eventually elected to serve as chair of the committee.

So while there is a group of ten of us, there's a central group of three... We had a conversation about, "how do we manage our strengths and weaknesses as a group in order to be as successful as we could?" And so, [one]'s kind of a visionary thinker. I'm kind of, "How can we take what [he] thinks and make it into workable goals?" [The third] is an honor's scholar. She's very analytical. She's the type of person that if I'm going to send a letter to someone I would send it to her to read first... She tends to think about things I don't think about.

It was important to those leaders that the larger group come together to ensure multiple perspectives or schools were represented as they discussed their concerns. From the identified academic challenges students were facing, the committee pinpointed a number of rather lofty but exciting goals and presented them to the university's provost. Although genuinely interested in what the group had to say, the provost also "shot down"

many of their goals as unrealistic or simply unattainable for very concrete reasons. The process was impactful for Drew in both experiencing the value of genuine collaboration and seeing the importance of being flexible and adaptive.

I've learned that a leader gets rejected a lot, and it makes you resilient, but you have to be persistent. I have learned that a leader is not someone who goes in with this set of goals, and no matter what they get told they will not change that set of goals. I knew at the start of the year we were going to have a set of goals that would not look the same the next semester, and they don't. Maybe where we can't wave credit hours for dual degrees, we can offer more classes that count for both majors, or maybe we can offer classes that integrate the two together... It's being agile. It's being able to change and understanding that at the end of the day you don't have to always be correct to still get something done.

In reflecting on that leadership experience and thinking about what he wants to accomplish before graduation in a few months, Drew shared,

I have a phenomenal team. I should have mentioned that earlier. Teamwork. While, yes, I am the chair and ultimately I am held responsible for the actions of this group of students, everyone works so well together and I never feel like I'm doing more. I always feel there's shared responsibility, and I always feel like everyone's working together to achieve our goals, which is what has been monumentally helpful for me this year. My big goal is how do we take what we've done this year and transition that into a group of totally new people who also have no idea what they're doing? My goal is not necessarily to accomplish more, but it's just to set up the next group, so they can accomplish more.

Jack

Jack's Irish Catholic identity is salient for him. He grew up in a suburb of Chicago with his parents and five siblings. As the second oldest child, he routinely helped out with the others or managed a lot of his schoolwork and extra-curricular activity on his own. Volunteerism with his family and through the Church was a regular

part of his life growing up, and that commitment is visible in the things he's chosen to spend his time on in college as well. As a strategic communications major, his discussion around leadership was not surprisingly centered on how he communicated with others and worked to establish relationships with them.

Beginning in late elementary school, Jack started spending time at the community library after school. He and his friends went there to do homework, but it was also just a fun place to hang out. It wasn't long before one of the librarians tapped him to serve as a volunteer with their children's reading incentive program. He continued that work in middle school and was asked to help train the new volunteers. It was at this point – because other volunteers were looking to him for guidance – that he also began to see himself as a leader. Eventually, Jack became a part-time employee at the library and enjoyed learning what went on behind the scenes and all that was required to effectively work with the town and manage a library.

As a child Jack was involved in typical athletic activities, but in middle school he discovered a greater passion for theater. He enjoyed the acting, singing, dancing and the community he found with that group of people. The theater directors were frequently mentioned as people he looked up to and still visits when he goes back home. They recognized his hard work and encouraged him to explore the other aspects of the theater. He served as an assistant stage manager for one production, and then was appointed as stage manager for the next. He enjoyed the responsibility that came with these positions, but also recognized the importance of the whole team.

[As an assistant manager] if I do something wrong, then that's going to fall on the stage manager, and then the director's going to hear about it. I think it was always having the mentality of "I don't want to let anyone down or to not do my job to the fullest capacity that I could do it." ...It's a team, so moving parts. If I fail, you know, it's going to be a domino effect. I think those leadership positions really kind of began to shape me and give me a greater sense of what leadership is.

When Jack arrived on campus, he knew he wasn't going to continue with theater as a major. He went to the student organization information fair held the second week of school and, in the process of trying to find his new "thing" signed up to join more than ten groups. The emails started coming and he knew right away that was too many. One thing he stayed with was a late-night safe driving program run through one of the large student volunteer organizations. Hanging out with friends, eating pizza, and driving drunk students around at night sounded like a fun time. He volunteered for a number of shifts with his friends, and then when a position opened up, served as a coordinator for the program. For Jack, it was a great way to socialize and volunteer while holding a leadership position at the same time.

Jack credits his college tour guide as one of the reasons he ended up at his institution. She was passionate about her experience there and her enthusiasm was contagious. Because of that, when the opportunity to be a tour guide was presented he applied for the position. He wanted to be that same source of motivation or encouragement for others – to share his love and passion for the school with prospective students. Although most of the other guides talk about the role in terms of it being a job, Jack also views it as a form of leadership. He was one of about 30 selected from a pool of over 300 applicants for the position. Because Admissions has placed their trust in him,

he feels a responsibility to the department as well as the prospective students touring the campus and works hard to give them an honest look at the institution. He also acknowledges that he learns from the students and families on his tour as well. He listens to all they are doing and uses that information to help them see themselves as a member of that community.

As a sophomore, Jack also tried his hand at being a Resident Assistant (RA) for a hall of largely first-year students. Although the professional staff members in the department provided substantial training to prepare him for the role, he also acknowledged that he did not expect to have nearly every possible crisis in their training become a reality for his residents. Like his work with Admissions, part of his responsibility felt more like a job – doing rounds, confronting problematic behavior, completing the required paperwork, etc. The part he enjoyed – the relationship building and community development – was the leadership experience he was looking for in the position. He genuinely enjoyed connecting with and supporting his residents in their transition and building relationships was important to him. He credits the RA training with at least some of his success.

If I'm talking to someone, I'm not just saying, "Hey. How's your day going? Blah, blah, blah," and asking the same question every time. Now I'm saying, "Oh. Last time we spoke you were interested in getting involved in this club. How's that going for you? How can I be of service? Can I point you in a certain direction?"

That sophomore year was a hard one. In addition to being an RA and working in Admissions, he was also involved with the campus's dance marathon program. The

program is a year-round fund-raising effort that benefits a local children's hospital and culminates in a 24-hour dance marathon for more than a thousand student participants. He had been a dancer and member of the facilities committee his first year, and passionate about the mission of the group, took on a leadership role. Serving as the director of the facilities committee his sophomore year, he realized how little he actually knew from his prior involvement and wasn't sure he had the knowledge or skills necessary to be successful.

I wasn't sure what specifically I was doing. I didn't feel ... I have had conversations with our advisors about this... I had to rely on all my different resources that I had around me. Not only was it [the past director], or current exec members, or [advisors]. I thought more about developing that relationship. They were all leaders. You know? What have they seen during their time here or having these interactions with people that were in the same positions as me? What worked? What didn't work?

As a junior and now in his second year in that leadership role, Jack feels much more confident. The leadership team met in August for a planning retreat and finalized a formal strategic plan that has been helpful. Although he flew to Spain to study abroad for the fall semester right after the retreat, when he returned he was not over-committed and has been able to commit more time to the position and his committee this semester. With the big dance marathon happening in just a few weeks, Jack shared the value of having a team and including them in the planning.

I think that that's a big part - that aspect of teamwork. Yes, we can all get in front of our peers and say, "All right, y'all. We're going to get this done. You do this. You do that. You do that," but I think a real testament to people being leaders is having the ability to step back and also listen. We can all bark, bark, bark, but if

you're not listening and you're not taking into account other ways, then are you really a true leader? Of course, people can disagree, but [I think] it's got to be a relationship.

As Jack considers next year and how he wants to spend his time, he is struggling with some decisions he needs to make relatively soon. He is considering stepping away from the dance marathon in order to focus more time on other career-related interests, but does not want to disappoint his mentors and the other student leaders he has worked with in that organization. In his leadership, relationships and an element of service are important to Jack, and stepping away from them – even if done to pursue other passions – will be a difficult decision for him.

Jasper

Jasper grew up in a small, predominantly White town in central Massachusetts with her parents and a younger sister. As practicing Tibetan Buddhists, family values centered on kindness and respecting life as something precious. They were very close and, with no television, spent quite a bit of time together reading, telling stories, and engaging in creative or imaginative play. She has always been an avid reader and lovingly recalled a time when she believed her “reading fever” was a real illness and something she could not control. As a child she briefly played softball, but much preferred dance. It was a more individual experience, but the dance troupe came together to perform as a group and tell their story.

In high school, Jasper started reciting poetry for the national poetry recitation program and contest. Participation was required within the public school system’s

curriculum, but poetry quickly became a passion for her. When Jasper's family moved to North Carolina she discovered that not only was it not required in her new school system, the poetry recitation program was not even offered at her school. Working with her teachers at the school, she started the program there. Although she now sees that as leadership, at the time she "wasn't thinking about leadership. I was thinking about 'what am I passionate about and what do I want to put into the world?'" In college, Jasper became a creative writing major and continued to be involved with the high school poetry competition program as a district coordinator and then a prompter during the events. She shared, "I just know how important it was to me and how important it is to other people... sharing poetry and stories is valuable."

Along with her interests in dance, poetry, and storytelling, Jasper participated in musical theater. The theater director was someone she considered to be a leader because of the formal position she held, but Jasper also thought of her as a friend. The director challenged the group to perform well but also demonstrated genuine care for them as individuals. She recognized when Jasper was struggling and went out of her way to reach out and make sure she was okay. And, although she wouldn't have used the term "mentor" at the time, this is how Jasper identifies her now. They have maintained that relationship and regularly meet when Jasper is home on breaks.

At the time, Jasper would not have called her initiation of the poetry program an example of leadership on her part because there was no formal title that went along with it. The same was true of her efforts when she first got to college. When she discovered the university did not have a Buddhist student organization, instead of accepting that and

walking away, she partnered with another student to raise awareness of their religion. This led to her involvement in the campus's multi-faith engagement efforts as an intern and her own deeper understanding of religions of the world.

After her freshman year, Jasper received an invitation to serve as a member of the university president's student leadership advisory board. Not having a formal leadership position at the institution, she recalled not really understanding why she was included, but appreciated and accepted the offer. The board's 35-40 student members came from all over campus and represented many different backgrounds, interests, majors, and passions. As Jasper heard similarities among the students' experiences, it became clear that she wasn't the only one struggling on campus. Her experiences and perspective were genuinely valued by the group, and she enjoyed getting to know the other students as well as the university's senior leaders present at their meetings. Over the course of the next year or two, she gradually came to realize that identifying a problem or need, working with others to solve it, and being committed to making a difference in her community – with or without a formal leadership title – was a form of leadership. And, as she began to see positive changes at the institution that were a result of the group's discussion and suggestions, she came to value the president's willingness to look to students for ideas for positive change at the institution. His authenticity and vulnerability helped change her understanding of leadership and what it meant to be a leader.

As an advocate for women's issues, Jasper struggled with one of her creative writing faculty members. In hindsight, she realized she was a leader in this situation even without a title but may not have handled everything as well as she could have. Over the

course of two semesters, Jasper was increasingly frustrated by what felt like a lack of respect for women's voices or lived experiences in their writing. After one particularly tense class period and sensing that she was not alone in her struggles, she reached out to him in the hopes of making a difference for everyone involved. She sent him an email along with an essay she found that helped her understand the situation and her concerns, and then met with him in person to discuss it further. She had a solid A in the course, an existing relationship with the faculty member, and felt responsible for continuing to advocate for the inclusiveness she felt was missing. After these efforts and still seeing little change in the faculty member's teaching style, she called out the issue again in one of her class assignments. During the peer editing process, a classmate wrote her a note.

She said, "I don't even know how to say... this just meant a lot to me that you wrote this because these are the things I've been noticing too, that I didn't know how to say anything about." And she even said that she's seen these dynamics with male friends of hers and didn't even know that you could speak up or talk to them about it. And so that, to me, made it worth it. It [writing that essay] was a mistake, but it's good to make mistakes sometimes. And he's a kind, generous professor. I wouldn't say he handled it well either, but to be fair I put him on the spot.

In a more formal capacity, Jasper has held leadership roles connected to the annual student literary and art journal. As a junior she served as the fiction editor and as is now the editor in chief. Initially hesitant to apply for this top leadership position, she recognized how much work it would entail and often in areas that she did not enjoy or feel she was well-equipped to manage. As she contemplated the idea a bit more over the summer, she eventually reached out to another student leader from the prior year.

I was like, "I think I want to do this, but I trust you and your artistic vision." She's really good with design... and she's also an incredible writer, so I just felt we would pair together well, and it wouldn't be so much on just me. I asked her [to be the managing editor], and I thought she was going to say no because she was a double major with dance, which is a lot of work. And right away, she was just like, "Yeah, sure."

This partnership was important to Jasper. She recognized the value of having multiple voices and areas of expertise involved, and continued to build a team of student leaders who could make sure the journal reflected the strength of the school's creative writing department. Although she had positional and administrative responsibilities that came with her title – making sure the project progressed on schedule and they met their publishing deadlines – she also valued the editorial staff members' opinions and wanted them to challenge her decisions if they felt differently about something. She framed her work as leading a team of really talented peers instead of delegating tasks or controlling the work.

Jasper identifies the faculty advisors for the literary journal, along with a number of other faculty members as leaders and mentors. Their willingness to admit when they make mistakes, talk about their failings, ask her for help on a project, and be authentic in conversations or interactions with her have been impactful. The relationships have helped her discover that perfection is not required and she, too, could be and is a leader.

Michelle

Michelle is a senior business management major from Long Island, New York. She is the oldest of three children who grew up with a stay-at-home mom and a dad who worked in Manhattan as a corporate insurance broker. Within that family dynamic,

Michelle identifies as the “rebellious trailblazing one” who routinely tested or pushed the limits and is gay. She went to the local public school until high school when she attended a Catholic all-girls school. Michelle played soccer and lacrosse but was not passionate about either sport. She danced through middle school, played the flute competitively, and then found rowing in high school. Her physical strength was an asset and although much of the training was done as an individual, in competition she was in a boat with seven other girls. Because the sport required a number of early mornings and weekends away as a team, that group became a second family.

Following in her father’s footsteps, Michelle also attended a summer sleep-away all-girls camp beginning at the age of 8. She returned each year – either as a camper or leader – for 11 years. The camp motto, “the other fellow first,” was something her father had already introduced at home; however, returning to camp each summer and eventually participating in their leadership development program meant it truly became a way of life for her. It influences her approach to life and has been instrumental in her developing understanding of leadership. At 15, Michelle was able to serve as an aid at camp.

Transitioning into that role of supporting the leaders, I realized that it “takes a village” to keep a cabin running or raise a child or whatever you're trying to do. So I think I kind of realized that being support to someone who is older and has more experience also has value.

She returned to camp the summer after her freshman year in college, but this time as a staff member. She had applied to be a cabin leader but was not selected for that role; instead, she was working with the athletic and weekly special events. Being

disappointed with what she perceived as a less prestigious role, Michelle eventually spoke to the camp director about the situation. The director explained that she saw Michelle's role as more than just a job at the camp but also a leadership role. Instead of working with a small group of girls in one cabin, she was tasked with creating a positive experience for all 260 girls at the camp, even if she wasn't closely involved with each one individually. The director's belief in Michelle's ability to lead was influential in how she saw herself and her identity as a leader.

That same year, Michelle learned another valuable lesson about herself and working with others. She knew her work was respected by another of the staff members, yet personally they seemed to clash and the woman rarely spent much time with her.

I talked to one of the other program heads and she's like, "I think it's just that you have all of this energy and you are just always at a 10. Your energy is always there." I think that kind of made me realize that I can be self-aware, and I can be open about who I am, but I also have to realize the impact that has on the people around me. So you know, don't come in to the room and be like yelling and super, super excited about this idea that I just had... adjust and kind of create an environment where we can both be productive and have a mutual understanding.

When Michelle started college she knew she did not want to join a sorority, and instead tried out for the women's club rugby team. Although she'd never played before, she described the sport as "football with a mouth guard" and, like rowing, it was an opportunity to use her strength in a positive and productive way. Michelle fell in love with the sport, found a group of friends and the supportive community she was looking for, and met her first girlfriend through this team.

Over the course of the next three years, she watched as the group elected new co-captains each semester. This meant many different individuals were in leadership roles during that time. Largely based on seniority and previous commitment to the team, some were successful captains; but others, although they may have been good at the sport, were not great leaders. She spent a lot of time reflecting on their strengths and learning lessons about leadership along the way, hoping to eventually be one of the captains and have the opportunity to lead the group. Her chance came this spring, but it also came with the reality of a challenging team dynamic. Because of what she identified as the previous captains' poor communication, lack of accountability, and inability to create a vision for the group, the team was struggling. They often did not have enough players to compete in their matches and many of the players that did come were new and not yet skilled in their positions. They had lost much of the camaraderie that made the group work well together and playing the game was just not as much fun as it previously had been.

Michelle and her co-captain set out to change that. They worked to make the practices meaningful, improve communication, and establish trust and mutual respect among the players. A group of them planned a body positivity photo-shoot, video, and social media campaign focusing on how rugby had inspired or given them “purpose, pride, or passion.” The experience was fun, demonstrated how they could come together as friends and teammates, and reminded each of them why they loved the sport. Although they still don't have enough regular players to complete the season competitively, they are continuing to practice and rebuilding a strong team. Michelle is

obviously frustrated by the slow progress and what feels like failure. She knows it was the right decision, but she is also personally mourning the loss of her final season playing competitive rugby.

I recognize that it was necessary to make this decision, and I spoke in favor of it. I believe that it's what we needed to do, but it still really hurt me... being a leader is a very selfless thing. I think you can't have too big of an ego to be a good leader. I just have to personally push through and keep showing up. It will get better, and hopefully I can somehow then inspire people to keep having fun while playing rugby. That's kind of my new goal.

For Michelle, leadership involves genuine collaboration. It is a group of people coming together and identifying a common goal that simply cannot be achieved on one's own. Each member brings unique skills and talents, but they must navigate the way to their end goal all together. But getting there also requires the willingness or courage to take some risk. Leading isn't easy. The leader of the group, "can be really organized, and you can have great people skills, and you can talk the talk, but the thing is, if you don't want to be the first one to take the step, who's going to do it?"

Morgan

Morgan is a junior strategic communication and economics double major. She is from Blairstown, New Jersey and grew up with her parents and three younger siblings. Of the four children, she identifies as the quiet and introverted one of the group and believes she is more of a "rule follower" than her free-spirited siblings. As a young child, she decided she wanted to attend a local but competitive boarding high school and credits her work ethic and commitment to academics with allowing her to accomplish that goal.

She played soccer, was a cheerleader and gymnast, and loved to draw, but outside of school her longest and most rewarding commitment was softball. She played throughout her childhood and enjoyed regularly having been coached by her father. As a high school senior she was elected captain of the softball team and that honor meant a lot to her.

When Morgan arrived at the university she had already set a goal of being the president of a sorority. She went through recruitment and accepted a bid, but very quickly discovered it was not what she expected. The women seemed to focus too much on conformity to petty rules or requirements, and she was not one to follow along just to follow. She withdrew from the process shortly after it started and spent the rest of her first year trying to find her place at the school.

Morgan was grateful for all of the privileges she had growing up and was passionate about giving back to help less fortunate children. With that in mind, she got involved in a mentorship program designed to empower young girls and support their development of healthy lifestyle habits. She has continued to serve as a mentor during her time at the university and recently served as one of the coordinators for a program that serves sixth and seventh grade girls. And while the girls can be challenging, Morgan has learned quite a bit from them as well.

I learned about [the town], in general... these middle school girls were a lot different from when I was growing up or the location where I was growing up. For example, some girls saying, "Oh, did you get that t-shirt at Salvation Army?" I've never heard anyone ask that question, but it just seemed like a very natural question to the girls... I was just so surprised that that was a question that was asked, I guess. When I was younger and growing up, it's something ... I don't want to say you're ashamed to say that you got second-hand clothing, but it's definitely not a question that you would say yes to. People would try to hide it. And it's also

kind of a taboo question. But with this group, it was very common and a very okay thing to ask.

During her time at the school, Morgan has tried her hand at a number of other leadership roles. She volunteered with the service learning center and was trained to facilitate an alternative break trip focusing on hunger and homelessness in Washington, DC. She served one term as a senator with the student government association, but did not find it particularly rewarding. As a strategic communications major, she started exploring related activities and applied for a position with the student-run public relations agency that serves both campus departments and local businesses. She was not selected because she did not yet have enough experience, and Morgan turned that “failure” into motivation to succeed. She spent that next year writing for the student magazine and auditioned to host the school’s entertainment talk show. Reflecting on that latter experience, Morgan shared,

That was a complete disaster, but it's okay. I had never spoken in front of a camera before... But I was like, “how hard can it be?” It was pretty difficult, honestly. I didn't know where to look. It was bad. I was also very nervous too, so I did not look natural... that's definitely not my forte.

In the fall of her sophomore year, Morgan applied to the PR agency again. This time she was wait-listed, but after reaching back out to them a couple months later, her persistence was rewarded and she was hired as an account executive. In that role she worked with a team and a student supervisor for a community-based client. The next fall she became a supervisor and directed an account, and then this semester she was

promoted to assistant director to work with three different supervisors and clients. The whole process has been rewarding and impactful for her both professionally and with regards to her leadership development. As someone with high expectations of herself and others, she shared,

You think, as a supervisor, that you have to do everything because what you're doing is going to a client and has to be perfect. Subconsciously you think, "Oh, if I have my execs do it or have them work on a part of it, it's not going to be good enough." And I know that's awful and that's not the way to think about things. That's the point of having a team. It's just very silly to think it's not going to be good enough, because everyone at [the agency] is good enough.

Everyone thinks differently, and everybody approaches something differently. So when I was a supervisor, I would organize doing social media for a client this way, whereas someone else, it made sense for them to do it that [different] way. It's a very small example, but it's a really good way for me to see, "Oh wow, you can do it more than one way." It made me understand or learn to listen to everyone's ideas and suggestions because they're coming from a perspective or a point of view where you're not, and that may help you greatly.

In high school Morgan questioned her identity as a leader. She believed she had strong leadership skills, but often looked to the more vocal or charismatic person in the group as the leader. She was selected to attend a leadership conference as a junior in high school, so knew the school administrators saw her as a leader, but Morgan struggled to feel comfortable with that title or confident in a leadership role. As she moved through her collegiate experiences, she gradually came to realize that just being vocal did not make someone a leader. That became clearer during her training to facilitate the alternative break program.

One girl in particular would just honestly never shut up, never stop talking. And okay, we get it, you have good points, but can you please stop talking? Other people want to add things. She was proud of the fact that she was a loud mouth. Well, the fact that you are deemed this [leadership role] and you're this loud mouth, like that's not a great thing. ...Kind of going back to that whole idea, you [as a leader should] just want to help everyone around you, so if you're the one that's talking the most and you're getting all the answers, that's kind of selfish.

Morgan's experience with the public relations agency and her other leadership roles on campus have helped her feel more confident in her abilities and see herself as a competent leader whether in a formal position or just working with others around her toward a common goal or as a source of support.

Leadership is understanding the people around you and taking time to learn about other people and how they work and being open to answering questions or helping people and also looking to people to help you as well.

I've learned who I am as a person and not to be apologetic for it. It's made me understand that even if you are a leader, you don't have to be perfect. No one's perfect. Every single person in this world has imperfections, and [you] just kind of embrace those imperfections or imperfect qualities about yourself.

Summary

In this chapter, each of the eight student participants shared how their understanding of leader and leadership has evolved and identified a number of influencing experiences along the way. They all understand leadership to include more than holding a position and believe it to also be a relational process of working with others to create positive change, but how they arrived at this understanding has been very different.

Chapter Five will identify the concepts that these students came to understand more deeply that brought about their transformation and allowed them to identify as a leader within a relational context. Chapter Six will offer a discussion of the findings with a summary and related recommendations.

CHAPTER V

UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION

The eight participant profiles presented in chapter four serve to help us understand their leadership journey. These students represent different races, sexual identities, and religious backgrounds. They come from different parts of the country and different socio-economic backgrounds. They were involved in athletics, the arts, service, and various student organizations. They worked in positions all around campus and in other communities. Yet in spite of these differences, a number of similarities emerged related to the participants' understanding of leaders and leadership before coming to college, the experiences that challenged those understandings and encouraged them to search for new meanings, and a few threshold concepts that created a significant and fundamental shift in their understanding of leadership. The themes presented in this chapter are not meant to speak for all students and their leadership development journey. Instead, they are themes related to these eight students and the meaning they made as the term "leader" was redefined. For them, leadership came to be understood as an ethical, inclusive, and purposeful process of working with others to create change and their identity as a relational leader was developed. As each area is presented, select quotes from our interviews are included to help illustrate the students' experiences or understanding around the topic.

Understanding of Leader and Leadership Entering College

As posited in the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model (Komives et. al, 2005) students typically come to college in the stage referred to as *Leader Identified*, believing leadership is having the abilities, skills, or competencies necessary to be successful in a position of authority with followers. They may have held leadership roles while in high school and some will look to hold similar positions in college. As was evident in the profiles shared in Chapter Four, the participants in this study all talked about their perception of leadership in a way that aligned well with Leader Identified. Leaders were their elders. They were typically the adults in their lives they turned to for guidance and support as they were developing some leadership skills and perhaps “practicing” being leaders. They did not fully identify as “the” leader in their activities because there was always someone else they turned to for guidance or help; they did not feel capable of leading the entire group on their own.

Leaders are Experienced Authority Figures

In high school, many of the study’s participants held leadership positions in groups such as student government, athletic teams, faith-based youth groups, or through volunteerism. They were elected or appointed to these positions and believed they were leadership roles, but most did not readily self-identify as leaders. They were generally proud of the work they did or the things they were able to accomplish, but also saw themselves largely reliant on more experienced leaders. They were learning to be leaders and encouraged or empowered to achieve a number of impressive things in those roles; however, these students considered the true leaders to be those with significant authority.

Leaders were the people they turned to for guidance and support – older students, their teachers, school administrators, coaches, camp counselors, or ministers.

Leaders are the “Do-ers”

When they did think of themselves as leaders, many saw their role as the “doer” or the one responsible for making things happen. They were the stage manager responsible for ensuring everything was where it needed to be during the production, the organizer of the poetry competition, the cabin leader responsible for the well-being of the younger campers, or the event planner. Alicia appreciated the encouragement she and other students in the youth group received to plan their activities.

(The youth minister) put me in charge of the rummage sale we had every summer. I had to contact all these people. We collected all of these random items and put them out in the gym, organized all of them, stickered them with the prices, and sold them. We’d keep the profit to keep funding the youth ministry. I was doing a lot of events like that.

These students had their plates full. It was their responsibility to be busy with at least the majority of the group's workload and be the “do-er” for the organization.

Leader as Delegator

In situations where these students included others in organizing or doing aspects of the group’s work, their understanding of leadership also included the delegation of tasks to others. When they were not able to manage all of the responsibilities on their own, they were (sometimes nervously) willing to identify others to take the lead on one or more of the items that needed to be completed. Drew described this in the context of being overwhelmed with everything he needed to accomplish at one point in his senior

year. While starting a chapter of the National Honor Society, serving as a prosecutor for the Teen Court, working on college applications, and being the class president, he realized he could not do all of it on his own.

One of the roles of the Senior Class President was to sit on the school improvement team with the principal, and the teachers, and the lead teacher, and stuff like that. I delegated that to the Secretary to do that for the year because I'd actually served on that the year before as a student representative. And so, I was like, "do this because you would be good with it." She was our valedictorian. She was very intelligent, very smart, a very dedicated student, and I was like, "This would a great fit for you. You should do this."

Leading included ensuring everything on their "to do" list was completed. If they were not physically capable of doing all of it within the necessary timeline, they were then willing to look to friends or others they trusted to help accomplish some of those tasks.

Leadership is Teamwork

Closely related to the idea of delegation in leadership was recognizing the value of a team to accomplish the group's goals or tasks. When the students talked about groups such as athletic teams, an executive council, or a group of people assigned to a project, they did perceive the team to be helpful or necessary. Similar to delegation, one person was not able to do it all by themselves and each person in the group was tasked with a specific role or responsibility. They saw the leader as someone who was still ultimately responsible for making sure everyone did their job, but it was much easier to accomplish their goals when everyone on the team participated. Although they did not call it cooperation, that was the essence of what they were describing. As a team member they still saw themselves as dependent on the leader, but when in a leadership role the

concept of interdependence was starting to become a consideration in their understanding of their role.

As the participants were graduating from high school, these students were leaving with the belief that leaders were the knowledgeable adults who supported and empowered them to accomplish their own goals. Although none of them genuinely understood or would have used the word at the time, the participants now frequently referred to those leaders as mentors. They often valued an ongoing relationship with those former teachers, coaches, ministers, or directors and still think of them as important figures in their lives.

Transformative Experiences

Within their first semester at the university, each of the students got involved in at least one organization or program on campus. Over the course of their time at the institution, they all took on more responsibility or formal leadership roles within those groups. As their leadership journey continued, their understanding of leadership changed as well. The second research question in this study sought to explore the encounters or experiences that led students into a state of liminality or troubled their understanding of leadership. Through students' reflection on that journey, a few themes emerged related to those experiences that caused or instigated their transformation.

Observing Admired Leaders

Within their daily activities and campus involvement, these students encountered a number of individuals – faculty, staff, administrators, and peers – early in their collegiate career who they came to regard as strong and respected leaders. These

individuals served as positive role models and some eventually became true mentors. They were ethical and challenging. They cared deeply about their work or leadership and engaged with others in a supportive and positive manner.

For Alicia, it was the associate director of the Spanish center and her inclusive and supportive nature. Alonzo's peer mentor confronted senior administrators with a call to action when a racial bias incident occurred on campus, then involved him in the work to create change. Bernadette's scholarship was connected to a cohort experience with both staff and peer mentors. They not only encouraged her through difficulties, but role modeled advocacy in many different contexts. Drew's work in the provost's office allowed him to observe senior administrators engage with each other in highly collaborative and respectful rather than competitive ways. For Jack and Morgan, their early involvement in the service office meant they observed a number of leaders who were committed and working hard to make a positive difference in others' lives. Jasper's work as a multi-faith intern put her in contact with very different students and staff who were committed to learning about others' faith traditions and guiding others in that same developmental process. And, for Michelle, her captains and coaches were passionate about rugby and building a winning team, but worked just as hard to create a supportive culture that respected each member of the team.

The Tap

Even when these students didn't see themselves as leaders, many of them reported being encouraged to apply for or accept a new leadership role in college. As a result of these taps, the students started to see themselves differently and were more willing to try

new experiences or challenges. One of Jack's most significant leadership roles is serving as a tour guide for the Office of Admissions. He knew that his tour guides were instrumental in his college selection process and had great admiration for the student that gave him his tour at this university. He saw her as a leader, but had not thought about himself in that role until others encouraged him to consider it.

I didn't even know that I wanted to be a tour guide. I had people tell me that I'd be a great tour guide. I was like, "Oh. Maybe." I didn't even know. Then one day my friend's like, "Application closes today and interviews are next week. Put it in." I'm like, "Yeah. Let's give it a shot."

For Alonzo, that tap came from an upper level student who quickly became a mentor for him. As a Black male student at a predominantly White institution, Alonzo was struggling to find his place or a group of friends that understood his experiences. In that search he found his way to the multicultural center. He shared,

I met (my mentor), who was like, "You need to be on BSU." I was like, "Okay." That's when I got involved with being a leader with Black Solidarity Day. That was the first one and I was a freshman. They were like, "You're going to do great things." I'm like, "I don't know what that means because I've never really been in leadership positions ever besides sports." It was really new for me.

After years of being a camper, Michelle was finally ready and excited to be a cabin leader that next summer. She confidently applied for the position, but was not selected. Instead, she was offered a staff member position responsible for developing the weekly special events activities for all of the campers. It wasn't until the end of the

summer that the camp director shared her belief in Michelle's leadership potential, changing her vision of leadership and goals for herself as a leader.

She said that since she's known me, she's always seen me as a leader of a larger group of people; that my leadership spreads far beyond a cabin of 10 girls and I can be a leader of the 260 campers. And that was kind of what I guess changed the way that I wanted to be a leader. I had always thought, "leader of a cabin or leader of a group - that's the goal," but now I think a leader who can have a vision and inspire a large group of people and kind of affect change in some capacity, I think that has become far more what I'm driven towards.

And at the end of Jasper's first year, she received an invitation to serve on the student leadership advisory committee for the university president. Although she'd been involved with multi-faith engagement initiatives, she did not think of that work as leadership and certainly did not see herself as a leader. Eventually her involvement in this group, with approximately 35 other student leaders from around campus, proved transformative as she saw the institution's senior leaders looking to students for help in identifying where and how change needed to happen to improve the student experience, but she'd never have sought this role on her own.

I first got the letter in the mail, and I really was curious about who nominated me. Because especially just finishing my first year here, I was like, "Who? What? Who knows me?" It was maybe on the edge of imposter syndrome. I was like, "I don't know what I'm a leader of." I was in a cohort (of multi-faith interns), but I was still thinking of a leader as someone who was president or treasurer or something.

Had it not been for the suggestion of someone else in their lives, many of the students in this study would not have thought of themselves as ready for the positions they

eventually held. They did not feel experienced enough to think of themselves as leaders in this context, but the fact that someone else believed in them was enough to help them start to think of themselves differently. In this new context, they were able to start seeing themselves differently.

Feeling Overwhelmed

As these students took on leadership roles around campus, many then shared moments when they felt overwhelmed by their responsibilities or ill-prepared to accomplish their goals. This uneasiness and fear of failure was unsettling. They were already concerned that they were not really ready for some of these roles. Because of this, many reached out to others for assistance, sought help discerning their own strengths and weaknesses related to leadership, and clarified their priorities for future leadership involvement.

In addition to his role as a tour guide, Jack sought an executive committee leadership role with the school's dance marathon that raises funds for a local children's hospital. He had served on a sub-committee and initially thought he was ready to lead that group. Once he got into the work, he quickly began to feel differently about it. He did not realize all that was required in the position. There were a number of tasks that needed to be done, but he also had a large sub-committee to manage and everyone there came with different needs or goals or levels of commitment to the group. Simply telling them all what to do wasn't effective and he reached out to his advisors for help navigating those relationships and guidance for his role as that group's leader.

Through his over-involvement, Alonzo discovered how important it was to be intentional in both where he chose to get involved and how many commitments he made. Just because others were tapping him for positions, didn't mean he needed to or even should get involved with all of them.

Sophomore year, I thought leadership meant positions so I accumulated as many positions as I could. People were like, "You're going to be a good leader." I was like, "Okay, how do I do that?" "Oh, you should be in this. Oh, you should be in this. Oh, you should be in this." That was not very good. That was so draining. Some of the positions I was in I really wasn't suited for. Even though I was struggling because I was doing so many different things, I will say that doing all those things and learning about my own leadership style has helped me.

Jasper had been a member of the editorial board for the student literary journal and was a bit intimidated by the prospect of applying and being the editor-in-chief, but also didn't see anyone else stepping up for a role she saw as especially important for the creative writing department. She approached another student about the possibility of working with her in another leadership role.

Oh my goodness, my title now is editor-in-chief, that's enormous. I don't know what I'm doing. I wanted someone to bounce ideas off of so that we could decide as two people, "Yes, this is a good decision," as opposed to just one person because... I feel like the word delegate is kind of still like top down. Like, "I delegate to the editorial staff." I don't delegate to [the managing editor]. We share the responsibilities. And I just thought that it makes it less stressful. It's also nice to have someone reassure you that you're doing okay.

Although these students often felt overwhelmed or a bit like an imposter in their leadership roles, it was also this uneasiness that pushed them to learn more about

themselves and what it meant to be a leader. The guidance, assistance, and discernment served to advance their understanding of leadership.

Experiencing Failure

While the fear of failure was certainly something that motivated many of the students to seek help or involve others in their work, actually failing at something also created a liminal moment that initiated a transformation or change in direction for these leaders.

When Bernadette became a resident assistant, she went through quite a bit of training and started the year feeling confident that she could be successful in that leadership role. As shared earlier in her profile, she was not prepared for the amount of time and attention her residents were going to need. They expected her to hold their hands and help them with everything. She was working elsewhere on campus while also serving as an RA, and simply did not have the time or energy required to build the relationships that the role required.

I had 20 to 30 residents but they were so wild. I did not know how to connect those 30 individuals because they were just freshmen... they wanted to be on their own. They were so different. They just happened to live in [the same area] and that is probably the only commonality they had. And so trying to learn these personalities and be a student and be in my other jobs was a lot. I did not give them the attention that they needed at all. And I, at one point, kind of gave up because they were just so wild I felt like it was too late. ...Freshman need a lot because they are home sick, they are trying to figure it out, they need resources, they need "Help me do my homework? How do I get to class? How do I take this?" I get it, but it is just a lot, you know.

Bernadette didn't really give up. She learned that successful leadership as an RA required trying to better understand the residents and their needs. Once she made that commitment, she enjoyed serving as an RA for two more years, and that lesson was evident as she described her interaction with her current residents, sorority sisters, and the young high school student she is mentoring.

As the chair of a student government committee focusing on academic concerns, Drew and the other members of the committee identified a number of problems and goals for the year. They took the list to the university's provost and the majority of them were quickly dismissed. At first Drew was frustrated, but came to appreciate the feedback they received. They gathered more information, adjusted their goals based on what they'd learned, and felt good about their chances of creating at least some of the change they desired.

I've learned that a leader gets rejected a lot, and it makes you resilient, but you have to be persistent. I have learned that a leader is not someone who goes in with this set of goals, and no matter what they get told they will not change that set of goals. I knew at the start of the year we were going to have a set of goals, and that they would not look the same the next semester, and they don't. Maybe we can't wave credit hours for dual degrees, but we can offer more classes that count for both majors, or maybe we can offer classes that integrate the two together.

It's like I told the group in December. I said, "Instead of meeting our goals, maybe we're just changing them into workable goals, things that we can actually achieve and make a difference with." I think that I've learned that you don't always have to be right, and that it's okay to mess up, and that those two things are all right.

Although it is possible that the students in this study chose to simply not share stories of failure and feeling completely defeated, they did not appear to let failure

discourage them. They frequently talked about rejection and failure as a source of motivation. In the spring semester of her first year, Morgan applied to be a part of the student-run public relations office.

I just got straight up rejected. They were like, “No. Sorry. Try again.” ...I really liked the fact that it was hard to get into. I liked how I got rejected at first. It just pushed me to get involved in more things and try other things to build up my resume. Then I applied (for the public relations program) for the spring of my sophomore year and then I got wait listed. I remember emailing them back like, “Hey, I never heard back and the spring semester is about to start and I just don’t know what my status is.” They basically emailed me saying, “This is what we are looking for in our staff, someone who perseveres, so you have the position.”

Similarly, in Michelle’s junior year she really wanted to be elected as one of the captains of her club rugby team. The team had been a strong cohort of friends and accepted each other for who they were. Over the last year that closeness had faded and she wanted to help bring it back. Michelle was not initially elected to be captain and that loss was painful; but she also didn’t let it prevent her from continuing with the team or working to make it better. That persistence was important in her development and for the team.

I wasn’t voted captain. That was really hard for me because I was the only one who had been playing since their freshman year. But the thing is, I kind of was like, I can’t force myself upon a team. I can’t lead a team that doesn’t want me to lead them. I may be the best (player), but that doesn’t make me the most qualified necessarily to be the captain. Then the season went and we had two very skilled players (as captains), but very introverted and not necessarily leaders. The team kind of fell apart and everybody then (this semester) looked to me and my co-captain to kind of pick it up and put it back together.

Although not comfortable or something any of them would likely have chosen, each of these students found initial failures or rejections to be instrumental in their development. They learned from the experiences and grew as leaders.

Desire to Help Others

Although not an experience like the others identified in this section, listening to these students, a theme quickly emerged around a desire to help others. From either personal experience or observing others' struggles, these students felt a sense of empathy for people in specific circumstances that served as motivation for them to get involved. Alonzo got involved with Black Solidarity Day to step up, speak out, let the community see where changes were needed, and provide support for other Black students on campus. In high school, Jack didn't know if he wanted to go to college. He became a tour guide to help high school students believe that they, too, could be successful at a place like his institution. Jasper understood that because the creative writing department was small and easy to overlook, her faculty members and mentors felt unappreciated. She became the editor of the literary journal as a way to celebrate their impact on student writers and give back to them. As a gay woman, Michelle felt she was unconditionally accepted by the rugby team; her motivation for being a captain included rebuilding that sense of community so others who were also struggling with their identity and body image could have that source of support. Morgan was deeply appreciative of the strong family support she had growing up, and realized how lucky she was. Because of that, she started volunteering with a mentoring program for disadvantaged pre-teen girls and then became a leader in the organization. And through her high school service experiences, Alicia had

come to understand the impact poverty and being a member of a marginalized community can have on someone. In college she got involved in local tutoring programs for children and families trying to learn English and served as a translator for a free income tax service.

I helped this one couple who were from Ecuador. She was trying to collect her tax return, and she's had on and off jobs throughout her time here. And her husband is disabled so he can't work. She told me she has a ton of grandchildren. And she also has around eight kids, and I think only two of them are in the U.S. because not everyone can cross – not everyone could get a visa. So just hearing her experience was... I mean I know about those experiences, because I've worked with other people in the past who have also struggled with immigration and getting through. But I think seeing her patience throughout the whole process, because she didn't understand anything that was going on... Her patience, and also her trust in the program because she didn't know any of us, was something I definitely noticed. And I was like, "Wow!" ...When I was leaving, she was thanking me. I was like, "I didn't even do anything. I just translated."

It was often through these experiences that students were challenged to step outside their comfort zones or found themselves engaged in a group or cause that became a passion for them.

Finding Passion and Developing Purpose

And finally, being involved in something they were passionate about created additional opportunities for these students to wrestle with their role as a leader. By spending considerable time on that passion, they came to understand the more complex or related issues and were motivated to engage even more deeply. They identified problems that needed solutions, discovered a deeper purpose, and used this as a platform for

participating in relational leadership – working with others in a group or community toward a common goal. It was in these contexts that they genuinely identified as a leader.

Alonzo built on his involvement with Black Solidarity Day and found himself engaged in issues of diversity and inclusion on a predominantly White campus. He joined organizations, took classes, found mentors, sought summer internships, and eventually worked with other Black men on campus to create a new group that serves to support the special needs of Black male faculty, staff and students.

Alicia developed a passion for the Spanish language and culture. She is a Spanish minor, spends considerable time in the Spanish center, tutors students in Spanish, and tutors local Spanish-speaking community members as they work to learn English. As a senior, she is now trying to find ways to use her business degree to help Spanish-speaking small business owners find greater success.

Bernadette's father has been in and out of the criminal justice system. She started college with an interest in helping those on society's margins and is minoring in criminal justice. She is a member of a highly selective cohort for first-generation or socioeconomically disadvantaged students and has learned a considerable amount about the roadblocks to success society has placed in front of her and her peers. This year she worked with administrators at a local high school to create a mentoring program for marginalized youth and has recently been awarded a one-year fellowship to work with low income families and their preschool-aged children. In the fall of 2019 she plans to start a graduate program in social work.

Drew got involved with the teen court program because he thought he wanted to be a lawyer. Through that experience he learned how important a stable and supportive educational environment is for children who lack that environment in the home. In college he took a job in the provost's office to learn more about higher education and got engaged in student government with the goal of improving the academic experiences of his peers. He is now preparing to start a graduate program in higher education administration this fall.

Jasper is passionate about writing, women's rights, and issues around gender discrimination. She uses her creative writing to raise awareness of women's issues. She gently and then more directly confronted a faculty member's actions that seemed to be silencing authentic women's voices in the classroom and in their writing. She took a class on childbirth and then served as a teaching assistant to infuse fiction, non-fiction, and poetry into that course's curriculum. Jasper plans to use her stories to invite readers into the discussion, help them better relate to issues of gender equality, and change hearts to change society.

Michelle grew up going to an all-girls summer camp and then an all-girls high school. She came to college looking for a community and, knowing she wasn't interested in joining a sorority, showed up for women's club rugby tryouts. She not only fell in love with the sport, but was good at it and found a group of women who accepted her. It was through the team that she learned to appreciate her strength and her body. It was through the team that she discovered a true passion for lifting up other women. Michelle is excited to start her new job in corporate insurance, get involved with some of the

women's insurance networks she discovered during her summer internship, and continue her activism around female empowerment.

For these students, their senior year has allowed different elements of their involvement to come together and their interests or passions have become a source of purpose. They have all woven a story out of their experiences and their future seems to be related to creating positive change within that area of passion. The two remaining participants, Jack and Morgan, are juniors. They are both choosing to let go of one or more of their multiple activities next year so they can spend more time on goals connected to their passions. If they follow the same pattern as the others, this will be an exciting year of self-discovery and finding direction or purpose in their leadership.

The handful of experiences that were influential for these students created a state of liminality where transformation could occur in both their identity as a relational leader and their understanding of leadership. They included observing admired campus leaders, being tapped for leadership roles, feeling overwhelmed by their role or their responsibilities, struggling or failing to achieve their goals, getting involved in something out of a desire to help others, and finding a passion that evolved into a source of purpose.

These findings are well-aligned with the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model (Komives et al., 2006, Komives et al., 2005). As LID posited, these students were influenced by their interactions with other leaders and, as they started taking on more complex or difficult leadership roles, realized they could not do all of it on their own. As the leader or the person responsible for the group, they were challenged by the fact that they needed to look to others for help, their expertise, and shared leadership. They began

to abandon the notion of a leader as the person in a position of authority and started to view leadership as an interdependent process (Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2005). And, as these students now sit in Leadership Differentiated, they are more fully developing a passion for an issue or group goal. They are deepening their engagement, working more purposefully to positively impact the desired change, and some are beginning to transition into Generativity (Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2005).

Identifying as a Leader

The experiences described above led students into a state of liminality, positioning them for both a transformation of their understanding of leadership and their identity as a leader. The third research question focuses on the specific meaning making that shifted students' ontological understanding and self-identification as a relational leader. Through their involvement on campus and observing respected leaders, these participants came to understand that leaders are not perfect. Instead, they are courageous, vulnerable, and willing to take risks. They admit what they don't know, and learn from others and from their mistakes or failures.

Leaders Are Not Perfect

Coming from high school, the students in this study all talked about leaders as the older people in their lives that had specific roles or titles and were very good at what they did. There were some positional leaders that the participants did not consider "good leaders," but true leaders were identified as those special individuals they looked to for their expertise and guidance.

As the students came to college, met some of the positional leaders on campus, and began establishing relationships with them, they started to see these individuals a little differently. Some were incredibly knowledgeable, but they were not all knowing. Instead, they asked others, including the students, for help. They made mistakes. They didn't have answers to many of the problems they were facing and often did not know how to solve them. All of this was true, yet they were still leaders both in the context of the positions they held and in the way they engaged in their work or leadership.

Realizing that they didn't have to be perfect gave the students permission to think differently about themselves. They did not need to be perfect or good at everything in order to be leaders. Jasper talked about this realization in the context of her creative writing faculty members and her role as editor-in-chief of the student literary journal.

I'm getting a little more comfortable being in official leadership positions, like with [the journal]. I think I'm learning that I... So my creative writing mentors at [my institution], the ones that I have connected to most... they're very unorganized, maybe. They're just kind of all over the place. Yeah, in general, "all-over-the-place" sort of people. And I still think of them as leaders, think of them as mentors; and they still do such incredible work both professionally and personally, and all of that. And so I think then going into my [editorial] position, I became more comfortable being like, "Oh, just because you're in a leadership position doesn't mean that you have to be cold and professional. You can admit that you don't know things and you can admit that you're bad at things." I think that helped me be able to be in more formal roles, where it meant that I didn't have to be anything that I'm not.

Morgan is a strong student and her ability to be successful and a leader in the classroom is a salient part of her identity. Growing up, academic work was individualistic and she functioned very independently. And so, asking for help and not

being good at something was hard for her. Thinking back on her overall experiences in college so far, Morgan shared,

It's made me understand that even if you are a leader, you don't have to be perfect, because that's another thing I always thought, too. Leaders are like these people you want to aspire to be like, but no one's perfect. Every single person in this world has imperfections, and just kind of embracing those imperfections or imperfect qualities about yourself, and either making yourself better from them or understanding, "Okay, I'm not good at this, so I'm going to rely on or talk to someone that is, to, like, hopefully make me better." Yeah, it just made me realize that you don't need to be perfect, and you also can lean on other people, too, and you don't have to do everything by yourself.

Realizing that they didn't have to be an expert, perfect, or infallible in order to be a leader, was an important step in these students' development. Even without being the best or most knowledgeable, they could still be and were leaders.

Leaders are Courageous

Admitting when you are wrong, don't know something, need help, or have failed is not easy to do. Neither is stepping up and taking risks. As the students described the individuals they considered to be leaders at the university, they recognized the courage it took for them to lead effectively. That courage included a blend of authenticity, integrity, vulnerability, and humility. These leaders were honest and willing to give up at least some of their perceived or real power to ask others for help and guidance. They were willing to go outside their comfort zones to have new experiences or try new ways of doing things. They trusted others with important responsibilities instead of trying to do it all on their own. They confronted problems that needed solutions. And, they responded

well when confronted by the fact that their actions were part of the problem. These leaders were courageous.

This concept could be perceived as intimidating, but it was also empowering for these students. This was what leaders did. And, once these participants were beginning to identify as leaders, they also felt they could be courageous. They could be humble, authentic, and vulnerable. They were empowered to take risks or step outside their comfort zone.

Michelle was willing to risk not being elected captain of her rugby team (for the second time) because she felt so strongly about rebuilding the supportive culture that had been so important to her. In her role at the public relations agency Morgan watched her supervisors let go of control and empower others to develop the public relations campaigns rather than doing it themselves. This meant that when she became a supervisor and then assistant director, she understood the importance of trusting others and empowering them to lead.

And at a planning retreat with the university's senior leadership team and student leaders, Jasper was nervous about the vulnerability required to share her difficulties transitioning into college. She was a rising junior, had struggled with the adjustment, and knew she needed to speak up. She also greatly appreciated the student body president's willingness to also be vulnerable.

I remember, at the second retreat [the president] said something about freshman or sophomore year being really lonely. And that was a nice moment for me, where I don't know if I said something after or before, speaking to the same thing, but

after hearing her say that, I was like, "Okay, it's not like these people are superhuman people."

When the students identified a problem that required challenging people in positions of authority, they also understood that courage was the responsibility of a leader. It empowered them to act. Jasper gently and relatively safely shared concerns with her faculty member, but when his troubling behavior continued she felt a responsibility to muster the courage necessary to challenge his actions again and more directly.

Alonzo first watched his peer mentor step up to confront the administration after a racial bias incident happened on campus, but then also found himself demonstrating a level of courage he hadn't expected. He was quickly and deeply involved in working to change the campus climate.

I think [my mentor's] goal in general was just to wake people up because he felt as though people were asleep. Especially at [this university]. I think that was his one real goal during that time and then from there, it would lead to not only the transformation [of the student organization], but also the transformation of how students engage with one another in these conversations and dialogues on campus, which I thought was really cool.

I really sat in so many different meetings with SGA, senior staff, administration, students that were trying to make sure that the rally was the best that it could be. Sometimes as students of color, we felt frustrated coming out of those meetings because people didn't want it to become something big and rowdy and even though sometimes I think big and rowdy is sometimes necessary. Sometimes you need to disturb the peace to not only, one, raise awareness, but two, bring about peace later on because comfort and complacency is something that so many people have in this day and age. Sometimes you need to rattle the cage to wake them up.

It takes courage to admit when you don't know something, need help, or see a change that needs to happen. It takes courage to be authentic, humble, and vulnerable in your leadership. The students in this study observed leaders on campus demonstrating this courage and came to see it as an important aspect of what it means to be a leader.

Leaders are Learners

At the same time these students were coming to understand that leaders really don't have all of the answers, they were also discovering that these same leaders were asking good questions and trying to find solutions to the problems or issues they were identifying. Even when they were incredibly knowledgeable or passionate about a topic, they still didn't have all of the answers and were learning more about it. They observed leaders research the topic, talk to others, learn about other people, learn from people, learn about the complexity of the issues, and then try out new ideas. These admired leaders acknowledged when they were wrong or failed at something, but also focused more on what they had learned through that process and then tried something new. They were not perfect or all-knowing, but embraced the learning process as a part of being a leader.

Morgan's mentor at the public relations agency shared mistakes he made while working in the field and the lessons he learned from them. Early in Jack's involvement with the dance marathon organization, he saw how incredibly successful they were at fundraising and helping people see how their donations were making a difference. He also appreciated how they reflected on the event, identified problems they could have avoided, learned from those reflections, and made plans for the following year so they

didn't happen again. And, Jasper appreciated the university president's intentional inclusion of students as a source of learning for his team as part of their decision making process.

I think it's a lot of being honest about the stuff you don't know. So, one of the things that I really like that [the university president has] done is even just putting together the [student] advisory council. He is not a student, and so he doesn't know what it's like to come into [the university] and live on campus, and be a student here. And so you need representatives to share that information with you, and to share that experience with you. And so, I think that that is something I really admire – admitting you don't know.

As the students then talked more about their leadership experiences in college, they routinely included what or how they also learned along the way. Many shared learning from failures or changing their perspective as a result of different experiences. Alicia began to see how religion has served as a source of oppression and discrimination for many people in the world. Out of a concern for marginalized communities, she has intentionally learned more about different faith traditions so she can be a better advocate when needed. And as Bernadette learned more about the struggles of her high school mentee and the limited time school administrators had to engage in the planning of a mentorship program, she changed how she engaged with her mentee, her approach to working with the school, and what the program offered to all of the high school students so their different needs could be met.

Threshold Concepts

As Meyers and Land (2003) theorized, threshold concepts are: *transformative*, resulting in an entirely new perspective of the discipline; *troublesome*, causing the

student to wrestle with their true or complex meaning; *irreversible*, leaving the learner unable to return to a prior way of believing or acting; *integrative*, weaving concepts or elements that were previously seen as disparate; and *bounded*, uniquely inherent to the discipline. While grappling with threshold concepts, students can often talk or write about these concepts in a way that mimics understanding, but still not fully grasp their true meaning. When these complex concepts are mastered, a significant and fundamental shift in their perception of the discipline and their relation to it also occurs. This study's final research question sought to identify the new meaning students made that moved them (out of liminality and) across a threshold toward understanding leadership as a relational process. The goal was to identify the threshold concepts of leadership that shifted these students' understanding of leadership to a relational and ethical process of working with others to create change and personally identify as a leader in this new context.

Leader

Framed within the threshold concepts theory and as described above, these students' new understanding of *leader* was as the first threshold concept for relational leadership identified in the study. They discovered that leaders are not perfect and aren't always experts. Instead, they are courageous and vulnerable. They are humble and admit when they don't know something, learn from others, learn from their mistakes or failures, and are willing to take risks. This new understanding of leader as a threshold concept served to change their understanding of leadership and their ability to identify as a relational leader.

Pluralism

In order to understand a complex problem, relational leaders make room for, actively seek out, and learn from a diverse group of people and from their perspectives. This concept of *pluralism*, or the intentional inclusion of multiple voices, is critical to leadership (Kezar, 2000; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 1998; Komives et al., 2005) and these students experienced multiple leadership challenges in which they saw the need for diverse perspectives in order to accurately understand a situation or identify possible solutions. Pluralism brings a necessary vibrancy to the discussion, a fuller understanding of the problem, and a more informed decision-making process. But it can also be challenging. Leaders must be aware of their own identities (including positionality and power) in order to identify who their leadership circles or teams are missing. It takes courage to hear dissenting opinions or be open to ideas that run counter to current beliefs or practices. And, pluralism requires that these voices be valued as assets in the leadership process and not seen as obstacles to the group's or leader's success. More than just an appreciation for diversity or being inclusive, when a leader engages pluralism, they position diverse perspectives, experiences, or skills as integral to the leadership process (Kezar, 2000). As Alicia was working with campus administrators to find ways they might engage more students in the Spanish center, she came to understand the importance of hearing from both people who frequented the center, but more importantly, also from those who chose not to come and those that knew nothing about the center at all. These different voices were critical to fully understanding the problem and developing an effective solution.

These students' understanding of pluralism as a construct of leadership was different than social perspective taking, or the ability to see and understand something from another's point of view (Dugan et al., 2014). They were not always focused on or able to walk in someone else's shoes, but did see leadership as something that relies on multiple voices to effectively accomplish the group's goals. Drew came to recognize this need for pluralism in his work with the academic concerns committee. In the past the group had accomplished very little. The chair had been meeting with the provost identifying the committee goals, but that meant that only one perspective was being represented or utilized in that process.

I didn't see it as effective because I am a liberal arts person. I am a Poli-Sci major. I look at things through a different lens. I write differently. I think qualitatively. And so, when you bring in a business person, so the senator for the Business School, the questions they're going to ask [the provost] are very different than what I would ask. If they're not in the room to be able to ask them, then they're never going to get asked because I'm only going to ask stuff through the lens that I live. I'm not going to ask questions through the lived experience of a Business major, or through the lived experience of an Education major.

Alonzo began to understand this concept in his philosophy class on rap music. His classmates were diverse in many ways, and the discussions gave everyone an opportunity to be heard and their experiences or perspectives understood. Through these discussions he developed an appreciation for others' experiences and came to understand the importance of learning from others in the leadership process.

It's so easy for us as humans to generalize things and it adds to a lot of the world's problems, but when you try to remain... not neutral, but... to just ask questions instead of make assumptions, you learn a lot more than you would when you

make assumptions or when you just make statements because I think through that learning process, you get to understand about yourself and the other person which also makes for having a better conversation, a better dialogue. Through that listening, you also gain another person's trust because everyone wants to be heard and everyone wants to have their voice listened to. So, I think that experience from that rap class has sort of led to just me trying to listen to people and use that listening to be able to better understand how I can help them.

Bernadette talked about that concept of pluralism, or making room for voices that may not otherwise be heard, in the context of rap music's role in society. She wasn't asserting that every rapper is engaged in leadership, but believed that some are absolutely leaders through their art. They share critical perspectives that society should not be ignoring. These leaders and their voices are needed to change society or create change for the common good.

[W]e don't understand rap, but rap isn't made to be understood necessarily. It's meant to project concerns, to voice it. And it's drastic, and people are worried about the vulgarity and the sexualization of it.

But where are these problems coming from? Why are they talking about drugs and gang violence? This is a reality for these people; it's not just a movie. But why are you selling drugs? Why don't you have a job? Post-industrialization jobs have been outsourced overseas, and now people are trying to provide for their families. Why do we have single mothers? Where are those fathers that are ...How did they get caught up in this criminal justice system? Or why are they dying young? Or why is there so much police tension? Why was the War on Drugs declared before drugs were actually in the Black community? Rappers can vocalize different concerns for communities that aren't often addressed, or marginalized communities that aren't often addressed or respected.

These students saw the intentional decision to seek out diverse perspectives around an issue as an important aspect of leadership. It built on their understanding of what it meant to be a leader – someone who did not know everything and learned from others –

and helped them come to see leadership differently. Multiple and sometimes challenging voices were needed in order to find real solutions to the problems they were responding to or the decisions that needed to be made. They were coming to understand leadership as a relational and interdependent process.

Collaboration

When the concept of pluralism is put into action and multiple people are invited or included in the leadership process, the result is a unique solution to whatever goals the group has set for themselves. That outcome is simply not possible without *collaboration* and each individual's participation. These students understood the value of cooperation and teamwork before coming to college, but as they engaged *with* others throughout the process and saw the role of "leader" shared among the group members, they came to recognize it as more than cooperation or just working alongside one another. As articulated in the description aligned with the Social Change Model of leadership, successful collaboration requires that group members be committed to,

keeping an open mind, being empathetic, building trust, and communicating clearly. ...[It] involves examining and clarifying one's values and vision; being open to learning about other group members' values and perspectives; being willing to redistribute power and at the same time take responsibility for and ownership of the group process and its outcomes; being authentic and congruent; and being willing to take risks (HERI, 1996, p. 50).

Collaboration can be time consuming, messy, and difficult, but these students also saw it as rewarding and more likely to result in innovative and effective solutions. Through collaboration or shared leadership they were better able to achieve the group's goals.

Jasper looked to her managing editor and editorial staff in the selection of the pieces for the journal. She recognized that each member brought a different perspective and may see things in the art that she or others may miss. That decision-making process was a collaborative effort and the final list of pieces selected were indeed different than if Jasper or any other group member had selected them on their own. The result was a journal that, when seen in its entirety, told an additional story on the challenges young adults face on a regular basis.

It is not uncommon to hear students or faculty members talk about group projects in classes and refer to them as collaborations. However, the students in this study were able to differentiate between a cooperative project and one that was truly collaborative. Many of Morgan's strategic communications classes regularly involved group projects and the most successful ones involved genuinely shared leadership rather than one group member dominating the direction of their work and simply dividing up responsibilities. And although Drew referred to it as teamwork, he was still describing a true collaboration.

The smaller the team the better it goes usually with classwork. But for me that's not actually teamwork; that's more just like divvying up who's going to do what, and everyone just doing their part, and then showing up, and presenting it. It's not transformational per se, it's just there. It's not much different than everyone doing individual assignments.

Bernadette had been frustrated with what she perceived as ineffective training sessions for RAs. They were not learning anything and the workshops were a waste of time. So when she and another experienced RA were asked to each give presentations on

time management to the new RAs, she saw it as an opportunity to work with that other student to create a new, unique, and better experience for her peers.

We were scheming. We're like, "No, we'll give it together twice." They were like, "No, it's one or the other." And we're like, "So we're not going to do it. So you get us together or neither of us do it."

[I] really just love working with him because he's just a very creative, visionary person, and we just bounce really good ideas off of each other. That was one time that we collabed [*sic*] on a project that was really impactful because a lot of people got something out of it. People enjoyed it so I knew we did something, and people learned from it.

Engaging with others in order to accomplish the group's goals became a critical part of good leadership for these students. It made the work more complicated and time-consuming, but also more rewarding. They often were not able to fully engage in the level of collaboration they would have preferred or wanted, but did see it as integral to strong and impactful leadership.

Pathway to Understanding Leadership as a Process

These students came to understand that leaders are not all-knowing or capable of leading on their own. Instead, they seek out and learn from diverse perspectives and work interdependently with others, sharing the responsibilities, in a collaborative process. Developing a deep and complex understanding of *leader*, *pluralism*, and *collaboration* meant they crossed a threshold in their understanding of leadership and could no longer see it as simply a position of authority. As illustrated in Figure 2, they entered college with a preliminal understanding of leadership, engaged in a number of transformative experiences, entered a state and cycle of liminality where they made meaning of those

experiences, came to understand the threshold concepts, and moved into a postliminal understanding of leadership.

The participants in this study came to college with the preliminal belief that leadership was the work done by older, experienced, positional leaders. Those they identified as true leaders were the authority figures in their lives and the people they often turned to for guidance and support. At times they held leadership roles and were learning to be leaders, but that meant they were most often the ones doing the work. If necessary, they cautiously delegated aspects of their responsibility to others, but still saw themselves as very independent in their work. And, when serving as a member of a formal team, there may have been more people involved and necessary to reach their goals, but team members were still dependent upon the leader.

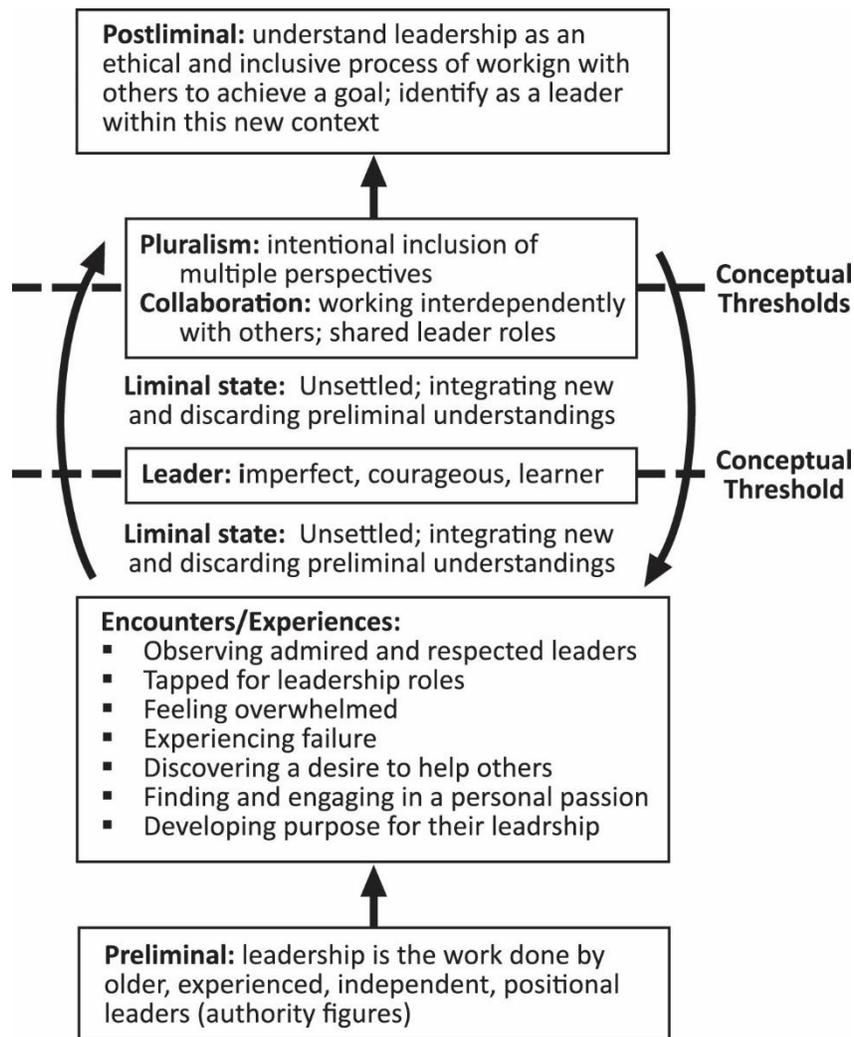


Figure 2. Identified Threshold Concepts for Relational Leadership.

As these students came to college and their understanding of leadership began to change, there were some common experiences that seemed to influence or prime that transformation. First, they were in places and activities on campus that allowed them to observe and engage with individuals they came to respect as strong, respected, and positive leadership role models. They were tapped or encouraged to consider taking on leadership positions within a group. When they took on too many responsibilities or

found themselves feeling woefully ill prepared for their role, they discovered that delegation wasn't going to solve their problems. They needed and sought help in ways that moved them toward a more interdependent understanding of leadership. And, when these students talked about times they truly failed, it was uncomfortable and not likely something they'd have wanted to happen, but the failure only served as a source of motivation for their continued efforts toward achieving their goals.

As they became more deeply engaged in their leadership journey, many of these students described the desire to help others or impact others' lives in a positive way as influential in their understanding of leadership. They were recognizing privileges they had experienced and wanted to give back to others in ways that had made a difference for them. And, as they became more deeply engaged in something they identified as a passion, they found the need to create change or do something more significant to advance their involvement in that area. Those passions then developed into a purpose for their leadership.

Those experiences and developing purpose were critical to their developing understanding of leadership as an ethical and inclusive process of working with others to create change and coming to identify as a relational leader. Along the way, they came to more deeply understand three key threshold concepts. The first related to a new understanding of a leader. Watching and reflecting on the actions of campus leaders they admired, they discovered that leaders are not perfect; instead, they are learners. They are courageous in their willingness to admit their need for others and to step out of their comfort zone and engage in that process. Armed with this new understanding and

emerging identity as a relational leader, the students developed a deeper understanding of pluralism or recognizing the need for multiple voices and their intentional inclusion in the leadership process. For them, including a diverse group or multiple people in a shared process, or engaging in genuine collaboration, resulted in outcomes that would otherwise not have been possible. These threshold concepts permanently shifted participants' understanding of leadership to be the interdependent process of people working together toward a common goal. They were no longer willing or able to view it solely as the work done by an independent person in a position of authority. They had crossed that important threshold of understanding within the discipline of leadership and identified as a leader within this new context.

Summary

This chapter identified the concepts that these students came to understand more deeply that brought about their transformation and allowed them to identify as a leader within a relational context. The final chapter will review this study's methodology, offer a discussion of the findings, identify ways the study can inform our practice, and present opportunities for further research.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

This research began out of a desire to better understand students' leadership development journey. Over the years I'd seen some students' understanding of leadership change dramatically during their time at the university. They came in focused on being the person "in charge" and desiring recognition for their individual accomplishments and graduated having been actively engaged with a group of change-makers and proud of the great work their group had accomplished together. Yet others, who arrived on campus with the same initial goals and expectations, graduated having not changed their views on leaders or leadership. They were still more interested in leadership for the power and accolades than for the advancement of a personal passion.

The purpose of the study was to more deeply explore college students' leadership journey, paying particular attention to that liminal time when they started to think about leadership as a relational and ethical process of working with others to create positive change rather than simply holding a position of authority. The goal was to better understand this phenomenon – the experiences and meaning making that were transformational along their path of understanding leadership differently and identifying as a relational leader.

The Leadership Identity Development model (Komives et al., 2005) posited that due to an increased workload, an understanding of leadership language, and a greater

appreciation of diversity, students come to recognize the need to give up authority and engage with others in their leadership. However, what students were learning about leadership that accompanied that cognitive shift and more complex understanding of leadership was still unclear. Identifying these threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005) or new understandings around a discipline that create a significant and fundamental shift in students' awareness, seemed to be critical in our efforts to support their growth and development. The LID model and threshold concepts served as a framework for exploring that liminality and students' meaning making, and the findings of the study add to the related body of literature. Once these experiences and threshold concepts were identified, the findings might then inform our practices to more intentionally engage students in that meaning-making process. This chapter serves to summarize the study's methodology, share findings related to the research questions, and provide a discussion on what was learned related to the theoretical framework. It identifies ways this study may inform our practice, identifies limitations, and suggests some exciting possibilities for future study.

Methodology

Through a series of interviews and reflections with upper-level students, I sought to explore their understanding of leadership as they came to the university, the experiences that influenced their growth and leadership development, their changing identity as a leader, and their new understanding of leadership. The purposeful sample was recruited through twenty staff and faculty members from various departments around campus with the goal of identifying a relatively diverse group of students who had

equally diverse experiences while in college (Jones et al., 2014; Maxwell, 2013).

Within 12 hours of sending the email to nominators, two volunteers had already reached out to express interest in participating in the study and over the course of about three weeks, nine students had contacted me. Although I was prepared to contact additional nominators if more students were needed, these first interviews suggested that the existing sample met the established goals for participants. The students represented multiple identities, experiences before college, and leadership experiences in college. They were majoring in a variety of disciplines, and were involved in a number of different activities both on- and off-campus.

As described earlier, the first interview focused on students' background, leadership-related experiences before coming to college, and some of their early involvement at the university. They were able to reflect back on their previous understanding of leadership and articulate a quite different definition during the interview. Most seemed to enjoy reminiscing about their childhood and were fairly direct about their positive and negative experiences both personally and related to leadership. At the conclusion of that interview, a number of the students expressed appreciation for the ability to participate in the study. Until that point, they had not intentionally reflected on their leadership journey and perceived this study as an enjoyable opportunity to do so.

The second interview allowed a deeper exploration of their learning and transformation while in college. Both interviews were 60-90 minutes long, but it was often in the last 15 or 20 minutes of the interviews that students were best able to articulate the learning or meaning they had made from their experiences. On more than

one occasion I had stopped the recording then asked permission to turn it back on as they continued to reflect and share additional thoughts. By voicing the lessons they had learned along the way, they were also able to identify other examples where that learning appeared in their leadership. They seemed to talk more intentionally about involving others in the discussions or problem-solving process, where they had recently been engaged in strong collaborations, and when they had struggled to create the type of culture or group they saw necessary to good leadership. These additional examples were helpful in discerning the experiences and threshold concepts that influenced their transition from Leader Identified to Leadership Differentiated.

After the second interviews were transcribed, reviewed, and notes were logged, participant profiles were developed for each student and sent to them via email. They were asked to identify needed corrections, share new information if needed, and ensure their experiences or understandings were not misinterpreted or misrepresented (Maxwell, 2013). Recognizing that reading this profile served as an additional opportunity for reflection and meaning making (Jones et al., 2014), they were also then asked to share thoughts on two additional considerations: what they now understood differently about leadership that does not allow them to view it only as what a person does when in a position of authority, and how they think of themselves as a leader within this context.

These students were all quite busy with a number of leadership activities, academic commitments, student employment, and interviews for professional employment or graduate school; however, they all responded within just a few days. They enjoyed reading about themselves and their leadership journey, and many expressed

how helpful it was to see it all packaged so clearly. Some had relatively brief responses, while a few wrote considerably on the final reflection prompts. They continued to lift up ways their understanding of what it meant to be a leader had changed and how their leadership had evolved as a result of that new definition. Although their responses did not provide much new information, the process was valuable in validating my analysis and identification of their threshold concepts.

As the study progressed and I engaged in member checking with these students, it also became clear that the interviews themselves had served as a source of reflection and meaning-making. Their comments at the end of the first interview signaled that sentiment, as did the enjoyment they expressed related to reading their profiles. When I saw these students on campus, they routinely asked how the study was going. I received requests to meet again and “catch up” or discuss my possible findings. They wanted to know what I was identifying as common threshold concepts and frequently provided additional validation for the concepts I was positing. As I shared my thoughts on the three threshold concepts, they frequently nodded in agreement as I talked and shared additional examples of when they had intentionally included others in discussions or as they were exploring problems, were vulnerable and courageous, or collaboratively shared leadership roles within a group in order to achieve group goals that would have otherwise not been possible. They were obviously still thinking about their leadership, the journey they experienced, and the meaning they had made (or were making) along the way. These students were invested, genuinely curious about the study, and excited to be a part

of it. As I had hoped, they saw the study and our discourse around the findings as a reciprocal and collaborative process (Seidman, 2013).

Summary of Study and Findings

Through those phenomenological interviews and a collaborative discernment process with these eight student participants, the key transition between understanding leadership as an independent position to viewing it as a relational and interdependent process was explored. I sought to better understand the prior beliefs or understandings of leadership that students brought with them to college, the experiences that led them into a state of liminality, the meaning making that allowed students to identify as a relational leader, and the threshold concepts that resulted in leadership being understood as an interdependent, relational process. To that end, this study resulted in four central findings:

- These students came to college primarily believing leadership was the work done by older, experienced, positional leaders. Although they may have utilized others to accomplish their goals, leaders were largely independent authority figures.
- The experiences that frequently served to position students for transformation included observing admired leaders, being tapped for leadership roles they might not otherwise have considered, feeling overwhelmed by their responsibilities, experiencing failure, discovering a desire to help others, and/or finding a passion and developing purpose.

- By observing and engaging with respected leaders on campus, these students discovered that leaders are not perfect and aren't always experts in the areas in which they are engaging in leadership. Instead, they are courageous and vulnerable; they admit what they don't know, learn from others and from their mistakes or failures, and are willing to take risks. With this new understanding of "leader," itself a threshold concept for leadership, these students could identify as a relational leader.
- And finally, in addition to a new and deeper understanding of leader, the concepts of pluralism (the invitation or need for multiple voices) and genuine collaboration (not just cooperation) allowed these students to see leadership as an interdependent relational process of working with others toward a common goal.

Discussion

This study was framed using the Leadership Identity Development model and theory of threshold concepts to explore the key transition from Leader Identified (Stage 3) to Leadership Differentiated (Stage 4) where students come to understand and value leadership as an interdependent process, develop a commitment to the community or group, and identify as a relational leader (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009). The findings serve to support and add to the body of literature related to these theories and identify some possible areas for further exploration.

Leadership Identity Development Model

As I interviewed and got to know the nine students, their stages in the Leadership Identity Development model were relatively clear. Although one was able to talk about leadership as a collaborative process, when he described his engagement in leadership positions, he was the individual responsible for doing most of the work. He delegated when absolutely necessary, but did not include others in the decision making or leadership processes. Engaging in purely independent leader roles or dependent follower roles, he was still functioning within Stage 3, or *Leader Identified* (Komives et al., 2005; Komives, et al., 2006). Because of this, his interviews were not included in the data analysis.

Most of the others were firmly in the fourth stage of the Leadership Identity Development model, Leadership Differentiated. In some contexts they saw leadership as requiring multiple voices or people working together to accomplish their goals and identified as interdependent and relational leaders in that process. At other times they were independent leaders responsible for guiding others; and in some contexts they were the dependent followers (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006).

However, there was one distinctive difference with these study participants and their leadership characteristics. Unlike Leadership Differentiated in the LID model, all of these students had also identified at least one area of passion and were highly engaged in leadership activities related to it, yet LID aligns that characteristic with Generativity. Through deeper engagement in this passion, they observed other leaders and came to understand the concept of leader differently, understood and valued pluralism, and

experienced and appreciated true collaboration as they worked toward significant common goals. These students identified a passion relatively early in their college career and were developing a sense of purpose for their leadership, but in all other ways they were still in Stage 4. They were committed to their group and the issue, but most did not yet view their leadership responsibility to also include intentionally mentoring or empowering those coming behind them. They were working toward some significant goals, but had not thoughtfully considered how their work or the desired change was going to be sustained after they graduated (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006).

The original research teams (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009) theorized that as students move through the developmental process they regularly returned to previous stages and students may be in more than one stage at the same time. However, Wagner's study (2011) of the LID model also found it difficult to clearly distinguish between Leadership Differentiated, Generativity, and Integration as the stages were described in the model. Based on the findings of these studies, the difference around commitment to a personal passion may be an area for further study. More deeply exploring the role of passion or the process of developing purpose within students' leadership development may help us better understand its saliency in their coming to understand leadership as an interdependent relational process.

Threshold Concepts of Relational Leadership

The theory of threshold concepts posits that students in a *preliminal state* approach the subject with a prior history of experiences, identities, and ideologies that have not been consciously evaluated or confronted (Land et al., 2010; Meyer & Land,

2003, 2005). As the participants of this study arrived on campus, their preliminal state related to leadership included interaction with a number of people they considered to be leaders; some were well-respected and appreciated, while others were seen as powerful but not someone they admired or thought of as a role model. Most of these students held leadership positions in high school, but they did not yet consider themselves old enough or experienced enough to be real leaders.

Early in their time at the university, faculty, staff, or older students were encouraging and tapped them for leadership positions they might not otherwise have considered. They often then felt overwhelmed by those responsibilities or experienced some level of failure. That crisis (Jones & Abes, 2013; Erikson, 1968) or disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000) then led them into a state of *liminality* (Land et al., 2010; Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005). As they stood at the threshold, continued to work their way through the experiences, and engaged more deeply in their leadership roles, these study participants also observed other successful leaders, acted on a specific desire to help others, found a personal passion, and began developing a sense of purpose for their leadership. While initially troublesome, letting go of their prior understanding of the term *leader* was also encouraging. They came to see a leader not as an all-knowing or heroic expert, but as a courageous and authentic learner; something they could be right now. Crossing that threshold, they then wrestled with the complex concepts of *pluralism* as more than an appreciation of diversity and *collaboration* as more than teamwork or cooperation. As those prior understandings were discarded, they came to more deeply understand these three threshold concepts, saw leadership as an interdependent relational

process of purposefully and inclusively working with others to achieve their goals, and identified as a leader within that context.

All three of these concepts – leader, pluralism, and collaboration – meet the expectations of threshold concepts for leadership as a discipline. They require letting go of prior beliefs, deeply transform one’s understanding of the subject, are not likely to be reversed, connect to each other in ways previously seen as unrelated, and are relatively unique to the discipline (Land et al., 2010; Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005). Their understanding of each concept evolved in such a way that crossing the threshold of understanding and moving into a *postliminal* state, these students looked at themselves and their relationship with leadership in fundamentally different ways (Land et al., 2010; Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005). They were no longer able to view it only as an independent position of authority and often expressed frustration when other student leaders were not inclusive. They now saw leadership and themselves very differently than when they started at the university.

Informing Our Practice

With an understanding of the experiences and threshold concepts that supported these students’ comprehension of leadership as a relational process and leadership identity development, there are a number of possible implications for our practice as leadership educators. We can make sure there is space for students to observe and engage with us as relational leaders, have opportunities for purposeful leadership education, and learn the language of the discipline.

Engagement with Adults

When these students arrived on campus they engaged with faculty and staff members who were leading as courageous and authentic learners. Those relationships or developmental influencers served as catalysts for reframing and redefining what it meant to be a leader (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009).

Crossing that threshold then allowed students to both see themselves as leaders and explore what it meant to be a relational leader. As faculty, staff, and campus administrators, it is incumbent upon us to examine the leadership we are role modeling. Are we admitting when we do not know the answers to challenges we are facing or when we have made mistakes? Are we engaging with our colleagues and students as partners when trying to find solutions to problems? When students are asked to complete course evaluations or give us feedback on co-curricular programs, are we framing that as an opportunity for us to learn from them? Are we sharing concrete examples of how their voices and perspectives have been used to improve our work? Modeling the type of leader that helps bring students to this critical threshold is a responsibility we should not ignore. That may mean creating intentional leadership education for faculty, staff, and administrators to better understand their role in students' leadership development.

Role modeling was influential, but the intentional interaction and mentorship mattered for these students as well. As they were tapped to engage in new ways as leaders, became overwhelmed or failed along the way, discovered passions, and developed purpose for their leadership, the challenge and support these students received allowed them to move through their struggles or times of liminality to make meaning of

those experiences. Consequently they grew in their efficacy as a leader and in their understanding of leadership. The concept of challenge and support as formative in a student's development (Sanford, 1966) has been at the center of our charge as educators for decades. We must be intentional in our efforts to identify more than the "usual suspects" for leadership opportunities and recognize when students may need a special tap, encouragement to try new things, or be challenged to step out of their comfort zones. And then, supporting them in those moments of crisis or disequilibrium and engaging them in critical reflection to guide their meaning making is critical to their positive development (Evans, et al., 2010; Kegan, 1994; King & Kitchener, 1994; Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009; Sanford, 1966; Torrez & Rocco, 2015).

And, at some point in their collegiate experience, the students in this study all found the need to quit something. They were no longer invested in an activity, organization, or campus leadership position and wanted to spend more time doing other things. For some it was just a natural progression, but others really struggled to walk away. They felt it would be disloyal to their friends, advisors, faculty mentors, or employers in those areas and worried about harming their relationships; however, eventually letting go of these commitments allowed them to engage more deeply in areas or activities that were more exciting for them. They were passionate about that work, intrinsically motivated to do more, and sought experiences that directly impacted their leadership development. As we pay attention to tapping or encouraging students to engage in leadership activities, it is also beneficial for the students when we recognize they may need "permission" to step away and go do other things. This is a form of

encouragement we may not often consider, especially when we also enjoy having those students involved in our programs, but is an important element of our mentorship.

Intentional Leadership Education

While this study explored the leadership development phenomenon of eight students at one college, the experiences they described and the threshold concepts that were meaningful to them are reflected elsewhere in the field of leadership studies. In light of this study and the existing literature, developing scaffolded curriculum that works to facilitate development and highlights these threshold concepts would be beneficial for students.

As leadership educators we can help students redefine what it means to be a leader through our own leadership. We can role model *leaders* as learners who are scholars of the discipline ourselves (Owen, 2015) and share our own journey of understanding and developing as a leader. We must engage others in our leadership efforts, be courageous and vulnerable admitting our own fallibility, and share what we learn from our mistakes (Komives et al., 1998; Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009; Roberts, 2007).

On many campuses there are leadership development opportunities for students that include exploring their own identities, engaging with diverse perspectives, and developing social perspective taking (Dugan et al., 2014; Kezar, 2000; Komives et al., 1998; Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009; Roberts, 2007). But as I identified in this study, intentionally including others in the leadership process is different than just understanding their own identities or being able to understand someone

else's perspective. Taking that learning one step further and applying those new understandings to the context of students' leadership roles and the value of different voices can help advance their awareness of *pluralism* as a critical concept within leadership.

And, we will help them move beyond cooperation to solve complex problems with, and not just alongside, others by creating structures that support shared student leadership roles (i.e. co-presidents for organizations or leadership roles in our programs, group projects in classes, etc.) and teaching the essential skills for genuine *collaboration* (HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009). And, as we engage with students and develop our curriculum, ensuring intentional reflective practices are infused in both co-curricular and curricular environments will guide them through the critical meaning-making process related to their leadership (Kegan, 1994; Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009; King & Kitchener, 1994). These were influential experiences for the students in this study, are reflected in the leadership literature, and may also serve as catalysts into liminality and subsequent transition into the next stage of understanding leadership.

Finally, the LID research teams (Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2009) identified the use of the language associated with relational leadership as an important influencing factor in students' transition from Leader Identified to Leadership Differentiated. This careful attention to language is also integral to the scholarship on threshold concepts. Mastery of the discipline's language serves to support movement across the thresholds to epistemological and ontological

transformation (Land et al., 2010; Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005). From the learning related to this study, intentionally naming and defining the three threshold concepts – leader, pluralism, and collaboration – could serve to support students’ key transition into understanding leadership as an inclusive and ethical process of working with others to create change.

Limitations

This study explored the unique phenomenon only eight students at the same institution experienced as their understanding of leadership and their identity as a leader changed while in college. As was expected and inherent in a study of this nature, the lack of generalizability of the results is admittedly a limitation (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). It cannot be assumed that all students will experience the same meaning-making process. And, although participants were relatively diverse, recruited through a number of faculty and staff nominators from across campus, and engaged in very different experiences at the institution, there are likely inherent similarities for students who were accepted at and chose to attend a private and selective institution known for engaged learning. A similar study at another institution may speak to different themes.

While I did not know them well, I did have some prior interaction with three of the eight participants. After learning about the study from other faculty and staff members, these students elected to volunteer without my direct involvement in the recruitment process, and member checking was a part of the methodology to reduce the

likelihood of researcher bias; however, there is no way to fully avoid the possibility without a diverse and collaborative research team (Creswell, 2013, Maxwell, 2013).

Future Research

Repeating this study at another institution with a different student profile would respond to one of the study's limitations and certainly add to this discussion. While not all participants were financially privileged, all of them did experience some significant levels of privilege along the way. Many attended private or charter schools, had strong support system at home, and were encouraged to engage in leadership or volunteer experiences in high school. Those experiences positioned these participants well for the next stage in their leadership identity development. Exploring the experiences of students at different institutions could prove beneficial.

The students in this study also seemed to be developing their passions and sense of purpose at an earlier stage in the LID model than expected. Although they were largely in Stage 4, Leadership Differentiated, the LID model posited that commitment was aligned with Stage 5, or Generativity. The grounded theory research for the LID model was conducted in 2001-2002 (Komives et al., 2009) when these participants were only 3-5 years old. A consideration for further study may be whether students in the millennial generation might be experiencing these middle stages of leadership identity development differently than the previous generation. Additionally, this study was conducted at a highly-selective institution where the admissions process valued and selected achievement-oriented students. Conducting research more intentionally focused

on the development of passion and purpose within the LID model or with a broader group of students may help clarify these stages.

The threshold concepts identified in this study were limited in scope to the key transition between Leader Identified and Leadership Differentiated. However, there are likely additional transformational concepts related to movement into Generativity and Integration. Although not found to be directly related to understanding leadership as a relational process, the concepts of advocacy and collectivism were beginning to emerge among those student participants transitioning into Generativity. A challenge for this type of study may be the identification of participants. Because most traditionally-aged undergraduate students do not reach these stages before graduation, the researcher may need to expand the target population to include alumni or graduate students.

Conclusion

For me personally, it was truly a privilege getting to know these students. They were gracious with their time and open about their experiences. Some talked about their failures as leaders. Others shared how their socially marginalized identities impacted relationships, their mental well-being, and their identity as a leader. Although there was initially a concern that my position as an administrator at the university would impact their willingness to be honest, all of them shared moments that were difficult and were vulnerable in what they shared. Reflecting on this experience and the threshold they'd crossed in understanding what it meant to be a leader, this openness to sharing where they were fallible and what they learned from those moments should not come as a surprise.

The time we spent together was a pause in their otherwise busy day and many expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on their leadership experiences. I am grateful they found it a worthwhile way to spend their time, but the results of this study have also changed me and my interactions with students. I have a better understanding of the struggles students are juggling in their lives. I was challenged to reflect on my own leadership, my role modeling of relational leadership, and my mentoring relationships with the students I work with on a regular basis. And, I am currently making changes to the curriculum of a course I will be teaching next semester. I started carving out more time to take students to lunch or get a cup of coffee and talk about their leadership journey. I continued to learn from their experiences or ideas, and hope this time together is also giving them an opportunity to pause, reflect, and make meaning of their journey as well.

This study was born out of a curiosity to better understand how students can have similar experiences in college, be engaged at a similar level, and yet have very different leadership learning outcomes. If we continue to engage students in ways that help redefine leader and build a deeper understanding of pluralism and collaboration, we will at least be better positioned to develop students into the leaders our world needs and accomplish our institutional mission.

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APPENDIX A

EMAIL TO FACULTY OR STAFF NOMINATORS

Dear (*insert faculty/staff name*),

As you may know, I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am conducting a phenomenological study of students designed to give voice to their unique lived experiences around leadership, reflections on the specific concepts they found transformational in their understanding of leadership, and identification as a leader.

I will need a diverse group of at least 6-8 **student participants** who might identify as a relational leader – someone **who views leadership as “a relational process of people together attempting to accomplish change or make a difference to benefit the common good” rather than a position of authority.** They do not need to have had formal leadership roles while in college, but should be in at least their sophomore year in college and see their non-positional work with others as a form of leadership. They may have identified personal passions around in an issue, serve as a mentor, or commit to the leadership development of others to ensure continued group success.

Based on your role here at [university] and opportunity to observe students demonstrating this more complex understanding of leadership, **I’m hoping you can help identify a few students who might be good for my study.** Please **send (or print and give) the attached study information sheet** to these potential participants. It explains the study and asks anyone interested to contact me.

Thank you for taking the time to read this! Please let me know if you have any questions or would like additional information on this study.

Respectfully,

Jodean Schmiederer

Doctoral Candidate, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

[professional title, university]

[email address]

[office phone]

[cell phone]

APPENDIX B

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

University of North Carolina at Greensboro STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title:

Threshold Concepts in Relational Leadership and Leadership Identity Development

Principal Investigator:

Jodean Schmiederer, Doctoral Student, Teacher Education and Higher Education,
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Contact Phone Number: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Email: jkschmie@uncg.edu

Faculty Advisor:

Colleen Fairbanks, Faculty Advisor, Teacher Education and Higher Education,
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Contact Phone Number: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Email: cmfairba@uncg.edu

What is this all about?

I am asking you to consider participating in a research study because a staff or faculty member has observed you engaging in collaborative leadership activities and working toward some shared goal for positive change. I'm hoping to talk with a diverse group of students to learn more about the specific concepts that college students identify as transformational in their understanding of leadership and their identification as a leader.

Will this negatively affect me?

No, other than the time you spend on this project there are no known or foreseeable risks involved with this study.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study. Indirectly, one benefit may be connected to the reflections on your leadership experiences and your ability to more clearly articulate your leadership identity on future job, graduate school or fellowship applications.

Will I get paid for participating?

Payment for participation will be \$5 for each of the two interviews, then an additional \$10 for reviewing your participant profile and responding to the follow-up questions either in writing or in a final interview. Participants will be paid for any portion of the study they complete and all payments will be made at the conclusion of the study.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

If you volunteer for this study, you will be asked to participate in two 60- to 90-minute interviews, review a profile I create from our interviews, and either respond via e-mail to a few follow-up questions or complete a third interview. Interview questions will focus on your leadership experiences, what you've learned about leadership, and what you've learned about yourself as a leader through those experiences. If at any point you feel uncomfortable and want to withdraw from the study, that request will be granted.

Is there any audio/video recording?

These interviews will be audio recorded. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although I will try to limit access to the recording.

What about my confidentiality?

We will do everything possible to make sure that your information is kept confidential. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Multiple steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality. First, all emails, questionnaire, and audio recordings (saved on an external drive) will be retained in a locked file cabinet. These will be shredded or deleted three years after the completion of the study. All participants will be able to select a pseudonym to be used with all of their records. Organization names, leadership roles, or other involvement details may also be disguised.

Our transcribed interviews and any follow-up information will be entered into a computer software program on a password-protected computer using a pseudonym (of your choice) rather than your name or any identifying information. I am the only person who will have access to the identification code (your real name and pseudonym) to be able to link your responses to your identity. Colleagues may review drafts of the study findings, but only my faculty members will have access to the data (also attributed only to the pseudonym). Neither your name nor any other personal identifying information will be included in the dissertation, additional papers, or presentations. Quotes attributed to your pseudonym may be used.

What if I do not want to be in this research study?

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. It is up to you to decide to participate in this research project or not. If you agree to participate, at any time in this project you may stop participating, for any reason, without penalty.

What if I have questions?

You can ask me, Jodean Schmiederer (email; cell phone) or Dr. Colleen Fairbanks (email; office phone) anything about the study. If you have any concerns about how you are being treated in this study, call the Office of Research Integrity Director at 1.855.251.2351.

What do I do if I'm interested in participating?

Send me, Jodean Schmiederer (email), an email with your **name, phone number, major(s)/minor(s), year in school, gender, and race/ethnicity**. My goal is to identify a diverse group of participants and this will be very helpful.

APPENDIX C

EMAIL TO VOLUNTEER PARTICIPANTS

Dear (*insert participant's name*),

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in my study. As a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and staff member at [university], I am excited to be conducting a research study designed to listen to students' unique lived experiences around leadership, their reflections around the specific concepts they found transformational in their understanding of leadership, and their identification as a leader.

As the information sheet explained, students will be asked to participate in two 60- to 90-minute interviews, review a profile I create from our interviews, and either respond via e-mail to a few follow-up questions or complete a third interview. Additional email correspondence may be included to clarify or elaborate on the information gathered during the interviews.

Participants will receive nominal compensation for your time. You will receive \$5 for each of the two interviews, then an additional \$10 for reviewing your participant profile and responding to the follow-up questions either in writing or in a final interview. Participants will be paid for any portion of the study they complete, and all payments will be made at the conclusion of the study.

If you are still willing to participate, please reply to this email and let me know if you could meet at any of these times listed below:

- *Date, time*

I've attached the information sheet you hopefully received from a faculty or staff member here at [university]. If you have any additional questions, please don't hesitate to respond to this email or call me directly on my cell phone at [number].

Thank you for your taking the time to read this invitation!

Respectfully,
Jodean Schmiederer
Doctoral Candidate, University of North Carolina at Greensboro
[title, university]

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Preparation:

- Select a casual space that supports more authentic conversation.
- Arrive early to prepare the room and be ready to greet the participant.
- Bring snacks and drinks.
- Make sure the room is arranged in a way conducive to the interview and recordings.

At the beginning of the **FIRST meeting**, explain:

About me:

- Long-term interest in working with students and understanding their identity development and meaning making (cognitive development).
- Worked with leadership education, diversity education, civic engagement, and ethical decision making, etc.
- At [university] for 9 years and still growing in my own understanding of what it means to be a leader – a lifelong journey.
- Now more specifically looking at students' journey or understanding of leadership.

Study Information:

- Review the document
- Answer any questions
- Clearly reiterate their option of no longer continuing with the process now or at any point during the study
- If they agree to participate, ask them to complete the questionnaire.

Role of students in interview process:

- 2 interviews, 60-90 minutes each
- Possible email follow-up for clarification or deeper exploration of something from the interview.
- Identify a pseudonym for publication (on the questionnaire) if desired.
- Review participant profile (developed after first two interviews) and provide clarifying details or additional information they feel is relevant.
- Respond to a few follow-up questions via email or during a third briefer interview.

Confidentiality:

- Questionnaire forms will be stored separately from the data collected.
- All data will be recorded and stored only using codes/pseudonyms.
- Specific quotes will be included in the paper(s) produced, but your pseudonym will be used instead of your name.
- Committee members may read the transcripts (in which only pseudonyms are used) for validity or quality control testing.

Review the purpose of the interviews (to be reviewed each time):

- First interview: to learn about you, your understanding of leadership before coming to college, your experiences here in relation to leadership, and the key concepts you struggled with as your understanding may have changed.
- Second interview: to discuss your thoughts/reflections (meaning making) related to your identity as a leader and your current understanding of leadership.
- Follow up questions or third interview: clarifying questions around their process of letting go of old definition/understanding of leadership and the adoption of their new understanding.

AFTER the interview (to be reviewed each time):

- THANK YOU – greatly appreciate your participation!
- (At conclusion of first interview...) Set up next interview appointment: (date) _____ at _____ am/pm; a reminder email will be sent.
- (At conclusion of second interview...) Set up possible next interview appointment: (date) _____ at _____ am/pm; a reminder email will be sent, or you can cancel the appointment and respond via email.
- If you think of anything else on this topic that you think I may be interested in learning more about, you can send an email and I will include it in my data.
- There may be subsequent email(s) if there is a need to clarify information or ask additional questions to better understand your experience.
- Reminder of confidentiality on my part; you are free to talk with others about your experience.
- (If necessary...) If you know other students I should interview, share informational flier on the study with them; get new students' permission before sharing their names with me.
- Do you have any questions? You can ask me or if you have concerns you can contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNC-G (ori@uncg.edu). (Contact information is on your copy of the informed consent.)

Research Questions

- What prior beliefs or understandings of leadership did students bring with them to college?

- What were the encounters, experiences and/or concepts led them into a state of liminality?
- What new meaning did the students make that moved them (out of liminality and) across a threshold toward understanding leadership as a process?
- What specific threshold concepts shifted the students' ontological understanding and self-identification as a relational leader?

APPENDIX E

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Threshold Concepts in Relational Leadership and Leadership Identity Development

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in my study! Because my goal is to have a diverse group of students and I may not know everyone or all that you are involved in, it would be helpful if you could answer a few quick questions.

1. Your name: _____
2. Preferred email address: _____
3. Campus Box: _____
4. Cell number: _____
5. Preferred pseudonym optional): _____
6. Age: _____

7. Gender
 - Female
 - Male
 - Transgender
 - Prefer not to answer

8. Race (Check all that apply.)
 - American Indian
 - Asian/Asian American
 - Black or African-American
 - Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 - Latino/Hispanic
 - Multi-racial
 - White
 - Unknown
 - Prefer not to answer
 - Other:

9. Class Year
 - Sophomore
 - Junior
 - Senior
 - Other:

10. Major(s)/Minor(s): _____
11. Organizations or campus/community involvement:
12. Where you consider your leadership experiences to be:
13. Things you are personally passionate about or where you might find purpose/meaning:

THANK YOU! Your willingness to participate in my study is invaluable!

APPENDIX F
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for Interview #1

Preliminal Understanding

- Tell me about you and your family.
 - Where did you grow up?
 - Who are your close family members? (however they define “close”)
- What were you involved in as a child? (*exploration*)
- Did any of those things continue while you were in high school? Did you explore new things?
- Did you hold any leadership positions before coming to [university]?
- Who would you have identified as leadership role models before coming to college? Why? What did you learn from them?
- How would you have defined “leader” and “leadership” before you came to [university]?

Experiences in College and New Concepts/Understandings

- Did any of your interests or passions continue when you came to [university]?
- What have your leadership roles been here at [university]?
- Where else have you engaged in leadership? (repeat “where else?” until they don’t identify any additional ways)
- How has your definition or understanding of leadership changed as a result of your experiences while here?
- What was happening when that shift started to happen?
 - What were you struggling with?
 - What did you learn?
 - What did you do or think about differently after that?
 - How did those experiences influence your thoughts on leadership?

Questions for Interview #2

Exploration of the Shift

- During our first conversation we talked about you, your experiences related to leadership before coming to college, and your experiences here. After our meeting, did you think of anything else that you think I might want to hear about?

- During that last interview you indicated that as your understanding of leadership was shifting, you were struggling with (insert the student's responses)...
 - Can you tell me more about that process?
 - What do you better understand now as a result of that experience or meaning making?
- What other new ideas have changed how you think about leadership?
 - (repeat secondary or follow up questions)
- Do you see your role as a leader differently now?
 - How has that shift affected you as a person?
 - How has it affected your identity as a leader?
- What do you think your responsibilities are as a leader?
- What are you still struggling with now related to your understanding of leadership and your role or responsibilities?
- What are your next goals related to your current (leadership) activities?
- Is there anything else you want to share with me?

Follow up Questions (in writing or as Interview #3)

Reflection on Meaning and the Transformational Process

These or additional follow up questions are tied to answers to previous questions but are directed at more deeply exploring the meaning made from key concepts to uncover the threshold concepts.

- Attached is the profile I've drafted from our interviews. Is there anything you think I've missed or have misinterpreted? Is there anything you'd like to clarify?
- Is there anything you'd like to add?
- Thinking back on ___X___ (the concept or experience identified in interview #2), what was the deeper challenging or troubling part of that for you?
- Did your understanding of ___X___ (potential threshold concept identified by researcher) impact your current understanding of leadership? If so, how?
- If you had to identify WHAT it is you now understand differently that means you cannot see leadership only as a position of authority, what would that (or they) be?
 - How do you think of yourself as a leader differently now?
 - Is there anything else you want to share with me?
- If when we started the interviews you indicated that you did not feel the need to use a pseudonym, but have changed your mind, please send me the name you'd like me to use instead.