2014

Exploring the Leadership Identity Development of Students of Color at a Selective Liberal Arts College

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Exploring the leadership identity development of students of color at a selective liberal arts college

by

Cameron C. Beatty

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:
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Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2014
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“Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave.”

Maya Angelou, Still I Rise

A quote by Maya Angelou from her “Still I Rise” poem really put into perspective my own responsibility for my education. When considering the shoulders and the backs that I stand, I am sincerely humbled, but understand this comes with great responsibility. So I say thank you to the ancestors. Thank you to my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ because “I never would have made it!” I give all honor and glory to God for allowing me to take this journey and fulfill my goal. Reflecting back on this journey and my identities I recognize that without the love and support of family and friends this would not be possible.

Thank you to my mother, Carmen Taylor, for always supporting me and doing her best for me. I would not be the man I am today without my loving Grandmother, Rita Beatty, who has always been the true matriarch of the family and taught me the true meaning of prayer. I appreciate my Aunt, Carla Gerton, serving like a second mom to me and always asking about the work I’m doing in higher education. To my Granny, Ernestine Taylor, thank you for loving me and supporting me. To my Godfather, Fr. Chester Smith, thank you for teaching me to be a man of faith and teaching be the importance of moving from boyhood to manhood. To my four sisters who look up their big brother, Markeshia Taylor, Mariah Taylor, Cherese Taylor, Eboni Tyner. Thank you to my cousin Ashlee Ballinger for always being so supportive. Thank you to my fathers,
E.B. Tyner and Marlon Taylor for your love and support. To the Beatty, Taylor, and Tyner families for being supportive and my number one cheerleaders. To my church family, St. Rita Catholic Church in Indianapolis, thank you for praying for me.

To Cameron J. Harris I say thank you from the bottom of my heart. In many ways you were my editor, counselor, and confidant. Your love and support has helped me mature into the man I am today. To Ellis Dumas and the Dumas family, thank you for letting me be a part of the family and always supporting me. To my closest friends, thank you for checking on me and our hour long phone calls to reflect on life: Leila Price, LaDonna Wiggins, LeAndra Ross, Lisa Saunders, Denise Morrow, Keon Gilbert, Ashley “Jerzee” McLean, Nadrea Njoku, and Vivian Nayiga.

To my dissertation committee: Katherine Bruna, Ann Gansemer-Topf, Frankie Laanan, and Patricia Leigh, thank you for being willing to serve on my committee and guiding me to be a critical scholar who contributes to the study of higher education. To my major professor, Natasha Croom, thank you for being willing to guide me through this journey and always challenging me to be a researcher who did not just accept the status quo. You have been there to support through this process, even in the early stages of your faculty career, and I appreciate you for this. Additionally, I give thanks to the School of Education faculty, both past and present, who were instrumental in my scholarly and personal development: Ryan Gildersleeve, Nana Osei-Kofi, Dan Robinson, Isaac Gottesman, Bob Reason, Linda Hagedorn, and Barb Licklider. Thank you to the School of Education administrative staff because this doctoral degree is not a reality without your hard work and support to me as a doctoral student: Holly Ryan, Marjorie Smith, Karen Couves, Dennelle Hogan, Phyllis Kendall, Donna Le, and Judy Weiland. I
give special thanks to all of the educators who have been so impactful on my life these past 30 years. Thank you to all of my undergraduate and graduate professors at Indiana University because I truly believe I learned something from all of you.

To the ten participants in this study, I am forever grateful for your courage and the privilege you allowed me by sharing a small piece of your lives and your stories. It was a pleasure to meet you and I look forward to following journeys through life. You will impact the world in ways that you have not even imagined yet.

To my support system that included my dear fraternity brothers of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. I say thank you. To my home chapter, Gamma Eta at Indiana University, that sparked my interest in pursuing a career in Higher Education Student Affairs I could not have done this with out your encouragement. Special thank you to the brothers that called me and I got to see through this journey: Desmond Jones, D’Juan Wilcher, Derrell Powers, Veldez Joshua, James Bigsbee, Terrence Dennie, Antoine Jones, and Brandon Johnson. The brothers of the Zeta Kappa Lambda Chapter of Des Moines Iowa, thank you for your hospitality and your brotherhood. Special thank you to: Robert Braswell, Jeremy Brown, Theotto Lillard, Jovan Johnson, Kenyatta Shamburger, and Venson Currington.

To my BC: Aja Holmes, Glennda Bivens, and Chad Kee, thank you for all of the support. The laughs and memories we have made will last us a lifetime. Additionally, thank you to those in my honorary co-hort who I took this journey with (we were just at different stages): Clint Stephens, Lissa Stapleton, Kathleen Gillon, Joyce Lui, Rio Reddick, Mike Davis, Susana Hernandez, and Stephanie Bondi. To those that I will see
complete this journey in the very near future remember to keep you head up. If this journey were easy then everyone would be doing it. Thank you for your love: Malika Butler, Criss Salinas, Meneka Johnson, Simone Soso, Julia Anderson-Lee, Alissa Stoeher, Lorraine Acker, and Jermaine Johnson.

Finally, thank you to all of my students that I have had the privilege of engaging with in the classroom. I have learned as much from you as I believe you have learned from me. To the students that I have had the privilege of advising at both Indiana University and Iowa State University, thank you for letting me into your lives and allowing me to be a resource to you. I am forever grateful for each of you coming into my life.
ABSTRACT

Students of color negotiate their own sense of what it means to be a person of color in the face of racial/ethnic stereotypes. This study aims to explore students of color’s identity as student leaders and further understand what role race plays in these students’ perceptions of race and leadership development. There has been a limited research on students of color, specifically regarding the experiences of these students who attend highly selective liberal arts colleges. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and understand how students of color who are considered relational leaders navigate the highly selective liberal arts college as student leaders, as well as how they construct their identity as leaders. Using critical race theory as the guiding framework for this study, five themes emerged: (a) individual social experiences, (b) early transition challenges and responding by involvement, (c) understanding leadership development and involvement as a process, (d) resisting and responding to racism and microaggressions, and (e) defining leadership for self. Implications for highly selective liberal arts colleges and other four-year institutions, as well as future research recommendations and implications for practice are discussed.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership scholars often understand leadership development as an aspect of personal development, connecting increases in cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal complexity with improved ability to collaborate and lead with others (Avolio & Gibbons, 1989; Daloz Parks, 2005; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005; McCauley, Drath, Palus, O’Connor, & Baker, 2006; Wagner, 2011). More recently, scholars have described leadership as an aspect of one’s identity, rather than as a set of behaviors, skills, and positions that one holds (Chávez & Sanlo, 2012; Day & Harrison, 2007; Hogg, 2001; Hall, 2004; Lord & Brown, 2004; Lord & Hall, 2005; Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004; Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2005). Theories of leadership as an identity have allowed leadership scholars to ask questions about the process of developing a leadership identity. In 2005, a grounded theory study (Komives et al., 2005) of student leaders resulted in a stage-based model of leadership identity development (LID). Leadership educators have found the LID model useful as a framework for educational programming, courses, and development of learning outcomes and assessment (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006). The stage-based model, however, does not explicitly explore students’ multiple social identities in relation to their leadership identity development.

When considering leadership and leadership identity development in students’ holistic development, student affairs professionals must reflect on social identities and consider them in the developmental process. Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) studied
students’ involvement in minority (sic, [race-centered]) student organizations at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). They found that student leaders of color with high levels of involvement and commitment to their leadership roles have an in-depth understanding of how their racialized experiences affect their leadership identities.

Arminio, Carter, Jones, Kruger, Lucas, Washington, Young, and Scott (2000) concluded that “the organization a student leader of color decides to join and the position and role he or she decides to fill are influenced by recognition of and identification with his or her racial group” (p. 506). Arminio et al. (2000) went on to argue that being involved in predominantly White student organizations may actually force some students of color to disconnect from their perceived racial identity. But, how do these students’ racialized experiences or, this disconnect from their perceived racial identity, influence their sense of leadership identity and their leadership identity development?

**Background and Context for Study**

There is currently one student development model that situates leadership as an identity. The grounded theory study that resulted in the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model was conducted to understand leadership development as an intersection of student development and leadership (Komives et al., 2005). The study was conducted at one large research-intensive university in the mid-Atlantic. This study serves as the foundation and the warrant for this dissertation. Thirteen students identified through purposeful sampling procedures as practicing a relational approach to leadership participated. Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (1998) defined relational leadership as “a process of people together attempting to accomplish change or make a difference to benefit the common good” (p. 21). Eight of the participants were White, one was Asian.
American, three were African American, and one student was an African who had immigrated to the United States as a child. Eight of the participants were men, and five were women. There were two sophomores, nine fourth- or fifth-year seniors, and two recent graduates. Two participants identified themselves as gay men; others identified themselves as heterosexual or did not identify their sexual orientation (Komives et al., 2005, p. 594).

Participants were part of three, 1–2 hour, individual interviews about their life histories regarding how they came to see themselves as leaders. Researchers explored the experiences deeply and reflected on the meaning of the experiences (Komives et al., 2005). Analysis of these interviews resulted in leadership identity as the primary issue at hand, with six stages in the development (Komives et al., 2006). Briefly, the stages that developed from the model are as follows (Komives et al., 2005):

1. Awareness: becoming aware that there are leaders “out there” who are external to oneself, such as the president of the United States, a sports coach, one’s mother, or a teacher;
2. Exploration/Engagement: 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);
3. Leader Identified: viewing leadership as the actions of a group’s positional leader; an awareness of the hierarchical nature of relationships in groups;
4. Leadership Differentiated: viewing leadership also as non-positional and as a shared group process;
5 Generativity: a commitment to developing leadership in others and having a passion for issues or group objectives that one wants to influence; and

6 Integration/Synthesis: acknowledging the personal capacity for leadership in diverse contexts and claiming the identity of a leader without having to hold a positional role.

Komives et al.’s study did not specifically explore how race influenced the student’s identity as leaders. When asked in the study about their personal identities, students of color were noted as identifying race as most salient. Komives and her colleagues’ (2005) study, however, did not explain the dissonance that can take place in the leadership development process, especially for students of color who are involved in, or who are leaders of, student organizations at PWIs.

This dissertation explored how students of color develop a leadership identity, and applied a critical race (CRT) theoretical framework to explore their experiences. This study will use CRT, as an analytical framework to explore how students of color perceive themselves as leaders in a predominately White higher education environment. Higher education’s social environments, such as student organizations, represent unique opportunities for students to learn how to work together with others who are different from them, as well as to differentiate how to think and how to behave in what will inevitably be, the racially and ethnically diverse professional environments and world around them (Cabrera, Nora, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Hagedorn, 1999; Eimers & Pike, 1997; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Museus, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
Statement of the Problem

Leadership identity development is rooted in student development. McEwen (2003) noted that theory development is often a result of paradigm shifts. The generation and further development of theory is a constantly evolving process that follows an identifiable cycle: “a new theory leads to research and new forms of practice which in turn inform the existing theory, which is then modified or changed” (p. 167). Multiple validation studies of the LID model should therefore be the next step at this time. Furthermore, what is needed is a thorough exploration of the role of race in relation to leadership development.

Despite the lack of evidence confirming the grounded theory study, leadership educators and scholars have embraced the LID model. Applications of the LID model in leadership programs have been presented at the College Student Educators International (ACPA) national conference (Komives et al., 2009) and the Leadership Educator’s Institute (Komives et al., 2008). Wagner’s dissertation (2011) pointed out that the model is described in several leadership publications, including two different chapters of Connecting Adult Development, Identity, and Expertise (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009); Deeper Learning in Leadership (Roberts, 2007), Handbook for Student Leadership Programs (Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, & Wagner, 2006), and Concepts and Connections (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2004; Ritch, 2007); and a publication for leadership educators by the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs. Also available is an article outlining the role of leadership instructors at each LID stage (Roper, 2009). The International Leadership Association used the model as the basis upon which to develop guidelines for leadership-teaching and leadership-learning
(Ritch, 2009), guidelines that address student needs and priorities at different levels of leadership identity development, and appropriate learning outcomes and teaching methods at each stage in the model. The LID model has already been used to inform three studies (Gonda, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2006; Shepherd, 2009). To date, only one study (a dissertation) has been designed to replicate, or otherwise test, the LID findings (Wagner, 2011). But none of these studies have explicitly discussed race and the role that it plays in leadership identity development for students of color on college campuses.

Such widespread use of the LID model in practice and program design is problematic, given that the model itself has not been tested for validation or generalizability. This dissertation study is nuanced in some ways by providing either supporting evidence for the LID model, allowing practitioners to be guided by it with confidence, or disconfirming evidence, informing practitioners that altering program design is premature and that more information about leadership identity development is needed for understanding how the model is experienced by students of color, and by other marginalized student populations that are a growing demographic on college campuses.

The percentage of American college students who are Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Black has been increasing (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2012). From 1976 to 2010, Hispanic students rose from 3% to 13%, the share of Asian/Pacific Islander students rose from 2% to 6%, and Black students rose from 9% to 14 % (NCES, 2012). Over the same period, the share of White students fell from 83% to 61% (NCES, 2012). With the rise of students of color attending American institutions of higher education, student affairs professionals must consider how student affairs
programming—particularly leadership development programs and opportunities—affect students of color at PWIs (e.g. in recruitment, retention, engagement, involvement, and academic achievement).

**Purpose of this Study**

Leadership development has been categorized as a critical college outcome (Komives & Associates, 2011), though the leadership literature has been criticized for its lack of attention to diverse populations (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). The purpose of this dissertation is to better understand the leadership identity development process for students of color. In addition, this study explored an intersectional approach to understanding how students of color experience race and develop leadership identities over time, specifically at a PWI. This study uncovered how students of color who are in student organization leadership roles and considered relational leaders make sense of their race and understand themselves as leaders. For the purpose of this study, relational leaders emphasized the primary importance of relationships among people in the approach to leadership (Wagner, 2001). This means leadership is understood to be the processes among people who work together – not the behaviors of individuals in positions of authority. The development of leadership then does not revolve around what the positional leader does, but on what everyone in the student organization does with each other. The LID model will be critiqued in order to explore how students are situated in the stages of the LID model (Komives et al., 2005). A critical race theory (CRT) framework will be used to explore students of color’s experiences and identity development at predominately White institutions.
The ideologies of race-neutrality or colorblindness are an attempt to ignore and maintain the roles that race plays in preserving disparities for privileged and powerful populations (Gotanda, 2000; Harper & Patton, 2007). Many students of color bring their experiences of exclusion, oppression, and unequal educational and social opportunity to PWIs (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000). Students of color, often times, must negotiate their own sense of what it means to be a person of color in the face of racial/ethnic stereotypes (Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Ospina & Su, 2009). This study aims to explore students of color’s perceptions of themselves as student leaders and further understand what role race-neutrality (both students’ and institutional colorblindness) approaches to leadership plays in those students’ perceptions of race and leadership development.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this research:

1. How do students of color perceive themselves as leaders at a highly selective liberal arts college in the Midwest?
2. How do students of color make sense of their race in relation to their experiences as leaders at a highly selective liberal arts college in the Midwest?
3. How have racialized experiences shaped students of color’s leadership identity?

Epistemological, Theoretical, & Methodological Framework

The epistemological, theoretical, and methodological framework provides a foundational understanding for this study. Creswell (2009) defined qualitative research as
“a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). The epistemological perspective of social constructionism provides an understanding of the ways in which both the researcher and participants construct knowledge and come to know that knowledge (Creswell, 2009). The theoretical perspective of critical race theory provides a lens with which to view and analyze the context of leadership development for students of color at PWIs. A critical race theory case study methodology will influence, and to some extent determine, the way in which data is defined, collected, and analyzed.

**Epistemological framework**

Social Constructionism. Epistemology conveys philosophical assumptions about what constitutes knowledge (Jones, Torres &, Arminio, 2013). Individually formed truth is the root of constructivist epistemology (Crotty, 1998). While student leaders construct knowledge based on their experiences individually, college campuses are social spaces in which meaning and knowledge is often co-constructed, shared, and/or communicated. Given the historical context of students of colors’ experiences in American higher education, the way in which knowledge is constructed, shared, and transmitted may be unique based on their social locations and where students are in their own inter/intrapersonal development.

**Theoretical perspective**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education recognizes that racism is established and systemic in American society, and particularly throughout education (P-20) (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Critical race theory as a
theoretical framework challenges dominant beliefs and understandings of liberalism, meritocracy, colorblindness, objectivity, equal opportunity, and race neutrality in order to unmask the historic and contemporary ingrained systems of power, privilege, oppression, and self-interest of dominant groups (Crenshaw, 1997; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper & Patton, 2007; Solórzano, 1997). In addition, “critical race theorists in education assert that experiential knowledge and the voices of people of color are critical and central to uncovering, addressing, and eliminating racial oppression and subordination” (Delgado-Bernal, 2002, as cited in Croom, 2011, p. 6). In this dissertation in particular, CRT provides a particular lens with which to view the apparently objective, race-neutral, or colorblind ideologies, practices, and policies of leadership programs and leadership development on college campuses through the lived experiences of students of color who serve and are recognized as relational leaders on these campuses.

Komives et al. (2004) asserted, “Understanding the process of LID is central to teaching leadership and facilitating the learning of leadership” (p. 1). The model, developed from a grounded theory study of undergraduate student leaders, included six stages of leadership identity, defined earlier as a personal and social identity incorporating “an awareness that [one] can make a difference and can work effectively with others to accomplish change” (Komives et al., 2004, p. 1). As an individual moves through the stages, he or she comes to an increasingly complex, deeper understanding of leadership, community, and self in relation to others. For the purpose of the study the exploration of the deeper understanding of self in relation to one’s race will be the focus, why also exploring other social identities that the student would like to discuss. The LID
model paired with CRT as a theoretical framework is useful for exploring the experiences of student leaders of color.

**Methodology**

A detailed explanation of the methodology will be included in chapter three and this section will serve as an introduction to that chapter. The methodological approach for this dissertation employed a critical race and case study methodology. Critical race theory methodology positions research as an epistemological process that generates knowledge about the experiences of populations that have been marginalized by past research (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Poon, 2010). Additionally, CRT methodology also positions research to examine and understand the experiences of people of color with racism and other forms of oppression as well as their responses to these experiences. These experiences and responses occur on college campuses, and must be understood within the larger social context of leadership identity development at PWIs if leadership identity development models are going to be used to construct curriculum and engage students outside of the classroom. In addition, research conducted using CRT methodology should be approached through an interdisciplinary lens, and it must attempt to counter dominant narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Poon, 2010). This study will do this through a counter-narrative method.

**Methods**

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) defined counternarratives and counterstorytelling “as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (p. 32). The counterstory method is also a tool for “exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32). Counterstories can dismantle
complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and advance the struggle for racial reform. Ospina and Foley (2009) highlighted that research on leadership and leadership development espouses Whiteness as a normative value in the leadership process. Although the discipline of leadership has evolved over the past 100 years, until the 1980s the majority of research on leadership was conducted on leaders in political, military and corporate settings, which at the highest levels were by dominated White men (Astin & Leland, 1991; Eagly & Carli, 2004; Hoyt, 2007; Klenke, 1996). These privileged few defined the context for how conventional leadership was defined and practiced. Ospina and Foley (2009) cited two reasons that people of color, and additionally women, were excluded from these studies; the dominance of White male researchers uninterested in the topic of race (and gender) and leadership, and an assumption that colorblindness existed in our society. This dissertation highlighted students of colors’ counterstories and dismantled the dominant narrative centered-around college student leadership identity development.

Participants. Potential participants were identified through criterion and purposeful sampling; this ensured information-rich cases and holds the greatest potential for generating insight about the phenomenon of interest (Jones et al., 2013). Patton (2002) defined information-rich cases as “those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling” (p.46). The sampling strategy was intended to return the researcher back to the purpose of the study and the research questions.

For the purpose of this dissertation the selection criteria included participants who were identified as having an understanding of themselves as relational leaders. Like the
Komives et al. (2005) study, I contacted student affairs professionals that have had the opportunity to observe students interacting in group settings. Student affairs professionals then were invited to nominate students who they saw as exemplars of relational leadership. The relational leadership model (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998) defines leadership as “a relational process of people together attempting to accomplish change or make a difference to benefit the common good” (p. 21). Student affairs professionals and faculty who recognized students promoting change and positive social activism for the good of Leadership College were invited to nominate these students to participate in this study.

Participants also had to self-identify as a person of color. According to Rendón, Garcia and Person (2004), a “student of color” is a socially constructed designation that is often interchanged with “minority” and is used to describe under-represented groups of students, such as: African Americans, Hispanics, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and American Indian/Alaska Natives. Being a member of one of these special populations poses many challenges at predominantly White colleges and universities. Some of the challenges faced by students of color include but are not limited to: isolation, judgment, tokenism, and culture shock; each of which have an added impact on the leadership experiences under-represented students face when combined with the everyday complexity of the college experience (Rendón et al., 2004).

In addition, students currently enrolled full-time and at least sophomore status (or a second-year student). By participants being second-year students, they have an awareness of the campus culture and their self and personal development. Only undergraduate students who meet these criteria will be eligible to participate in the study.
These criteria will be used to increase the likelihood that each participant has an enhanced understanding of their perceived experience at the highly selective liberal arts college on their development of a leadership identity. Demographic information about each participant will be gathered during the first and second interviews (with a total of three interviews) and self-recorded on a demographic sheet (See Appendix A). To recruit the participants, emails will be sent (by the researcher) to invite nominations from student affairs administrators, faculty, and staff who advise student organizations.

**Site.** Despite a diverse body of literature on student leadership development, no recent studies have focused specifically on students of color at small, private, selective liberal arts colleges. This lack of research is not surprising; studies on students of color at highly selective liberal arts colleges are rare given students high persistence and graduation rates. Highly selective liberal arts colleges enroll approximately 9% of all college-going students, (College Board, 2011) and admit students with high academic ability (Pascarella et al., 2006). Finally, “highly selective” liberal arts colleges, like other “highly selective” institutions, typically have the highest retention and graduation rates in the country for students of color, prompting little concern on the part of administrators at these institutions when it comes to exploring the experiences of students of color.

**Delimitations.** This study is delimited to students of color who attend a liberal arts college in the Midwest and are perceived to be relational leaders. Through the interview process the participants’ relational leadership, and thus their leadership identity was explored. This study addressed student leaders who self-identify as persons of color, and explored how they perceived themselves as leaders. Even though this study is limited to a small liberal arts college in the Midwest, the findings are still useful, and could be
applied, in other settings, leadership development programs, and leadership identity development practices. This study is bounded by time, the fall 2013- spring 2014 academic year, and only allow participants who are identified as relational leaders at a liberal arts college in the Midwest.

**Significance of Study**

The LID model is a representative example of a new model of leadership development that focuses on developing increasingly complex ways of thinking, knowing the self, and interacting with others. It describes leadership development not as adding to a long list of skills but as adapting qualitatively different ways of thinking, being, and doing (Wagner, 2011). As student development themes and issues begin to permeate leadership development more research is needed to show how race and leadership development overlap and deviate. Although some research studies have linked leadership effectiveness and outcomes to adult development (McCaulley et al., 2006), LID was the first published empirical stage-based model within this new paradigm that specifically examined the leadership development of students. The researchers of the LID model do highlight that “more participants of color would have allowed for more saturation in diverse experiences. Although diverse perspectives were incorporated, a more diverse research team might have analyzed the data differently” (Komives et al., 2005, p. 610). This dissertation fills a gap in the research on student leadership development and race, which is not only limited, but lacking in critical analysis. The leadership literature often situates Whiteness as normative and a central profile for leadership (Ospina & Foley, 2009).
The LID model has the potential to provide a framework to inform leadership development workshops and courses and thereby meet the needs of students in different stages of leadership identity development. It can provide criteria to help decide which leadership development program offerings would most benefit student learning. The model becomes problematic when one attempts to understand how students’ understanding of their social identities intersects with student learning. It would make the model more applicable across institution types—and support its widespread use—to further explore, in the findings, what role race, and other social identities, plays in leadership identity development. Critical race theory as a framework for exploring the role of race in identity development, and specifically in leadership identity development, will start to address these questions. If leadership development is a critical outcome of higher education, it is crucial to understand how to foster this development in students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, in order to best serve an increasingly diverse world. This study will use the voices and experiences of students of color to better understand how they come to understand themselves as leaders at a highly selective liberal arts college.

**Background of Researcher and Leadership Development**

Understanding researcher positionality is key in qualitative work (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Specifically, it is crucial to understanding and “explaining...possible biases and how [the researcher] will deal” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 108) with them. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2013) described positionality as “the relationship between the researcher and [their] participants and the researcher and [their] topic” (p. 31). Therefore, the researcher’s positionality is presented below as my relationship to the topic.
As an aspiring faculty member whose research agenda will be the leadership development of college students, I as the researcher entered into this experience with a vested interest in understanding the experiences of students of color and how they understand themselves as leaders. Additionally, I came to this study having had directly worked with and advised students of color who served as campus leaders and wanted to explore those experiences more deeply. Furthermore, I identify myself as a former student leader at a predominately White institution in the Midwest during my undergraduate career. This is where I started to make meaning of my race, understand racism in higher education, and started to construct knowledge of my race and how I understood myself as a leader.

One situation in particular that shaped my experiences as a student leader during my undergraduate career, was when my fraternity hosted a week of events filled with community service programming in honor of our chapter’s founding date. The week was one of our most successful programming efforts. However, our success was soon tainted. The final event of the week was an all-campus dance at the student union. The dance was going well until an altercation occurred, causing campus police to end the event early. While my fraternity brothers and I were inside debriefing the incident, outside, we later learned guests were accused of carrying weapons and detained by police due to a report of shots being fired in the area. Although the shots fired and the party were unrelated, the incident appeared on the front page of the school newspaper. The article included a picture of the campus police with their guns drawn towards the unarmed students and a headline that read, “Shots Fired Following Fraternity Party.”
The incident immediately became a racialized incident because of the picture used on the front cover. The Vice-President of Student Affairs was seriously concerned and wanted to consult with me because I was the president of the governing body of Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (HBGLO). The incident and my subsequent discussions with the Vice-President motivated me to work on a new dance policy along with the Dean of Students Office and an appointed committee. I was in a position to invoke changes and my obligation as president empowered me with the responsibility to ensure that corrections were implemented for the rest of the school year. But as I reflect back on that experience, there were multiple times throughout that experience that shaped the way I saw myself as a student leader of color. In particular, many key administrators continuing to stress to me that race was not a factor in the way the police responded, the way the campus newspaper covered the story, and the way the university responded to the incident, by means of campus-wide dance policy and security restrictions. But I knew that in my role a student leader of color on that campus, I had the opportunity to enact some serious social change on that campus. I saw my role as a student leader as addressing the systemic racism and injustices on that campus. This is just one salient experience that has influenced my work as a student affairs professional and scholar when exploring race and leadership development. The findings from this align in some ways from this salient experience, especially when students highlight the need to resist and respond to racism at Leadership College.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter One has provided an overview of this dissertation, including the study’s background and purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, methodology, and
significance. Chapter Two will review key literature related to student leadership development, leadership identity development, race and student leadership, and racial colorblind ideology on college campuses. Chapter Three will focus on the epistemological, theoretical, analytical, and methodological frameworks. Chapter Four will highlight participant profiles. Chapter Five will present key findings. Finally, Chapter Six will provide a thorough discussion of those findings and share implications of the findings as well as recommendations.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following discussion reviews literature pertaining to four key aspects of this study: (a) leadership and leadership identity development; (b) the six-stage Leadership Identity Development Model; (c) leadership, race, and students of color at predominately White institutions (PWIs); and (d) liberal arts colleges and student leadership development. The purpose of this study is to further explore the leadership identity development (LID) model (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005; 2006) in relation to the experiences of students of color at highly selective liberal arts colleges using a critical race theory lens. The LID model identifies six stages in the development of a leadership identity. Although used widely to inform the design of leadership development programs, the model has not been validated by further research or critically examined for the role race plays in how students define themselves as leaders. This literature review will outline the leadership identity development model—highlighting the role of race—to provide an overview of social identity theory and suggest the use of critical race theory as a framework in exploring leadership identity development for students of color at highly selective liberal arts colleges. Literature on critical race theory will be jxdiscussed briefly, but will be explored in more detail in the methodology section in chapter three.

Leadership Theory: The Evolution

Leadership is a socially constructed paradigm; therefore, this examination of leadership must first be framed by the theoretical context that influences our
understanding of leadership today. Trait and behavioral theories of leadership prevailed in the industrial era. Leadership was viewed as good management and leadership theories described traits and behaviors that worked well and could be applied to production and efficiency (Bennis, 2003). These theories focused on “great man” philosophy, which posited leadership as positional and leaders as exhibiting certain behaviors including power, authority, and rational thinking (Northouse, 2007). These theories supported the traditional attitude that certain groups of people (i.e. women and people of different races and ethnicities) usually lack adequate leadership characteristics, and these theories failed to address how leadership “happens” in real life situations. (Astin & Leland, 1991; Eagly & Carli, 2004; Klenke, 1996; Northouse, 2007). As the study of leadership progressed, researchers sought to understand the role of followers in leadership, which gave rise to situational and contingency theories. These theories incorporated the needs of followers, and recognized that situations may call for different kinds of leaders, but the focus remained on the leader in a position of power and influence (Bennis, 2003; Northouse, 2007).

The evolution of leadership theory is as multifaceted as the phenomenon itself, with more than 2,000 definitions of the word leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Rost, 1993). The evolving definitions are important to consider when examining the time and contexts in which these definitions were created. Leadership was believed to be a trait only an elite group was born with, thus, leadership development involved providing high quality education to the few who would be considered to be the great leaders of the future (Wren, 1995). The goal in studies of leadership around the early twentieth century was to identify the traits that leaders needed to be successful
Eventually the conversation shifted from traits to certain skills leaders needed, such as: technical skills, the ability to work well with people, and creating, communicating a vision and strategic plan (Northouse). Another shift occurred, in the 1950s, when the understanding of leadership expanded to include leadership styles and later, situational theories, that focused on finding the connection between the group and the leadership style of the leader (Northouse). This approach was known as industrial leadership, and characterized by the following definitions: leadership as being the best, leadership as that which is done by those in positions of authority, and leadership as what one person does to a group of others, presumably followers (Rost, 1993). The practice of industrial leadership has been described as having three characteristics: 1) focused on leaders and studied leaders as individuals; 2) examined power and hierarchy; and 3) aimed to find universal characteristics to explain why some leaders were successful and others were not (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). The goal of leadership was on building skills (Komives et al., 2005).

A shift occurred in the 1980s that started to look at leadership not only as hierarchy, but the process among the actively engaged members of a group, rather than the action of a single authority figure (Rost, 1993). This shift in understanding leadership is described by Rost’s (1993) four part definition: (1) leadership is people actively working together in groups, (2) in influence relationships that are non-coercive and multidirectional, (3) with the intention of creating substantive change, (4) toward mutual purposes that have been developed by the group members together. Leadership is not something that just happens to followers by their leader, rather it describes the process that groups engage in together.
However, the theoretical development of leadership has classified specific leadership theories into two distinct paradigms: the industrial (i.e., management-oriented, leader-centric models) and the postindustrial (i.e., relational, reciprocal, values-based models) (Rost, 1991). Postindustrial models reflect contemporary approaches to leadership, such as:

- Role of leader as servant (e.g., Greenleaf, 1970);
- Leadership as a process (e.g., Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007; Wheatley, 2006);
- Role of followers as collaborators (e.g., Burns, 1978; Rost, 1991);
- Character and ethical practices of participants (e.g., Ciulla, 1998; Komives et al., 2006; Terry, 1993);
- Positive/authentic approaches (e.g., Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Clifton & Nelson, 1992).

However, most of the above examples were contextually originated from or intended for the organizational framework of work environments. In the mid-1990s, new frameworks for understanding and teaching leadership in the college context gave rise to a number of conceptual models explicitly created for college student populations (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996; Komives et al., 2006).

The social change model of leadership development (HERI, 1996) was designed specifically for college students and warrants attention, given the significant degree to which it influences collegiate leadership programs nationally (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). The model situates leadership as being inherently tied to social responsibility and manifested in creating change that benefits the common good.
(HERI, 1996). It is predicated on the importance of increasing individuals’ levels of self-knowledge and abilities to work collaboratively (HERI, 1996). This is accomplished by fostering growth across seven critical values: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship. These values, in turn, contribute to the eighth value of change (HERI, 1996). These values interact synergistically across three dimensions: individual (consciousness of self, congruence, and commitment), group (collaboration, common purpose, and controversy with civility), and societal (citizenship).

There are also several examples of leadership scholars focusing on the concept of identity development as it relates to leadership (Day & Harrison, 2007; Hogg, 2001; Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Van Knippenberg et al., 2005). Identity development refers to the processes through which a person comes to have an enduring sense of who he or she is. This includes how people make meaning of their unique personal characteristics and values as well as how they make meaning of the groups they share affinity and similarity with (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Erikson, 1980; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Leadership identity, then, refers to how a person comes to make sense of who he or she is as a leader, and how he or she makes meaning of involvement in groups through various roles (Lord & Hall, 2005; O’Connor & Day, 2007).

(Re)Defining Leadership

Komives and her colleagues (2006) defined leadership within the LID model as “a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change” (p. 74), with relational emphasizing the primary importance of relationships
among people. Leadership is understood to be the processes among people who work together—not to be confused with the behavior of individuals in positions of authority. Therefore, the development of leadership does not revolve around what “the leader” does but rather on what everyone in the leadership relationship does with each other (p. 74). Other critical aspects of this approach included an emphasis on balancing individual and collective values and on collaboration among individual actors rather than influence of leaders unto followers.

The researchers who introduced the student LID model have described student leadership development as an intersection between relational leadership and student development theory. To establish leadership identity, one has to understand that both psychosocial and cognitive development stages will have developmental processes happening at the same time (Komives et al., 2006, p. 402). The LID model describes six stages in which individuals define leadership and see themselves as leaders in increasingly complex ways (Komives et al., 2006).

**Social Identities**

Scholars have used the term social identity to describe how students made sense of their race, class, gender, and sexuality as aspects of the self that exist within a social context. In using the term, social identities are understood to influence a student’s relationship to others within socially constructed systems of dominance and oppression (Hall, 2004; McEwen, 2003). However, according to Ruderman and Ernst (2004), the original definition of social identity, by Henry Tajfel, described it as both the knowledge of belonging to a certain group and that belonging has a value or significance to the person in some way. Stryker and Burke (2000) also used the term social identity to refer
to other social categories or constructed social groups. These definitions, therefore, would include leadership identity among social identities. The college student development literature refers to this as a social identity in the “global” sense, meaning that it refers to “an overall sense of self or sense of being” (McEwen, 2003, p. 205). The social construction of self and how one defines self based on these social spaces is the root of social identity.

**Background on the Development of LID Model**

Recognizing a lack of scholarship about how leadership develops, a specific research team formed to study the topic. Susan Komives, Julie Owen, Susan Longerbeam, Felicia Mainella, and Laura Osteen (2005) had the goal “to understand how a leadership identity develops” (p. 594). The team based its study on the relational definition of leadership (Komives et al., 1998). Grounded theory methodology was used as an appropriate fit for generating a theory to describe the experience and perceptions of study participants (Creswell, 2009).

Using purposeful sampling procedures, the team selected subjects who would reveal the development of relational leadership in an intense but not extreme way (Patton, 1990). Students who were considered exemplary examples of the relational approach to leadership were nominated by higher education professionals who had the opportunity to observe them in leadership situations (Komives et al., 2005). The relational leadership model included five components: purposeful, empowering, inclusive, ethical, and process-oriented (Komives et al., 2007). Being purposeful referred to the building of collective commitment toward a common goal or mission, developing shared goals within the group and a common sense of the group’s purpose for existing. Being
empowering meant sharing responsibility, authority, information and power. It also related to developing capacity and leadership in others and valuing their contributions to the group rather than trying to solely control the group’s direction. Being inclusive referred to welcoming different people, different perspectives, and understanding where one’s own perspective comes from in order to fully appreciate that of others (Komives et al., 2007). Being ethical referred to having a commitment to socially responsible behavior and decisions, being authentic, responsible, trustworthy and congruent with one’s values. Being process-oriented meant understanding that the process of how the group arrives at an outcome is as important as the outcome itself. “It meant understanding a systemic perspective of organizations and change, and being able to engage others in relational processes such as reflection, feedback, collaboration, controversy, and on-going learning” (Wagner, 2011, p. 15).

From the pool of nominated students, 13 were selected. According to the study, the student participants represented a diversity of ethnic backgrounds, genders, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, and majors. With two exceptions, participants were fourth- or fifth-year seniors or recent alumni. From the pool of possible participants, students invited to participate exhibited the theoretical dimensions of relational leadership. Eight participants were White, one was Asian American, three were African American, and one student was an African who had immigrated to the United States as a child. Eight of the participants were men and five were women. Two participants identified themselves as gay men; others identified themselves as heterosexual or did not identify their sexual orientation. The group was religiously diverse, including Muslim,
Bahá’í, Jewish, and Christian students, as well as those without active religious affiliations.

Through the students’ descriptions of their leadership journey and reflections on the ways they previously conceptualized leadership up to their current approach to leadership, the research team came to understand the students’ experiences—hence, the creation of the LID model. Briefly, the stages of the model are:

**Stage One: Awareness.** Stage One is becoming aware that there are leaders “out there” who are external to self, such as the president of the United States, a sports coach, one’s mother, or a teacher.

**Stage Two: Exploration/Engagement.** This period of immersion in group experiences is usually to make friends; a time of learning to engage with others (e.g., swim team, boy scouts, church choir).

**Stage Three: Leader Identified.** This stage views leadership as the actions of the positional leader of a group, an awareness of the hierarchical nature of relationships in groups.

**Stage Four: Leadership Differentiated.** Leadership is also seen as non-positional and as a shared group process.

**Stage Five: Generativity.** Generativity is a commitment to developing leadership in others and having a passion for issues or group objectives that the person wants to influence.

**Stage Six: Integration/Synthesis.** Stage Six acknowledges 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., 2005)
A leadership identity was found to develop in these six stages, with periods of transition between each. As the developing self interacted with group influences, the students’ view of the self with others changed, which expanded their view of leadership, all within the context of the developmental influences. The six stages are described next in more detail.

In stage one, Awareness, there is recognition that leaders exist, and that they are other people, particularly adults. In stage two, Exploration/Engagement, there is a period of getting involved and experiencing groups. Students take on some responsibilities and get involved in a wide variety of groups. Motivation to be involved is largely based on friendships and belonging, but it is also a time when leadership skills were observed in others, laying the groundwork for one’s own participation in leadership (Wagner, 2011). In stage three, Leader Identified, groups are observed to have clearly distinguishable leaders and followers, based on whether one holds the formal leadership position. Students see themselves as leaders only when they hold a leadership position. During this time, participants become more intentional about the groups they choose to join, narrowing their interests and getting more deeply involved in just a few groups. Given the complexity of this stage, two phases were identified: an emerging phase in which students initially move into the stage and realize that new ways to relate to others in a group and new leadership skills are needed. With experience, students gain confidence and take on leader and follower roles in various contexts and groups, indicating an immersion phase (Wagner, 2011).

Events during stage three sparked a shift in the students’ consciousness or the way students thought about themselves in relation to others; this shift changed their view
of leadership (Komives et al., 2005). The key transition of the model occurs after stage three with a dependent–independent shifting order of consciousness. This means that holding a position does not mean a person is a leader; the student starts to look to the entire group for leadership to happen. During this transition, the emphasis on learning more about leadership occurs, with the understanding that each person brings unique contributions to the development and success of the group. Further, the student accepts that he or she needs others to be able to lead effectively (Komives et al., 2005). During the immersion transition phase of stage three, students begin to show signs of readiness for the transition to stage four.

Stage four, Leadership Differentiated, is an interdependent commitment to group growth and community. An understanding starts to take place that leadership is a process and that the student can be effective as a leader from within the group or in a formalized position. The student places new value on teams and making meaning from every experience. The help of guides, mentors, and peers is vital (Komives et al., 2005). The role of understandings one’s own and others’ social identities in relation to each other is not clearly defined at this point. In stage four, Leadership Differentiated, students recognize a difference between being a leader and holding a leadership position. They realize that everyone in the group is dependent on everyone else, and that anyone can make a difference in the group, regardless of whether they have the leadership position. They realize that leadership is a process between individuals, not a position. Those who hold leadership positions will share responsibility and invite participation from others. Those who do not hold positions will look for the ways that they can best contribute to the group. This stage also has two phases, an emerging phase in which the student
constructs leadership in this way and tentatively tries acting upon it, and an immersion phase where the student confidently practices leadership in ways that are congruent with this view of it (Wagner, 2011).

In stage five, Generativity, students come to see themselves as group “elders” with a responsibility to mentor younger members. They become committed to the causes they believe in and to the groups and people who address them. They choose groups based on alignment with their goals and values. In stage six, Integration/Synthesis, leadership is seen as a consistent aspect of the student’s self-concept. They are confident that they can contribute to new groups they may join (Komives et al., 2006; Wagner 2011).

As is true for most stage-based adult development theories, the point of transition between stages is important to note and understand. Transitions mark the point where the views held in the current stage are no longer useful for making meaning of a person’s experience. For the LID model, the key transition is at the end of stage three, leader identified, in which students begin to value working interdependently with others rather than having a dominant leader with followers. What this model does not explicitly explain is how other social identities, specifically race for the purpose of this dissertation, influence how they see themselves as leaders and what role race plays when engaging with others.

Although the categories of the LID theory describe distinct constructs, there is an interaction among them such that development in one category will influence development in another. For example, aspects of the developing self, such as self-awareness may lead to greater commitment to the goals of a particular group, influencing
the group influences category. The combination of development in both of these categories may influence how one sees the self as being mutually dependent on others for success, which influences development in the changing view of self with others category (Komives et al., 2005).

The LID findings, as with previous identity models, revealed that students from individualistic cultures experience the self as separate and discrete, while a collective understanding of self depended on group relationships and obligations (Helms & Cook, 1999). As views of self and views of self with others shift across the LID model from dependent to independent—and finally to interdependent—racial identity understanding may shape the development of leadership identity. For example, whether students of color are in conformity, immersion, emersion, internalization, or integration statuses of racial identity development may affect the experiences that shape their leadership development (Helms, 1990). More research is needed about the intersection of race, culture, and leadership identity.

Environmental factors—such as strong group membership, learning about leadership, and the presence of mentors—are important influences in facilitating movement through the next stage. Stage three: Leader Identified Stage, relates to diverse peers and is essential to developing interpersonal skills. Learning to relate in diverse groups was an experience White students, in particular, felt they needed (Komives et al., 2005). However, the model does not account for minority racial groups learning to relate to White students and the dissonance that can take place during that process—especially for minority students involved or leaders of predominately White student organizations and the racialized experiences they encounter.
**Social identity theory.** This is the understanding that each individual has multiple identities. It is important to explore the ways in which leadership identity and aspects of social identity—such as race, gender, sexuality, and so on—intersect. In applying the LID model, college educators must also acknowledge the ways leadership identity intersects with other dimensions of identity, such as race, culture, sexual orientation, gender, religion, and social class. A challenge in using the LID model is recognizing this intersectionality (Collins, 2000) and how students’ multiple identities shift in relative salience, depending on context and relationships (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). As social constructionist approaches to identity development have suggested, identity could be socially, historically, politically, and culturally constructed (Weber, 2001); if so, these factors must be considered in LID application and research (Komives et al., 2009, p. 24).

Komives et al. (2009) noted, “There is a growing body of research that relates racial and cultural factors to leadership development,” stating that students of color may experience the LID stages differently than do their White peers (p. 24). When conducting the LID grounded theory research, the research team noted that descriptions of leadership identity development for several participants of color differed from those of their White student counterparts. However, the LID model fails to clearly define how students of color experiences differed. The researchers did note that students emerged through the stages differently if they had a mentor or mentors; this was particularly true for the students of color in the study. What the study did not explain is why this is uniquely different for students of color. The importance of this level of support for minority students in a predominantly White environment has been identified by other researchers
(Allen, 1992; Guiffrida, 2003). For all students, the existence of close adult relationships facilitated their development in the LID model.

**Racial Identity Development Models**

The construct that one must consider when exploring the intersection of race and leadership identity development is the racial identity models as described by Helms and Cook (1999). Racial identity models are “descriptions of hypothetical intra-psychic pathways for overcoming internalized racism and achieving a healthy socio-racial self-conception under varying conditions of racial oppression” (p. 81). Helms replaced the term “stages” with “statuses” to portray that “an individual may exhibit attitudes, behaviors, and emotions reflective of more than one stage” (p. 183). Helms and Cook (1999) suggested that if individuals develop more than one status, then the statuses could exist simultaneously. The LID model does not account for stages to exist simultaneously.

In Helms’ Status Two: Dissonance, there is the realization that one is unable to be completely accepted as part of White society: “Ambivalence and anxiety caused by lack of familiarity with the nature of one’s own group’s cultural and sociopolitical battles and accomplishments and one’s waning idealization of the White group” (Helms & Cook, 1999, p. 86). During the Dissonance Status, individuals are confused and conflicted about beliefs and values, usually because of negative experiences based on race or ethnicity. A transition occurs within this status as the person begins to resolve conflicts and confusions of dissonance stage and begins asking why one should feel shame about oneself and one’s cultural background (Helms & Cook, 1999). This transition is vital when considering where students of color are in their racial identity development when applying the LID Model.
**Students of color and leadership development**

A phenomenological study examining leadership perceptions and experiences of students of color acknowledged the presence of meaningful differences in how students conceptualize leadership based on racial backgrounds (Arminio et al., 2000). Kezar and Moriarty (2000) examined specific differences between self-reported scores on general measures of leadership for African-American and White college students. The researchers found that African-American students perceived a change in their leadership skills but not in their overall ability. The researchers also identified the differential influences of a variety of college experiences on leadership self-perceptions and ability based on race (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000). In a single-campus study of 1,964 first-year students, Asian Pacific Americans were the least likely of all racial groups to categorize themselves as leaders, as well as less likely than both African-American and White students to identify members of their own race as leaders (Balón, 2005). Several scholars cite a potential lack of congruence between conceptualizations of leadership and Asian Pacific American values, suggesting the need for empirical research to further explore this aspect (Liang, Lee, & Ting, 2002; Liu & Sedlacek, 1999).

A Black person experienced dissonance between their previously held beliefs of race and new understandings presented by others; this was considered an encounter (Cross, 1995). Oppressed people must identify and overcome the psychological appearance of internalized racism by recognizing that racism’s existence does require the oppressed person to believe the myths and stereotypes of the inferiority of the oppressed group (Torres, 2008). Research has pointed to racism as an integral part of the holistic development of Latino/a students (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez,
The recognition of racism was one of the elements of the Crossroads experience within the cognitive dimension of a longitudinal study of Latino/a students (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). The study revealed that the recognition of racism was an important aspect of the development of ethnic identity (Torres, 2008). This finding is significant for the design of this dissertation when exploring the way racism, color-blind ideology, and critical race theory inform identity development in relation to race and leadership when constructing a counter-narrative to leadership.

Jones (1990) observed that “most traditional theories of individual development do not place such an emphasis on cultural identity” (p. 60). Jones concluded that “without this emphasis, developmental theories apply less accurately to ethnic groups” (p. 60). Therefore, considering Jones’ argument, the LID model may not apply to all members of an ethnic group. A number of cultural identity models have emerged that “assert the need to understand how ethnic students relate to their own respective cultures and to the culture of the majority” (p. 61). Frazier (2010) noted that many times on campuses with a White majority, there will be a “second university”—that of African-American students with their own homecoming celebration and student government. Also, Dillavou (2008) suggested that on the campuses of PWIs, two different worlds are created, therefore, barriers also arise when the goal is to create holistic campus environments. Hence, an experience of leadership development occurs very differently for minority students as compared to White students, which could be validated, especially in predominately White student organizations.

Torres and Hernandez (2007) discovered that the most prominent Latino student leaders pointed to their experiences as college or high school students—to campaigns,
protests, and service efforts to improve conditions for Latinos—as their first foray into leadership in their study. Latino student organizations have played a central role in the emergence of Latino leaders by serving as pathways through which young people could begin the leadership development process (Torres & Hernandez). Latino student organizations first became largely established on colleges and universities around the nation during the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960s (Davis, 1997). In the brief time they have existed, Latino student organizations have created a rich legacy of activism, community service, advocacy and, naturally, leadership development. The young Latinos who emerged as leaders during the Civil Rights Movement organized to create Latino-controlled institutions on their campuses and in their communities as a way to take action in improving their community’s conditions. For Latino youth, being involved in a Latino-focused student organization is a critical leadership development experience (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Because Latinos recognize that they must take on the mantle of leadership to effectively advocate and provide services for their communities, strong processes for leadership development are essential. This dissertation warrants using critical race theory for continuing to conduct research based on the LID model using student leaders of color and exploring their experiences at predominately White institutions.

**Follow-Up Studies to the LID Model**

Additional studies on the LID model would be particularly open to feedback from others, seeking information that would reveal their blind spots. Some scholarship has followed the initial grounded theory study. A qualitative study at Texas A&M University (Durham, unpublished) in which 10 students participated in group and individual
interviews was mentioned earlier. In her dissertation, Gonda (2007) sought to further explore the LID theory and model, with particular focus on the processes that women experience as their awareness of leadership abilities develops. The dissertation used case study and life narrative research techniques with five subjects who were early to mid-career professional women and who demonstrated a relational leadership approach. The study found some support for the stages described by the LID model, particularly Stages Two through Four. A lack of evidence for the experience of Stages Five and Six was thought to reflect that the subjects had no formal leadership education or training. Although the subjects might have actually been operating in these last stages, they may have lacked the specific language to describe to the researcher their experiences that would be reflective of these later stages. Thus, Gonda’s (2007) study has significant implications for this dissertation because it highlights the importance of exploring the intersection of gender and leadership identity development. Although this dissertation is exploring the saliency of race, we learned from Gonda that “gendered” roles create a normative and dominant understanding of leadership. If the LID model was developed with a White “normative” approach to leadership identity, it is important to understand how students of color negotiate their own sense of what it means to be a student leader in the face of racial/ethnic stereotypes (Ospina & Foldy, 2009).

The other major differences between Gonda’s (2007) study and the original LID study (Komives et al., 2006) involve the key transition between the leader identified and leadership differentiated stages. In Gonda’s study, the transition happened much later than for the subjects in the Komives and colleagues’ (2006) study—as much as 10 years after college. It should be noted that the subjects of the original LID grounded theory
were intentionally selected as exemplars of the relational approach to leadership. It makes sense, therefore, that those subjects had advanced through the stages earlier than did those in the Gonda study. Another finding of the Gonda study was that the subjects seemed able to simultaneously hold beliefs from these two stages—or, in some cases, the subject’s approach depended on the context. Clearly, more study is needed of the experience of this key transition and what the experiences facilitate.

A third research study, using the LID theory and model, focused specifically on the leadership development experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students (Renn & Bilodeau, 2006). Using grounded theory methodology, 15 LGBT-identified student leaders participated in interviews. The researchers applied the LID model to the findings. The researchers claimed there is more than sufficient data from their interviews to support the stages and developmental processes described by the LID model.

The students in Dugan, Komives, and Segar’s (2008) quantitative study had multiple social identities, and factors in developing self were central to developing a leadership identity. In research about the multiple identities of college students, Jones (1997) found that students’ most salient identity was that of minority status. Nonetheless, students did not usually speak about identities associated with a privileged status; this silence indicated a limitation in their development of the identity associated with a privileged status. This finding from Dugan et al. is consistent with the development of leadership identity; race, for example, was most salient for the students of color in the study. The Dugan et al. study has implications for this dissertation when exploring meaning making of multiple identities in relation to leadership and the role of race.
The students in the Dugan et al.’s (2008) study had a leadership identity that developed over time. Erikson (1968) asserted that people discover, more than create, their identities, and they do so within a social context. Each person discovers and uncovers his or her identity through a continual process of observation and reflection. “Identity development is the process of becoming more complex in one’s personal and social identities” (McEwen, 2003, p. 205). Identity is often viewed as a global sense of self, but it can also refer to a particular dimension of one’s identity (McEwen, 2003), such as a professional identity, an athlete identity, or as it did in this study, a leadership identity.

Finally, a large-scale national study on college student leadership by Komives (2011) included several items relating to the LID model. Preliminary examination of the results indicated that for those students who clearly scored in Stages Three and Four, the Stage Four students scored significantly higher on all eight values of socially responsible leadership. The data suggested that having a non-positional definition of leadership and an interdependent approach to working with others contributes to development of the values of socially responsible leadership (Komives, 2011).

Students of color and leadership research

Harper and Quaye (2007) examined the experiences of Black male student leaders within student organizations, focusing on students’ purposes for engaging in such commitments. The authors recommended that Black male student leaders use both predominately Black and White student organizations as platforms for racial uplift and support for minority student interests. Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) studied students’ involvement in minority student organizations at PWIs, and found that student leaders of color remained in self-segregated student organizations because of the organizations’
mission and commitment to enhance academic and social environments for other students of color on campus. In other words, students with high levels of involvement and commitment to their leadership roles have an in-depth understanding of how their racialized experiences impact their leadership identity.

Critical race theory scholars, Delgado and Stefancic (2001), presented counter-narratives as instruments or methods for conveying stories that are often untold among those who have been marginalized. Consequently, counter-narratives offer a racially different lens and challenge the assumed generalization of stories told by those who are in power—stories that are erroneously thought to be commonly shared by White students and racial/ethnic minorities. These narratives introduce educators to ways in which students of color have had to quietly endure racial fatigue to survive at PWIs (Parker, 1998). Thus, these racialized experiences could impact the leadership identity development process for students of color, which was not considered with the original LID model.

**Liberal arts colleges and student leadership development**

Liberal arts colleges provide unique environments that foster student leadership development as part of their overarching culture. The small enrollments and broad curricular and co-curricular opportunities that symbolize the liberal arts culture facilitate involvement, which can lead to engagement (Rothblatt, 2003). The engaged student experiences leadership opportunities, especially in an environment that values pursuit of service to the community and society (Durden, 2007). According to Durden, community service and volunteerism are necessary activities for building citizenship among students on liberal arts campuses today. Furthermore, anecdotal literature suggested that there is a
significant relationship between a liberal arts focus and leadership development. As Brown (1994) pointed out in his research on liberal education for leadership, “integrative thinking, coupled with strong preprofessional training and executive skills of articulation, understanding, and inquiry, promises an . . . education for the individuals who will be making crucial judgments and decisions in leadership capacities in our communities” (p. 47). Liberal arts colleges are culturally distinctive because of their focus on student development due to their intentional emphasis on involvement and engagement (Rothblatt, 2003). But many of these studies on involvement and engagement at liberal arts colleges have not explored the role of race, which this dissertation will explicitly do.

Studies have determined that liberal arts colleges have had positive effects on the psychosocial development that is necessary for student leadership development and growth (Seifert et al., 2008; Pascarella et al., 2005). Seifert et al. found that “the practices and conditions embodied in the liberal arts experiences variable are indeed those that promoted the development of students’ intercultural effectiveness, inclination to inquire and learn for a lifetime, psychological well-being, and leadership” (p. 123). The suggestion of intercultural effectiveness within the liberal arts college culture is apparent when researchers discuss the openness to diversity factor that is so critical for student leadership development. Pascarella et al. (2005) found that compared to the enrollments of large regional or national research universities, the students at liberal arts colleges exhibited more openness to difference and more growth in their self-awareness. As Brown (1994) stated, “A liberal arts education can be an exceptional education for leadership in a time of rapid cultural change and growing cultural complexity” (p. 44). Intercultural effectiveness, openness to diversity, and self-understanding are important
student leadership qualities for those who desire social change. What these studies do not explore is the role of post-racial and colorblind ideology in liberal arts college culture and the role race plays in student leadership development.

In today’s college and university setting, many institutions freely proclaim their ability to prepare students to be leaders, to be social change agents, and positive influencers for societal advancement. Some have argued that liberal arts colleges are best suited to provide leadership development outcomes for their students (Durden, 2001). As Durden explained, a liberal arts education is extremely practical; it provides the student with a robust self-understanding and the practice of intellect and engagement that develops leadership. Seifert et al. (2008) found that liberal arts experiences had positive outcomes in developing student leadership. As Rothblatt (2003) described, liberal arts learning is an educational structure that promotes the growth of the individual, while keeping their future connection with the global community in each student’s mind.

Student leadership development begins with self-understanding and moves toward openness to diverse ways of thinking. The intentionality of a liberal arts education is well suited for the development of leadership skills that formulate the required attitude to promote social change. As higher education institutions struggle to find the means to articulate and evaluate student leadership development, the liberal arts model may present a worthwhile platform for developing this important outcome, especially for students of color when considering the high persistence and graduation rates for these students at liberal arts colleges. Liberal arts colleges provide exceptional opportunities for student engagement. This educational environment is fitting to explore the role of race and the development of student leadership.
In order to determine how liberal arts colleges provide an environment that leads to leadership identity development for students of color who attend those institutions, literature were reviewed. The review of the literature focused on identity development, student leadership development, and liberal arts colleges. The development of student leadership skills is a common goal of colleges and universities across America. Many researchers on leadership development believe that it is the role of higher education institutions to cultivate these important attributes in the students who attend these schools. Liberal arts colleges in particular are notably positioned to develop socially responsible leaders due to their emphasis on student involvement and campus engagement.

The first section of the review provided an overview of student leadership development. This section investigated the historical nature of leadership as well as models and theories of leadership development from the 20th century. Key to this section of the chapter was the review of literature pertaining to student leadership development theories and programs, as well as the desired outcomes of these programs. The second section of the review explored the literature pertaining to leadership identity development. Most notably, the literature focusing on Komives et al.’s LID model were examined. The last section of the review focused on liberal arts colleges and their unique learning environments. The liberal arts culture, including the history and philosophy of this educational typology were investigated in this section. This review synthesized the literature on the topics that are central to this study.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The leadership development of students of color on college campuses is nuanced and complex. In light of this complexity, the purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of the students of color who are at least second year students and serve as student leaders at a highly selective liberal arts college in the Midwest. Therefore, the following research questions framed the study:

1. What perceptions do students of color have of themselves as leaders at a highly selective liberal arts college in the Midwest?
2. How do students of color make sense of their race in relation to their experiences as leaders at a highly selective liberal arts college in the Midwest?
3. How have racialized experiences shaped students of color’s leadership identity?

The remainder of this chapter addresses the theoretical perspective and framework, study design, site selection, participant selection, data collection methods, ethical considerations, issues of goodness and trustworthiness, limitations and delimitations of the study, and the positionality of the researcher.

Study Design

Research began with one or more questions, and those questions served as the foundation from which other decisions were made, including the design of this study. Based on the research questions, a critical race, case study methodology was adopted.
This approach aims to capture the important, nuanced elements of the case participants’ experiences, as well as the systemic and institutional racism in which these experiences take place. Merriam (2002) described the case study as “… an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community” (p. 8). By “intensive description,” Merriam referenced the depth of focus, which is characterized by the researcher paying careful attention to the ordinary features and particularities of any case: “By concentrating upon a single phenomenon or entity (the case), this approach seeks to describe the phenomenon in depth” (p. 8).

As a collective case study, the unit of analysis is each participant, also considered an individual “case.” Considering the research questions for this study, this procedure was purposeful by design of the study. Studying the experiences of undergraduate students in at least their second year of undergraduate study, who identify as students of color provide the necessary depth to respond to the research questions. Crotty (1998) stated, “meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (pp. 8–9). Thus, even though the participants share elements of their individual identities in that they are undergraduate students of color at the same selective liberal arts college, their realities are different, and the various ways in which they have made and continue to make meaning of their leadership experiences that will inform this study are different.

**Epistemological, Theoretical, & Methodological Framework**

The epistemological, theoretical, and methodological framework provides a foundational understanding for this study. The epistemological perspectives, social
constructionism and critical race case study methodology, provide an understanding of the ways in which both the researcher and participants construct knowledge and come to know that knowledge (Creswell, 2009). The theoretical perspectives, critical race theory, and case study methodology, provides a lens with which to view and analyze the context of leadership development for students of color at a highly selective liberal arts college. A critical race case study methodology influenced and determined the ways in which data was defined, collected, and analyzed.

**Epistemological framework**

Epistemology expresses “philosophical assumptions about what constitutes knowledge” (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2013, p. 70). A constructivist epistemology implies that truth and sense making are not simply objective or subjective, but instead individually formed (Crotty, 1998). Jones et al. (2013) stress that constructivism and constructionism are often used interchangeably. Constructivism points out the unique experiences of all of us and social constructionism “emphasizes the hold our culture has on all of us,” therefore, constructivism tends to struggle with the critical disposition, while constructionism tends to foster it (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2013, p. 17). While constructivism implies an individual meaning construction process, social constructionism is the way in which social cultures influence “the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). Student leaders construct knowledge based on their experiences individually; college campuses, specifically a selective liberal arts college for the purpose of this study, are social spaces in which meaning and knowledge is often co-constructed, shared, and/or communicated. The documented and researched experiences of students of color, the way in which they
construct knowledge and share that knowledge, is unique based on their social locations and where these students are in their own inter/intrapersonal development.

Understanding the experiences of diverse populations is a growing need in higher education research and policies. “[T]he use of theoretical perspectives emerges as a useful approach to help in the analysis of data and to convey findings through different lenses” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 55). The role of a critical theoretical perspective is to promote a view of the “human world and social life within that world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 7) and take into account “the cultural, symbolic, economic, and political power that influences the lives of individuals oppressed by those in the majority, often times seen as those in power” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 55). Critical theoretical perspectives also provide critiques for the historical relationship that exists between the researcher and the researcher’s knowledge/truth. By acknowledging the researcher’s view of societal influences on what is considered knowledge, the questioning of the status quo is recognized through the research process (Jones et al., 2013).

As a constructivist researcher, for the purpose of this study, I am using a theoretical perspective with philosophical tenets focused on truth that is socially constructed and an ideology that has shaped my sense making. Using CRT as a theoretical perspective, acknowledges the foundation around understanding the world through the lens of racism (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Constructivist perspectives bring to the forefront of “analysis the voices, experiences, and meaning-making of participants, including those whose stories have been underrepresented in the research” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 56). My constructivist epistemology, along with the critical race theoretical perspective will inform the research design for this dissertation.
**CRT as a theoretical and analytical framework**

Critical race theory (CRT) has informed the work of critical progressive legal scholars for over 40 years. The original goal of CRT was to critique the unrealized promises found within the civil rights legislation and thus challenge ongoing racism in the legal system (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Only in the last 20 years have scholars in the field of education pragmaticized CRT’s concepts, tenets, and epistemological perspectives to inform their scholarship in the education context (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Since this study will be in the context of leadership development in higher education, I will focus on how educational researchers describe the tenets of CRT and the expectations researchers should consider when using CRT in their higher education research.

When CRT is applied through a theoretical and analytical framework, it helps to explain how educational structures, practices, and opportunities are shaped by race, racism, and power (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, 1997). Critical race theory has been used as a theoretical lens in education research (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997), and higher education in particular (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Villalpando, 2004). Ladson-Billings (1998) noted that race in education was under-theorized. Taylor (2000) characterized college and university campuses as microcosms of the larger American society and suggested that racism is woven into the cultural fabric of higher educational institutions. In addition, Villalpando (2004) noted that CRT helps to “expose the ways in which so-called race-neutral institutional policies and practices perpetuate racial or ethnic subordination” (p. 42). By using CRT as a
theoretical and analytical framework, higher education researchers are able to conduct anti-oppressive research that explores the contextual history of race and racism.

**CRT and the LID Model as theoretical frameworks**

A critical race theoretical framework ascribes to the understanding that racism is a normal common aspect that shapes society. “Race is deeply embedded in social, cultural, and political structures, thus making it difficult to recognize and address” (Patton et al., 2007, p. 43). Gloria Ladson-Billings (1999) pointed out that CRT is helpful with exposing racism in its various forms within education. Patton, McEwen, Rendón, and Howard-Hamilton (2007) acknowledged that this strategy should be applied to student development theories and other theoretical models used to inform practice and research in higher education. I propose that CRT is important to use as a theoretical perspective when understanding how college students of color develop a leadership identity by re-conceptualizing Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) three propositions of critical race theory in education:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the U.S.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool through which inequities can be understood.

These propositions will be explored more deeply in the context of higher education in the discussion section.

**Race and the maintenance of educational inequities.** In the first proposition, Ladson-Billings and Tate argued that race continues to be a significant factor in
producing inequities in society and educational institutions. Patton et al. (2007) cited that the educational achievement of students of color lags behind that of their White counterparts has been well documented. Students of color have had difficulties enrolling in college because of previous systemic inequities created by the education pipeline between the rich and the poor (Gándara, 2005; Rendón, Garcia, and Person, 2004). College educators and administrators must acknowledge and understand how race produces and perpetuates inequities.

**Race and propriety rights on college campuses- role of leadership programs.**
The second proposition allowed for Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) to indicate that the U.S. society is based on property rights. Social benefits are placed in the hands of property owners given the history of the United States. We must acknowledge that property inequities and property rights show up in various ways on college and university campuses.

**Intersections of Race and other Social Identities.** In the third proposition, Ladson-Billings and Tate cited that CRT should be expanded to understand the intersections of multiple social identities. Embracing a critical race perspective when considering how students of color develop a leadership identity is an important step in creating campus leadership programs to be spaces “…for safe dialogue, reducing microaggressions on campus, and moving one step further toward understanding the intricacies of multiple identities, including race” (Patton et al. 2007, p. 47). This framework is significant when understanding how students make meaning of the leadership identity when they have very salient racialized experiences on campus.
LID Model as a Theoretical Framework

Stage four, Leadership Differentiated of the LID Model, is an interdependent commitment to community. The understanding that leadership is a process and that the student can be effective as a leader from within the group or in a formalized position starts to take place. A new value placed on teams and making meaning from every experience with the help of guides/mentors/peers is vital (Komives et al., 2005). The role of understanding others and one’s own social identities in relation to each other is not clearly defined. What is also not clearly defined in this stage is how the intersections of these social identities and the leadership identity contribute to understanding the self as a leader for students of color, which is problematic when using this identity development model to develop leadership programs and curriculum. This study will explore this gap more explicitly through the counter-stories of the participants, who are students of color at a liberal arts college, as they discuss how they define leadership and reflect on how they see themselves as leaders.

CRT Methodology

In this study, I will use the tenets of CRT to examine the ways in which race and racism affect the leadership identity development of students of color at a selective liberal arts college. One construct of CRT in particular that will be used as a theoretical and analytical framework in this study is colorblindness. I find it important to acknowledge that other constructs of CRT could emerge during the analysis as I use CRT as an analytical framework. Previously, I provided an analysis of Gloria Ladson Billings’ (1998; 1999) application of CRT in education. In this next section I provide a foundational review and highlight the literature regarding the colorblind construct of
CRT that appears to be most relevant to this study. Finally, I will provide an overview of master and counter-narratives, because I will use counter-stories to frame the findings in this study as they relate to the understanding of leadership development for students of color at a predominately White liberal arts college in the Midwest.

**Colorblindness**

Colorblindness, allows for the general disregard of the affect of race and racism. The use of colorblindness has allowed for the creation of many race-neutral initiatives in higher education that were designed to counter race-based programs. According to Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000), “The notion of colorblindness is the global justification Whites use to defend the racial status quo” (p. 69). Other scholars have defined colorblindness simply as the belief that race does not matter (Neville, Spanierman, & Doan, 2006; Spanierman, Neville, Liao, Hammer, & Wang, 2008; Worthington, Navarro, Lowey, & Hart, 2008). This less overt form of racism allows Whites to blame people of color for their status in American society without expressing their prejudices overtly (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Worthington, et al., 2008).

Bonilla-Silva’s (2006; 2010) frames of colorblindness are applied to this study because they represent a newer ideology from which to understand the insidious nature of how racism is presently expressed (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; 2010; Forman, 2004). According to Bonilla-Silva (2006), colorblind racism is subtle, institutionally confirmed and practiced, and often appears to be race neutral. Colorblind racism preserves racial inequities, allowing Whites to deny race through the language of race-neutrality and merit and in turn receive material benefits and privileges through maintaining racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; 2010; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Forman, 2004).
Bonilla-Silva (2006) highlighted four frames of colorblind racism: 1) abstract liberalism, 2) naturalization, 3) cultural racism, and 4) minimization of racism. Persons and groups who use abstract liberalism present ideas connected with political and economic liberalism to explain the absence of racism. This frame allows White people to appear reasonable and moral when dealing with racial inequities. This belief superficially ignores the systemic factors that contribute to racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; 2010).

The frames of colorblindness provide a lens to understand contemporary forms of racism. Although Bonilla-Silva’s (2006; 2010) frames of colorblindness focus on how individuals make sense of race and racism, these frames are also applicable to the use of colorblindness in policy formation in higher education. The construct of colorblindness has been used to understand how once race-based policies and programs have recently moved to race neutrality. The emergence of race neutral policies and practices has affected several components of higher education to include admissions and recruitment practices, scholarships and financial aid opportunities (Lopez, 2003; Morfin, et al., 2006; Rendon, et al., 2005; Robinson, et al., 1996). I posit that the colorblind approach to leadership has also affected the development of leadership programs and curriculum. Williams and Land (2006) argued that, “non-recognition of race reinforces and reproduces the flawed structure of society because it does not allow for the analysis of social inequality at the core of the problem” (p. 580). This study employs a critical race methodology with a case study methodology in order to take the experiences of students of color at a liberal arts college in the Midwest and explore their racialized experiences as student leaders of color.
Case Study Methodology

Case study methodology is frequently used in higher education and student affairs research because many of these environments represent unique and nuanced “cases.” A case study was defined by Merriam (2009) as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded-system” (p. 40). What differentiates case study methodology from other qualitative approaches is the intensive focus on a bounded-system. This bounded-system could include an individual/s, a specific program, a process, an institution, or a relationship. What is implied with a case study approach is that something can be learned from a specific single case (Stake, 2000). The purpose of the bounded-system is to provide lines around what is to be studied and what is not to be studied (Jones et al., 2013). Merriam (2009) stressed “the unit of analysis, not the topic of investigation, characterizes a case” (p. 41). For the purpose of this dissertation, the bounded-system in this case study is the small highly selective liberal arts college in the Midwest where the specific leadership experiences of students (participants) will be explored.

Considering that the case study approach is both a unit of analysis and a methodology, there is no assumed philosophical or epistemological tradition attached to it, hence, case studies are conducive to being combined with theoretical perspectives (Jones et al., 2013). A critical case study “keeps the spotlight on power relationships within society so as to expose the forces of hegemony and injustice” (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). The case study methodology therefore becomes representative of the theoretical perspective of the researcher and the particular unit of analysis (Jones et al., 2013). In addition, case studies need to be distinguished from one another depending on the purpose of the research.
A researcher should provide a rationale for why studying a specific case is important and appropriate (Jones et al., 2013). Stake (2000) delineated types of case studies as: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case studies. When the researcher is interested in understanding particulars of one case, then intrinsic is used, “because in all its particularity and ordinaries, this case itself is of interest” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). An instrumental case study takes the approach that it is less about the case itself and more directed toward understanding of an issue, meaning “the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else” (p. 437). Whereas a collective case study focuses on several instrumental cases in order draw some conclusions or theorize about a general condition or phenomenon (Stake, 2000).

This dissertation will use a collective case study approach with some focus on the descriptive approach, which has an emphasis “on the outcome of the investigation, which should produce rich description of a particular phenomenon, typically in narrative form” (Jones et al., 2013, pp. 95-96). The particular phenomenon in this study is the experiences of students of color in the environment of the selective liberal arts college in the Midwest and how these students come to understand themselves as leaders in this environment.

**Critical Race Case Study Methodology**

Critical race methodology and case study methodology will be used as complementary approaches to understanding the unique phenomenon of exploring the experiences of students of color in relation to how they understand themselves as leaders at a small liberal arts college. Additionally, critical race methodology and collective case study methodology will provide direction for the design of the study, specifically the methods of the study such as: sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Solórzano and
Yosso (2002) defined critical race methodology as, “a theoretically grounded approach to research that foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process” (p. 24).

Developing a critical race methodology must begin by defining race and racism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Audre Lorde (1992) has a succinct definition of racism, which is “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (p. 496, as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Manning Marable (1992) defined racism as “a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color” (p. 5). Marable’s definition shifts the paradigm of race and racism from a Black-White dichotomy “to one that includes multiple faces, voices, and experiences” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). These definitions of race and racism inform my understanding as I approach this study incorporating CRT, critical race methodology, and case study methodology.

As a collective case study, the unit of analysis is each participant, also considered an individual “case.” This procedure is intentional, by design, and informed by the research questions driving this study. Studying the experiences of a single, undergraduate student of color who is exploring leadership, would not provide the necessary depth to respond to the research questions, and it would also run counter to this study’s constructivist epistemology. As Crotty (1998) stated, “meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (pp. 8–9). Thus, even though the participants share elements of their individual identities, in that they are at least second-year undergraduates who identify as students of color, their social realities are different,
and the various ways in which they have made and continue to make meaning of their experiences would inform this study are different.

**Methods**

**Selection of site**

In this study, the institutional context is a small, private, selective liberal arts institution that provides a distinctive and understudied backdrop for studying leadership development. While other research has examined the role of institutional selectivity in the student experience (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Carnevale & Rose, 2003; Melguizo, 2008), few studies have examined the specific experiences of students and leadership development. Institutional selectivity has been found to play a direct role in student persistence by enrolling students who are more academically prepared for college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Titus, 2004). Evidence also suggests that selectivity influences persistence indirectly through the institutional messages and peer interactions (Bowen et al., 2009). I posit that these peer interactions often times happen outside of the classroom in co-curricular activities, which include leadership programs and student organizations.

Leadership College [pseudonym] has approximately 1,600 students, with Black, non-Hispanic at 5.7% and Hispanic (sic) at 7.3%. Leadership College was selected as the site for this study for three primary reasons. First, as a residential liberal arts college, Leadership College offers a site that has received little attention in the broader literature on leadership development and college students, and specifically the experiences of students of students of color. Given the large amount of literature on the experiences of students of color at large public universities, and the creation of the leadership identity
development model at a large, public, mid-Atlantic university, Leadership College provides a rarely studied environment in relation to leadership development and the experiences of students of color in relation to a liberal arts education. It is important to first appreciate the relationship between student leadership development and liberal arts education. In the colonial colleges, leadership development as an integral element of a liberal arts curriculum was considered central for preparing young [white] men to be engaged citizens in a free society (Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2004). Rothblatt (2003) explained that certain typologies have been associated with liberal education throughout the history of American higher education. He suggested that the most critical characteristics of this type of educational experience would result in the advancement of “character formation, leadership, breadth, personality development, critical thinking, and general education” (p. 4). Researchers in the literature have discussed the linkage between a liberal education and [white] student leadership development (Canada, 1999; Durden, 2007; Lang, 1999; Pascarella, Wolniak, Seifert, Cruce, & Blaich, 2005; Seifert et al., 2008; Rothblatt, 2003). Durden expressed that a liberal arts education serves as one of the foremost pathways to leadership, and Seifert et al. “found positive effects of liberal arts experiences on the eight scales of socially responsible leadership” (p. 122). The past literature has not situated race, and specifically examined the experiences of students of color in these liberal arts college environments.

Second, Leadership College is considered a highly selective institution. The college denies admission to more applicants than it accepts, and the majority of admitted students are in the top quartile of their graduating high school class and report high achievement scores on the SAT and/or the ACT. Many of the liberal arts colleges in
America have leadership development of their student population as one of the fundamental elements of their educational objectives (Astin, 1997; Durden, 2001; Rothblatt, 2003). The desire to develop leadership qualities in students is especially evident when investigating the mission statements and learning outcomes of American liberal arts colleges. My assumption is that many of these students come in as leaders from high school and with a high leadership capacity, but little attention has been paid to the experiences of these students at the most selective colleges and universities. In addition, little attention has been given to the experiences of students of color who identify as leaders.

Finally, Leadership College was selected for its mission and espoused values. Today, Leadership College has a commitment to social justice continues through a strong philosophy of self-governance and personal responsibility, as well as programs and initiatives that encourage students to learn about the world beyond the campus and effect positive social change. The liberal arts college culture fosters values that often lead to the pursuit of service to the community and society, strong tenets of student leadership development (Rothblatt, 2003). In fact, this objective may promote the development of socially responsible leadership skills for students attending these colleges and universities. This environment is a unique case to explore the experiences of students of color because it important to consider their lived experiences. Students of color who are considered relational leaders highlight the role race plays in leadership identity development at Leadership College.
Participants

A “criterion-based selection” technique was used to identify potential participants for this study (Merriam, 1998, p. 51). As a case study, it was critical that each prospective participant, or case, met certain criteria. Specifically, the participants needed to be entering their second semester, second year of study at Leadership College. Upper-class students were of particular interest due to: (a) their extended time at Leadership College; (b) some of them nearing graduation from college; and (c) the fact that they had time to get involved in campus student organizations and hold a position. Students also must self-identify as a student of color. Nominators in student affairs positions at Leadership College, who have the opportunity to observe students interacting and leading student organizations, will be invited to nominate students who they consider “relational leaders” and are considered leaders on campus. After students were identified, I did ask participants, through snowball sampling, to nominate peers who they felt fit the criteria of the study and that they felt were making positive change on campus. Table 1 (below) highlights the students’ self-reported demographics.
Table 1. Participant Self-Reported Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Leadership Orgs.</th>
<th>Scholarship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bernardo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Spanish and Education</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Latino Stu. Union (LSU); Unity Rally</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Latino Stu. Union (LSU)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriela</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Mexican-American</td>
<td>Stu. Government (SGA)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>Black/Nigerian</td>
<td>SGA; African Stu. Association</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Political Science and English</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Black Student Union</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>Chinese-American</td>
<td>ACE; LSU</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>LSU; Intercultural Diversity; Unity Rally</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Chinese-American</td>
<td>AAA; SGA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonardo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>LSU; Intercultural Diversity</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Asian/Malaysian</td>
<td>Program Committee;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collection

While collecting different types of data is common across other forms of qualitative inquiry (e.g., ethnography and phenomenology), it is a key and critical feature
of case study research. The rich detail that is frequently characteristic of exemplar case studies would be difficult to achieve without collecting and consulting an array of information sources. Data consisted of information from interviews and campus documents, with the interviews being the focus of data collection for the purpose of this study. Each participant was interviewed individually three times in person or via telephone due to scheduling. Interviews followed a semi-structure, open-interview protocol (Jones et al., 2013) informed by the research questions and theoretical frameworks. Interviews lasted anywhere from 60 minutes to ninety minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed.

Public documents were collected from Leadership College (i.e., institutional data on student demographics, student organizations). Institutional documents assisted in understanding institutional processes and policies in relation to student leadership development. Additionally, public campus climate reports were analyzed to triangulate the data and to also help form questions to the participants around environment and their perceptions of the campus climate. Researcher memos were used to reflect and record thoughts and ideas throughout the research, and particularly interviewing, process (Jones et al., 2013). After each interview, I created memos in order to not forget any thoughts about information shared, but to also remember my reactions to the students stories and responses.

**Data analysis**

Counterstorytelling serves as an analytical tool for examining stories and is prevalent in research using critical race theory. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), counterstorytelling “aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or
myths, especially ones held by the majority” (p. 144). Counterstories function to (1) build community among marginalized individuals and groups, (2) challenge claims of knowledge and wisdom of dominant groups, (3) illuminate alternative realities of those at the margins of society, and (4) provide context in an effort to transform current systems of belief and value (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado, 1989; Lawson, 1995; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Through use of counter-storytelling in this study, dominant understandings around leadership development can be addressed when considering the experiences of students of color at a highly selective liberal arts college.

There are three most common types of counterstories: autobiographical narratives, biographical narratives, and composite narratives. This study used a combination of narratives, so that the data was originated from the stories and experiences of the participants individually, but a cross-case analysis was also conducted. The cross-case analysis provided an opportunity to see the multiple ways in which race (and racism) impacted the leadership development experiences.

**Trustworthy, member checking, and triangulation**

The ability to execute a meaningful qualitative study is informed by the researcher’s commitment to ethical procedures and guidelines as well as his or her ability to establish trust with the participants. It is important to ensure the latter is partially determined by the former. Several steps were taken to encourage full participation from the participants and to ensure their rights as participants were fully understood.

All participants, choose a pseudonym at the beginning of the first interview, and were presented with an informed consent document prior to their participation in any
element of the study. The participants were presented with an electronic informed consent form through email once they agreed to participate. All participants received a copy of the informed consent document they signed, and all signed copies were stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. All data that was gathered for this study was stored in a secure location. All electronic files were stored on a password-protected laptop accessible only by the researcher.

The final ethical measure included the use of member checks. Stake (1995) defined member checking as the process whereby “the actor is requested to examine rough drafts of writing where the actions or words of the actor are featured” (p. 115). This technique provides the case participants an opportunity to provide feedback to the researcher directly, clarify any misperceptions of what was presented, and even suggest the use of alternative phrasing or language (Stake). This is not only an ethical strategy to ensure the participants’ experiences were presented fairly and accurately, but is also a method to ensure the study is trustworthy.

For this study, several measures were taken to ensure the study is trustworthy and dependable. First, as previously mentioned, the use of member checks provided the participants an opportunity to review their interview transcripts during which time they were invited to elaborate on their comments, redact statements, and respond to any additional follow-up questions the researcher might pose. Their involvement in the review and revision of their contributions to the study greatly improved the overall quality of the study. Second, the use of multiple data sources not only enhanced the rigor of the study, but also provided multiple points for triangulation to occur. As Creswell (2013) described, “this process [triangulation] involves corroborating evidence from
different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (p. 251). The rich data that was gathered from each case participant’s interview transcripts provided profound information from which to identify individual and shared themes across the cases. Third, I recruited colleagues to serve as peer reviewers to “keep the researcher honest” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). These peer reviewers were two practitioners in higher education with advanced degrees who are familiar with the student leadership development literature and the experiences of students of color. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the role of a peer reviewer is to provide good feedback, ask tough questions, and play the role of devil’s advocate. This also helped to enhance the quality of this study. Finally, an audit trail will be created and maintained to document the study’s data collection methods, noting specifically when data will be obtained and when and how the data will be analyzed. As Merriam (2002) described, “An audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (p. 27).

**Researcher Positionality**

When reflecting on how I position myself as a researcher conducting qualitative research, I must first acknowledge my identities and my understanding of those identities. Through this I recognize that issues can emerge for me as a researcher from the same social identity as a potential study participant. Additionally, I must recognize my privileges and power dynamics as a leadership educator. Through reflection, I must understand how I will potentially navigate this situation throughout the entire research process. This reflection and understanding has assisted me in developing this research design that is inclusive of how I situate myself and my personal investment in the
research. My own worldviews may cause tensions or congruence with the epistemological approach of constructivism. This reflection briefly outlines some of my own salient social identities and how these identities influence my research position, my understanding of my “hyphen” (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006), and reflect on my personal understanding of constructivism in the research process.

A researcher’s position signifies the influence that comes from his or her own social identities. “A researcher must understand his or her position and power within societal structures in order to attend to her or his potential biases” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 103). My social identity as a Black gay man from Indiana can influence how I relate to a study participant from similar or different identities. My understanding of my experiences and feelings of oppression as a Black man witnessing the oppression of family members and friends can contribute to a bias I might reveal during the research process. These biases could be towards a participant who cannot recognize their racial privilege or who acknowledges it, but also cannot recognize oppression, or sees the world through a colorblind lens. These biases might also come into play when analyzing the data and interpreting a participant who I might perceive as having privilege. I might interpret the participant’s interview as portraying privilege because that is what I am choosing to hear, as a person who has been oppressed, and may not be staying true to what the participant is really saying. According to Jones et al. (2006), it is important to clarify whose story is being told and to explain how the participants’ words are being understood.

Therefore, it is also important to recognize that issues can surface for me as a researcher with participants from the same social identity. Jones et al. (2006) also discussed being an “insider” and allowing students to be able to create their own meaning
from their experiences and not imposing the meaning of the researcher, as the insider, on the experiences of the participants. I had to reflect and understand how my social identities can influence how I relate to a study participant with similar social identities during the research process and understand their leadership identity, without imposing my past racialized experiences with leadership on them.

Doing research in fall 2009 on Black student leaders, I found myself coding an interview transcription of a Black male student leader, and he was describing a situation that I could totally relate to as a past student leader on a predominately White campus. I found myself interpreting the transcription and living through the story and recreating my own personal experience as a student leader. My co-researchers had to bring this to my attention and ask me “Is this what you are saying, or is this actually what the student is saying?” I had to acknowledge my bias and assure the quality of the research by figuring out how to balance my own interpretations with the participant’s stories and allow for the students stories to speak for themselves (Jones et al., 2006). This now positions me to acknowledge all of my social identities in relation to the sample of the study and the participant’s identities and how I construct meaning of the data that is presented in the upcoming chapters.

As I reflected on my own identity and how I might interact with different social identities and identities similar to mine, I needed to think about how I would respond to that interaction. “Privilege and power must be acknowledged in the research process in order to appropriately work the hyphen and understand…” (Jones et al., 2006, p.108). Working the hyphen to me means that for those study participants of different social identities than myself, I had to analyze my position of power and privilege (as a male,
Christian, educated, etc.) and recognize my own actions of oppression. I then had to address how the participant viewed me as the researcher in relation to power and privilege, what was their understanding of the research process and my role; these are all questions I had to consider when thinking about the “hyphen.” Finally, I needed to ensure I fully understood my own interpretation to the answers to these questions and how I communicated that both verbally and nonverbally to the participants. By recognizing my own biases during the participant interaction, I became conscious as a researcher of my response to the participants. Thus, I was able to understand how I might construct knowledge of the participant’s experiences.

Constructing knowledge in higher education student affairs entails taking developmental theories and reevaluating and adapting them to meet the situation or research at hand (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). When reflecting on my own worldview and how that might cause tensions and congruence with the epistemological approach of constructivism, I first must understand my worldview and how that knowledge has been constructed through my experiences. My experiences as a minority student on a predominately white campus, as Christian in a predominately Christian country, and my role as a male in a chauvinistic society have all shaped my worldview. My knowledge of oppression and privilege have been influenced by all of these identities and my development within these identities. “Views of reality are socially constructed and culturally embedded, those views dominant at any time and place will serve the interests and perspectives of those who exercise the most power in a particular culture” (Patton, 2002). Therefore, this knowledge that I have constructed from these experiences shaped how I constructed knowledge during this research process.
By understanding constructivism in this research process and how I made meaning, I could further acknowledge my biases that might have influenced the research process. Recognizing these biases allowed me to assure the quality of the research and be conscious of my own social identities and their influences on me when I conducted interviews and analyzed the data. Therefore, I brought this to my own attention when analyzing data and asked myself: “Am I interpreting the data from the perspective of what I think the participant means or from the perspective of what the study participants are really revealing in their own words?” I was also challenged by my peer reviewers to remain true to the students’ voices. This reflection allowed me to enter a critical qualitative study with the understanding that I was continuing to construct knowledge throughout the entire research process, and had to acknowledge my biases that are relative to my own social identities.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter three focused on detailing the research design of this project. Specifically, the epistemological (constructivist), theoretical (critical race theory and leadership identity development), and methodological (critical race and case study methodology) frameworks were shared. Lastly, specific methods employed to recruit participants, collect, analyze, and share data were presented. Chapter four presents participant profiles. Chapter five will highlight key findings and chapter six will offer implications, recommendations, and conclusions.
CHAPTER 4. PARTICIPANT PROFILES

In this chapter, I present profiles and the lived experiences of the 10 leaders who self-identify as students of color and who participated in the study. The participants selected for this study included a representation of different academic majors, racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and levels of campus involvement. All participants were nominated by college administrators and peers who considered them relational leaders—meaning they were identified as students who engaged in positive change on campus. In order to give context to the students’ experiences, I have provided a description of participants’ lives beyond their academic experiences and lives prior to attending Leadership College. Seven of the participants chose to attend Leadership College because of a scholarship program through a foundation, the Community Leadership Scholarship foundation [pseudonym]. This chapter will profile each of the 10 participants. The profiles are intended to frame the students’ racial identities, specifically how they self-identify. Students’ background, major, and classification at Leadership College will also be profiled. Finally, students’ family background and how they came to Leadership College will also be highlighted.

Grace

Grace is a senior majoring in International Affairs. When I first met Grace, she was rushed into our first interview and was out of breath. She apologized for being a few minutes late and shared with me that someone stopped her on the way over to ask a question related to the Student Government Association (SGA). Grace currently serves as
the vice-president for Student Affairs for the SGA. I assumed it was normal for her to
walk across campus and be stopped by someone because of her role on campus. Grace’s
energy was infectious and she greeted me with a large smile. Grace is a junior and calls
herself a “third culture kid” who was born in Nigeria. She describes being a “third culture
kid” as spending the majority of her life in the United States while being raised in a very
traditional Nigerian home. She stated that she does not feel that she has “entirely been
American,” but is conflicted because she feels that she is too far removed from the
happenings of Nigeria. Grace describes being Nigerian as a very important aspect of her
identity in terms of how she interacts with her peers. Grace feels that with her African
friends she is not “African enough” and that with her American friends she is not
“African enough,” but her Black friends tell her, “You’re Black, but you’re a different
kind of Black.”

Grace lived in Nigeria for the first few years of her life and then moved to the
United States with her family. She has lived in Nebraska, Kentucky, and Maryland.
When Grace described herself, she stressed the importance of family in her life. She has
three siblings and is a middle child with one younger sister. She stresses that she is very
close to her siblings. Through Grace’s three interviews, it was evident that she is very
aware of her identity as a woman of color at Leadership College. Grace could clearly
articulate how she has made meaning of her experiences thus far. Immediately following
the three interviews for this study, Grace was elected president of the student body.

Bernardo

Bernardo is a sophomore majoring in Spanish and Education from Los Angeles,
California and was born in Chinatown. Bernardo shared with me that his family moved
into a predominantly low-income Latino neighborhood and then moved to Koreatown, where they have lived for 16 years. He is the oldest child and has two younger brothers. Bernardo self-identifies as Latino; his parents are from Mexico and of Guatemalan descent. He shared with me that while growing up he did not know much about being Hispanic and Latino. Bernardo has great admiration for his mother and her hard work. He described how she always has worked multiple jobs to support him and his brothers.

Bernardo was nominated to participate in this study by a student affairs administrator who felt that he was an active student on campus. Originally, I excluded sophomores from the study. However, administrators felt Bernardo would be a great participant based on his leadership on campus, so I extended an invitation for him to participate (once I made an IRB modification). Bernardo received the reputation as a campus leader very recently when he organized a Unity Rally in reaction to racial discrimination events on campus. The Unity Rally came up multiple times in students’ interviews when discussing their experiences on campus and is described in more detail in Chapter Five. Bernardo is heavily involved with the Latino Student Union (LSU), and he came to Leadership College on the scholarship mentioned previously.

Diana

Diana is a senior psychology major from the Sun Valley, California area. She has aspirations to attend law school. Diana is the co-chair of the Latino Student Union and has been involved all four years she has been at Leadership College. Diana also received the scholarship.

Her parents are Mexican, and she uses the label of Chicana because of her Mexican heritage. She first identified as Chicana in middle school when she started
learning about the Chicana movement and what it meant to be Mexican-American in Los Angeles. She shared with me that up until that point, she was told that she was Hispanic and never really knew what that meant. She learned about the origin of the term Hispanic in high school, meaning of Spanish descent and/or coming from a Spanish-speaking country. Diana said the following:

The Spanish-speaking part made sense to me because my parents are from Mexico and Spanish is my first language, but I didn’t know how I felt about identifying as Spanish or of Spanish ancestry, even though that’s very much true for a lot of people with Mexican heritage.

Thus, she chose the term Latina to describe herself because it is more inclusive in her opinion and does not leave out certain people, such as those who may have indigenous parents, for example. She identifies more with the geography of her heritage and not so much with her “Spanish descent” or the fact that she speaks Spanish.

Diana was always very professional during our meetings. For each interview, she appeared to be neatly dressed and came across as very put-together. I must say of all the participants, I developed a strong bond with Diana when she shared her personal struggle of being a Latina, identifying as Christian, and struggling with her lesbian identity. During the second interview, she was very emotional when discussing the tensions she navigates with because of identifying as a Latina, lesbian woman and being accepted in both identity groups even though she is a leader in both student groups on campus. At the end of the second interview, instead of shaking hands, we offered each other a hug. Diana’s negotiations of her multiple identities contributed to how she constructed her leadership identity.
Gabriela

Gabriela identifies as a Mexican-American from Los Angeles who is majoring in philosophy with aspirations to also be a lawyer. Her parents emigrated from Mexico, and she considers herself a first-generation Mexican-American. She is the youngest of three sisters, all of whom have pursued higher education. The main reason she came to Leadership College was because of the scholarship. Gabriela is involved on campus with SGA; she serves as the administrative coordinator. Additionally, Gabriela serves as a tour guide for the Office of Admissions, a technical consultant coordinator for Information Technology Services, a trip coordinator for Alternative Spring Break Trips, and a co-president for the Debate Union. She described herself as someone who is constantly trying to do what is right. She stressed to me that she does not like having free time and likes to stay busy to avoid boredom.

Gabriela always came into our meetings very serious. She would get angry and raise her voice, and she would slam her hand down on the table when she discussed experiencing racism or sexism on campus. In Chapter Five, I include a detailed story from Gabriela’s experience during an SGA meeting when discussing poverty on campus. While telling me about these painful experiences, Gabriela was extremely emotional, specifically during the second interview. Given her immediate emotional reaction to my probing questions about her experiences, I assumed she had not fully made sense of how she felt during those meetings with SGA and how the feeling of anger had affected her.

Howard

Howard is a senior majoring in political science and English and is from Chicago, Illinois. Howard identifies as a Black man. He describes himself as a Christian and a
person who cares about his community. He chose Leadership College because of the scholarship. Throughout our interviews, he was very reflective of his time at Leadership College. He was able to be critical of the college while also articulating what he feels Leadership College has given him as a co-chair of the Black Student Union.

Howard came across as a very serious young man during our conversations. He was the most difficult participant to schedule interviews with due to his schedule. Howard is also the monitor, a senior student staff member, at the Black Culture Center on campus. Through this position, he is responsible for programming and administering the facility space, which he mentioned is extremely time-consuming. He was very proud of his actions because he was instrumental in drafting a successful student initiative to secure funding to renovate the Black Culture Center. Additionally, Howard works in the Office of Admissions and coordinates the self-governance security volunteers on campus. Howard was very passionate about supporting and being engaged with the surrounding community around and stated that he got that from his grandfather, who was a local business owner in Chicago.

**Jay**

Jay describes herself as a second-generation Chinese-American from Honolulu, Hawaii. She is a sophomore majoring in international relations. She shared with me that she grew up in a big house, and her Chinese heritage was definitely very strong growing up. She gave examples of her family speaking Cantonese around the house until she started attending grade school. She has two sisters and is the middle child. Her older sister also attends a college in the Midwest. Jay is actively involved on the All Campus Events (ACE) committee. The committee is responsible for funding and approving
student-run events at Leadership College. Jay also serves as the public relations chair for the Latino Student Union. I was surprised by this, considering she does not identify as Latina. She advised me that it was the first student organization meeting she had went to with friends and felt very welcomed in the space and has been engaged for the past two years.

Jay was a burst of energy and was very excited to be asked about her identity and leadership experiences thus far. Jay’s high-energy personality made our interviews exciting because she was full of laughter. She said no one had ever asked her some of the questions I posed, and thus, she had never really thought about her race in relation to her leadership until I asked. During the first interview, I could tell that she had not fully thought about the issues of leadership and race, specifically race at Leadership College. By the second interview, 10 days later, Jay was much more thoughtful and intentional with her answers and how she has made sense of her Chinese-American identity in relation to her leadership identity, which is explained in Chapter Five.

Julian

Julian is a sophomore majoring in sociology and is from Los Angeles, California. Julian was adamant that he would not be at Leadership College if it were not for the scholarship program and the access to higher education that it provided. Julian identifies as a Latino man whose family is from Mexico. Julian got excited when sharing his love for music with me, specifically metal music. He was hoping to find an internship over the summer in the music industry. Julian was a co-organizer of the Unity Rally with Bernardo and stated that it was his first true leadership experience at Leadership College.
Julian is involved with the Latino Student Union, works in the Center for Careers, Life, and Service as an intern and as a student worker in the Office of Intercultural Diversity.

Julian described his neighborhood as the “ghetto” and pointed out that no one goes on to college after high school. He described feeling a great responsibility to do something great with this opportunity to pursue higher education. I sensed a great humility from Julian as someone who was trying to understand what role he could play at Leadership College to make it better and leave an impact. Julian was recommended by fellow students, Bernardo and Diana, to participate in this study because of his involvement in organizing the Unity Rally.

Leonardo

Leonardo is a junior from Los Angeles and is majoring in sociology. Leonardo is active with the Office of Intercultural Affairs and Diversity and an active participant in the Latino Student Union. Of all of the participants, Leonardo was the most interested in the actual study of student leadership and the approach I was taking. He repeatedly asked me about my methodology, how I was defining leadership, and what I planned to do with the findings after my dissertation. His immediate interest really surprised me, but he informed me that he wanted to go on to graduate school in sociology, so he wanted to know more about the research process.

Leonardo was very critical of his experience at Leadership College and the racism and classism he had experienced both on campus and in the community. He was adamant about being engaged in the community around him, something he had in common with Howard. He explained that he does this by coaching soccer for students whose families cannot afford lessons or club sports in the community where the college is located.
Leonardo has even taken the initiative to start a coaching program with students from Leadership College who can go into the community to coach sports for low-income families who want to participate. Leonardo said he felt a huge separation between the community and the college when he first arrived at Leadership College and did not like the way that felt. He wanted to know about the people in the community and how he could serve them. He acknowledged that many of his peers frequently question him about why he is so involved in the community and that their ignorance is extremely frustrating. This experience is very salient for Leonardo and how he is defining his identity as a student leader at Leadership College. These aspects will be explored further in Chapter Five.

Kayla

Kayla is a Chinese-American woman from Queens, New York. She is a senior majoring in history and Chinese. Kayla is the diversity and outreach coordinator for SGA and has served as the president and events coordinator for the Asian and Asian American Association (AAA). She was recommended to participate in the study by Grace, who she works with in SGA. Kayla attended a small high school that focused on the humanities and really wanted to attend a liberal arts college as a result of that experience. She wanted to gain a more “holistic education” and felt she could receive that at a highly selective liberal arts college like Leadership College. She had a friend who attended Leadership College two years before her, which was the first time she had heard of the college, and looked into the school further and decided to apply. Kayla shared that she had a very difficult time transitioning from Queens, New York, to the Midwest. Kayla’s parents had immigrated to the United States earlier in life, and she was born in New York.
Kayla expressed that she had difficulty in understanding why others saw her as a leader because she felt her actions were just that of an engaged student. Kayla shared her frustration of being a Chinese-American student and of often being confused as an international student by other students at Leadership College. She feels these misconceptions, or false representations are due to lack of understanding of Asians, Asian Americans, and international students from Asia. Kayla feels this ignorance does not only happen at the student level, but also at the faculty level and inside the classroom. These experiences have defined Kayla’s leadership journey and are outlined in more detail in Chapter Five.

**Rachel**

Rachel is a senior majoring in political science from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Rachel identifies as Asian. She was recommended for the study by a student affairs administrator in residence life. Rachel is a student representative on the Program Committee, was a past senator for SGA, and serves as the media relations assistant for the Office of Communications.

Rachel has an interesting background that differs from other participants because Rachel considers herself an international student. Her mother serves as a Malaysian diplomat and was the Malaysian ambassador to Romania. Rachel grew up partly in Malaysia and Romania, where she attended an American high school. There she met an alumnus of Leadership College who was a faculty member at her high school. He encouraged her to consider Leadership College because she wanted to attend a liberal arts college in the United States. Rachel stated that, through her classes at Leadership College, she started to understand the meaning of race in the context of American history.
She stated that students are often surprised that she is an international student because they say “you can speak English so clearly without an accent.” Rachel stated that experiences like this at Leadership College happen often, considering it is a predominately white campus, but she is encouraged to stay involved, specifically in student government, to challenge the misconceptions and ignorance regarding students of color and international students.

**Chapter Summary**

All 10 participants were actively engaged on campus at Leadership College and were considered to be relational leaders by those who recommended them for the study. The participant profiles highlight the students’ understanding of their identities, specifically their racial identities. The participants in this study have experiences that shape how they have navigated through Leadership College and what role their leadership experiences have played in their leadership identity development. Their family histories and lived experiences shape their understandings in higher education. In the following chapter, Chapter 5, the findings of this study will be presented. In Chapter 6, the discussion surrounding the findings, practical and research implications of the study, my personal reflection, and the study conclusion will be presented.
CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

Participants’ profiles were highlighted in the previous chapter. The findings from this study are highlighted in this chapter and guided by the following research questions:

1. How do students of color perceive themselves as leaders at a highly selective liberal arts college in the Midwest?
2. How do students of color make sense of their race in relation to their experiences as leaders at a highly selective liberal arts college in the Midwest?
3. How have racialized experiences shaped students of color’s leadership identity?

After a comprehensive data analysis, the themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis are descriptions of: (a) individual social experiences, (b) early transition challenges and responding by involvement, (c) understanding leadership development and involvement as a process, (d) resisting and responding to racism and microaggressions, and (e) defining leadership for self. Each theme highlights the different ways students of color create perceptions of themselves as leaders and make sense of their race in relation to their leadership experiences at Leadership College, which is a highly selective private predominately White liberal arts college in the Midwest. This analysis is guided by critical race theory and the endemic and systemic structures of this particular liberal arts college in relation to the lived experiences of this study’s participants. The discussion of the findings in relation to the analytical and theoretical framework of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) will be discussed further in Chapter 6.
Social History and Experiences

Participants in the interviews provided information on their understandings of their race and ethnicity, parental response to their decision to pursue their educational goals far away from home at Leadership College, their family situations and childhood experiences that have supported their educational and leadership decisions, and those who they consider to be role models for their personal leadership development. Therefore, social history and experiences was revealed as the first thematic category in the data analysis. This category was divided into four corresponding thematic sub-categories of (a) self-defining race/ethnicity, (b) parental reaction and support, (c) childhood experiences, and (d) role models. Each of these sub-categories is discussed separately.

Self-defining race and ethnicity

The participants described their personal heritage and ethnic background. These descriptions formed the first sub-category under the thematic category of social history and experiences of participants. Of the 10 participants, five described themselves as Latino, two as Chinese or Chinese American, two as Black or African American (one specifically Nigerian), and one as Malaysian. Table 2 below provides an illustration of these ethnic origins.
Participants offered their own understandings of their race and ethnicity. The participants who identified as Latino/a, in particular, specifically chose to identify as Latino/a or Chicano/a as opposed to Hispanic. One participant, Bernardo, explained the reason for this distinction. Bernardo stated:

Growing up I didn’t know much about the difference between being Hispanic and Latino but as I’ve matured and done research on my culture and my community and the people who look like me Hispanic kind of connotes that colonization from Spain. I don’t choose to identify to being European or being from European decent, from Spanish decent so too I consider myself more Latino than I do Hispanic.

Similarly, participant Diana explained how the distinction personally relates to having a Mexican heritage specifically. Diana stated, “I identify as Latina. My parents are Mexican and so I also identify, or use the label of Chicana because I have Mexican heritage.” Diana explained the difference clearly, when she described:

All my life I was told that I was Hispanic and I never really knew what that meant. So, it wasn’t really until maybe the end of high school or beginning of my time at Leadership College that I started looking into what it meant to be Hispanic. And so, I learned about the origin and Hispanic meaning of Spanish descent and, or come from a Spanish-speaking country. So, the Spanish-speaking part made sense to me because my parents are from Mexico and Spanish is my first language, but
I didn’t know how I felt about identifying as Spanish or of Spanish ancestry, even though that’s very much true for a lot of people with Mexican heritage. So, I chose the term Latina and to describe myself as Latina because it’s more inclusive in my opinion and so it doesn’t leave out people who maybe, may have parents who are indigenous, for example, but are, they were born in the U.S., which is- One of my friends actually from high school had indigenous parents who were illiterate, yeah, and all those things. So, I identify much more with the geography and not so much my Spanish descent or the fact that I speak Spanish.

Participant Grace, who identified as Black and Nigerian, described being from two worlds and not necessarily fitting in with either one:

I was born in Nigeria. Lived there for the first few years of my life and then I moved to the U.S. . . . I’ve spent the majority of my life in the states but I was raised in a very traditionally Nigerian home, so I’ve never entirely been American, but I’m sort of too far removed from like the happenings of Nigeria to be like, you are from the mother land kind of thing. So that’s a very important part of my identity in terms of how I interact with my peers because with my, you know, African friends, you know, I’m not African enough with my American friends, like you’re not really American but my Black friends, you’re Black but you’re a different kind of Black. So that’s sort of like, you know, I’ve created my own little niche of person or culture which has been fun. It’s been fun. It’s been challenging but it’s like an integral part of my world and I think that probably has one of the biggest impacts on how I view myself in relation to others.

Participant Kayla had a similar experience of mixed cultures with the American culture. Kayla stated:

I identify as Chinese American. My parents immigrated here so I was born here, I grew up here. But my heritage, I guess, like because my parents are immigrants and a lot of my extended family is still in China, I would say I still feel ... and I can also speak the language.

From some of these responses, participants often described close knit family relationships. Therefore, the question was asked about parental and family responses to
the decision to attend college very far from home. These response represent the next thematic sub-category.

**Parental reaction and support**

The participants were asked how their parents responded to their desire to attend college far away from home at a predominately White private liberal arts college. For most of the participants, the transition to college was difficult with respect to their families. The participants described parents who did not understand their decision, were hurt by their decision to attend college so far away from home, or were simply missing their son/daughter. One participant described how the decision to leave the family to attend college far away went against cultural norms that support staying with your family. In contrast, two participants noted that their parents were supportive of their decision, even expecting that the participant would go to college, perhaps far away. Table 3 provides the responses of participants related to this second sub-category of the first thematic category of social history and experiences of the participants.

**Table 3.** Participants’ Self-Reported Parental Reaction and Level of Support for College Choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Reaction/Level of Support</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficult, missed me</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not understand choice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took the choice to go far away personally</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected to go to college</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous about my adjustment period</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino culture supports staying with family, and I did not</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parental reactions typically combined emotions of family loss and understanding the choice made for the future. For example, participant Gabriella stated:

They [parents] just like can’t understand why I didn’t apply to Harvard, why I didn’t apply to like Yale and Princeton cause they ... My mom is confident, 100% confident that I would have gotten in if I had just like applied. But they’ve seen how much Leadership College has given me so like they ... they were very like I don’t know why you want to go to [Midwest state], like. But they were very proud that I got a full tuition scholarship. So ... And they were very upset that I was going so far in ... in the selection process. . . They were so happy that I got a full tuition scholarship and, you know, the more they heard of Leadership College, the more they liked it. (Gabriella)

Other participants described the support offered by their parents. Grace described:

I think they knew that I was going to come out to ... I would be the one to go out to somewhere crazy. And they ... But they were incredibly supportive. I think my parents were nervous about me not applying to different schools. They were sort of nervous about me being so singularly focused. But luckily for me, I have parents who believe in my craziness as much as I do so that’s been ... that was no issue.

**Childhood experiences**

The third sub-category falling under the thematic category of social history and experiences was formed from participant responses related to specific childhood experiences that served to support their decision to attend Leadership College and to develop their concept of leadership. These experiences showed an influence on the participants’ attitude toward and personal responsibility placed on their college education and social responsibilities. Although the participant experiences were varied, all of the participants experienced some level of family financial difficulties with regard to affording college, with additional similarities evident in having moved around to different
areas and learning to give to the community. Table 4 illustrates participant responses and frequency of similar responses among the group of participants in the study.

### Table 4. Participants’ Self-Reported Childhood Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moved around to different areas</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned to give to the community and be active in community</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive high school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of family experiences and difficulties, feel personal responsibility with education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents strongly supported education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The childhood experiences of the participant were felt to influence their educational and leadership goals and directions. Three participants described moving around and two described how they learned from a young age to be active in the community and to give back. For example, participant Grace described the many locations in which she has lived:

I was born in Nigeria. Lived there for the first few years of my life and then I moved to the U.S. and I’ve sort of lived all over the place. I’ve lived in Nebraska. I’ve lived in Kentucky. I’ve lived in Maryland.

Similarly, Rachel described some confusion over one’s personal identity when one has lived in many places:

I was born in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. My mom is a diplomat so we moved around a lot. I moved to Australia when I was 3 and then after that we lived in Thailand and Malaysia for a bit. Then I spent my high school years in Romania. Then I came to Leadership College in [Midwest state]. I am a political science major and I guess I really like to center my activities and internships and things. I guess activities that concern social
equality, poverty alleviation. Also I have a general interest in international relations and development.

Relating specifically to learning to support the community, participant Howard explained:

Even before high school, [I] probably [got it] from my mom. You know, it’s just something that we’ve always done. Feeding the homeless is actually something that we’ve done every Christmas Eve or something. And even thereafter, [in] high school, I spent my Saturdays feeding the homeless through this organization [in Chicago]. . . and here on campus, you know, I’m one of the chairpersons for the [Black Student Union]. And one of the things that we do to give back to the community is hosting community meals.

Role models

The participants were asked to describe their role models who have served to support their leadership development. The responses of participants were used to develop the fourth sub-category within the thematic category of social history and experiences. Common responses were family members, specifically parents and grandparents. Table 5 illustrates the variety of participant responses and response frequencies.

Table 5. Students Self-Reported Role Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Model</th>
<th>Times Named</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother or godmother</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia Sotomayor, Supreme Court Justice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly older Chinese girls, who are self-assured and capable</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandfather</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older sister</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not really have a role model</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A musician example</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the common responses, parents and close family members of the participants most often were reported as their role models. These individuals who served as role models were often the mothers and/or fathers, godmothers, and grandparents. For example, Gabriella explained in detail:

I guess this is kind of like cliche but it’s definitely like my mom and my dad. Because, okay. So my mom and my dad are very different. They’re so different. They really complement each other so well. . . . So I definitely see like both my parents and like what they’ve managed to accomplish together as like my role model. Because, like I said, they’re so different but they’ve accomplished so much. You know, my dad, he’s so smart. My dad is really, really smart and in high school, the only class he ever failed was English. And now he’s come and he’s learned this language and he knows it better than most like the fathers that came with him. And he’s worked so hard so I definitely want that. And my mom, she’s been the one who’s like really struggled with English and, you know, like I can see how like embarrassing it’ll be for her to like have to speak, have to work and like it be using English, and just her resilience, you know, her ... her ability to like ... like be embarrassed but keep trying. Like I’ve seen how hard it is for her and so like I definitely want that of her. You know, like my dad, ya, he’s been intelligent, he’s been really practical and like managed to accomplish things but my mom’s had the keep trying even though this is making me feel embarrassed, you know, keep trying. So I think like both of my parents like together, like I ... I wouldn’t have gone anywhere with just following one. I really needed both of them.

In addition to familial role models, participants cited individuals in the community who were seen as role models. For example, participant Diana remarked, “In terms of my motivation to do well and to be successful, I really do admire Sonia Sotomayor; she’s the Supreme Court Justice.” Diana highlighted the importance of having a national figure in that role who looked like her and someone she could model
her career and leadership development after. Another participant, Kayla described peer mentors:

I guess like what comes to mind for me most is I have this like group of friends who, are all kind of older. They’re all like slightly older than I am. . . and they’re all Chinese girls and they’re all well established in the sense like they know they’re doing something that they really love and they like know what they want to go in their future. And I know a lot of these girls like from the internet like mutual blogs, like things that I guess there isn’t one person among them that I’m like oh, I most want to be like this person but I think that ... I think just like being able to have them sort of serve as a role model in the sense that like five or six different kind of Chinese girls who sort of had ... who had similar ... like a similar upbringing as I did, you know, ones who had a lot of the same issues but are now doing things that they love are very secure in themselves.

From these experiences, ethnic backgrounds and heritage, and familial support and role models, the participants then described their personal experiences of early challenges in college. These participants traveled far distances, and are considered out of state students, to attend Leadership and experienced specific challenges related to living far from one’s family, being a minority, and transitioning to a completely new environment, particularly in the first-year that contributed to their leadership development at Leadership College.

**Early transition challenges at Leadership College**

The second thematic category developed from the data reflected participant descriptions of early challenges related to attending college and how the participants met these challenges, creating two sub-categories.

**Early challenges.** The early challenges associated with first attending college were often focused on the first-year, or even the first semester of college, a time of transition and adjustment to a radically new environment and social experience.
Participants commonly noted feelings related to students of color at predominately White institutions: out of place, having a sense of needing to prove themselves, and transitioning to a more privileged environment. Students highlighted feelings specifically related to Leadership College, which included: ignorance of social injustices within the campus environment, difficulties associated with leaving home (being “home sick”), having to start a new and redevelop oneself, difficulties associated with making friends in the new environment, and having to “catch up” academically to the other students. Table 6 presents the common responses and the associated frequencies to illustrate commonality among the participants in each individual case. Single responses are provided in the table note.

Table 6. Participants’ Self-Reported Early Challenges to Attending College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Times Listed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First semester the hardest</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling out of place</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of having to prove yourself</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privileged environment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued ignorance</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving home; home sick</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to start over, redevelop yourself</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making friends</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to catch up academically; felt not good enough</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated, did not have people to talk to, share</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Responses made by a single participant included: (a) environment was supposed to be accepting, but was cliquey; (b) depression; (c) difficult transition to
college from a city to small rural town environment; (d) new experiences and different cultures; (e) first person in family to attend college and did not know what to expect; (f) not having enough money for books and other expenses; (g) moving from a social environment of being the majority to the minority; and (h) lack of parental experience and understanding resulting in feeling abandoned or more alone.

Not surprising, participants in this study commonly noted that the first semester at college was the most difficult, in terms of adjusting to the new environment and perhaps missing home and family. Participant Bernardo explained, “My first semester was my hardest semester here in terms of emotional, academic, everything piled up.”

**Feeling out of place.** Some participants described feeling out of place in this new environment. Julian explained early on at Leadership College,

My friends don’t [or] might not consider me fully Latino and then, my white friends who might try to consider me white, you know; I’m not white, you know. So that makes sure [it] really puts me in a weird position cause it’s just like I’m not either, so I don’t fit in.

Similarly, Kayla described not being able to relax and just be oneself. Kayla stated:

I feel like here, I always had to be like switched on in a sense, like I always had to be very academic, very like know how to, you know, hang out with kids who came from a very different racial background from me and I felt like there’s no way here that I could just switch it off and just sort of, you know, be somewhere where I could feel like oh, I could just be myself or be around people who were like me.

Diana detailed an experience of feeling not only out of place but disrespected when student-athletes dressed in costume for a “Cinco de Mayo” party rooted in stereotypes and racism. Diana noted:

I already felt out of place and disrespected. I really didn’t appreciate my culture being an excuse for getting drunk and disorderly and belligerent,
and that I didn’t really appreciate my culture also being a costume. . . That’s been the only time that I’ve ever felt disrespected on this campus because of my heritage or my culture.

**Feeling the need to prove oneself.** Another response offered by participants was feeling that they needed to prove themselves. For example, Leonardo explained:

I had to assimilate, forget a lot of cultural upbringings I had, because I had to perform in sequence with everybody here. Everybody knew what they were talking about, everybody was sort of, their vocabulary was elevated, mine lessened. Apparently, I have an accent that I never thought I had, so there was a sense I had to prove myself. I think that was first-year; that was pretty difficult.

Gabriela had an understanding of social justice and could use language during our interview to discuss issues around intersectionality, power, privilege, and oppression. Gabriela described a specific example of a racial incident that resulted in this same sense of the need to prove herself in the new setting and the associated difficulties:

So I have this social capital now where, if I walk out of the room, like it’s trouble for them. But when I first got here, it wasn’t that way. I had to prove to, I had to convince people and that was so frustrating because, you know, like it’s so difficult to come from a high school where you know, my race, my sex didn’t matter really. People had known me forever, you know. Every other person was like my race so that never mattered. But to come here where, all of a sudden, it was just like I have to prove myself, which is fine, like everybody should have to prove themselves, but I feel like I definitely had to work a little harder to have people listen to me. And I had to make sure I didn’t come off as like too intense or too emotional. So that ... Because that’d just seem like oh, my god, like she’s just over feeling this and whatnot. It was so difficult, so many cards playing against you. Like people, I feel like, if they say it less now but, when I first got here, people still would say like oh, she’s pulling the race card, like oh, she’s pulling the sex card. It’s stuff like that. No, I’m not pulling any card, this is, literally, what is happening. This is, literally, like how I see things. So that was very difficult. But I feel like I’ve done a good job. I like rising up.

**Privileged and ignorant environment and negotiating privilege.** The environment at the college was described by participants as privileged and many of the
students within the college community, ignorant to the fact that the environment is privileged. Participant Bernardo explained:

I feel like there’s a lot of privilege, it’s very not real. I’ve lived in reality my whole life, I’ve lived through some of the things that I shouldn’t have lived through and then you put me in an institution like this where everybody is trying to be perfect and it doesn’t feel right to me. Being in the community even trying to work in the community makes me feel more closer to home because I’m in a community, I’m actually doing something for different people and helping them with what I can. It just makes me feel a lot more comfortable being out there. (Bernardo)

Similarly, participant Leonardo explained that he feels the individuals studying and working on campus at Leadership College remain unaware of the inequalities around them, unaware of their own privilege.

But people here, they’re oblivious to inequalities. There’s a privilege that they don’t think about, they go about their daily lives, and volunteer work gives you a sense of reality again. Everybody’s always caught up in, “Oh, I have to type my paper,” or, “Oh, my resume,” or, “My professor said this.”. . . Somebody out there’s not being able to eat, so I think, I don’t know. You see the position that I’m in, my privilege, in terms of my academic setting, the resources that we have here, and you see them with [the community organization] and then helping more people know about that. I feel like that’s my responsibility. Yeah. Being a recipient of a lot of social programs myself kind of makes you empathetic, or what it’s like not to have something. . . . You know what it’s like to be hungry, you know what it’s like to have your lights cut off on one of you while you’re trying to do your homework, so you’re doing homework with a little flashlight, and people don’t know that here, so I don’t know. Pretty powerful. (Leonardo)

Adjusting to the new environment. Participants also described difficulties with feeling homesick, having to redevelop oneself, and making new friends. For example, Julian mentioned many of these elements, stating:

I have a hard time just making friends here. If I don’t go to D hall with my Latino friends or ya, with my Latino friends, I don’t go to D hall at all cause I don’t have other friends. I don’t have other friends that I’m comfortable with, you know, going to dinner with. I don’t have friends
that I’m comfortable studying with. You know, it’s just like, I don’t feel comfortable. And I think that ... that’s what I struggle with the most, you know, just making friends. Even though these people might not have done anything to me, I still feel that inability to connect with them just because there’s so much difference, you know. And then, apart from that, there’s no time to; it’s hard for me.

As a result, participants reported feeling isolated, lacking others to share and talk with, and lacking role models at Leadership College. For example, Bernardo described:

I didn’t have people who I could talk to; I didn’t have a lot of people who I could speak to. I didn’t see a male role model or a male administrator here who I could go to for support until later when I started putting myself out there. That was always really difficult. (Bernardo)

Lastly, participants commonly noted the need to catch up academically. Julian described this educational catch up as the hardest part of the transition process.

Well school was definitely the hardest thing. I had never read a book, like a complete book, I had never read a complete book. I never wrote an essay longer than like three pages, I ... Everything about academics, I did not know anything about. So I came in first-year just trying to catch up, you know, get to the level and learn vocabulary words, you know. So that was the hardest part in terms of academics.

Given these challenges offered by the participants, the interview questions then turned to how they addressed those challenges to continue to be successful in school and engage in leadership at Leadership College.

Addressing the challenges. The second sub-category was developed from responses related to how the participants felt they were able to meet the challenges they experienced and succeed beyond that initial transition period. The primary means of meeting the early challenges was through involvement in student organizations, in which many of the participants eventually became leaders. These organizations were reported to provide the student participants with a culturally familiar, comfortable setting. A second, similar
common response, though less frequent, was becoming actively involved in the community (community action and engagement). The responses are illustrated in Table 7 with the associated frequencies of response among the 10 student cases in the participant group.

Table 7. How Participants Reported Meeting Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Times Listed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in student organizations that offered familiarity, comfort, and ability to facilitate change</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active involvement in the community; community action</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in different activities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of starting leadership involvement early on</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Involvement in student organizations. All 10 of the participants (100%) described using involvement in student organizations and the community as a means of meeting the challenges they experienced in the transition process. The organizations specifically mentioned by the participants included the Latino Student Union (LSU), the Student Government Association (SGA), the Multicultural Leadership Council, the Asian American Association, the African Caribbean Student Union, the Black Student Union (BSU), All Campus Events (ACE), and Social Entrepreneurs. These organizations offered cultural familiarity, comfort, and the ability to facilitate social change. In addition, involvement in the organization supported the ability to speak out, supported better engagement and performance, and facilitated mentor relationships. For example, Bernardo described:

I was more engaged, I was doing more homework, classes got harder and I think that’s why it dropped or it stayed the same but I was at least doing my homework, cognizant of what I was doing in class, participating in class, asking questions, going to office hours. That for me was a lot better
than the first semester and so a lot of it was then they [student organizations] helped me get out of my comfort zone and go out there and be who I truly was here on campus.

In addition, Julian, Leonardo, and Grace explained their experiences with these student organizations, their involvement, and how it helped them to feel more comfortable and in control. Leonardo shared:

My first semester, I wasn’t part of any clubs. I was really scared that I wouldn’t, you know, do good here so like I, literally, spent every day studying and doing homework, you know, and I did pretty good... And then that was only because I pretty much decided not to do everything. And then second semester came along and my friends were like, ya, come to LSU. And I decided to go and it was really fun, you know. It was just like family environment and being in a group of crazy, loud Latinos and it was really ... it was really nice, you know. It was just like a little piece of home.

LSU gives me, it’s kind of hard being away from home, and then you come to a place where everybody’s Latino, looks familiar, similar face. You’re not the one Latino in the classroom. Here, whatever you say in that setting is now representative of that entire population, so I feel like I can be more me, if that makes sense. I feel more comfortable using Spanish slang sometimes in English, or even the things that we say or don’t say, body language, like this, everybody understands what that means. It gives me closure, if that makes sense. It brings me back. It reminds me of what I left and why I’m here. (Leonardo)

Grace highlighted the first time she should was engaged with her racially-based student organization:

The African Caribbean Student’s Union was the first thing I got involved because the meetings and the seniors, at that time, did a really, like they were just really warm and really inviting and did really, I think an excellent job recruiting people and it’s very easy. Like on a campus, it’s very easy to identify people who sort of like have an affinity for the African culture or just sort of looking for that. So I got involved there. (Grace)

Community involvement. In addition to involvement in student organizations, participants also became involved in the community. This was particularly evident in the
interview discussions with participants Bernardo and Leonardo. For example, Bernardo explained:

I think most of what I was doing was just LSU, Student Organization of Latinos and Latinas and soccer, I was coaching soccer in town. The kids I … soccer was one of the reasons I didn’t stick completely into a life of crime and life of gangs and for me it was very easy to go down there and mess up my life. Partially I did and so soccer kept me away from it for a bit and so that’s what I feel helped me and so that’s how I like to give back to the community. I coach soccer and I coach soccer and I did SOL, that was my first semester. . . . my employer at the time asked me, we don’t have enough coaches for the whole [league] do you think you can help me find some students who you can train and get together and I said yeah I could do something like that. I hired 4 students and 3 of them are first-years and there’s a senior who’s on my coaching staff. I think about it as a family because we often would just go to work together, ride bicycles together to work and then come back together. We go to after practices so it was really familial and it was really nice but at the same time we loved what we were doing, we were working with kids, we were helping them get better. It wasn’t just about soccer but it’s also about discipline, it was also about how to interact with other people. (Bernardo)

Similarly, Leonardo described his own involvement with the Mid-[Midwest state] Community Action program and how it helped him to assimilate into the new community and environments.

I got involved in Mid-[Midwest state] Community Action. . . . [which] is a non-profit, and [the college] community offers social services to a lot of people in need, so that was the immediate thing that I was like, “I’m going to dedicate my entire time here.” . . . You go down [street], go down to, I don’t know how many blocks next left, you see trailer homes, and a lot of people don’t know about that. That was kind of the first thing, that instant, I was like, “[I] got to get more involved,” and I have been involved. I’m kind of an interpreter, translator, I do a lot of them. They have Food Pantry there, and I make a lot of food boxes, we give over 200 food boxes a month. (Leonardo)

**Leadership Development as a Process**

The third thematic category, leadership development as a process, was formed from participant interview responses related to (a) participant leadership involvement, (b)
Leadership College experiences contributing to leadership development, (c) influence of racial/ethnic culture on leadership development, and (d) their personal understandings of leadership. Therefore, the responses were divided into these four sub-categories for data presentation and analysis. Each is discussed individually, revealing common themes among the participant cases.

**Leadership involvement.** Participants offered varied responses related to their personal leadership involvement, why they became involved, what keeps them involved, and personal development resulting from their involvement. Key common responses, not surprising for developing a leadership identity, within this sub-category reveal themes related to learning to work with others, being naturally outspoken, trusting others and learning to delegate and listen to others. Other common responses with unique findings to students of color included becoming more assertive and outspoken, an expectation to naturally get involved, getting involved immediately upon arrival on campus, and leadership involvement for positive change against social injustice. The full variety of participant responses is offered in Table 8 along with the associated frequency of responses. Single participant responses (those offered by only one participant) are offered in the table note to manage the table size.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity, Trait, or Behavior</th>
<th>Times Listed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning to work with others, understanding how to get along, especially when do not agree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturally outspoken; extroverted</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For positive change against social injustice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became more assertive and outspoken with leadership involvement</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal nature is to get involved and become a leader</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Got involved right away 2
Role in SGA 2
Trusting others, delegating, learning to sit back and listen 2

Note. Responses that were offered by a single participant included (a) want to take my education and leadership to the communities and make a difference; (b) active participation when leading; (c) all are meant to lead in different ways; (d) need leadership involvement on résumé to support success; (e) time-consuming; (f) lack of global mission (conversations focus on domestic issues, not international issues); (g) forces you to fight own anxiety and fears in leadership roles; (h) found student leadership to be disorganized; (i) singled out by professor to be a leader; (j) in a small community, all are accountable for each other; (k) recognition for hard work; (l) being called a leader pushes to work harder; (m) got involved to make changes; (n) leadership involvement through inspired passion; (o) feel the need to prove self as a minority leader; (p) importance of being a minority in leadership; (q) learning from and considering others’ ideas; (r) leadership as a balance of humility and ownership of your accomplishments; and (s) facing gender stereotypes.

Learning to work with others. The majority of participants described their leadership involvement as supporting the ability to work with others and understanding how to get along with others, particularly those with whom you do not agree, and acknowledging the contributions of others. For example, Howard explained:

Even like BSU, there’s four chairs so we have to learn to work with each other and agree to disagree sometimes. So, you know, I’m constantly working with other people and I feel like I’m a person that’s easy to get along with so, fortunately, it kind of works. There are times like then you just have to learn to resolve it and hear another one out. (Howard)
As an example of acknowledging the contributions of others, Grace discussed the importance of being cognizant of the equally useful ideas of others:

I think for me it’s been an important opportunity to realize that there are people with different but either one better ideas than I or like equally like ... equally useful ideas or equally ... Like with the potential to be as, you know, impactful as mine. (Grace)

Kayla also discussed learning about oneself and others, but added the experiences gained through the school involvement have given her a better understanding of others and the world. Kayla noted:

But I think that like I definitely learned a lot about myself and other people here. And, you know, I got to think when I go home to New York now, it’s weird to think that oh, I spent three years out in the cornfields and you spent like, you know, three years in the city and I feel like I have a better understanding of [the world here]. (Kayla)

**Outspokenness and tendency toward involvement.** Three participants noted their natural outspokenness and innately extroverted personality, which they used toward facilitating positive social change. Gabriela highlighted always wanting to be a person who is vocal about calling out injustices and see it as her responsibility as a leader:

It’s less of what I learned about myself and what... like what I learn about others. Cause when you are a leader or like, at least for me, my strengths of being a leader, it is ... I never want to be the leader that no longer has their feet on the ground, you know. So when I see these injustices or I see how people are being like rude or racist or sexist or like classist, I try to ... I don’t want to think like oh, my god, I’m so special, I have this intelligence and can see all these issues that you guys can’t see. But like I don’t want to think I’m the exception. I want to think like I’m the rule, like ... like you should be able to recognize when you’re saying elitist or racist things, you should be able to recognize it. And so it teaches me about others when they can’t because I never want to ... I never want to think of myself as special or the exception or someone who can see what others can’t see because that is dangerous ground for someone who wants to be a leader. I don’t want to lose... I don’t want to think about myself, I mean, above others. (Gabriela)
Similarly, two participants noted that their personal nature is to get readily involved.

It’s kind of like second nature to me. In my Myers-Briggs, I’m an EMTJ and we’re like the managers, the personality types and so getting involved and being involved is second nature to me. I can’t imagine not being involved. And it’s like it’s kind of what I’ve always known. (Gabriela)

As a result of leadership involvement a few participants noted that they became more assertive and outspoken. For example, Bernardo explained:

I felt that I was always a leader in terms of being able to do things that were right but I think now I challenge a lot more people when I don’t think something … something is being done wrong. I challenge a lot more people, I talk about it, I’m really open about what I feel, how I feel, how I don’t feel comfortable around many white people. How I don’t feel I can talk to a lot of white people, things like that. I’m very verbal about it (Bernardo)

Student leadership involvement was also described as affected by school specific experiences. The next thematic sub-category provides insight into these contributing experiences. Common responses are highlighted in the findings.

**Leadership College experiences contributing to leadership development.**

Participants described personal experiences stemming from school, academics, and extracurricular school activities that have contributed to their personal leadership development. Participant responses related to these school experiences supported the development of this second thematic sub-category under leadership experiences. Key themes revealed in this analysis suggest the importance of Leadership College (a) encouraging students to be proactive (“agents of change”); (b) social justice mindset in changing how participants think about issues and solutions; (c) providing access to administrator and teacher mentor relationships; (d) supporting peer mentors and role models; (e) providing opportunities to facilitate change, and (f) role of self-governance
promoting sense of freedom and responsibility. The full variety of responses offered by participants is illustrated in Table 9 with the frequency of mention among the 10 participants in the study.

**Table 9.** School Experiences Participants Report Contributing to Their Leadership Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Times Listed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged to be proactive, agents of change</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to administrator and teacher mentor relationships (especially same-ethnicity mentors)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social justice as a mindset has changed way I think about issues and solutions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became a mentor for others, made me a role model, was conscious of the role</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given opportunity to facilitate change</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of self-governance, supporting sense of freedom, responsibility, and sense of own strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Responses offered by a single participant include: (a) teaching quality and open curriculum to support learning of other disciplines; (b) opportunities for internships; (c) school enables discussion about social justice, but often lacks action and awareness of other backgrounds or perspectives; (d) personal and cultural background enabled me to take the discussion and social justice learned from school and apply it; (e) superficial diversity: university gets minority students there, but fails to provide support; (f) sociology education has taught to be mindful and humble of different experiences; and (g) support from Posse scholarship group.

*Encouraged to be agents of change.* Leadership College was felt to contribute to leadership development through the experiences gained in leadership at the university.
Leadership College’s values of social justice and self-governance contributed to this experience for participants. One commonly noted experience was that Leadership College encourages students to be proactive and to be agents of change. For example:

The liberal arts thing and the social justice, I think, is just … it’s encouraged me to be very proactive. Like change is not going to come to me; I have to go make the change. And I think I had a limit of that in me already but, definitely, being at a school like Leadership College is all about, you know, being a change agent, being proactive, not just sitting by and letting injustice go has really facilitated my growth in the … in that arena. (Grace)

The social justice mindset promoted by the school was also believed to be effective in supporting leadership development.

It’s like in order to affect social justice, to like, you know, adopting social justice as a way of life or … letting that come into your mind set. I think that has really changed the way I think about social justice and I think, in a lot of ways, it’s also changed the way that I think about issues or how to solve problems. (Kayla)

**Faculty and administrator mentor relationships.** Student felt there were was access to faculty and administrators for mentor-like relationships, although the number of faculty of color was minimal. Bernardo explained:

For me it was really nice to just be able to go into an administrators office, a person who looked like me, who had a similar upbringing to mine and be yeah things can and will get better. To me he was proof of things getting better because he looked at me at one point and was now an administrator in a top tier institution. (Bernardo)

Likewise, participant Grace described the access to school leadership and how these relationships worked in developing her leadership.

It’s given me access to administrators who identified something that I work on in myself, let that be my leadership skills, and then helped me help myself. For example, you know, it’s a really small school and people like, very early on, will identify, you know, who’s who and who are the people you should be on the lookout for. And then I’ll be sitting, you
know, I’ll have meetings with administrators and they’ll just give me pointers or they’ll encourage me and they’ll be just like, I see you’re doing this, good job. Or I saw that you did this; maybe next time, you do this or you could consider doing this. And just having that proximity to them and being able to read them and being able to like, ask them for advice has been instrumental in terms of my personal leadership. (Grace)

Finally, Julian offered a slightly different perspective of the same notion by being empowered to take responsibility because a faculty member recognized his leadership potential:

He [professor], pretty much, made me a leader. He put me in charge of being the intern of his office, you know. He’s the director of the center for international studies and he’s like, “I want you to be the intern, you’re going to be the head intern of this office.” And I was like, “Okay, sounds good. Let’s do this.” So he just gave me the responsibility and he knew that I could do it. (Julian)

**Peer mentoring.** In terms of peer mentoring and student stories, some students felt Leadership College has provided a collegial environment and opportunities for students to become a mentor for others and to share their experiences and personal testimonies. But students also expressed how they had to take responsibility for creating spaces where cultivating and mentoring future leaders was a priority. Leadership College has provided opportunities that support student’s asking questions, thinking about the issues, such that they know of and use the opportunities to engage in change. Howard described having peer mentor experience and the importance of having someone that looked like him to support him in navigating Leadership College and becoming engaged in leadership:

For me, my first-year, I had a mentor, we have a [peer mentoring program] here so I had that senior mentor who was kind of showing me how to guide the ropes and navigate [the school], you know, ways or resources that he found helped him as a Black male from Chicago at a predominately white institution, you know, these are the kind of activities or organizations that will be an aid or a resource to you. So he was the one that got me in the pipeline or in the various organizations... He also put
me in the pipeline to be one of the ten senior interviewers from the admissions department, you know, sitting on student panels just to, you know, all these different ways of giving back to the campus. He started me off my first-year.

**Influence of racial/ethnic culture on leadership development.** Participants in the study offered their perceptions of the influence of ethnic culture and race on leadership. The one strong theme revealed in this sub-category included providing the motivation to speak up to injustice; however, the other responses, although varied, offer insight into the effect of and importance of ethnic culture on leadership. For example, students of color who are student leaders provide positive role models for other students of color, may be more approachable to students of color, and may promote greater consideration for inclusion, diversity, and equity. However, student leaders of color also may feel the need to “prove” themselves as leaders and may be more likely to need the leadership experience to demonstrate personal success toward achieving leadership development goals. Table 10 illustrates the variety of responses along with the response frequency among the study sample.

**Table 10.** Self-Reported Influences of Racial/Ethnic Culture on Leadership Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Times Listed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to speak up to injustice and make a positive change</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators seeking my perspective/opinion</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides strong ethnic role models</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of being a minority leader: people feel more comfortable</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approaching when look similar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation of need to prove self as a minority and as a leader</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes strong consideration for inclusion, equality, and diversity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Motivation to speak out.** According to the student participants in this study, racial and ethnic cultures have an influence on leadership. In particular, four participants mentioned that their culture and ethnicity and racism or discrimination toward provide the motivation to speak up, particularly to injustice, and to support positive change in the community and also leave a legacy for those students that will come after them. For example Bernardo shared:

I want to leave but it always comes back, well if I don’t do anything the students who look like me, who come after me are going to feel the same way and nothing is ever going to be done for it or because of it. For me that’s the main reason why [I’m] active; that’s the main reason why I’m still in [school]. That’s my motivator because I don’t want students to feel the same way I did who look like me. I feel that there’s not enough institutional support so what I’ve called it is superficial diversity because we have the money to bring in students of color, a diverse pool of students but we don’t have the means or want to support them institutionally once they’re here. That’s another reason why I joined [peer mentoring program] was because I felt that I need to put my money where my mouth is, I got to do something about it. I started that way and I don’t regret it, I actually think it’s benefited me as a person. (Bernardo)

Kayla shared how addressing injustices has influenced how she has come to make meaning of leadership in terms of the intersection of race and gender.

It’s definitely influenced how I understand leadership. I think in the Asian American community, I think that a lot of the leaders tend to be women. I don’t ... I don’t know if that’s like factually true but I think I ... I think like a lot of strong, leadership roles I see are taken by women and I think that comes down to a lot of weird, misogyny within the Asian American community. Like we were traditional values people can’t get rid of. So I think of, in the sense of role models, there’s definitely ... there isn’t definitely isn’t a shortage. Like I definitely, in terms of like strong, Asian American women, I can name a ton more that I can really name strong Asian American male leaders. But I think that when I come out of the
Asian American community, if I try to, I do think, for example, I think on campus, I think someone’s first impression of me is like she’s a quiet, Asian girl or whatever. And, again, I think it may, not necessarily surprise them, but I do think there is like a public or like a social, popular social perception that like.

**Giving input and guidance to administration.** Two participants described administrators seeking guidance from the student participants. For example, Diana described:

So besides having people refer to me as, or you know the go-to person in LSU, because we do have a cabinet, people would always come to me for things and I would say, “Oh it’s not really my part of LSU, you should talk to our historian or our treasurer,” things like that. I think when administrators started coming to me and asking my opinion about events that they wanted to plan towards incorporating all the multicultural organizations. They would come to me and ask, “What do you think?” Or like, “What does LSU want to do?” and things like that. So, I think, really, getting support from administrators and not just students or other organizations, in terms of like what we were thinking of doing and people always looking to us to see what we were planning next. That, I noticed that people were always looking at us and we had some influence over events and things like that. (Diana)

Gabriela also noted time with administrators to offer their perspectives:

And I sat down with the president afterwards cause he wasn’t in the room too and he was, he’s one of those guys that is like a very like logistical, practical, doesn’t really know how to handle emotion but at least he knows that. He knows it and so he tries to be aware of it. But he doesn’t know how to deal with emotions or like consider emotions or consider it like ... like that and he’s like a very socially just person so I was very upset with him that he didn’t stand.

These discussions of racial/ethnic influence on leadership development lead to specific noted racial experiences and climate on campus.

**Racial climate and experiences on campus.** The fourth thematic sub-category under leadership experiences was developed from participant discussion of the racial
climate and experiences on campus. Key themes revealed in this sub-category highlight the presence of racial micro/macroaggressions, attitudes and statements on campus, and distinct racial and class social segregation among the students on campus. The participants believed these microaggressions of surprise were directly related to faulty stereotypes and race-laden doubts White student leaders had about their abilities. Some participants actually deemed this an advantage. Participants offered additional examples of ways in which stereotypes aided in their roles as policy enforcers.

**Table 11.** Self-Reported Experiences and Incidents on Campus Related to Racial Climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience or Incident</th>
<th>Times Listed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Micro-/Macro-aggressions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial and class social segregation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with dating for minorities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working together with different minority organizations to address racial issues</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divide between being international student and being person of color</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Racial Micro/macroaggressions.* Six of the 10 participants described directly evidence of experienced racism, derogatory statements and/or attitudes toward minorities, themselves or others. For example, participant Diane detailed one of these experiences.

The second semester of my first-year, I heard about this Cinco de Mayo party. . . . So, I go and it’s just a bunch of athletes getting drunk and the basketball team had—they were all wearing these huge sombreros and they all shaved their facial hair to have mustaches. And I was like, “No way, like, this is ridiculous.” I thought it was very offensive. . . . I really didn’t appreciate my culture being an excuse for getting drunk and disorderly and belligerent, and that I didn’t really appreciate my culture
also being a costume. . . That’s been the only time that I’ve ever felt disrespected on this campus because of my heritage or my culture. (Diane)

Grace shared with me that as a leader she feels it is important address microaggressions in the moment. Grace is one of the few students of color on the student government cabinet and described to me how she resisted and responded to microaggressions during a meeting for SGA:

So I’ll be sitting... having a meeting with student government and there are other students ... who we’re having a meeting with. And I will be the primary leader of the meeting but... The president is a white man and it’s my job to lead this meeting. I called the meeting; it’s my meeting. And everybody will be looking to the white man and I’m just like sort of look at me, this is my meeting, I’m going to run this... And even little things like body posture where, you know, they’re turning more in his direction than in mine or they’re directing their questions towards him, despite the fact that I’m going to be the one answering, those little things I think, are ways that show me that people sometimes doubt my capacity as a leader. Depending on [what] day it is, I feel more compelled to fight... The days I do feel up to fighting, I just ... I think I’m much more active in redirecting the conversation back towards myself, you know. Where I’m just like, you know, I can answer that question for you. (Grace)

A salient example for many of the participants was a recent Unity Rally on campus in response to racist incidents on campus and in the surrounding community. Bernardo was one of the organizers for the rally and shared:

It was difficult for me, it was the first big thing that [Leadership College] had done in terms of social movements, apparently they hadn’t done big social movements over decades. Whereas [Leadership College] was known previously as a very social movement oriented school it hadn’t been like that for a while. We would always have discussions about racism, prejudice and stuff like that, we’d have discussions and nobody would do anything about it and thing kept occurring. For me it was more of like all right let’s do this, let’s do this now. (Bernardo)

Other examples of the importance of the Unity Rally were given by Grace and Howard, who described the following:
So last semester was a particularly charged semester in terms of racial relations because there were a few incidents of people from the community and, you know, some students on campus, themselves, saying like derogatory terms, be they gender-based, race-based, [sexual] orientation-based, and appearance ... Actually, a few friends of mine had things said to them. People would just be driving by and things would be said to them. (Grace)

One problem that we were having, you know, we’re in [Midwest state] in the middle of the cornfields, a lot of minorities were experiencing overt racism and, you know, me, personally, that was the first time I had experienced it where, you know, somebody actually called me the N word and told me to get out here and, you know, things like that. . . . I mean, you do have that kind of conflict with the town. So even though, you know, sometimes we do community service, not everybody is so welcoming to a student of color and so, you know, when we brought the issue up to the multicultural leadership council, you know, their organization said ya, you know, and Triple A, which is the Asian, Asian American Association, one of their students, I think somebody threw like a drink at them and called them a derogatory term. And same for students of LSU and, you know, we actually did something about it. (Howard)

Bernardo highlighted the importance of having community leaders engaged with the Unity Rally. Bernardo wanted to stress that the rally was not to just to highlight the prevalent racism in town and at Leadership College, but was to call for some type of action and movement towards social justice in the community.

Not only do we have conversations with the chief of the police department - he came in and talked to us. And we’ve, you know, acted as the leaders or representatives of our organizations and asked them the questions that needed to be asked and things like that, but then we also had a rally and the rally was so amazing and impactful because we actually got the mayor to come. There were students and teachers and everybody from in town, from elementary schools who came to the rally and, you know, students as well as myself shared our personal testimonies and accounts of what’s happening but also provided different ways that we can move forward, you know, different things like how to be those active bystanders, how to . . . how do we move past these social injustices. And that’s just one example. (Bernardo)
Racial and class segregation. The second theme revealed in this sub-category was that of racial and class segregation at the school. Four participants discussed this student self-segregation. For example, Jay noted:

I would definitely say that most racial groups hang out within their racial groups, if that makes sense. In terms of like comfortability to like actually spend time and hang out, people would normally choose their own race group to hang out with. (Jay)

Similarly, Julian described student self-segregation by race and often by economic status.

It’s very cliquish, people segregate according to, sometimes race, sometimes economic status, most of the time economic status, in my opinion. You know, me, being a student of lower income, you know, I see that difference and I’m not able to ... to get together with those groups because I just have no, nothing in common and sometimes they see themselves as better, you know. . . . I’m in this environment where, you know, I thought I was going to be accepted but, you know what, oh, you’re not, you’re not accepted, you can’t be who you want to be because, you know, sometimes that doesn’t fit in. (Julian)

Rachel detailed what was done after becoming aware of this problem and how leadership involvement can help.

Once I became conscious of these issues I was immersed in multicultural groups where we talk about this a lot. The reason it became so evident to me that there was so much divide on campus because at some point during my second year I have no white friends, which his strange because my whole life all my friends are white. Yeah. It said something to me a lot about the racial climate in America, but then things like that also. (Rachel)

Personal definition of leadership. As a final sub-category under the thematic category of leadership development, participants offered their personal definitions of leadership and what being a leader means to them personally. Responses were varied, but common responses revealing themes included the ability to speak out, accepting being a positive role model and the immersive work in the school and community toward
achieving social justice, taking the initiative toward active involvement (taking charge), putting a priority on serving others above oneself, facilitating collaboration and teamwork, listening to and learning from others, and leadership as not positional and not elitist. Table 12 illustrates the results of the analysis of the interview data revealing commonality in the responses.

Table 12. Students’ Personal Definitions of Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Times Given</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Able to speak out, to articulate the cause and to influence/inspire others</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes initiative, is active, takes charge, executes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive role in community: immersed working toward change and social justice in the school and community</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizes service to others; puts own needs behind needs of group</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitates collaboration/team effort</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listens to and learns from others</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership is not positional, not elitist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeps people informed, report back</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated and hardworking</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builds connections with people to enable supporting people</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Speaks out and influences and inspiring others.* A leader was felt to be someone who speaks out and can clearly articulate a point to motivate others. Kayla noted, “A leader is, you know, well spoken, able to articulate things clearly.” Bernardo tied this ability to articulate oneself with inspiring and influencing others:

I feel that leadership for me shouldn’t be about people following me, shouldn’t be about people wanting to be like you but should be about
inspiring others to do what’s right and to do something that’s beneficial for the larger community. (Bernardo)

_Takes initiative, actively takes charge._ Another characteristic of leaders evident in the data is taking the initiative. Diane and Howard offered good examples of this response.

I think it is, so, taking charge, not really waiting for someone else to bring it up if you have a good idea or if you are interested in starting something. Then, you are the person to start that thing or to lead that thing. Yeah. So, someone who takes initiative, I would say, and then delegates also. (Diane)

I want to say like leaders are in power but I don’t really think it’s all about that. I think it’s just about being an active bystander, you know, that’s the word that we’ve been using to, I don’t know, train the security and just to really get involved in whatever you do. So, you know, even if it appears as though there’s nobody else around you with those same ideas or wanting to do that same thing, if you take that student initiative or that initiative to do something and be that leader, that pioneer, so to say, you know, then that would be a leader. (Howard)

_Prioritizes service to others and serves toward social change in community._

Participants noted the importance of leadership action in the community toward social change. Bernardo explained:

A mile from here again there’s kids who are going to their schools hungry because they don’t have money to buy food, their families don’t have money to support food for them. I don’t see any social justice in that. . . . I also feel like there’s a lot more work to do and that’s what I hope to accomplish.

Similarly, Kayla added:

I think a leader always puts what they want, sort of, takes like a backseat. [That is] what they want takes like a backseat position to whatever organization or group that they’re leading [wants]; what the group wants comes first. But I think also a leader is in the position that they are in because like they know or they understand that they are in the best position to affect the change, I guess, that like everyone, that a group of
people might want. . . A leader is not necessarily selfless but, understands when not to be selfish, I guess. (Kayla)

**Facilitates teamwork and collaboration.** According to the participants in this study, leaders work to facilitate team work and collaboration. For example, Jay and Leonardo explained:

I definitely think leadership is you being the person that can make the group work at its full potential. Like everyone’s collaborating, working together and getting things done. Because I really believe that if you want to produce something well, it has to be a group effort. Like one person cannot do it by themselves. I mean, as a leader, it’s definitely, it’s not your job to run the show or anything. No, it’s your job to delegate and make sure people are working together and getting things done and being approachable. (Jay)

Similarly, Leonardo described:

A good leader knows how to follow. I think is one of my biggest things. Everybody’s always caught up in being number one, number one; I have to be the leader, I have to teach people. Then, that creates a sense of dictatorship, like everything has to be my way. Where I feel a good leader knows how to follow, and that’s really overlooked. If somebody has a good idea… a great leader that I am, let me support you with that idea, let’s see if we could go work together. I guess that’s my definition of a leader. (Leonardo)

**Listens to and learns from others.** Leaders listen to and learn from others. This notion of a leader was offered by Gabriela and Grace.

No, a leader is the type of person who like listens to others, helps them, helps like me, you know, I help others help me and so I will like ask them if they could help me out in doing this or doing that. But mostly, a leader is there to listen and then execute, at least that’s how I approach things for me. Being a leader means to listen to what others want, consider it, talk it out, and try to adjust your plans accordingly, and then just do it and just execute (Gabriela)

Do it because you love it; do it cause you care and then just like do it. Be good at what you do; be very good at what you do, but also keeping in
mind, [that] there are people who are better than me and everything that I do in life, I’m always looking to learn from others. (Grace)

**Not positional or elitist.** Two participants noted that leadership is not positional or elitist. Participant Leonardo stated, “I feel like leadership shouldn’t be positional at all” (Leonardo). Similarly, but more in depth, Diane explained, “With the label leader comes responsibilities. So, you can’t get away with being a leader and then not doing things, but you can definitely be filling that position and not necessarily have the label, the title” (Diane).

**Summary of Findings**

From the individual descriptions and the analysis of the coded responses revealing common themes among the group of interview participants, several overarching themes were evident in the data. These themes represent the perceptions of the group as a whole from a cross-case analysis. The themes revealed from the data include descriptions of (a) individual social experiences, (b) early challenges and how participants addressed those challenges, (c) leadership development and involvement, (d) racial climate and its influence on leadership development, and (e) personal definition of leadership.

**Addressing the Research Questions**

The three research questions were explored to form an understanding of the experiences that contributing to the leadership identity development of the participants at Leadership College. The questions that guided this study, along with the findings presented in this chapter, are revisited in this section as a way to analyze the themes and
answer the questions. The discussion of these findings in relation to critical race theory and leadership identity development theories will be presented in the next chapter.

**How do students of color perceive themselves as leaders at a highly selective liberal arts college in the Midwest?**

The first research question served as an introduction for the study. In order to comprehend how these students of color developed a leadership identity, I believed it was important to first consider what leadership meant to them as well as to become aware of the ways in which they developed this understanding of leadership. The participants’ backgrounds and social histories were explored to reveal students’ racial and ethnic identity perceptions and how these perceptions influenced these students’ images of themselves as leaders.

**Individual social experiences.** Participants articulated different heritage, family, and other social experiences that they brought to college. These experiences naturally influenced who they were as individuals and how they interpreted the world around them. Life history is important in the student identity development literature. The unique social experiences of the participants affected the challenges they experienced during the transition to college and their responses to those challenges. Additionally, the students’ experiences contributed to their leadership development and leadership identities.

**Personal definition of leadership.** Participants identified several characteristics of a leader. Leaders, according to the participants in this study, are able to speak out and inspire others, take the initiative, assume positive community roles toward positive social change, prioritize service to others, facilitate collaboration and teamwork, and listen and learn from others. These characteristics are seen by the participants as shaping leadership,
which does not need to be bound by titles or elitism. All of the students saw these attributes in themselves or were striving towards these goals in their leadership development at Leadership College.

**Early challenges and addressing those challenges.** The participants detailed the early challenges they experienced, particularly in the first semester of college. These challenges included feeling out of place, feeling a need to prove oneself, noting the privilege and ignorance of others in the environment, leaving the familiarity and comfort of home and having to start new and reinvent oneself, making friends, being less prepared academically, and feeling isolated. To address these challenges, participants sought involvement in the community and in student organizations, both of which offered cultural familiarity, comfort, and the ability to facilitate needed social change in the college and local communities to support greater understanding and acceptance. This involvement cultivated their leadership identity development.

**How do students of color make sense of their race in relation to their experiences as leaders at a highly selective liberal arts college in the Midwest?**

Participants’ understanding of leadership in relation to their experiences at Leadership College was directly connected to their backgrounds. In terms of how students of color made sense of their race as leaders, the findings in this analysis suggest the importance of Leadership College in (a) encouraging students to be proactive (“agents of change”); (b) cultivating a social justice mindset to change how participants think about issues and solutions; (c) providing access to administrator and teacher mentor relationships; (d) supporting peer mentors and role models; (e) providing opportunities to facilitate change, (f) promoting a sense of freedom and responsibility through self-
governance, and (g) articulating the role of the Community Leadership Scholarship. These seven topics are interconnected in such meaningful ways that removing one would render an incomplete representation of the influences that contributed to these students’ self-perceptions and their leadership identity development. It is through these seven topics that students of color cultivate a leadership identity while resisting and responding to racism and microaggressions—not only as students at Leadership College, but as student leaders of color.

**Leadership development and involvement.** Leadership involvement of the participants was seen (a) to support learning to work with others and general assertiveness with regard to social justice and (b) to develop from a natural outspokenness and tendency toward involvement with a desire for positive change and social justice. The school was felt to support the notion of the students as agents of change, to provide access to administrative and faculty mentors, to maintain a social justice mindset among the students and faculty, to support peer mentoring, and to provide opportunities for self-governance and to facilitate change.

**How have racialized experiences shaped the leadership identity of students of color?**

Racial/ethnic influences were seen as affecting motivations to speak out against injustices and seek positive social change. The racial climate at the institution, as described by participants and the 2011 campus climate report, evidenced continued racial and ethnic discrimination, derogatory attitudes, micro/macroaggressions, and self-segregation. Leadership College was seen as specifically in need of targeted social change by the student leaders of color in this study. Students felt their roles as leaders
was to address these injustices and speak against them or offer a counternarrative to their prevalence at Leadership College. This significant role was a vital role in students of color understanding themselves as leaders at Leadership College.

**Summary**

Chapter 5 provided the key findings in the study. The themes revealed from the data include descriptions of (a) individual social experiences, (b) early challenges and how participants addressed those challenges, (c) leadership development and involvement, (d) racial climate and its influence on leadership development, and (e) personal definition of leadership. These themes highlighted the experiences of 10 student leaders of color and the value they put on their role of resisting and responding to racism and injustices at Leadership College. This study allowed for students to center race as an identity and racialized experiences as a part of the leadership development process. In Chapter 6, the discussion of the findings, framing critical race theory (CRT) and leadership identity development (LID) in the analysis and situating the analysis in the context of the extant literature, will be included. Additionally, the next chapter will address limitations, provide implications for practice and research, and identify specific implications for Leadership College. Finally, I will conclude by outlining specific recommendations for centering race in understandings of the leadership development process for students of color.
CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter, the findings of this study were presented. The findings in relation to CRT, the LID model, and existing literature are explored further in this chapter. Additionally, the implications, limitations, and recommendations based on the study will be provided in this chapter. The implications for practice and will center on highly selective liberal arts colleges and leadership identity development for students of color.

Findings Situated in Theories and Relevant Literature

The findings from this study are consistent with previous research that found participating in student organizations was beneficial for students of color (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus, 2008). The data from this study revealed that being involved in student organizations and the community were positive leadership opportunities for student leaders of color, but students did express experiences of navigating racial microaggressions and racism. The findings in Chapter 5 presented several themes that connected the theoretical framework of CRT and furthered the importance of leadership as an identity for students of color at Leadership College, which is a highly selective liberal arts college in the Midwest. Both CRT and LID provided direction to understand students’ experiences.
Critical race theory

The main theoretical framework used to analyze the data was CRT. As explained in earlier chapters, CRT is useful for understanding inequities in education, as it is a framework that challenges how race and racism impact educational structures and practices (Yosso, 2005). As highlighted in Chapter 3, a CRT framework ascribes to the idea that racism commonly functions to shape society. “Race is deeply embedded in social, cultural, and political structures, thus making it difficult to recognize and address” (Patton et al., 2007, p. 43). Ladson-Billings (1999) pointed out that CRT is helpful with exposing racism in its various forms within education. Patton, McEwen, Rendón, and Howard-Hamilton (2007) acknowledged that this strategy should be applied to student development theories and other theoretical models used to inform practice and research in higher education. CRT was important as a theoretical perspective when understanding how college students of color develop a leadership identity at this highly selective predominately White liberal arts college, by re-conceptualizing Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) three propositions of CRT in education:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool through which inequities can be understood.

Race and the maintenance of educational inequities. In the first proposition, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that race continues to be a significant factor in producing inequities in society and educational institutions. Patton et al. (2007) stated
that the gap between the educational achievement of students of color and that of their (typically better-performing) White counterparts has been well documented. Students of color have had difficulties enrolling in college because of systemic inequities between the rich and the poor created by the education pipeline (Gándara, 2005; Rendón, Garcia, & Person, 2004). College educators and administrators must acknowledge and understand how race produces and perpetuates inequities: “For example, racism could be said to be at the core of a curriculum that focuses exclusively on White, Western viewpoints that render students of color invisible in what is learned and discussed in class” (Patton et al., 2007, p. 44). I argued earlier that this is true inside and outside of the classroom. Leadership programs and campus communities must develop curricula and practice that acknowledges all students, all social identities, and all processes of development. Offices dedicated to student activities and campus student organization advisers are implicated when considering hegemonic understandings of leadership development and taking into account students’ social identities, backgrounds, cultures, and diversity.

Patton et al. (2007) recommended that in order to transform higher education, student affairs professionals and faculty should incorporate an inclusive curriculum that incorporates a dialogue of race. This has significant implications for leadership programs that develop curricula that apply the LID model and for campuses like Leadership College that strive to cultivate student leaders. Leadership educators and student affairs professionals must understand what role race and other social identities play when developing a leadership identity for students of color. Even though students of color at Leadership College graduated and persisted at higher rates compared to national
averages, they still had to navigate racial micro/macroaggressions from the campus and town communities.

**Race and propriety rights on college campuses—Role of leadership programs and campus communities.** The second proposition allowed for Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) to indicate that U.S. society is based on property rights; consequently, social benefits accrue to property owners. In U.S. history, there are multiple examples of “tensions and struggles over property: acquiring land belonging to American Indians and Mexicans, viewing Africans as property, and the concept of possessing one’s own property, for example” (Patton et al., 2007, p. 45). Using a critical race lens, one must acknowledge that property differences manifest themselves in various ways on college and university campuses. The example Patton et al. (2007) provided was that of professors owning the curriculum in their classrooms. The curriculum was designed according to the professors’ ontological and epistemological assumptions, which may have worked against students of color. I take this point a step further by theorizing that leadership programs and curriculum have often been developed based on mono-cultural, colorblind paradigms that continuously validate Western/White understandings of leadership and leadership development. Additionally, non-race-centered student organizations and involvement take a colorblind approach when cultivating leaders and leadership development.

Campus wide student organizations, like the student government association, can also be seen as maintaining Whiteness as “property” on college campuses. Many students in this study explored their leadership styles and developed, or were developing, their leadership identities while participating in student organizations and engaging in the
community around them. At Leadership College, the large campus-wide student organizations, like the student government association or the all-campus events committee, were predominately White spaces. These spaces were continued examples of racial microaggressions, as highlighted by Grace in her meeting she was leading and the questions constantly being directed at the White male student leader.

There are racial inequities that cannot be ignored with regard to student organizations on college campuses. For instance, this concept of Whiteness as “property” is legitimatized when students are rewarded for conformity to White norms or hegemonic understandings of leadership. Dugan, Komives, and Segar (2005) recommended that future research should examine the extent to which the salience of racial, gender, and sexual identity development influence leadership development. The use of demographic categories instead of indicators of developmental perspectives potentially masks what might be a more potent and practically useful means of understanding leadership development. This is evident with the stage-based LID model. Each stage ends with a transition that signals the beginning of the next stage. Environmental factors, such as strong group membership, learning about leadership, and the presence of mentors, are important influences in facilitating movement through transition to adoption of the next stage. But the model does not account for minority racial groups learning to relate to White students and the dissonance that can take place during that process, especially for the minority students involved or leaders of predominately White student organizations and the racialized experiences they may encounter when they do not have “property rights” (Patton et al., 2007, p. 46). Grace’s example as a student leader in SGA
highlighted this concept and other racial microaggressions at Leadership College and the surrounding town where the college is located.

**Intersections of race and other social identities.** In the third proposition, Ladson-Billings and Tate stated that CRT should be expanded to understand the intersections of multiple social identities. Embracing a critical race perspective when considering how students of color develop a leadership identity is an important step in creating campus leadership programs and student organizations that are spaces “for safe dialogue, reducing microaggressions on campus, and moving one step further toward understanding the intricacies of multiple identities, including race” (Patton et al. 2007, p. 47). A major limitation of early research is that most of the leadership models—trait, behavior, power and influence, cognitive—were based on research using mostly White, male samples. These models tend to emphasize hierarchy and one-way or directive power and influence processes; this created a master-narrative around who is a leader and what characteristics are valued in leadership based on the experiences of White men. Leadership program coordinators, student organization advisers, and leadership curriculum developers must be knowledgeable about and aware of how students’ social identities influence their understanding of themselves as student leaders, which this study also highlighted.

**Leadership identity development model**

While limited research has been conducted on an individual’s construction of a leadership identity, Komives et al.’s (2005, 2006) research is most commonly referred to in this area. Their research is beneficial in understanding how college students form a leadership identity, but it is incomplete as it does not include the specific influences that
gender, race, ethnicity, and culture (and other identities for that matter) may have on this process. Their research was based on a purposeful sample of 13 college students who represented a diverse group in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability backgrounds at a PWI. However, given the small number of students representing women, the lack of students who identified as Latino in the sample, and the context of the PWI, Komives et al.’s study (2005) was unable to describe any specific impact race and ethnicity may have on the development of a leadership identity. However, some of the influences that emerged from this study support their findings. The participants in my study shared the major influences that contributed to their development of a leadership identity that in many ways resonated with Komives and her colleague’s (2005) illustration of the developmental model their participants experienced. Participants identified role models and family members that contributed to their understanding of themselves as leaders as well as wanting to impact positive change in their role as leaders.

While the data from this study suggest some alignment in the overall topics derived in both studies, they also suggest differences that may relate to the impact of race and ethnicity. For example, many of the participants who would be considered Stage 6 in the LID model did not desire the title “leader,” as they felt it separated them from their group members and indicated “superiority” in their status. In addition, as a group, the participants in this study struggled with issues of power in ways that connected to the messages they have received since birth about what it means to serve the community, putting others’ needs first, being a giver, and standing up against injustices. Although Komives et al. (2005) referred to race/ethnicity as an aspect of their participants’ selves
that led them to view leadership contexts differently, they did not address race as a specific influence in the LID model. The data in this study suggest that race/ethnicity plays a pivotal role in the leadership identity development of these students at Leadership College when they see their role as resisting and responding to racism and microaggressions.

The participants in this dissertation were recognized as relational leaders at Leadership College, but this did not afford the participants immunity from the racist stereotypes that have been reported in other research on students of color in general (Arminio et al., 2000; Charles et al., 2009; Cokley, 2003; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper et al., 2011; Solórzano et al., 2000; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Swim et al., 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). And similar to the student leaders of color in Arminio et al.’s (2000) study, the participants in my study intentionally sought out or found it difficult to locate same-race role models and advocates on campus as administrators and faculty; and had to think carefully about how they spoke and dressed, for fear of confirming stereotypes their White counterparts already held about people of color. The consistency between my findings and those reported in previous studies confirms that there is still work to be done to make campus environments less racist and more conducive to minority student leadership.

**Relevant literature**

Continuingly changing are the growing demographics on college campuses and the social identities such as: race, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and (dis)ability. When considering leadership and leadership identity development in the holistic development of students, student affairs professionals must reflect on all social
identities and consider them in the developmental process. Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) studied students’ involvement in minority (race-centered) student organizations at PWIs. They found that student leaders of color with high levels of involvement and commitment to their leadership roles have an in-depth understanding of how their racialized experiences impact their leadership identity. Arminio et al. (2000) concluded that “the organization a student leader of color decides to join and the position and role he or she decides to fill are influenced by recognition of and identification with his or her racial group” (p. 506). Arminio et al. (2000) argued that being involved in predominantly White student organizations may actually force some students of color to disconnect from their perceived racial identity. I did not necessarily find that in this dissertation, but students who were engaged in the student government association, stressed that they were initially involved in a race-centered student organization when they first got involved at Leadership College. This dissertation highlighted the need for the LID model to continuously being expanded in future research to explore what role racial identity (and other social identities) plays in students of color’s sense of leadership identity and leadership identity development. Critical race theorists in education suggested that empirical knowledge and the voices of people of color are critical and central to uncovering, addressing, and eliminating racial oppression and subordination (Delgado-Bernal, 2002).

Resisting and responding to racism and injustices is a key finding that is also revealed in a study by Harper and his colleagues (2011), where they explored the experiences of Black male resident assistant at PWIs using CRT as a framework. Findings from my study and the Harper et al. (2011) study, highlight the important
challenges faced by student leaders of color. These experiences are explored and further understood in both studies; these experiences are problematic, race-specific experiences that have gone unaddressed in the leadership identity development literature. “By responding only to the standard story, we let it dominate the discourse” (Ikemoto, 1997, p. 136). CRT, specifically counternarratives and reflections on lived experiences with racial microaggressions, was useful in revealing tasks that complicate the leadership identity development for students of color at Leadership College: (a) Resisting and responding to racist stereotypes; (b) effectively negotiating relationships in spaces where few others from their same racial backgrounds hold leadership positions; and (c) serving as positive representatives for their racial group. Specific to this dissertation, CRT provided a particular lens with which to view the apparently objective, race neutral or colorblind ideologies, practices, and policies of leadership programs and leadership development models being applied on college campuses through the lived experiences of students of color who serve as leaders on campuses like Leadership College.

**Limitations**

There are currently two main limitations to this study. First, although the study is a case study of multiple participants (cases), it is conducted at a single institution. Therefore, analysis of institutional differences are not a possibility. The study was bounded to a particular group of students of color at a public, 4-year private liberal arts college in the Midwest. As a result of the site selection, the findings may not be transferrable to other liberal arts college campuses or PWIs. Students of color who attend private institutions, PWIs, or any institution other than Leadership College may reveal different experiences in their leadership identity development process. In addition, the
unique aspects of where Leadership College was located, in a predominately White rural town, are not necessarily transferable to other traditional college towns/cities.

Second, this study focused exclusively on the experiences of students of color at this particular liberal arts college; thus the perspective of the participants of this study could not address the experiences of all students of color. The heterogeneity of the students of color also does not mean all students of color experience race the same way in the leadership identity development process. This study did not explore similarities or differences amongst the races of the student leaders of color at Leadership College. It is possible that individuals from specific races may experience similarities and differences in their development of a leadership identity.

**Implications for Practice**

Over the years, researchers in higher education have argued the need for increasing students of color in campus leadership activities at PWIs (Brown, 2006; Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Harper, 2009b; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Museus, 2008). In this study, CRT was useful in exposing how students of color experience leadership at a highly selective predominantly White liberal arts campus. Racist encounters described by the participants could make efforts to increase student engagement in leadership development counterproductive. That is, if the environment in which these students do their work is replete with racist stereotypes and unjustified perceptions of incompetence, excessive expectations for racial representation, and the racially inconsistent enforcement of standards and consequences, students might be less energized to cultivate future students leaders of color.
Leadership College administrators should attempt to gain a greater understanding of how to support students of color who serve in leadership roles on campus and in the surrounding community. It is imperative that faculty, staff, and administrators at PWIs have a greater understanding of the specific needs and concerns of student leaders in order to adequately assist them in their student leadership development. This is even more imperative for students of color, given the campus racial climate at highly selective predominately White institutions like Leadership College. Information about this population may be gained by affording them an opportunity to self-reflect as well as share their experiences. Students expressed opportunities to engage with college administration, but only when the administration wanted their opinion on issues of diversity. Opportunities established by Leadership College, like the Unity Rally, to resist and respond to racism as a campus community would be an institutional way to address the salient student leaders’ experiences with racism and microaggressions on campus.

Specific to Leadership College, the ideal student leadership development environment at a liberal arts institution should offer a four-year program that included curricular and co-curricular opportunities to engagement in undergraduate leadership development both inside and outside the classroom in a structured way. Each student could engage in leadership development with a mentor or advisor beginning in the first-year, and a peer mentor, and progress through a program with learning outcomes of leadership development, but also addressing injustices on campus. The program would culminate with a capstone experience. In the later years of their collegiate experience at Leadership College, I would recommend that students would also provide mentorship for younger students.
Finally, this study highlighted that students need to be supported in their efforts to self-govern and explore their understandings of the social justice mission of the institution. This includes institutional support for students to organize, develop, finance, and regulate their own organizations. These things are already happening for the students at Leadership College.

The results suggested that leading their peers and creating their own programming were examples of self-governance for students of color at Leadership College. Institutions that provide and encourage student organized, governed, and managed organizations add to the learning environment for their populations. But there is significant consequences when advisers are not engaged in the day to day advising and operations of these student organizations. This is highlighted by students of color taking on the burden and expectation to resist, address, and respond to microaggressions, racism, and injustices they experience by being in the role of a leader. The data emphasized that tremendous leadership development occurred when students were given the responsibility for their own organizations, and specifically for these student leaders of color their role in addressing injustices on campus. Rethinking the role of student affairs administrators and faculty in the self-governance value at Leadership College is imperative.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This dissertation had a goal of filling a gap in the student leadership development literature by examining and understanding the leadership experiences of students of color at a highly selective liberal arts college; yet it is imperative that additional research be done in order to gain a greater understanding of their leadership experiences and expand
this area of research. The findings of this study, participant observations and the limitations described earlier suggest additional areas of research.

While the intent of this study was to focus on the leadership experiences of students of color at Leadership College, the use of a single PWI limits the generalizability of the findings. As a result, the findings of this study may not be applicable at other predominantly liberal arts colleges, White institutions, Historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, or all-female institutions. For future research, including students of color who attend various institutional types (i.e. cross-case analysis) to gain deeper insights into the leadership identity development process and the role the campus environment process would contribute to the current literature. Furthermore, it may be interesting to explore and compare the differences and similarities in leadership experiences for undergraduate students of color attending various institutional types and the role of resisting and responding to racism in the leadership development process.

There were valuable understandings gained from this study, however, the researcher only conducted the study during an academic year, and more time in collecting data may result in richer data. Therefore, a longitudinal study may provide a more rich and in-depth description of the leadership identity development of undergraduate students of color. Specifically, future research could be developed to follow cohorts of student leaders of color beginning their first-year of college and continuing through college graduation. Questions to explore might include: What was their entry way in getting involved on campus? How did they navigate and resist racism and microaggressions during their first-year and how did that change over time and as they were more involved on campus?
The above recommendations for future research are offered to encourage improving practices and policies for undergraduate student leaders at PWIs and to gain a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the experiences of undergraduate student leaders who identify as persons of color by expanding the student development literature. This study is only a beginning to a long journey of understanding and conceptualizing the leadership experiences of undergraduate student leaders of color and the role of race in the leadership identity development process.

**Conclusion**

The core mission of student affairs is to develop students holistically by connecting curricular and co-curricular initiatives on campus. Institutions of higher education are uniquely positioned to educate tomorrow’s leaders and initiate change in the number of students of different ethnicities in leadership roles. The findings and recommendations of this study have been summarized and presented in this chapter for implications and recommendations for research and practice in the hopes that it will enable those who work with diverse populations an opportunity to better understand a growing population within the academy as well as the biases that still exist in leadership paradigms.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A. PRE-INTERVIEW

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your feedback will provide invaluable insight in meeting the future needs of other students of color by shedding light on the leadership experiences by this population at a liberal arts college. Prior to participating in your first interview, please take a few minutes to complete the following background information and submit to the researcher.

Demographic

1. Age: _____
2. Ethnic Identification: ___________________________
3. Racial Identification: ___________________________
4. Gender Identification: __________________________
5. Classification (i.e.- Junior or Senior): __________________
6. Hometown: _________________________________
7. Major: _________________________________
8. Please list the student organizations you are involved and if you hold a leadership position:
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview #1 Protocol

Guiding questions for individual interviews: Introduce myself and share informed consent, ask to create a pseudonym

1 Tell me about yourself, who is “name”

2 I would like to start with some demographic questions. How do you describe your heritage? Why do you use this label instead of others? What does it mean to be “xyz race/ethnicity?”

3 Tell me about someone you admire or consider a role model? What about him/her do you admire?

4 Tell me why you got involved and when? How did you begin to think of yourself as a person who could engage with others and get things done? prompts (if needed):
   a Tell me about an experience that worked really well who led that experience? What was your role? And tell me about an experience that didn’t work well?

5 Tell me more about experiences you had learning to work with other people?
   a Prompts (if needed): What about working with people different than you? Does your leadership change if the opposite gender is involved? Does race/ethnicity matter? You seem to be “xyz” focused, when did you switch to using this style of working with others?

6 Who has the power/influence in a group and how do you know that individual has the power?

7 When you are in a group who gets things rolling and how do you know they are moving things forward?

8 How do you react to people calling you a “leader”?

9 What’s your philosophy of leadership and has it changed? If so, how?

10 How has “Leadership College” shaped your leadership? (talk about Leadership College as a highly selective liberal arts college; race; campus climate)

11 Is there anything else you would like to add?
Interview #2 Protocol

1. What initially compelled you to become a leader at Leadership College?

2. What were your expectations of the leadership position before you were in the position—meaning, what kind of experience were you expecting to have in the position?

3. How have your actual experiences differed from the experiences you were expecting to have?

4. What do you enjoy most about being a student leader at Leadership College?

5. In case you haven’t noticed, there are not a lot of students of color who are considered leaders on this campus. Why do you think there are so few of you?

6. How would you describe the racial climate at Leadership College?

7. What roles have race and racial dynamics played in your experiences as a student of color at Leadership College?

8. In your role as a student leader, tell me about a situation where you felt you experienced something that was directly attributable to your race.

9. Why have you chosen to continue in your leadership position(s)?

10. Earlier, I asked what you liked most about being a student leader. Now, I’m interested in knowing what you like least about being a student leader. Probe: How does this dissatisfaction affect your performance and motivation to do a good job?)

11. What advice would you give a future student leader with a similar background as you?

Interview #3 Protocol

Introduction: Share the purpose of the final interview – member check, expound upon and/or confirm themes generated in individual interviews

1. So you talked about “xyz” in your interviews, what does “xyz” mean to you?

2. One of the themes that emerged was “xyz,” is this an accurate interpretation? Is it true to your experience?

3. Continue with this type of interaction

4. Anything else you would like to add?
APPENDIX C. EMAIL SENT TO UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS TO SOLICIT NOMINATIONS

Dear [University Administrator, Faculty, or Staff],

Hello, I am writing to ask for your assistance in identifying students to participate in my doctoral research study.

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the leadership identity development of students of color who are leaders at a liberal arts college. In total, I plan to interview 8-12 men and women. Each student will participate in three individual interviews lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes each. As a university administrator who advises and/or supervises student leaders, I am asking for your assistance in identifying student leaders of color who are interested in participating in my study. I hope to solicit participants who represent the diversity of student leadership at a liberal arts college.

Four criteria are established for participation in this study:

1. Students can be male or female and be in at least their third year of undergraduate study at a liberal arts college.

2. Students must identify as a student of color and is considered a racial minority (African American/Black, Hispanic, Asians/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native).

3. Students who are considered to be leaders on campus and are known to develop strong relationships in student organizations and impact liberal arts colleges positively by their involvement.

If you would, please speak with individuals whom you believe will best represent these criteria and ask if they are willing to participate in this study. Then, please forward the names, emails, and phone numbers of these individuals to me at your earliest convenience.

If you have any questions, or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at ccbeatty@iastate.edu or at 317-414-7401.

Sincerely,

Cameron Beatty

Ph.D. Candidate,
School of Education
Iowa State University
APPENDIX D. LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT TO INTERVIEWEES PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

Title: Exploring the experiences of students of color and leadership development at a liberal arts college

Dear ______________________,

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The principal investigator of this study is Cameron, a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Administration Program, School of Education in the College of Human Sciences at Iowa State University. The study will include about 12 students from liberal arts colleges who are currently involved in student organizations. Your participation as an interviewee will require a total of approximately 5 hours of your time. I want to learn more about your experiences as a college student who is involved.

The purpose of the study is to learn about the journey of undergraduate students of color who are involved on campus, through their words and experiences. The study will include 3 interviews, each approximately 60 to 90 minutes with each student who participates, for a total time commitment of approximately 5 hours. I am seeking to understand how your experience with involvement and understanding of what it means to be a person who is involved, have guided you to become the person you are today, and, how these experiences and understanding may guide your future in relation to leadership.

Four criteria are established for participation in this study:

1. Students can be male or female and be in at least their third year of undergraduate study at a liberal arts college.

2. Students must identify as a student of color and is considered a racial minority (African American/Black, Hispanic, Asians/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native).

3. Students who are considered to be leaders on campus and are known to develop strong relationships in student organizations and impact the liberal arts college positively by their involvement.

During the interview you will be asked questions about your childhood experiences, your schooling, people who have impacted your life, your leadership experience, your race/ethnicity, and your future goals. These questions will serve as a guide to the interview, but the format of the interview is open to reflect what you wish to share and
you may elect to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You are not required to participate in this study for any reason and you have the ability to end your participation at any time, for any reason. In addition, I will answer any questions you may have concerning this project. To thank you for participating, you will receive a $25 gift card of your choice from one of the following: iTunes, Target, or Best buy. In addition, you may find that participating in this study provides a unique opportunity to reflect upon the ways that your experiences have guided and will continue to guide you and your understanding of leadership. The transcripts of each interview will be provided to you for your review prior to my analysis of data. I do not expect any harm to you by being in the study.

All of your answers are private and confidentiality will be maintained in the following ways:

1. The recording and transcript of your interview will be identified by a special number (not your name or student number) and kept on a password protected laptop.

2. I will ask that you develop a pseudonym that will be used in all written documentation.

3. In addition, the recorded interviews will be deleted at the conclusion of the dissertation process.

If you would like to talk to someone about your rights of being a subject in this study, you may contact the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board at (515) 294-4566. If you have questions, need to contact me, or would like additional information, you may contact me at any time at (317) 414-7401 or via email at ccbeatty@iastate.edu.

Please review the informed consent form attached. I will bring this form to our first interview and will also be able to answer additional questions you might have then. Your signature on the attached document indicates that you have read the informed consent document, that all of your questions have been answered, that you are aware of your rights, and that you would like to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Cameron C. Beatty

Ph.D. Candidate
School of Education
Iowa State University
The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.

- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.

- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.

- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.

- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.