EXAMINING THE PROCESS OF LEADER SELF-IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT
AMONG COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LEADERS:
DEVELOPING A GROUNDED THEORY

by
James P. Sartain, Jr.

JEAN BROWN-BRYANT, PhD, Faculty Mentor and Chair
PAULA FREMONT, PhD, Committee Member
DAVID SARNOFF, PhD, Committee Member

Andrea Miller, PhD, Dean
Harold Abel School of Social and Behavioral Sciences

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Capella University
September 2015
Abstract

The growing field of cognitive leadership has begun to explore possible connections between leader self-identity and leader performance. Little of this research, however, has focused on the process of leader self-identity development, particularly approaches that employ data-rich qualitative inquiries. The present study employed a constructivist grounded theory approach to examine the process of leader self-identity development among sixteen senior leaders of a private university in the Southeast. Semistructured interviews revealed a cyclical, phased approach to leader self-identity development that began with an antecedent event or experience that served as a spark for leadership and led to acknowledging the possibility of self as leader. A reinforcing developmental cycle followed and included the stages of acquiring (development of skills in the leadership domain), applying (use of skills to address leadership challenges), adapting (modification of leader skills based on experience and new knowledge), and assimilating (refinement, clarification, and incorporation of the leader self-identity). The proposed grounded theory of leader self-identity development was examined using the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism and in consideration of compatible theories associated with self-identity development including core self-evaluations, self-monitoring, and implicit leadership theories. Finally, implications for future cognitive leader development approaches to better prepare college and university leaders for the growing challenges of leading institutions of higher education were considered.
Dedication

First and foremost, I would like to dedicate this work to my wife Lynda, my best friend and partner for over 25 years, who assures me a safe place to land whenever I decide to reinvent myself. I thank you for understanding, encouragement, and patience as I made the act of burning the candle at both ends an art form over the past six years. Your love and unconditional support gives me the courage to try and the assurance of knowing that failures are simply temporary setbacks on the journey toward something greater.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Katy, who inspires me every day to be a better person and citizen of the world. You amaze me with your kindness, compassion, insights, and talent. Your remarkable ambition and drive will take you far, perhaps even to your own doctoral studies one day. However you choose to pursue your passions, I know you will be a great success. Thank you for understanding when my doctoral work started to overlap the first years of your own college experience. Nothing I accomplish in this life will ever be as great as having the privilege of being your father.

Finally, I dedicate this to a group of influential women in my life. These women, in one way or another, influenced who I am today and include my mother, Judith Hinson Ginnis, my sisters, Johanna Sartain Hill and Megan Sartain Garrison, my longtime friend, colleague, and business partner, Kathryn W. Davanzo, and my early academic mentors, Dr. Elizabeth Rice Allgeier and Dr. Sharon Tkacz.
Acknowledgments

Throughout the writing of this dissertation, I was reminded of the ancient Chinese Proverb, “When there is no wind, row.” Writing a dissertation requires a lot of rowing and is, at times, a lonely and insular process. I am fortunate to have a rich community of family, friends, and colleagues who encouraged me and cheered me on—reminding me that I was not alone and that there was life beyond the dissertation. I am particularly grateful to my wife, Lynda, my daughter, Katy, for being everyday examples of patience, support, and encouragement.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my dissertation chair, Dr. Jean Brown-Bryant, and committee members, Dr. Paula Fremont and Dr. David Sarnoff, for creating a circle of support, guidance, and encouragement that sustained me these last few months. I would also like to thank Dr. Nancy Aragon and Dr. Bruce Fischer for their considerable and consistent guidance and support throughout the formative stages of this project. I am also grateful to Dr. Nathan Hiller for so graciously sharing his insights and recommendations regarding the focus of the project and the research questions included in this inquiry. Dr. Hiller’s research has greatly inspired this work and continues to encourage me to think deeper about the phenomenon of leadership.

Kathy Davanzo, my colleague of over 25 years, has been an instrumental part of the journey of learning about life and leadership. Our partnership started when we were young leaders within an organization and has evolved to a rich consulting collaboration of over fifteen years and counting. What I have come to believe about leadership has been largely influenced by our shared experiences working in organizations, colleges,
and universities and shaped by our multiple deep-level conversations about the nature of leaders and leadership.

I want to thank Dr. Jeffrey Anderson for more reasons than I can count. Dr. Anderson was instrumental in helping me to focus and refine my research. He sacrificed Saturday mornings and weeknight evenings to pilot my interview approach, edit various versions of manuscripts, review my methodology, verify my analysis, and to provide a supportive ear when needed. His friendship and support during this process were invaluable.

Finally, I would like to thank the exceptional college and university leaders I have had the opportunity to work with over my career and who planted the seeds regarding the connection of a strong leader self-identity and leadership effectiveness. There are too many to include but I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge, by name, Dr. Arthur Kirk, Dr. Paul J. Olscamp, and Dr. Katherine M. Johnson, for their exceptional leadership examples.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.............................................................................................................. iv

List of Tables ..................................................................................................................... ix

List of Figures ..................................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER 1.  INTRODUCTION .................................................................................. 1

  Background of the Problem (Introduction)............................................................. 1
  Statement of the Problem........................................................................................ 4
  Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................... 6
  Significance of the Study ........................................................................................ 8
  Research Design.................................................................................................... 12
  Research Questions and Hypotheses .................................................................... 18
  Assumptions and Limitations ............................................................................... 18
  Definition of Terms............................................................................................... 23
  Researcher Biases for Consideration .................................................................... 28
  Organization of the Remainder of the Study ........................................................ 30

CHAPTER 2.  LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................................... 32

  Introduction to the Literature Review................................................................. 32
  Theoretical Orientation for the Study ................................................................. 47
  Review of Research Literature Specific to the Topic ........................................... 50
  Review of Methodological Literature Specific to the Topic ............................... 63
  Synthesis of the Research Findings ..................................................................... 66
  Critique of the Previous Research....................................................................... 67
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Population and Participant Selection</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Procedures</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Findings</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: The Study and the Researcher</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the Sample (Participants)</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of the Data and Results of the Analysis</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Results</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of the Results</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of the Conclusions</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1. Actions of Grounded Theorists ................................................................. 65
Table 2. Independent Samples T-Test ................................................................. 85
Table 3. Semistructured Interview Questions ..................................................... 90
Table 4. Description of Participants .................................................................. 103
List of Figures

Figure 1: Cyclical Process of Leader Self-Identity Development (LSID) 129

Figure 2: Actions by Phase of the Leader Self-Identity Development Model 133
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem (Introduction)

The unprecedented pace and complexity of today’s organizations have underscored the need for competent leadership. Effective leaders must successfully navigate through myriad challenges in order to position their institutions and organizations for optimal performance, growth, and sustainability (Weber, 1999). Consequently, developing leadership talent has become one of the most urgent priorities for today’s businesses (Fegley, 2006). The unique confluence of challenges facing today’s institutions of higher education, in particular, has added to the clarion call for more effective ways to prepare leadership (Sitkin, Emery, & Siang, 2009). Exactly how to best develop this talent continues to be a central concern for Industrial/Organizational (I/O) psychologists and for stakeholders both within and outside of the institution (Silzer, 2002).

A Cognitive Focus

In the design of new models and approaches to leadership development, researchers have increasingly begun to explore cognitive connections to the performance of leadership. Specific to their investigations is the desire to learn more about how leaders and followers think and process information and, ultimately, how these cognitive functions impact leadership performance (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Day &
Harrison, 2007; Lord & R. J. Hall, 2005; M. D. Mumford, Watts, & Partlow, 2015). How leaders see themselves and their awareness of how others perceive them are integral dimensions to this emerging direction of leadership research (Ibarra, Wittman, Petriglieri, & Day, 2014).

Until recently, the role of cognition in leader emergence and performance has not received significant attention in studies of leadership (M. D. Mumford et al., 2015). Much of the early research in cognitive leadership has limited the exploration of perceptions and leadership cognitions in three directions: The perceptions that followers have of themselves and their leaders (Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000; R. J. Hall & Lord, 1995; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004; Quaquebeke & van Knippenberg, 2012), the perceptions that leaders have of their followers (Dinh, Lord, & Hoffman, 2014), and leader behaviors that impact follower self-identity (Lord & Brown, 2004).

A fourth, and heretofore under researched area involving cognition and perception is how leaders perceive themselves and what impact these self-perceptions have on the performance of leadership (Connelly et al., 2000; Hiller, 2005; Lord, De Vader, & Alliger, 1986; MacDonald, Sulsky, & Brown, 2008). This is a particularly important new direction of research given a growing belief that the cognitive view of the self may be one of the most powerful elements of leadership performance (D. T. Hall, 2004; Hiller, 2005; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Ibarra et al. (2014) suggested that identity is a “potent force in understanding leadership.” (p. 285). Within this growing cognitive focus of leadership are emerging models of leader development
that consider the leader’s cognitive attributes and skills (e.g., Lord & R. J. Hall, 2005; Petriglieri, 2001), the structure of the self-concept (Altrocchi, 1999), and competencies required to develop a leader self-identity including self-awareness and adaptability (D. T. Hall, 2004). More research is required to help explain how the self-concept links to meta-cognitive leadership theories and how leaders actually develop (Avolio et al., 2009). Additionally, although there is growing empirical support suggesting a connection between leader self-identity and leader performance, more exploration and explanation regarding the inner workings of leader identity on subsequent behaviors, style, and effectiveness is required (Bass, 2008; Hiller, 2005; Murphy, 2002).

A Qualitative Approach

Leadership has been extensively explored in the field of psychology yet very few studies have applied a qualitative approach (Glynn & Raffaelli, 2010; Salovaara, 2011). Day (2014b) suggested that inductive research designs that take into account time and exogenous variables might offer insights not derived from theoretically driven, deductive research (p. 866). Further, Hiller (2005) noted that a qualitative approach might allow for a deeper analysis of constructs and factors associated with leadership that might not have been previously identified or addressed in traditional quantitative designs.

The reasons for the possibility of untapped leadership dimensions in prior quantitative designs may be the result of varied and ambiguous definitions of leadership and the corresponding lack of a standard or uniform construct for empirical studies (Day, 2014a; Day & Harrison, 2007; Pfeffer, 1977). A qualitative inquiry may help to further refine and clarify the phenomenon of leadership through the identification of different
variables or new relationships between variables associated with its emergence or presence. This could allow for more rigorous and targeted experimental, quasi-experimental, and qualitative inquiries in the future (Hiller, 2005).

Accordingly, the proposed qualitative approach, therefore, was designed to advance the growing scientific knowledge base of cognitive leadership by exploring, via grounded theory, the process of developing a leader self-identity among college and university leaders. It was hoped that future leader development approaches would be informed by a better understanding of the common experiences, events, and milestones associated with the process of leader identity development and the relationship of this identity on subsequent leader behaviors and effectiveness.

**Statement of the Problem**

Research documenting how a leader’s self-identity influences the performance of leadership is a significant missing element in the ongoing exploration of leadership (Bass, 1999; Murphy, 2002; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Only in recent years has the construct of identity been explored by researchers in the domain of leadership (Ibarra et al., 2014). Further, there has been no conclusive examination of the process of how a leader’s identity develops (Drath, 2001; Johnson, Lanaj, Venus, & Mao, 2012; Lord & R. J. Hall, 2005) and scant research examining how self-identity changes over time, particularly during an adult’s working years (D. T. Hall, 2004).

Prior studies in the area of cognitive leadership have predominantly explored the follower’s self-identity with very little work targeting the leader’s self-identity (e.g., see van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg et al., 2004, for a research review). A focus on the
leader’s self-identity is an important new frontier of research given that leadership effectiveness may be predicated, in part, on how this self-identity influences the identities of those who follow them (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2005). It has been suggested that a full understanding of the leadership dynamic is not possible without considering the leader’s orientation toward self and others (Carey, 1992). Understanding, then, how this identity develops and how it mediates or moderates follower identity and behavior is of great significance in the ongoing exploration of leadership, particularly as a potentially powerful consideration in effective leadership development (Lord & R. J. Hall, 2005).

Identifying and designing proven, evidence-based approaches to leader development are critical in order for leaders to effectively respond to the challenges of an increasingly complex and ever-evolving modern workplace (O’Connell, 2014). Of particular value in the emerging research linking identity and leadership is the potential that these new insights, theories, and relationships offer to the design and delivery of next-level developmental models, frameworks, and strategies.

Although more robust and effective leader development approaches are required for a wide range of industries and businesses comprising today’s marketplace, strategies to equip leaders of institutions of higher education are particularly critical given the growing and unique range of complexities these leaders face (Sandeen, 2011). Today’s colleges and universities are among the most complicated and challenging institutions to lead due to the convergence of economic (Carnoy & Castells, 1997; Williams, 1999), political (Gardner, 1999; Gioia & J. B. Thomas, 1996; McGuinness, 2011; Mumper,
Gladieux, King & Corrigan, 2011), ethical (Trachtenberg, Kauvar, & Bogue, 2014), legal (Olivas & Baez, 2011), generational (Oblinger, Oblinger, & Lippincott, 2005; Rowley, 1997), financial (Duderstadt, 1999), technological (Hanna, 2000; Ikenberry, 1999), social (Altbach, 2011), ideological (Gardner, 1999), and demographic challenges (Parnell, 1990). The scope and depth of these challenges converge in a manner that is particularly unique to leaders of higher education. Duderstadt and Womack (2003) described colleges and universities as among the most significant social institutions in contemporary society and in great need of multi-faceted, change tolerant, resilient, and fully equipped leaders. As such, developing leaders to successfully lead these complex institutions is, and will remain, a critical priority for I/O psychologists and others who research or practice in the leadership domain.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to contribute to an emerging body of research focused on cognitive dimensions of leadership. A better understanding of a leader’s cognitive views of the self offers a promising dimension to new and emerging approaches to leader development and is part of next generation theories and models categorized under cognitive leadership (Avolio et al, 2009; Bass, 2008). Although there is growing empirical support suggesting a connection between leader self-identity and leader performance, more exploration and explanation regarding the inner workings of leader identity on subsequent behaviors, style, and effectiveness is required (Bass, 2008; Hiller, 2005; Murphy, 2002).
Accordingly, this work sought to develop a grounded theory of how college or university leaders’ cognitive perceptions of the self, or self-identities, develop over time and how these self-views influence the performance of leadership. In beginning to clarify the process of identity development for leaders, particularly leaders considered effective by their peers, supervisors, and subordinates, it was hoped findings would inform opportunities for institutions of higher education and other organizations to create cultures and provide activities and experiences that foster effective leader self-identity development.

As a topic of study, leadership development is among the least explored topics in leadership research (Day, 2000; Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2008). However, extant research does suggest that leadership development has a positive affect on performance, although there is a lack of agreement on the level of this affect (e.g., see D. B. Collins & Holton, 2004, for a meta-analytic review of the positive outcomes associated with leadership development). Strategies targeting cognitive dimensions of leaders, particularly dimensions of self-identity that emerge through a developmental process, could inform more incisive leadership development methods and approaches. In contrast to prevailing development models that process leaders through a fixed and uniform (or boilerplate curriculum), cognitively oriented leader development would require customized content and approaches that were appropriate to the leader’s developmental level. These cognitive approaches could target deficiencies in self-views that served as barriers to leadership effectiveness (e.g., distorted thoughts, blind spots, perceptual errors, thinking errors, lack of awareness of self, others, and context). By focusing leader
development work on the deeper structures of the mind, it stands to reason that the effect of these interventions would be more sustainable, portable, and adaptive to future contexts and situations given that the strategies would be individualized and inexorably linked to how a person thinks.

Finally, this study sought to address the problem of under-representation of qualitative inquiries about leadership (Salovaara, 2011). The field of leadership has largely been examined through quantitative approaches and, as a result, what is known about the nature of leadership, particularly how it emerges and develops over time, is remarkably limited (Connelly et al., 2000; Glynn & Raffaelli, 2010; Hiller, 2005; Lord, De Vader, & Alliger, 1986; MacDonald, Sulsky, & Brown, 2008). Positivistic constructs borne from the scientific method and emphasizing objectivity, generalizability, and the elimination of competing hypotheses may have limited nuances regarding leadership development and leader self-identity, which have been previously uncharted in quantitative designs (Glynn & Raffaelli, 2010; Ladkin, 2010). In particular, because of the focus on context and process in the inquiry, grounded theory is considered one of the most fruitful qualitative methodologies to use when studying the phenomenon of leadership (Kempster & Parry, 2011, p. 106).

**Significance of the Study**

Through a grounded theory exploration of the process of leader self-identity development among college and university leadership, it was hoped that findings would generate insights and inform approaches to leader performance, leader and leadership
development, research methodology, and leadership theory. Each of these considerations is briefly addressed below.

**Leader and Organizational Performance Considerations**

Strong leader self-images and ego ideals have been associated with overall leadership effectiveness (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Elements of self-identity (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy, and locus of control) have been found to be among the best predictors of job satisfaction and job performance (Judge & Bono, 2001). Self-efficacy, in particular, has been associated with coping behavior, achievement, growth of intrinsic interests, and career advancement (Bandura, 1982; Bandura, 1997).

Self-identity has also been shown to have a large influence on cognition, emotion, motivation, and behavior, and, as a result, may affect follower perceptions of leadership (Hanges, Lord, & Dickson, 2000). Because it is through the influence on others that leadership is witnessed, if researchers could better understand how a leader’s self-identity influences follower behavior or follower self-identity, the opportunities to positively leverage that relationship for enhanced organizational outcomes could be increased (Yukl, 2006).

**Leadership and Leader Development Considerations**

The development of individual leaders and groups of leaders could be advanced by a better understanding of how cognitive self-views moderate and mediate the performance of leadership. Lord and R. J. Hall (2005) suggested that development of a leader’s self-identity is critical to advanced leadership development. They wrote:
To sustain interest for the months and years required to develop and practice complex leadership skills, it is also likely that the leadership role needs to become part of one’s self-identity and...over time, leadership skills and knowledge become inextricably integrated with the development of one’s self-concept as a leader. (Lord & R. J. Hall, 2005, Introduction, para. 1)

By having a better understanding of the process of leader self-identity development, researchers and practitioners alike could consider developmental experiences that engage, refine, or expand elements of the leader’s self-identity in ways that could lead to improved organizational outcomes (Day & Harrison, 2007).

Engaging the cognitive elements of leadership will likely require a deeper and more sustained approach to leader development. This is in sharp contrast to the prevailing leadership development models that focus on skill building or short-term surface interventions as opposed to conceptual understandings of the self (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, & Mainella, 2005). By focusing on how leader self-identity emerges, particularly through the identification of common developmental events, experiences, and milestones, it is hoped that the resulting grounded theory will guide next-level approaches for leaders of institutions of higher education and other fields and professions where leader preparation is essential to manage complex systems, priorities, and challenges.

**Qualitative Inquiry Considerations**

The primary theoretical implication of choosing a qualitative approach for this study was to address, in some small measure, historically restrictive quantitative methods
used to identify the nature and process of leadership and leadership development. Salovaara (2011) noted, “Qualitative studies of leadership are relatively few and their history is short.” (p. 100). Glynn and Raffaelli (2010), in their review of leadership research from 1957 to 2007, found that over 85% of leadership studies employed quantitative methodologies. These quantitative approaches have largely been limited by positivistic constructs regarding the scientific method emphasizing objectivity, generalizability, and the elimination of competing hypotheses (Glynn & Raffaelli, 2010; Ladkin, 2010). Not simply limited to the study of leaders and leadership, the emphasis on quantitative methods has dominated business research as a whole (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

A potential consequence of such a narrow method of inquiry to investigate a phenomenon as expansive and layered as leadership is the problem of commensuration. The risk of commensuration is increased when research is designed to test, refine, or expand existing theories rather than looking for alternative explanations or in comparing, replacing, and synthesizing theories. Commensuration can also result from relying on a restrictive list of historical variables associated with leadership rather than being open to the possibility of new variables or new relationships between variables that could influence leader emergence or performance. Such a restrictive approach to the study of leadership may have inadvertently overlooked or failed to measure variables that may actually impact leadership behavior simply because they did not align with variables that had been previously tested in quantitative studies. Because of commensuration, prevailing theories can often go unchallenged, commitment to a fixed perspective can
become strengthened, and “stand alone silos of thought” perpetuated (Glynn & Raffaelli, 2010p. 390). To counter the risk of commensuration, rich phenomenological approaches can expand the possibilities, patterns, and variables potentially influencing a phenomenon and potentially capture previously overlooked dimensions and relationships (Hiller, 2005).

**Theoretical Considerations**

The primary theoretical implication of the proposed qualitative approach is to contribute to leadership research theory and emerging cognitive leadership models. In particular, implicit leadership theories could be advanced by a richer examination of leader self-identity development. Similarly, leadership dimensions including emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), collective leadership (Hiller, Day & Vance, 2006) and multidimensional approaches to leadership (Day & Harrison, 2007) may also be informed by the findings. Consistent with the practices and tradition of grounded theory, additional theories were evoked during the analysis and as tentative ideas emerged about the data that was collected (Charmaz, 2014). Additional theories and perspectives, including core self evaluations, self-monitoring, and symbolic interactionism, emerged from the data and were used to further elaborate and refine categories, explain emerging theoretical ideas, and help to examine implications of this work.

**Research Design**

This study employed Charmaz’s (2014) constructivist grounded theory as the research model and semistructured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Each of these elements of the research design is further detailed below.
Constructivist Grounded Theory Research Model

Charmaz (2014) suggested that grounded theory is a useful qualitative methodology in that it proposes flexibility within the guidelines of the study, facilitates rather than eliminates the influence of the researcher on the theory, and helps develop an understanding of experience as it is shared through the relationships, situations, and hidden networks of the participants. Grounded theory is particularly appropriate as a framework for examining leadership because the methodology seeks to illuminate and describe, through theory, a process (Patton, 2002). Because self-identity is developmental in nature, a grounded theory approach is often used for research that involves some type of movement or phased phenomenon, such as identity (Kempster & Parry, 2011; Percy & Kostere, 2008). This inquiry is considered grounded in that it used comparative methods, analyzed actions, and identified processes rooted in the narratives and descriptions of leaders to develop new conceptual categories and theoretical explanations (Charmaz, 2014).

Population

Sixteen leaders of a private university in the southeastern United States participated in the qualitative inquiry. Participants were divided into two cohorts based on their scores on the university’s culture and effectiveness surveys: One cohort was comprised of leaders with scores above the university’s mean ideal culture scores (representing higher effectiveness) and a second cohort was comprised of leaders with scores below the university’s mean ideal culture scores (representing lower effectiveness) as measured by the Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI) produced by Human
Synergistics. Specific leader behaviors from each of the two cohorts were further examined using a second instrument, the *Organizational Effectiveness Inventory* (OEI), to identify differences in leader behaviors from the perspective of the leader, followers, and supervisors. This process allowed for a contrasting of responses based on lower or higher leader effectiveness rankings; an element not addressed in the previous grounded theory investigation of leader self-identity (i.e., Komives et al., 2005).

Potential insights gained from a grounded theory exploration of self-identity emergence among college and university leaders could inform development initiatives to better equip these leaders to meet the unprecedented challenges they face. Specifically, the traditional model of higher education is experiencing a seismic shift in education distribution and delivery. The information age has created an exponential increase in the amount of accessible knowledge, which has had profound affects on leaders of higher education (Duderstadt, Atkins & Houweling, 2002). Technology has eroded old boundaries of traditional education, creating new markets and methods for instructional delivery (Duderstadt & Womack, 2003). Long-held beliefs about educational design, distribution, and access are being challenged, especially around the commoditization of knowledge (Hamel, 2012). For example, online programs, distance learning, and the Massive Open Online Classrooms (MOOCs) offering free or greatly discounted student access to the best thought leaders around the world are challenging leaders in new ways (Daniel, 2012).

In addition to the development of the ability to successfully navigate the conflicting demands for change, college and university leaders are now increasingly
required to be experts in negotiating the extensive and often competing agendas of an array of constituents (Duderstadt, 2000; Harcleroad & Eaton, 2011). Faculty, students, parents, and community members look to leadership for solutions for their particular concerns that may controvert the needs of other stakeholders, including, but not limited to corporate entities that govern for-profit institutions and regulatory and accrediting bodies. These challenges require the institutional leader to be both facile and an advanced critical thinker. A heightened level of social and emotional intelligence may also be a critical job skill for leaders of institutions of higher education in light of the increasingly complex social role required of college and university leadership (Shapiro & Gross, 2013).

In addition to the increased complexity of leading in higher education, recent high profile failures of some of the most renowned colleges and universities in the United States have focused attention on how leaders are (or are not) being developed to successfully meet the ethical requirements of their office (Sandeen, 2011; Trachetenberg et al., 2014). A recent example of ethical failures was the 2009 University of Illinois scandal involving admissions practices that unfairly benefitted well-connected applicants and led to the resignation of the university’s president (Masterson, 2009). Similarly, Penn State’s 2011 child sex-abuse scandal resulted in the firing of the university’s president and football coach, and convictions on 45 counts of child molestation of the assistant football coach. This scandal is now characterized as a 14-year period where informed leaders deliberately failed to protect victimized children for the sake of the university’s sacred football program (Wolverton, 2012).
Leaders must be equipped to monitor their own behaviors and responses to ethical challenges and also employ measures to ensure their institutional cultures do not contribute to ethical breaches (Kaiser & Craig, 2014). Leader development initiatives that focus on cognitive elements of identity and leadership may offer an avenue for helping leaders prepare for the ethical challenges of leadership (Caldwell, 2009). For example, a focus on self-regulation (Kaiser & Craig, 2014) might assist leaders in examining ethical responses by having better self-awareness about their thoughts and corresponding actions along with the consequences of those actions. Similarly, the application of theoretical concepts associated with self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974) might also provide an avenue for cognitively focused leader development that could reinforce responsibility and accountability. A growing focus on destructive leadership has suggested that cognitive elements may be involved (i.e., unethical decision-making, failing to self-regulate, intentionality of destructive behavior). These cognitive elements should be targeted as part of a more comprehensive leadership development approach (Kaiser & Craig, 2014; Tierney & Tepper, 2007). To best prepare leaders for ethical challenges, Treviño & Brown (2014) have suggested that researchers should begin to develop a framework for ethical leadership to guide leader development interventions.

Development approaches to better prepare college and university leaders need to be reviewed, expanded, and refocused in light of the complexities of the changing landscape of higher education (Nica, 2013), in response to the demand for more ethical leadership (e.g., Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005), and in consideration of the new focus on multilevel approaches to leadership development based in identity (Day &
Harrison, 2007). This study aimed to combine the qualitative tools of grounded theory to explore the process of leader self-identity development among college and university leaders in the hopes of informing future college and university leader development initiatives.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The primary data collection process involved the administration of pre-interview questionnaires followed by semistructured interviews conducted face-to-face of approximately 90-minutes in duration. The pre-interview questionnaires were comprised of 20 questions covering a variety of dimensions related to self-identity development (i.e., process and developmental questions, and questions related to elements of leader self-identity including self-construct, self-efficacy, self-consistency, and self-esteem). Specific interview questions were designed to elicit participant narratives, a key element of grounded theory data (Charmaz, 2014). These narratives described the process of how participants became leaders and identified critical influences, events, and challenges that prompted, revised, and sustained their journey to becoming leaders. Through a constant comparative method of analysis, interview responses and participant narratives were coded and analyzed after each interview. Categories and clusters were then combined, integrated, and compared throughout the data collection process. Per grounded theory guidelines, the inquiry process was left as open and inductive as possible, allowing for the greatest probability of documenting a common experiences, events, and insights for leader self-identity development (Charmaz, 2014).
Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study was driven by the primary research question: *What is the process of leader self-identity development among college and university leaders?* Through this examination, it was hoped that a previously unexplored inductive abstract analytic category or process would emerge that would help explain how leaders cognitively become leaders. As a complex and rich phenomenon, the research question was designed to suggest previously unidentified domains, dimensions, and processes associated with leader-self-identity development.

Assumptions and Limitations

The following section summarizes the theoretical, methodological, topic-specific, and instrument assumptions followed by a review of possible limitations of the proposed dissertation study.

Theoretical Assumptions

The primary theoretical assumption in grounded theory research is to avoid, as much as possible, the influence of prior theories. Because grounded theory is largely an inductive and iterative process, suspending notions and beliefs about the topic under study, including existing theories, is a critical component of the methodology. In other words, grounded theory should be used to generate theory and not to test it (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through the interview responses of participants, inductive data emerged from the constant comparative method and abstract analytical categories were identified. The researcher worked diligently to allow this inductive process to happen with as little interpretation as possible while the theoretical categories
emerged. This suspension of preconceived notions is a critical characteristic of a
grounded theorist in the early work of data analysis. The data and any process or model
it evokes should be allowed to emerge as naturally as possible with prior theoretical
assumptions controlled or contained as much as possible (Charmaz, 2014).

**Methodological Assumptions**

Although the topic of leadership has been the subject of thousands of scientific
investigations, the body of knowledge has yet to reveal and common or integrative
definition or model (Day & Halpin, 2004). Leadership, even after years of research,
remains an obtuse and varied construct (Day & Harrison, 2007; Pfeffer, 1977). A
grounded theory methodology was chosen based on the assumption that
phenomenological investigations of leadership would reveal rich detail that might have
been missed in previous qualitative studies (Hiller, 2005). In addition, because
leadership is largely a longitudinal process and revealed through the social interaction of
leaders and followers, grounded theory was, ultimately, the most appropriate
methodology for examination (Kempster & Parry, 2011; Parry, 1998). The scope and
purpose of this dissertation does not allow for a full discourse between quantitative
versus qualitative methodology and value. Nor does it allow for a full examination of the
shift in scientific philosophical perspectives between the traditional positivist and the
grounded theory constructivist. As the topic becomes more defined, quantitative analysis
can then be used to refine and verify elements of the phenomenon with greater scientific
rigor (Conger, 1998).
**Topic-Specific Assumptions**

A topic-specific assumption was that the leaders participating in the survey would be able to accurately recall those developmental milestones, events, and experiences that were impactful through the course of their development. To help mitigate the errors in recall, the participants were given the questions in advance of the interview along with instructions to reflect on the topics given the retrospective nature of many of the items. To further address issues in recall, each participant was given a transcript of their interview with instructions to revise their responses based on any changes in their recollection that may have happened after the interview. Several participants expanded their responses during the period of transcript review, benefitting from the additional time to reflect upon historical events and experiences that shaped their leadership emergence.

Because self-identity is predicated on self-awareness (D. T. Hall, 2004), an assumption was made that the participants would be sufficiently self-aware to be able to accurately evoke examples and dimensions of their own identities. An assumption was made that they would not only be able to recall the seminal events, experiences, and relationships that influenced their leadership but that they would be able to identify the impact that these factors had in the creation and modification of their self-views over time. Provision of the questions in advance of the interview was intended to not only prime recollections but also to prime awareness. During the interviews, all 16 participants demonstrated sufficient self-awareness by being able to recall events that shifted their cognitive self-views throughout the course of their careers; including careers of 30 years or longer.
Limitations

Perhaps one of the most significant limitations to the proposed study is the vague and varied definition of leadership (Day & Harrison, 2007; Pfeffer, 1977). Among its many varied definitions, leadership has been described as a phenomenon manifested by the use of authority and social power (Kochan, Schmidt, & DeCotiis, 1975), as an interaction of consideration, initiating structure, and organizational criteria (Korman, 1966), as social influence (Yukl, 2006), as a balance of technical and symbolic roles (Deal & Peterson, 1994), and as evidenced by the motivation and enablement of followers to perform (House, Javidan, & Dorfman, 2001). While it is clear that leaders have an impact on organizational outcomes, it is less clear what specific traits, behaviors, and competencies are needed for leader effectiveness and how these dimensions vary across different contexts and domains (Day, 2014b, p. 859).

In an early work regarding the ambiguous definition of leadership, Pfeffer (1977) suggested that the number and range of dimensions associated with leadership were primarily due to the research methodologies employed by the researchers. He noted that factor analysis was the predominant methodology used in early examinations of leadership and researchers targeted a large number of behaviors in their analyses. As new factors were introduced, Pfeffer suggested that greater imprecision was also introduced (p. 105). Similarly, Day (2014) suggested that advances in conceptual frameworks and methodologies have added to the variances in the way researchers conceptualize and study leadership. He further posited that a stable leadership construct
and a uniform, concrete definition may not be possible given the dynamic, interpersonal, and multi-layered dimensions of the phenomenon (p. 4).

Although a working definition of leadership was employed for this study and corresponds to the definition derived from the GLOBE conference in Calgary, Canada in 1994 (House et al., 2001), there was still a probability of variance in perceptions of what participants thought was leadership. Because personal definitions of leadership varied, participant perceptions of, and recall of events influencing their leader development may have also varied. Given the cognitive leadership focus of this study, however, the results should have value despite these varying perceptions. Specifically, this grounded theory investigation was designed to inform the next generation of theories and models categorized under cognitive leadership (Avolio et al., 2009; Bass, 2008). These emerging cognitive conceptualizations have taken into account multiple and interactive dimensions of leadership and have eschewed overly narrow or dogmatic attempts at a unitary definition of leadership (Day & Harrison, 2007, p. 360). Instead of a stable construct, this study was designed to capture the richness of participants’ recollections and the subjective meaning applied to those events and experiences.

Similarly, another limitation was the possible recall bias given the retrospective nature of this inquiry. As discussed under the topic-specific assumptions immediately above, the research design was predicated on the participants’ ability to recall specific events that may have happened decades earlier. This provided a methodological limitation in that there was potential for inaccurate or incomplete recollections. Again, as with varied definitions and perceptions of leadership, accurate or complete recollections
of events, relationships, and experiences were less important than the richness of the narratives participants constructed. The value resided in the sensemaking they employed to contextualize their leadership progression and the importance they attributed to relationships, events, and experiences along their individual leadership journeys.

A final methodological limitation, or perhaps an artifact of the purposive sampling, was the absence of academic leaders in the sample. University leaders, regardless of role or title, were included in the candidate pool as long as they met the criteria (i.e., at least two direct reports, five years of prior leadership experience, not currently involved in a leader development program). These criteria, however, may have eliminated the majority of academic leaders who could be recruited for participation. Specifically, other than department chairs, the majority of faculty members did not have supervisory responsibility over others. As a result, only executive and administrative university leaders were represented in the final participant sample. Consequently, the sample did not allow for a contrasting of processes by leader category (e.g., faculty vs. administrative vs. executive). Prior research has found that there are different leadership orientations and decision-making requirements between administrative, executive, and academic leaders of higher education (Birnbaum & Edelson, 1989). An examination of differences in leader self-identity emergence between academic leaders and executive/administrative leaders would be an interesting focus of further research.

**Definition of Terms**

In conducting this grounded theory examination, several construct terms were used to help explain the phenomenon of leadership and identity development. Because
both leadership and identity are complex and varied constructs and include elements that are not easily observed or measured (e.g., cognitive and social processes), there are no universally shared and integrative definitions of either phenomenon. The following terms and their definitions were not meant to reconcile the varying definitions of these social and cognitive processes. Instead, they serve as a lexicon to help clarify the scope, context, and phenomena addressed in this inquiry.

**Construct Terms**

*Certainty,* as it relates to self-identity, is the extent to which a person believes that his or her self-view is accurate and aligned with how others view the individual (Pelham & Swann, 1989).

*Cognition* is a complex interaction of knowledge and its organization, storage, and application. Cognition includes such features as the speed and depth of information processing, problem-solving, and overall cognitive capacity (M. D. Mumford et al., 2015).

*Leadership,* as a construct, lacks a standard and universally accepted definition (Day & Harrison, 2007). One noteworthy attempt to develop a working definition of organizational leadership was conducted in 1994 as part of the first GLOBE research conference held in Calgary, Canada. Fifty-four researchers representing 38 countries proposed the following consensus definition: “Leadership is the ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members” (House et al., 2001, p. 494). This definition is aligned with Yukl’s (2006) review of common elements of various definitions of
leadership that include intentional influence by one person over another, a focus on 
achievement of a goal or outcome, and enabling others to move toward a shared goal or 
outcome.

*Leader development* is distinguished from *leadership development* for the 
purposes of this study. Day (2000) suggested that leader development focuses on the 
skills, competencies, experiences, and knowledge areas of an individual that prepares that 
individual to work effectively in the organizational and to competently respond to the 
social context of the workplace. Leadership development, in contrast, occurs within the 
social context and interaction of multiple people and, accordingly, is developed by 
bringing those people together over time and focusing on social interaction as a 
developmental dimension.

*Leader self-identity* is a self-construction of experiences and self-knowledge in 
the leadership domain that develops over time—how a person perceives him or herself as 
a leader (Hertnecky, 2008).

*Locus of Control* refers to a person’s perceptions of his or her own agency and 
influence over an outcome. A person’s locus of control could described as *internal*— 
perceptions that outcomes are made possible by the individual’s own agency or 
*external*—perceptions that outcomes are controlled by outside factors such as luck, fate, 
or others with whom they cannot exert influence (Rotter, 1966).

*Scripts*, in the context of self-schema research, are conceptual structures with a 
sequential pattern for processing familiar tasks and circumstances (Bass, 2008). Scripts
represent behaviors that are associated with a particular schema (Wofford, Goodwin, & Whittington, 1998) and help guide action and decision-making (Lord & Kerman, 1987).

*Self-concept* is comprised of cognitive maps or mental models, also referred to as *self-schemas* or *schemata* (Markus, 1977; Markus, Smith, & Moreland, 1985). These schemas are beliefs that people hold about themselves and that help them navigate and process information to determine if it is relevant, meaningful, and useful. Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein (2003) defined self-concept as a knowledge structure that helps an individual organize and give meaning to memory and behavior. A foundational concept for cognitive psychologists, self-concept is also useful for social psychologists in that much of an individual’s self-concept is relational. In other words, individuals draw meaning about who they are in the context of their interactions with others. Not only does self-concept evolve from interactions with others, it serves to regulate these social interactions (Lord & Brown, 2004). It is through the dynamic process of influencing, being influenced, and interacting with others in the social context that informs an individual’s beliefs about him or herself.

*Self-consistency* is the sense of continuity that is present in an individual’s perceptions of him or herself. Also known as self-concordance, self-consistency includes the stability of past, present, and future beliefs and values that a person holds (van Knippenberg et al., 2005).

*Self-construct* is essentially synonymous with self-concept in that it represents the beliefs that an individual holds about him or herself, and is defined in personal, relational,
and collective terms. It is also a dynamic and ever-changing construct (van Knippenberg et al., 2005).

*Self-efficacy* refers to the beliefs that an individual has about his or her ability to act in ways necessary to successfully accomplish a goal (Bandura, 1997; Maddux & Gosselin, 2003). It is often described as including a level of confidence that a person holds in being able to successfully complete a task. Generalized self-efficacy refers to one’s self-appraisal of his or her fundamental ability to persevere, perform, and ultimately be successful (Judge & Bono, 2001).

*Self-esteem* provides an affective component to the self-concept or construct and includes both positive and negative evaluations that a person holds about him or herself (Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2008).

*Self-Monitoring* is defined as the awareness and subsequent ability to observe, regulate and control how self-views are presented to others (Snyder, 1974).

*Self-Schema* (or *Schemata*) are mental maps comprised of cognitive generalizations and self-views that are informed by past experience and used as sensemaking and organizing filters to process information about the self (Markus et al., 1985).

*University leadership* includes presidents, vice-presidents, provosts, deans, chairs and department heads with authority over various functions of an institution and who have some degree of responsibility for the operations and strategic direction of the university. For the purposes of this qualitative inquiry, university leadership is further defined as positions with responsibility of more than two direct reports. This distinction
addresses the nature of complex social relationships of colleges and universities and the specific social development outcome inherent in the work that college and university leaders do (Rost & Barker, 2000). Although the term leader can be appropriately used to describe an expert within a particular domain or discipline who may not control the work of staff (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2011), the social interaction of leadership and the perspective of followers is a central consideration of this research.

**Researcher Biases for Consideration**

Constructivist grounded theory allows for a reciprocal approach between the researcher and the participants and allows the researcher a degree of subjectivity in order to best understand the meaning of participant responses (Charmaz, 2014) as long as there is accountability for the inquiry’s context, the researcher’s position, priorities, and interactions (Charmaz & Bryant, 2007). In service to this accountability, I acknowledge a 30-year career as a senior leader with the last 15 years serving as a leadership development consultant and trainer for organizations, including institutes of higher education. It would be misleading to say that the grounded theory developed in the absence of preconceived notions and understandings about leader development, as there is no truly effective way to remove all biases or pre-understandings that the researcher holds about the topic (Charmaz, 2014). As much as possible and with deliberate and sustained effort, I tried to suspend these pre-understandings, preconceptions, and biases about the topic in order to let the patterns and themes emerge naturally from participant narratives and responses.
Paired with a personal history of working with leaders in colleges and universities, my prior training in research methodologies has predominantly been quantitative in nature and one that placed, at a premium, objectivity and empiricism and heavily relied on prior theory to explain and predict. As with suspending assumptions about the nature of leaders and leadership, significant effort was made to withhold thoughts regarding prior theories and research methodologies to allow for patterns and categories to naturally emerge from the constructivist grounded theory framework. To receive the full promise of the methodology, it was critical for me to fully embrace the role of a grounded theorist. Tendencies and sensibilities from prior training and experience had to be actively monitored and set aside in order to get the best qualitative results. This is not to say that the present work is devoid of a researcher’s personal point of view. As the constructivist grounded theory approach progressed, the model allowed, and even facilitated, my responsibility as the researcher to appropriately infer the meaning and categorization of variables, to construct patterns and identify themes, and to unify these themes into a cogent theory as part of the sensemaking process associated with grounded theory.

Finally, to aid in suspending assumptions that could have provided unintended influence in the direction of the inquiry or the emergence of themes, a process of self-reflection (i.e., journaling) was employed to identify and actively eliminate or control any preconceived notions that emerged during the research process. Known as reflexive analysis in qualitative research, the goal was to engage in a constant process of self-reflection to monitor my role as researcher and to identify assumptions and biases.
throughout the course of the research (R. B. Johnson, 1997). Self-reflection and journaling have been proven successful in managing bias in a variety of settings (Teal et al., 2010). By maintaining a journal and reflecting on the data, the analysis, and the overall project regularly throughout the process, it is hoped that personal biases and pre-conceived notions were actively controlled and their potential negative impact minimized.

In summary, deliberate and sustained effort was required to suspend notions about each leader’s particular process of identity development in consideration of other leader stories and experiences that have been shared over a career in leader development. Similarly, predictions and explanations borne from leadership theories were actively suppressed to allow the richness of the grounded theory process to flourish. What emerged were categories defining the process of identity development that included both broad strokes and nuances in themes and processes that may not have been as effectively or thoroughly identified through quantitative approaches.

**Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

Chapter 2 begins with an introductory section that provides the context for the emergent cognitive leadership research. The section briefly summarizes the history of leadership theories beginning with the *Great Man* theory and continuing through trait-based, behavior-based, and contingency/situational leadership theories to emerging cognitive leadership theories. Following the overview of leadership theories, a literature review of self-identity research is provided along with the important challenges facing the specific category of leaders participating in the study—college and university leadership.
Chapter 3 summarizes the rationale and methodology for conducting a constructivist grounded theory inquiry. Chapter 4 summarizes the findings of the inquiry and considerations for the interpretation of the results. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings along with conclusions and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

Various interpretive lenses have been used to examine and explain the phenomenon of leadership. Each has contributed insights into this ubiquitous but vague construct, much like adding pieces to a large and complex puzzle. Still, leadership research is plagued by a lack of theoretical integration (Avolio, 2007). Varying theories, methodological approaches, and research designs have added to a better understanding of what leadership is and its impact on followers and organizations and efforts to integrate leadership research and theory continue (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011). Far from complete, the big picture of leadership is ever emergent and dynamic (Day & Harrison, 2007). The more that is known or proven about the phenomenon, the more there is to discover. To provide context to the cognitive focus of this dissertation, this chapter begins with a brief overview of the evolution of leadership research and theory. Not meant as an exhaustive and all-inclusive review, this section summarizes key milestones in dominant bodies of thought about the nature and antecedents of leadership over a time span of approximately 80 years. Prevailing categories of leadership theory during this time period (i.e., trait-based, behaviorally-based, situational/contingency-based, and cognitively-based approaches) are examined and challenges facing these theoretical perspectives are considered.
Following a review of theoretical considerations, a deeper examination of research literature on the proposed topic of study, leader self-identity, is provided. Conceptual considerations for the role and function of a leader’s self-identity are addressed along with a review of the limited research focusing on its emergence and impact and on various dimensions of leadership. The methodological literature is then explored specific to the topic of self-identity. Given the focus of the inquiry and the desired intended result of this dissertation is to inform the performance of leadership in institutions of higher education, a brief review of the various constraints and challenges facing today’s college and university leaders is offered. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief examination of emerging leadership development considerations in light of the cognitive leadership focus.

**Evolution of Leadership Research and Theory**

Leadership has been a focus of scientific exploration for over centuries and a part of the human vocabulary since antiquity (Zaccaro, 2014, p. 13). Historically, scholars have debated whether leadership is a trait or inherent behavior (Doh, 2003; Elmuti, 2004). The early dialectic about leadership was based on the *Great Man* theory that posited leaders were born with qualities that could not be translated or communicated (Bird, 1940; Stogdill, 1948). Eventually the Great Man theory gave way to trait-based theories (Cowley, 1931) that dominated the leadership literature until the 1940s and 1950s (Zaccaro, 2007).

During the 1950s, alternative competing theories began to emerge as researchers increasingly found leader traits as insufficient to fully describe leader performance (e.g.,
Mann, 1959). Behavior-based theories were developed during this time, including research on consideration and initiating structure as part of the Ohio State University leadership studies (Stogdill, 1963). Behavior-based theories and approaches to leadership expanded to include, among others, Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) (e.g., Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982), and several behaviorally-based styles including transformational leadership (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1990), servant leadership (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002; Spears, 1995), charismatic leadership (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1987; House, 1977; Shamir et al., 1993) and authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

In tandem with the development of behavior-based theories of leadership and fueled, in part, by the insufficiency of trait-based theories to fully capture the influence of leaders, situational and contingency models began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s (Bass, 2008). These theories attempted to explain leadership behavior based or contingent upon the situation and included the Fiedler contingency model (Fiedler, 1967), the Vroom taxonomy (Vroom, 1964; Vroom & Yetton, 1973), path-goal theory (House, 1971), and the situational leadership model (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977).

Beginning in the 1980’s, cognitive theories of leadership began receiving increased focus (Bass, 2008) and targeted a range of cognitive elements including mental structures and prototypes (e.g., Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984; Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001), attribution (e.g., Feldman, 1981; McElroy, 1982), and the cognitive processes and cognitions of followers (Dinh et al., 2014; Lord & Brown, 2004; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Research on the cognitions of leaders has continued to be a prevailing focus of modern leadership research (e.g., D. T. Hall, 2004; Shamir et al.,
Each of the broad foundational theoretical perspectives and approaches are outlined in greater detail below.

**Trait-Based Theories of Leadership**

Trait-based theories, such as the Great Man theories, began with a belief that leaders were born with extraordinary physical and mental characteristics that made them more suited for leadership. Attributes desirable for leadership were believed to pass from father to son (Galton, 1869) and often from generation to generation (Carlyle, 1849). The basic premise of early trait-based theories was that leaders were born and not made. The timing, location, and circumstance of an individual’s birth were overriding factors in determining leadership opportunity and responsibility.

Over time, research targeting leader traits began to identify specific attributes (e.g., personality, skills, abilities) as predictors of leadership effectiveness (e.g., Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; T. V. Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007). These trait-based theories and approaches to leadership have also been described as leader-centric; meaning that the attributes residing in the leader were more important in explaining leader emergence and performance rather than as the result of systems, forces, and structures (Day, 2014a, p. 7).

Despite disagreement regarding what leader traits were purported to affect, meta-analytical reviews of prior research found that certain leader-centric traits were frequently correlated with leadership effectiveness and/or emergence. For example, personality traits (e.g., coping with the external environment), cognitive traits (e.g., high intelligence) and interpersonal traits (e.g., high interpersonal competence and sociability) tended to be
consistently correlated with both the emergence and effectiveness of leadership (Judge et al., 2002). Bass (2008) also identified character traits as receiving increasing emphasis in the study of leadership. For example, he cited the work of Parry and Proctor (1999) who, in a study of 1,354 leaders in New Zealand, found a high correlation between the perceived leaders’ integrity and followers’ satisfaction with their leadership. Further, Peterson, Walumbwa, Byron, and Myrowitz (2009) found that positive psychological traits such as hope, optimism, and resiliency were positively correlated with CEOs’ transformative leadership ratings and, in turn, these ratings positively correlated with firm performance.

In recent years, trait-based leadership research has explored leader personality, skills, gender, education, age, ethnicity, and abilities as predictors of leadership effectiveness (Judge et al., 2002; Judge, Colbert, & Ilies, 2004; T. V. Mumford et al., 2007). This category of leadership research has found that specific attributes or traits demonstrated by leaders have been associated with positive leadership outcomes including gender, intelligence, and the Big Five Personality traits (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992; Eagly & B. T. Johnson, 1990; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995).

Behavior-Based Theories of Leadership

Behavioral theories of leadership are also as diverse as trait-based theories and include a range of psychological perspectives and approaches (Levine, 2004). With the shift in paradigms from trait-based to behavior-based predictions and explanations of leadership, scholars and practitioners began to explore innovative methods to improve the behavior of leaders; no longer being constrained by the previous conventions of
leadership as fixed or innate. Primary sub-theories have emerged as an attempt to isolate specific styles and their corresponding behaviors and outcomes. Although not an all-inclusive list, some of the more predominant styles and dimensions predominantly represented in the research literature include Charismatic leadership, Transformational leadership, and Consideration/Initiating Structure.

**Charismatic and transformational leadership.** Charismatic leadership theory suggests that a leader’s inspirational traits (e.g., self-confidence, energy, engagement) engender faith, confidence, and admiration in his or her followers (House, 1977). Similarly, transformational leadership theory suggests that leaders motivate followers to achieve more than they thought possible and engage in the accomplishments and pursuits of their followers and organizations sometimes at a cost to their own self-interests (Burns, 1978).

Some researchers have treated charismatic and transformative leadership as virtually synonymous (House & Aditya, 1997). Whether or not they are different terms for the same behavioral leadership style, research does support that the leadership types suggested by the theory share a variety of traits including authenticity, vision, able to manage attention and meaning, able to articulate goals of what is possible, and empowerment of collective effort (Bennis, 2009).

**Consideration and initiating structure.** The leader behaviors of consideration and initiating structure were originally identified by researchers at Ohio State University interested in identifying and examining behavioral indicators of effective leadership (Stogdill, 1963). *Consideration* is defined as the extent that a leader demonstrates
concern, interest, support, appreciation, and respect toward his or her subordinates while *Initiating Structure* is the extent that a leader defines and organizes his leadership role and the roles of subordinates to ensure clarity in reporting relationships, effective communication channels, and a focus on goal achievement (Fleishman, 1973). Although these sub-components of behavioral leadership theory have fallen out of favor in recent years, meta-analytic reviews have found that both factors were highly correlated with follower satisfaction, leader satisfaction, job satisfaction, motivation, leader effectiveness, leader job performance and group-organizational performance (Judge, Piccolo, Ilies, 2004).

**Situational and Contingency Theories of Leadership**

Situational and contingency theories also emerged in reaction to the trait-based theories of leadership (Bass, 2008). This category of leadership theory posits that leaders and leadership are formed and influenced by the characteristics of the situation in which they must lead (Hemphill, 1949). Among the various situational and contingency theories are the Fiedler contingency model (Fiedler, 1967), the Vroom taxonomy (Vroom, 1964; Vroom & Yetton, 1973), path-goal theory (House, 1971) and the situational leadership model (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). Each theory attempts to explain leadership in the context of situations, environments, and decisions based on context and there is significant overlap in theoretical perspectives. Specifically, Fiedler’s (1967) contingency model suggested that there is no ideal leader and that both a task and relationship orientation can be effective if applied in the appropriate context. His work was later expanded and re-conceptualized to focus on the influence of the leader’s
intelligence and experience on his or her reaction to stress (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987). Known as Cognitive Resource theory, Fiedler & Garcia posited that stress damaged a leader’s cognitive ability to analyze and solve problems but the leader’s intelligence and experience can mitigate this damage.

Hersey and Blanchard’s (1997) situational leadership model posited that leaders adapt their task or relational focus based on the complexity of the task and the developmental level of the subordinate. House’s (1971) path-goal theory was based on the premise that various leader behaviors (i.e., achievement, directive, participative, and supportive) were contingent on the environmental context and the needs of the subordinate while Vroom’s (1964) taxonomy and associated expectancy theory suggested that certain normative decision models and leadership approaches varied based on the situation.

Cognitive Theories of Leadership

Perceptual and cognitive theories of leadership are founded on the premise that how a person thinks and the self-views that he or she holds directly influences behavior in the leadership domain. Prior to the 1970s, there was very little research and theory that focused on leaders’ behavior as a result of thoughts and perceptions (Bass, 2008). In the last 30 years, investigation of the thought-behavior link to leadership has received increased attention. The majority of this early work, however, has focused on perceptions followers had about leaders and perceptions leaders had about followers (Dinh et al., 2014; Lord & Maher, 1991; van Knippenberg et al., 2004) with very little focused on how leaders perceive themselves (Hiller, 2005; Ibarra et al., 2014).
For example, in an early work, Green et al. (1981) explored the cognitive processes of leaders and found that leader cognitions were influenced by feedback they received on subordinates’ performance, characteristics of subordinates, and the nature of the task and environment in which the work was completed. Their work falls under a primary subcategory of cognitive leadership known as attribution theory that began to receive significant focus in the 1980s (e.g., Feldman, 1981; McElroy, 1982).

In the mid-1980s, cognitive and perceptual studies of leadership increasingly began to examine mental structures and information processing. For example, Lord et al. (1984) explored how mental prototypes contributed to leadership perceptions and implicit leadership theories. They later explored the role of leaders’ information processing; suggesting that, although there were multiple inputs and data sources facing a leader, only one item was processed at a time on a conscious level. Data was then processed and categorized through schema, or cognitive maps, and outlier elements that did not fit existing schema received closer scrutiny (Lord & Maher, 1991).

Altrocchi (1999) made a further distinction about cognitive mental structures of the self by differentiating between the structure of the self-view and its contents. He posited that the contents of self-identity were represented by the core self-evaluations one made along with self-beliefs he or she held. In contrast, the structure of the self-identity represented the way the self-identity content was arranged and organized for processing. Similarly, Lord and Brown (2004) suggest that that self-identity was comprised of self-views (the current working self-concept), current goals (current desires, aspirations), and
possible selves (ideal selves, best selves) that interacted with one another to create a working self-concept appropriate for time, place, and context.

Others have focused on similar cognitive dimensions of leadership such as scripts. Scripts are sequenced behaviors associated with a schema or knowledge structure to cognitively process familiar circumstances and tasks. Prior research has explored whether schema or scripts vary by leadership style. For example, in a field study, Wofford et al. (1998) examined schematic processes and associated scripts to determine if transformational and transactional leaders used different schemas to interpret events. Their research found that transformational leaders’ schema were associated with subsequent transformational leader behaviors. However, they did not find consistent evidence between the schema of transactional leaders and subsequent transactional behaviors and actions. Given the continued popularity of transformational leadership in contemporary leadership research and writing, it is not surprising that additional research has been conducted to examine the connection of transformational leadership to leader self-identity (see, for example, Carey, 1992; Cavazotte, Moreno, & Bernardo, 2013; Humphrey, 2012; R. Johnson, et al., 2011; Wofford et al., 1995).

Concurrent with the emergent research on information processing and attribution, research began to explore the role of self-schema, or cognitive self-views, to help explain how cognitions influence behavior (Markus, 1977). Self-schema serves as an organizing framework to interpret and provide meaning to experiences, interactions, and contexts (Aviolo et al., 2009). Research on self-schema (also referred to in the literature as self-
schemata) is explored in greater detail later in this chapter given the import of this area to the primary research question of how leader self-identities are developed.

Most recently, cognitive psychology has included attempts to design models of leadership development based on cognitive dimensions (Lord & R. J. Hall, 2005) and the cognitive considerations for the effective development of leaders (Day & Halpin, 2004). More research in the arena of cognitive leadership is expected to continue. For example, *the Leadership Quarterly* has published over twenty articles focusing on identity as a central dimension in leadership research between January of 2014 and July 2015. Topics included leader cognition in vision formation (Partlow, Medeiros, & M. D. Mumford, 2015), implicit leadership theories (Junker & van Dick, 2014), leaders’ narrative sensemaking during LMX role negotiations (Kelley & Bisel, 2014), leader role efficacy (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014), and special issues on dynamic viewpoints of implicit leadership and followership theories (Foti, Hansbrough, Epitropaki, & Coyle, 2014). In addition, a recent special issue was dedicated to examining research regarding leader cognition (M. D. Mumford et al., 2015). It is clear that cognitive leadership research has gained considerable traction in very recent years and will continue as researchers attempt to build the connections between cognition, leadership, and performance (Ibarra et al., 2014; Wofford et al., 1998).

**Challenges and Considerations with Leadership Research**

Given the absence of a universally accepted and integrated definition of leadership, it stands to reason that there is also significant discourse regarding the theories about how leaders are made and developed (Bass, 2008; Day, 2014a). There is
lack of agreement on what behavioral categories, leader characteristics, and taxonomies are relevant to effective leadership. Different terms have been used to describe the same leader behavior and the same behavior has been defined differently by various researchers (Day & Harrison, 2007; Yukl, Gordon & Taber, 2002) and in which contexts they apply (Day, 2014b). In addition to varying construct definitions, each of the broad theoretical categories of leadership mentioned above also face myriad methodological and philosophical challenges and criticisms. These challenges and criticisms are briefly examined below.

**Challenges to trait-based theories.** The range of leader traits analyzed in the leadership literature is as broad as it is diverse. And herein lies one of the primary problems of trait-based leadership—the lack of integration (Day, 2014b; Day & Harrison, 2007). Trait-based leadership theories lack a common set of leader traits considered essential by researchers (Yukl et al., 2002). Further, there is debate in the literature regarding whether or not traits actually target perceptions of leadership, leadership emergence, or leadership performance (Lord et al., 1986). Lord, De Vader and Alliger (1986), for example, suggested that prior research on trait theories and leadership may have been misinterpreted as addressing the leader’s effect on performance rather than the actual focus of predicting leader emergence. Similarly, much of trait-based leadership research focused on a single trait and did not control or compare the effects of different traits (DeRue et al., 2011). Additionally, prior quantitative methodologies used to examine leadership have added to criticisms regarding the clarity and precision of factors and the accuracy of outcomes. For example, it has been suggested that too many bivariate
correlations were used to examine leadership, a phenomenon too complex to be captured by such simplistic methodology (Lord & R. J. Hall, 1992, p. 153). Additionally, as stated earlier, an overreliance on factor analyses in leadership research both exponentially grew the number of factors associated with leader behaviors without integration and refinement of those factors. Consequently, greater imprecision was introduced to these investigations (Pfeffer, 1977).

**Challenges to behavior-based theories.** As with trait-based research, behavioral research was often restricted to a single behavioral dimension and there is a similar lack of integration, even among other behaviorally oriented leadership researchers. For example, in a meta-analysis of transformational and transactional leadership, Judge et al. (2004) found that studies typically focused on one behavioral aspect of leadership (e.g., task-oriented leader behaviors vs. relational-oriented leader behaviors) rather than multiple aspects. The challenges to behavior-based theories, as with trait theories, may be due, in large part, to issues with research methodologies and the same lack of clarity regarding whether or not the research was targeting behavior associated with leader perceptions, performance, or emergence.

**Challenges to situational and contingency theories.** Criticisms of situational and contingency theories have identified three primary areas of concern. First, research has failed to explain why the specific leadership style works in some contexts and not others. Second, the theory has not adequately explained how a misalignment between leader style and context/situation should be resolved (Northouse, 2015). Finally, some of the approaches and associated tools (e.g., the Fiedler contingency model) have been
criticized for a lack of flexibility, presuming that natural leadership styles are fixed (Mitchell, Biglan, Oncken, & Fiedler, 1970).

**Challenges to cognitive theories.** Perhaps one of the significant challenges to cognitive theories of leadership involves the complexity of the cognitive functions matched with the intangible and elusive phenomena of identity and leadership (M. D. Mumford et al., 2015). In fact, all three constructs, cognition, identity, and leadership, are largely internal processes that are manifested outwardly through their influence on others. Other invisible constructs, such as general intelligence, knowledge recall, and knowledge use, may also impact leader cognition and increase the complexity of each phenomenon (M. D. Mumford et al., 2015). With these limitations, there is a growing body of knowledge suggesting that cognitive theories offer a pathway to more significant advances in leadership theory in that they move beyond superficial observations of leader behavior and focus more on understanding how and why the behavior exists in the first place (Ibarra et al., 2014; M. D. Mumford et al., 2015).

**Integration of Theories**

Along with advances among the various approaches to understanding leadership, there have also been recent efforts to integrate various theoretical perspectives in the hopes of better explaining the phenomenon of leadership. For example, there have been recent attempts to bridge trait-based leadership theories with behavioral theories. Humphrey (2012) argued that the problem with leadership research in the area of transformational leadership is due to a lack of understanding regarding the processes of transformational leadership and how it actually influences follower behavior. To address
this concern, she examined the relationship of transformational leadership on organizational citizenship behaviors and organizational identification. She found that transformative leadership approaches were positively correlated with organizational citizenship behaviors—representing one of the first findings to link transformational leadership to a behavioral outcome.

Similarly, DeRue et al. (2011) attempted to integrate trait and behavioral theories by proposing a trait-behavioral model of leadership effectiveness. Specifically, they aligned specific leader traits (i.e., gender, intelligence, personality) and behaviors (i.e., transformational-transactional, initiating structure, consideration) across leadership effectiveness dimensions (i.e., leader effectiveness, group performance, follower job satisfaction, satisfaction with the leader). They then validated this model through a meta-analytic review of the research and found that 31% of the variance in leadership effectiveness was attributable to the combined trait-behavioral elements.

The application and integration of trait, behavioral, and cognitive theories to current thinking on leadership development have forced a discussion regarding the behaviors that can be taught and the skills that can be developed and enhanced. Conger (2004) offered a compelling research agenda in consideration of their recent resurgence. He suggested future research that addresses the trait-by-situation variances in leadership, the stability and malleability of leadership skills over time, and, perhaps most importantly, how different leader attributes combine to influence leadership behavior. All are essential in order to identify leadership development strategies that offer the most promise.
Theoretical Orientation for the Study

Leader self-identity is a growing research focus area in the expanding theoretical category of cognitive leadership. Cognitive leadership is concerned with how cognitive views of the self, self-perceptions, and thoughts impact the performance of leadership. A leader’s self-identity represents a reflexive and personal construction of a person’s self-views and it functions as the core for which other experiences, interactions, and events are compared, contrasted, and eventually integrated or discarded (Stets & Burke, 2003).

Integral to the theoretical orientation of this work are supporting cognitive theories of leadership that include internal mental processes that a person engages to make sense of their environment and context, to solve problems, and to influence others. For example, the theory of core self-evaluations posits that a person’s self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability (or low neuroticism) has an impact on job satisfaction, motivation, and work performance (See Judge & Bono, 2001, for a meta-analysis of the relationship of core self-evaluation traits with job satisfaction and performance).

In addition to core self-evaluations, self-schema (or self-schemata) are also considered as a primary theoretical construct of the proposed study. Self-schema are cognitive generalizations about the self that are molded and informed by past experiences. They serve to organize and guide the processing, categorization, and integration of information about the self (Markus et al., 1985). These schemas serve as mental maps that help interpret events, respond to problems and opportunities, and make sense of the world.
Research specific to leadership self-schemas has found that there is predictive value in the strength or clarity of the leader’s self-views with the leader’s behaviors and performance (e.g., Shamir et al., 1993). Lord and R. J. Hall (2005), when discussing how leaders develop deep structures about leadership over time, suggested that the skills leaders acquire are eventually inextricably integrated into their self-identities. Leadership problems, challenges, and successes all inform the elements of self-identity and these experiences help to create meta-structures that guide more efficient access, understanding, use, and application of the information.

D. T. Hall (2004) differentiated self-identity from self-awareness by suggesting that self-awareness is the extent to which people are aware of the various sub-identities that comprise their global identity, that these self-views are integrated internally and aligned with others’ perceptions. He suggested that self-awareness provides an “evaluative component” in both its accuracy and quality. (p.154). For the purposes of this inquiry, however, the theoretical orientation to the topic of self-identity is viewed as a person’s conscious view of the self and does not include those components of identity that are not salient outside of the domain of leadership. In this definition of self-identity, self-awareness is a requisite meta-competency in the conscious recognition of the self-identity.

**Caveat about self-identity.** There is significant research on the impact of a leader on follower’s identity and follower perceptions of leader behavior (e.g., Dinh et al., 2014). For example, leaders’ group-oriented values have been found to be a moderator of group membership, follower-identification with leadership, and follower endorsement of
leaders (Graf, Schuh, Van Quaquebeke, & van Dick, 2012). Research has also demonstrated that leaders can prime the identities of followers and influence their behavior by making certain values salient or by facilitating a collective identity that followers embrace (Lord & Brown, 2001). Further, followers’ identification with the work unit and their level of self-efficacy has been found to influence perceptions of supervisor effectiveness (Walumbwa, Avolio & Zhu, 2008). Although follower perceptions of their leaders were considered as a part of the methodology for participant selection (as identified through the Organizational Culture and Organizational Effectiveness Inventories), follower self-identity was not a central construct examined in this inquiry.

**Methodological Considerations**

In determining the best methodological approach, the most salient question guiding this inquiry was how a leader’s cognitive view of the self emerges over time with specific consideration to the process that leaders engage or experience to create, refine, revise, or enhance their leader self-identities. The direction and nature of this question suggests a methodology that prompts rich phenomenological detail to identify elements and phases of a process and, as such, a grounded theory approach was determined the most appropriate methodology (Kempster & Parry, 2011; Percy & Kostere, 2008). In addition, the proposed grounded theory approach was designed to fill the gap created by an overreliance on quantitative inquiry in the study of leadership and a general lack of attention in the theoretical knowledge base regarding the process of the development of a leader’s self-identity. It is hoped that a grounded theory regarding this process of self-
identity emergence among leaders may suggest alternative directions for future qualitative and quantitative research.

Review of Research Literature Specific to the Topic

Leader Self-Identity Research

Even with the growth of cognitive approaches to examining leadership, very little is known about the leader’s self-identity and the field has been described as under-researched (Hiller, 2005; Murphy, 2002). D. T. Hall (2004) noted that “The way people see themselves is so basic to how they behave and yet so ‘invisible’ because it is such an internal and often privately held process” (p. 173). This relative invisibility along with complex and overlapping constructs associated with identity (e.g., evaluative components and knowledge components of the self-concept, concept clarity, achievement, status, integration), ways to evaluate, measure, refine, or develop the construct of identity offers considerable methodological challenges (Campbell et al., 1996).

As a multifaceted and complex construct, self-identity is said to interpret and categorize meaning based on an individual’s self-perceptions in relation to others in their environment (D. T. Hall, 2004). It is dynamic and ever-changing construct (van Knippenberg et al., 2005) that represents the core beliefs that individuals hold about themselves in personal, relational, and collective terms (Hiller, 2005). Self-identity is comprised of knowledge structures (Kihlstrom et al., 2003) or schemas (Markus, 1977) that help individuals filter and process information and apply meaning to memory, experience, and behavior.
Self-identity also regulates one’s interactions with others (Lord & Brown, 2004) and interacts with the social context of the workplace and specific work roles and a myriad of other sub-identities that a person holds at any given time (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Showers & Ziegler-Hill, 2003; Stets & Burke, 2003). Self-identity is primed or made salient by the initiating contexts, roles, and conditions that elicit that particular identity that, once activated, becomes the working self-concept (Lord & Brown, 2004; Markus & Wurf, 1987). In addition to a leader self-identity, individuals have multiple self-identities that co-exist (Banaji & Prentice, 1996; Turner et al., 1994) and are continually accessible based on the initiating context (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

Self-identity displays self-reflexive properties. In other words, self-identity is created and revised by a reflexive consciousness of interpreting, evaluating, and applying knowledge about the self to the self (Baumeister, 1999). In the social sciences, reflexivity suggests that acting is impacted by self-reference or examination and self-reference and examination are reciprocally affected by the acting. This reciprocal process has prompted significant debate in the social sciences because the capacity for self-inquiry and adaptation complicates the functions espoused by classical science such as prediction and control (Flanagan, 1981). Despite the debate inherent in reflexive constructs, psychologists are charged with exploring reflexive processes, particularly those processes that are critical to identity formation, as they are so integrally linked with behavior. Leadership, in particular, cannot be fully understood without consideration of how the leader’s self-identity mediates and moderates the actions of followers (Hiller, 2005; Yukl, 2006). A leader’s self-identity is particularly important in the context of
work, as there appears to be predictive value in the strength or clarity of the leader’s self-views with subsequent behaviors and performance (Shamir et al., 1993; Judge & Bono, 2001).

One early work conducted by Burke & Reitzes (1981) attempted to define the link between identity and role performance. Standardized regression analysis showed a strong connection between performance and a variety of identity dimensions (i.e., academic responsibility, assertiveness, intellectualism). They surveyed 640 college students to determine if their self-identity had any impact on two performance dimensions (i.e., educational plans and involvement in social activities). Their work is noteworthy given that it appears to be one of the first research projects to attempt to examine how self-concept translated to behavioral performance.

A more recent work employed a longitudinal approach to examine a dimension of self-identity, self-efficacy, and its impact on creative work performance over time. Among their findings, Tierney & Farmer (2011) found that 225 participants working in a social service agency evidenced increases in creative performance that corresponded to increases in creative self-efficacy. Similar works in this arena are limited, perhaps due to the methodological challenges in capturing dimensions of the self and in determining uniform measures of leadership and performance.

Despite these methodological challenges and a lack of research specific to the leader’s self-identity development, there have been a few nascent attempts to define and explore dimensions related to a leader’s self-identity. They include research that attempts to link leader self-identity with orientation toward leadership, core self-evaluations,
motivation to lead, and self monitoring, and leadership experiences (Hiller, 2005); leadership, task, and trait self-efficacy, emotional intelligence and self-awareness, (Villanueva and Sánchez, 2007); leader self-identity and LMX quality (Jackson & R.E. Johnson, 2012); collective, relational and individual dimensions in follower perceptions of leader effectiveness (R. Johnson et al., 2012); priming leader self-identity (MacDonald et al., 2008), and self-deception and its effect on leader identity (Caldwell, 2009). Results, considerations, and methodological challenges of each of these research projects are briefly examined below. Following this summary of research is a review of the one prior attempt to evaluate leader self-identity through a grounded theory approach followed by an early example of a longitudinal examination of elements of self-identity.

**Orientation toward leadership, core self-evaluations, and self-monitoring.** In one ambitious approach to empirically test leader self-identity, Hiller (2005) designed a two-part study to examine how perceptions about the nature of leadership interacted with the leader’s self-identity. In the first part of his study, the leader self-identity of undergraduate students was examined. He found that the presence of a leader self-identity was related to previous leadership experiences (i.e., quality, quantity, and intensity of the experience), core self-evaluations, motivation to lead, and self-monitoring. In the second part of the study involving a sample of medical center employees, Hiller used hierarchical linear modeling to examine the effects of supervisor self-identity on leadership potential and LMX on leadership orientation (finding no main effects). Hiller found that leader self-identity seemed to be associated with the quality of prior leadership experiences and an active motivation to lead.
Because there were no valid and reliable instruments to measure self-identity or orientation toward leadership, particularly instruments that rated the extent to which an individual viewed him/herself as a leader, Hiller designed a *Leadership Identity Scale*. The scale was designed in consideration of the self-schema work of Pelham and Swann (1989) and incorporated self-descriptiveness, certainty, and importance as measurable dimensions of self-identity. Similarly, he considered Drath’s (2001) work about views of leadership and developed a scale to address leadership orientation across three dimensions (e.g., dominance, developmental beliefs, and leadership as a shared/collective construct) and developed the *Orientation Toward Leadership Scale*. Hiller’s work represented the first substantive attempt to measure leader self-identity as a multidimensional construct. His work also represented a first attempt to measure leader self-identity and leadership orientation in tandem as part of a more comprehensive cognitive exploration of leadership.

**Leader self-efficacy, task-self-efficacy, and trait emotional intelligence.**

Examining dimensions of leader self-identity, Villanueva and Sánchez (2007) used structural equation modeling to explore the relationships between leadership self-efficacy, task self-efficacy, collective task self-efficacy, and trait emotional intelligence (EI) and their impact on collective task efficacy and overall group performance. In this experimental design, a convenience sample comprised of 217 undergraduate psychology students was randomly assigned to work teams of three (one leader and two followers). Leaders were administered instruments to measure trait emotional intelligence (*Schutte Self-Report Inventory*), leadership self-efficacy (Customized 10-item questionnaire), and
task self-efficacy (Modified Personal Self Efficacy Scale). Followers and leaders were given an assessment of collective task efficacy (Collective Efficacy Beliefs Scale) upon completion of a manufacturing production task. Results demonstrated that the leader’s task self-efficacy mediated the relationship between the leader’s self-efficacy and collective task self-efficacy was found to be the best predictor of group performance while trait emotional intelligence was found to be positively associated with leadership self-efficacy.

Research has not previously examined the individual and collective impact of individual and collective task self-efficacy, leader self-efficacy, and trait emotional intelligence on collective task efficacy and group performance (Villanueva and Sánchez, 2007). The use of structural equation modeling to evaluate the moderating and mediating impact of various aspects of self-perceptions on performance represents an important step in better understanding the leader’s self-perceptions on group performance.

**Leader self-identity and LMX quality.** Jackson and R. E. Johnson (2012) conducted a nonexperimental research design of a purposive sample of 229 U.S. employees and their supervisors to determine if leader and follower self-identities mediated the quality of LMX. Employees and their supervisors completed a self-identity survey measuring individual, relational, and collective dimensions along with an assessment of LMX quality. As predicted in the research hypotheses, regression and path analyses found that supervisor and employee relational and collective identities and identity similarities (identity fit) were all associated with higher LMX quality while independent identities were negatively associated with LMX quality. Post hoc analysis
found that self-identity predicted the degree of employee-supervisor agreement regarding LMX quality.

Jackson and R. E. Johnson’s (2012) research suggested that both leader and follower self-identity provided an important regulatory function for workplace interactions and served as important mediating factors in determining the quality of leader-member exchange. The research represented the first study examining the relationship between self-identity and LMX quality although there were notable methodological issues with the design including psychometric issues associated with the work-based *Levels of Self-Concept Scale* (Selenta & Lord, 2005), the collection of self-identity and LMX measures over a short time period, and the measurement of only one dyadic relationship (one supervisor to one employee). Further, the short-term nature of the supervisor/subordinate relationships reflected in the sample ($M=11.7$ months, $SD = 7.2$) may have also diminished internal and external validity as the study was designed to examine established relationships. Internal validity could have been improved by taking additional measures over a longer time period, to have included additional team members to validate accurate assessment of self-identity and the quality of LMX, and to ensure that established supervisor/subordinate relationships were predominantly represented in the sample.

These factors were targeted by the researchers because they had been previously included as possible variables in the researchers’ theory of core self-evaluations (Judge, Locke, Durham & Kluger, 1998). The researchers found predictive validity with each of the factors and concluded that elements of self-identity were positively correlated with job performance and satisfaction. Their findings were noteworthy given that their work represented one of the first meta-analytic reviews to examine the relationship of self-identity elements with job performance and satisfaction. Their findings suggested that self-identity moderated or mediated both job performance and job satisfaction.

**Priming leader self-identity.** MacDonald et al. (2008) conducted an experimental study examining whether priming individuals’ self-identities to be either independent or interdependent influenced their ratings of leadership prototypicality. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three priming conditions based on the priming language (interdependent self-identity using “we” or “us” pronouns; independent self-identity using “I” or “me” pronouns; or a control condition using pronouns evaluated by subject matter experts as neutral to both transactional or transformational leadership). Prototypicality rating scores generated from several items from the *Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire* (MLQ) for transactional and transformational leadership and neutral items from Lord, Foti, and De Vader (1984) for the control group served as the dependent variables.

MacDonald et al. (2008) found support of their hypothesis that collective (interdependent) pronouns did, in fact, prime transformational leadership while independent pronouns primed the prototype of transactional leadership. To improve
internal validity, the researchers rigorously tested the priming manipulation descriptions by conducting a manipulation check through a project to the study to verify that the priming scripts were aligned with a supplemental measure of self-attitudes. Further, the researchers employed two coders who were blind to the priming manipulation to code the respondents’ independent and interdependent responses.

Because of the research design, MacDonald, Sulsky, and Brown (2008) were not able to assume causal relationships and the generalizability of results is limited. Specifically, the researchers used brief generic descriptions of leadership traits to address leadership preferences when, in fact, leadership is a more complex phenomenon that cannot be fully understood outside of the social context in which it operates. In addition, the use of university undergraduate students adversely impacted internal and external validity in that self-identity and implicit leadership theories are said to be refined over time through actual leadership experiences that the participants may not have had (Lord & R. J. Hall, 2005). These limitations notwithstanding, the implications of their findings are noteworthy and suggest the potential of priming collective identity as a future leader development intervention.

**Collective, relational, and individual dimensions of leader self-identity.** R. Johnson et al. (2012) employed a nonexperimental research design to explore the impact of leader self-identity across collective, relational, and individual dimensions on follower perceptions of leader effectiveness. Researchers administered three waves of assessments to a convenience sample of 55 high level managers. The first wave administered identity measures, the second wave (initiated one week later) collected daily reports of leader
behaviors over a period of 15 consecutive workdays, and the third wave was an online survey routed to direct reports and/or peers to assess the leader effectiveness of the focal participant. Descriptive statistics, correlational data, and analyses of variance found that leaders’ collective identities were related to transformative behaviors while individual identities were related to abusive behaviors. Further, abusive behaviors were most frequent when a leader exhibited a strong individual identity along with a weak collective identity. The dimension of leader effectiveness was both self-reported and verified by other independent sources (i.e., direct reports and peers). Regression analysis allowed the researchers to regress average leadership behavior and variance in behavior on the three identity levels (i.e., collective, relational, and individual).

R. Johnson et al. (2012) used a convenience sample of high-level leaders who were also students of an executive MBA program. Because the curriculum included the definitions and impact of collective, relational, and individual leadership styles on group performance, social desirability may have impacted the internal validity of the study and the generalizability of its findings. In addition, the leader self-reports were collected one week after the self-identity instrument was administered and may have primed the participants to be cognizant of leadership styles during the collection period and added another threat to validity. With these limitations, the research is significant in that it is an early attempt to test individualistic and collective elements of a leader’s self-identity on leader behaviors and follower perceptions of those leaders.

**Leader self-identity, self-awareness, and self-deception.** Caldwell (2009) presented one of the first attempts to describe the relationship between self-identity, self-
awareness, and self-deception. He suggested that an individual could deny an aspect of their self-identity, lack self-awareness about the implications of this denial, and act in ways that might be unethical or immoral as a result. This is a useful contribution to the growing body of leader self-identity research in that it expanded the thinking beyond the link between leader self-identity and effectiveness to include areas where self-identity contributed to ineffective practices, even unethical, illegal, or immoral ones.

**Leader self-identity research with a longitudinal focus.** Mayo, Kakarika, Pastor, and Brutus (2012) conducted a nonexperimental longitudinal study to examine the effects of peer feedback on 221 MBA students' self-ratings of leadership competence over three data collection waves scheduled over a six month time period. Researchers used the Peer Evaluation Survey (PES) to measure self-ratings on four dimensions of leadership competence. Results showed that self-ratings decreased at the three and six month re-assessment periods and this effect was stronger for women. Male self-images continued to be inflated at each time period while women more quickly aligned their self-ratings with the assessments of their peers.

The research represents one of the first longitudinal examinations of leader self-awareness and identity development. A robust developmental process was used for the PES instrument that included several stages of review and refinement including inter-rater review conducted by subject matter experts, content analysis, and exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses involving data from a pilot study of 375 MBA students. The resulting response set included four categories of leadership competency: Self-confidence, self-management, behavioral flexibility, and interpersonal understanding.
The overall fit of the 4-factor model was excellent and reliability coefficients of the four scales were .86 for self-confidence, .86 for self-management, .78 for flexibility, and .84 for interpersonal understanding; indicating strong internal consistency.

Potential limitations to generalizability of the research are due to different sources of sampling error. First, there was an under-representation of women in the sample (less than 30 percent). This is particularly noteworthy given that gender differences were a focal point of the research. Second, a high proportion of students were from Euro-Latin and Latin American countries where different leadership competencies may be valued—particularly masculine prototypes, and different approaches to feedback are experienced. Mayo et al. (2012) acknowledged that external validity could have been increased by examining a cross-cultural sample where power distance, masculinity-femininity prototypes, and cultural acceptance of feedback differed. What is important about there approach, however, is that the researchers considered temporal factors associated with identity, a critical dimension of future self-identity research (Day, 2014b).

**Leader self-identity and qualitative inquiry.** Hertnecky (2008) employed an exploratory, narrative inquiry to examine leader identity development among female college presidents in their first presidential position. A purposive sample of 12 presidents representing both private and public institutions of higher education participated. Semistructured interviews were organized around four components of self-identity (i.e., core identity, career, relationships, and narrative) that were identified prior to the interviews rather than emerging from the data. She then used these four categories as theoretically derived codes for analyzing the responses using a paradigmatic narrative
inquiry (analyzes and categories the participants’ stories into common themes). From her analysis, Hertnecky identified five critical components for leadership identity development: authenticity, leading through relationships, composing a life, balance, and learning. This work represented the first qualitative inquiry of college and university leader self-identity development. Although narrow in focus, the research provided rich phenomenological detail of the shared experiences of a small sample of college and university leaders.

**Self-Identity and grounded theory.** Komives et al. (2005) completed the first and only grounded theory inquiry regarding leader self-identity development prior to this present work. The inquiry examined the developmental experience of college students who demonstrated success in working collaboratively and who demonstrated a highly relational leadership style. A purposive sample of 13 student leaders was identified to participate in one-to-two hour semistructured interviews. The interview responses were then coded and organized into five categories including developmental influences, developing self, group influences, students' changing view of self with others, and students' broadening view of leadership.

Although noteworthy as the first grounded theory approach to leader self-identity emergence, there were significant methodological problems that require cautious interpretation of results. Specifically, Komives et al. (2005) selected only students considered effective and highly relational leaders. No comparison group was identified to contrast the experiences of leadership identity development. A comparison group may have revealed different developmental pathways from the effective/relational leaders.
Additional comparisons of the present work with Komives et al.’s grounded theory will be addressed in Chapter 5 given the alignment of its central research question with the question targeted by this dissertation study.

One additional grounded theory approach to leadership deserves mention as it suggests developmental milestones in the process of leader identity development. Hartnett (1994) conducted a grounded theory investigation of relational leadership among 13 female community college presidents. Hartnett’s work suggested that female community college presidents had to deconstruct and reconstruct their understanding of what it meant to be a leader using relationships with role models, mentors, friends, family and followers to organize these reconstructions.

Hartnett’s theory, *relationized leadership*, posited that female leaders’ relationships with a strong female role model during childhood helped reframe potential for leadership in contrast to prevailing male-centric views of the time. As these leaders entered adulthood, early experiences and cognitions about leadership would likely lay dormant if not for the influence of a strong relationship with a mentor that served as a trigger for greater self-actualization as a leader. Hartnett concluded that early childhood leadership experiences, strong female role models, an influential mentor, and a focus on relationships as common themes across leader experiences.

**Review of Methodological Literature Specific to the Topic**

Constructivist grounded theory occupies a *next level* place in grounded theory approaches; straddling the dispassionate empiricism and rigorous methods associated with Glaser’s (1992) approach to grounded theory and the subjective meaning, open-
ended inquiry, verification, and emergent processes characteristic of Strauss’s (with Juliet Corbin, 1998) approach. Early on in their collaboration, Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed an initial conceptualization of grounded theory as emerging from data and included a rigor in methodology that appeared more tied to quantitative traditions. Their later work created the disparity in approach that exists today (Charmaz, 2014).

Charmaz’s constructivist approach retains Glaser and Strauss’ original tenets of inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended inquiry while expanding the approach to include Strauss’s iterative logic to verify and assign meaning to data. Her approach also departs from the constructivism movement of the 1980s and 1990s by validating the importance of subjective notions in the construction and interpretation of data. Her approach validates, rather than eliminates, the researcher’s perspective and expertise regarding the field of inquiry. In other words, the researcher is considered as central and valuable in the construction of the emergent grounded theory.

Although there are differences in various models of grounded theory, Charmaz (2014), Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested that there are common actions that are shared among grounded theorists. These common actions were applied as part of the methodological process of this inquiry and are summarized in Table 1.
### Table 1.

**Actions of Grounded Theorists**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Data collection and analysis are conducted simultaneously and inform each other through an ongoing, iterative process (Charmaz, 2014, p. 15).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The analytical focus is on the identification of actions, processes, and systems as opposed to themes and structures (Charmaz, 2014, p. 15).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Identification and analysis of the range of variability in the studied categories or process (Charmaz, 2014, p. 15; Strauss &amp; Corbin, 1998, p. 143).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. New conceptual categories are pursued; ones that are informed by narratives, rich descriptions, and other qualitative data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 15) and concluding with the conceiving or intuiting of ideas-concepts-that are formulated into an explanatory scheme (Strauss &amp; Corbin, 1998, p. 21).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ensuring sensitivity to the words and actions of study participants (Strauss &amp; Corbin, 1998, p. 7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Focus on building theory rather than testing theory or applying results to existing theories (Charmaz, 2014, p. 15; Strauss &amp; Corbin, 1998; p. 13).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Constant comparative methods are used to elucidate emerging trends and themes (Charmaz, 2014, p. 15).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Pursuit of data gathering until category development is complete and no new properties, dimensions or relationships emerge (Theoretical Sampling). (Strauss &amp; Corbin, 1998; p 143).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Focus on developing a category as opposed to covering a specific empirical topic (Charmaz, 2014, p. 15).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Synthesis of the Research Findings

Self-identity research outlined earlier in this chapter referenced several integrating constructs to help define the complex process of the self including leader self-efficacy (Villanueva and Sánchez, 2007), self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, emotional stability (Judge & Bono, 2001), and orientation toward leadership (Hiller, 2005). This research included the impact of identity on leader-member exchanges and on leadership effectiveness across individual, relational and collective domains (Jackson & R. E. Johnson, 2012). The impact of a leader’s language was also examined for its priming effect on leadership prototypes (McDonald et al., 2008). In addition, understanding of how leadership identity and performance are impacted by cognitive processes provides the groundwork for understanding the results of the grounded theory inquiry. This growing body of research in the cognitive leadership domain attempts to explain the phenomenon of leadership through self-images, self-perceptions, and other internal dimensions of leadership (Bass, 2008; D. T. Hall, 2004).

These cognitive dimensions under review varied by the role or context in which the person was engaging or interacting (Markus & Wurf, 1987). There are different schemas at play across the personal, relational and collective domains (Hiller, 2005). For example, a person may have a high degree of personal self-efficacy, but may not have high collective efficacy. In this case, the individual may hold a strong belief that he or she can attain a goal through his or her individual contributions (personal self-efficacy), but has less confidence in the ability of the group to organize and execute in a way to ensure group goal attainment (collective self-efficacy). Individuals hold these varying
self-identities across domains until the context or antecedent event activates the specific self-identity (Lord & Brown, 2004; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Identity is complex and ever changing, which may speak to the difficulties in documenting the process for the emergence of self-identity in individuals. Each of these constructs interacts and combines in a dynamic way to help create and sustain a leader’s self-identity (Lord & Brown, 2004; Showers & Ziegler-Hill, 2003; Stets & Burke, 2003; van Knippenberg et al., 2005).

**Critique of the Previous Research**

Many of the research topics addressed complex constructs and latent variables (e.g., self-identity, self-efficacy, and even leadership) that cannot be measured directly. These constructs were measured by how they manifested in self- and other-ratings, assessments, and performance on tasks. Social and cognitive processes were examined and included leader attributes (e.g., emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and self-awareness), LMX, and the impact of identity on leadership effectiveness across individual, relational and collective domains. In addition to their complexity, a lack of consensus by researchers in their actual definitions limited comparisons between research and is a challenge to integration and synthesis. Agreement is lacking on what constitutes leader traits and behaviors and how to differentiate effective leaders from ineffective ones (Day & Harrison, 2007; Barker, 1997). Attempts to create universally accepted definitions and categories of leader traits and behaviors may not be possible given the complexity of leadership as a construct (Day & Harrison, 2007). However, continuing
efforts to integrate leadership concepts and variables are critical (DeRue et al., 2011; McCormick & Martinko, 2004; Yukl, Gordon & Taber, 2002).

Many of the instruments used to measure complex constructs of leadership and identity lacked sufficient psychometric properties to be considered a reliable and valid measure of the latent variables under study (Hiller, 2005). Similarly, instruments for measuring leader behavior and effectiveness may not be applicable to different work environments (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000) or encompass the spectrum of behaviors determined to be effective (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; K.W. Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). For confirmability and dependability, the counterparts to reliability in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), self-identity measures and instruments with robust psychometric properties are critical. Hiller (2005), for example, had to create instruments to measure self-identity and leadership orientation. Although he used extant theory to support the design of the instruments, more exploration of valid and reliable measures of self-identity and its sub-dimensions are required. For the purposes of this inquiry, no instrument was used to measure self-identity. Instead, participant narratives served as the primary mechanism to gather rich phenomenological data. Research targeting perceptual and cognitive theories of development would benefit from the use of proven and standardized instruments to measure elements of leader self-identity and performance.

In the extant research on leader self-identity and related dimensions, there were shared issues with sampling as well. A predominant number of the researchers used undergraduate or graduate participants to explore the phenomenon of leadership.
Although not uncommon in social sciences research, this practice remains problematic because the phenomenon under study is leadership and leadership cannot truly be evaluated without considering its impact on others (Yukl, 2006). This implies some level of actual leadership experience. For example, the single research study (described earlier in this chapter) to examine the process of leadership identity development through a grounded theory approach (Komives et al., 2005) was based on 90-minute interviews conducted with 13 undergraduate students identified as high relational leaders. These students were not employed full-time and may not have directed the work of others in a way that would be necessary to fully understand leadership influence, much less the process of leader identity development. This is one of the underlying considerations of this dissertation—generating a grounded theory on the process of leader identity development of experienced leaders. In order to evaluate the actual process of leader self-identity development, it is important to examine the process as experienced by people with actual leadership experience and responsibilities.

The absence of qualitative studies in the area of leadership also limits a full understanding of the phenomenon. Hiller (2005) noted that nuances and layers of leadership might be best explored by rich phenomenological techniques of qualitative inquiry. More qualitative studies could examine the phenomenon without some of the restrictive categories in which leadership has been viewed, and possibly too narrowly defined, in the past.

Finally, for credibility or transferability of qualitative research, the counterpart to validity in quantitative research, Maxwell (1997) posited that the inclusion of discrepant
evidence or negative cases might increase credibility, along with other measures including triangulating conclusions with multiple sources. Accordingly, it is important in future research on leader self-identity to examine both leader self-identity emergence and impact from both the perspective of highly effective leaders and less effective leaders. Komives et al. (2005) demonstrate an example of this limitation. By studying only highly relational leaders, documenting a process of leader self-identity development is naturally limited. This grounded theory investigation, in contrast, was created to capture the process of two cohorts of leaders: Those defined as being of higher effectiveness or lower effectiveness based on culture and effectiveness ratings obtained by the institution on leaders and departments.

Summary

The ongoing evolution of leadership research has experienced several stages or shifts in prevailing thoughts about the nature of leadership and specific elements associated with its emergence. No longer are attributes, traits, or behavioral dimensions considered to be sufficient, particularly without integration, in fully explaining the complexities of leaders and of leadership. Cognitive approaches to leadership are among the next wave of research and are driven by an attempt to understand the cognitive connection to leadership; particularly in linking identity to leadership effectiveness and performance.

Recent research in the area of leader self-identity illustrates that there is are increasing attempts to explain the phenomenon of leadership through self-images, self-perceptions, and other internal dimensions of leadership although there is a paucity of
research directly measuring leader self-identity formation. Future research is required to explore the process of leader self-identity formation and to employ phenomenological techniques to help generate more rich descriptions of cognitive processes involved in leadership (Hiller, 2005).

Finally, given the absence of research focusing on leader development across a leader’s lifespan (Drath, 2001, Lord & R. J. Hall, 2005), qualitative and longitudinal approaches that help document leader development over time would add to the growing understanding of the process of leader development, in general, and leader self-identity development, in particular.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

A qualitative design was chosen based on the focus of the inquiry, understanding the process of identity development among college and university leaders. Rich phenomenological approaches may reveal heretofore untapped variables, themes, and relationships associated with leader self-identity emergence (Conger, 1998; Hiller, 2005) and address the noted under-representation of qualitative designs in the leadership domain (Salovaara, 2011). Given the focus of identity development among college and university leaders, it is hoped that findings may contribute to leader development opportunities for institutions of higher education in order to address the growing demands and complexity of the college and university environment.

By better understanding the process of leader self-identity development, future interventions could target points in the process to strengthen leader identity development. Strong leader self-views and elements of leader self-identity have been associated with overall leadership effectiveness (Bennis & Nanus, 1985), are among the most accurate predictors of job satisfaction and performance (Judge & Bono, 2001), and are associated with a variety of follower-specific considerations including motivation, behavior, and overall performance (Hanges et al., 2000; van Knippenberg et al., 2005). A grounded theory may inform leaders of institutions of higher education with insights that could
possibly transfer to other fields where leader development is a critical consideration in equipping employees to manage complex systems, priorities, and challenges.

**Research Design**

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the specific research design and methods employed in conducting the research. Constructivist grounded theory that followed the methodological guidelines espoused by Kathy Charmaz (2014) was employed for the study and semistructured interviews provided the primary vehicle for data collection. This chapter further details specific considerations and steps taken to conduct and analyze the interviews. Specific sections that follow will detail the process for identifying the target population and methods of recruitment, data collection, coding and analysis, and ethical considerations.

**Sample Size**

An initial sample size of 12 university leaders was identified to participate in the study. The specific number of suggested participants for qualitative studies varies widely but the decision is generally predicated on what the researcher seeks to know and how the interviews will inform the inquiry (Charmaz, 2014, p. 106). Morse (2000) further suggested that the scope of the study, the nature of the research topic, the quality of the data, and the design of the study are also factors in determining the sample size (p. 4). Other qualitative theorists have suggested a smaller sample size if there is expertise in the chosen topic (Jette, Grover, & Keck, 2003) and in studies that do not employ multiple methods for data collection (Lee, Woo, & Mackenzie, 2002). Given these factors, 12 were initially considered adequate for the scope of this study. The sample size was
expanded to 16 participants as interviews and subsequent analysis began in order to achieve required theoretical saturation, a hallmark of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Morse, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**Semistructured Interviews**

Semistructured interviews were the primary data gathering method for the proposed study. Semistructured interviews were determined to be the best data collection process for obtaining the rich detail of experiences required by phenomenological methodologies (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Each study participant was asked 20 core questions and follow-up sub-questions to help elucidate the topic under discussion and to gain additional insights and understanding.

Questions were designed to elicit events and experiences that have helped to inform the leader's identity. Interviews helped to document each respondent's individual leadership journey—with emphasis on milestones, experiences, developmental opportunities, people of influence, and other events and activities that helped to inform their leader self-construct, self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-consistency and other dimensions related to the leader’s self-identity. Through interviews, the leaders were asked to not only give rich detail about their leadership but also to describe times when they felt highly effective, or highly ineffective, as leaders. As findings emerged, interview participants were asked to help clarify and expand explanations. In other words, *returning to the ground* to examine emerging findings (Percy & Kostere, 2008).
Pre-Interview Packets

No later than one week prior to the interview, participants were sent, via an e-mail attachment, a copy of the core interview questions, a brief demographic questionnaire, and the informed consent information along with specific instructions to review the documents in advance of the face-to-face session with the researcher. The decision to include the questions in the pre-interview packet was made after an informal piloting phase when participants expressed difficulty initially remembering situations and experiences within the context of the 90-minute interview. Time to recall, consider, and to reflect on questions related to the process of their own leader identity emergence yielded more robust and rich interview responses in subsequent participant interviews.

In addition to the interview questions, participants were asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire that requested information regarding their age, job title, ethnicity, education and credentials, total number of years of employment, total number of years in professional leadership positions, number of years employed at the university, number of positions held at the university, prior leader development events and experiences, and current number of direct reports. This identifying information was entered into a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQAS), MAXQDA-11, that provided response coding based on attributes to allow for the identification of response codes and trends by each demographic factor (or a combination of factors).
Participant Review of Transcripts

Within one week of the interviews, transcripts of the interviews were routed to the participants with instructions to edit, revise, or enhance the responses. During the transcription process, all identifying information was redacted and each participant identified in the transcript by a participant number. Participants were instructed not to add any identifying information during the editing of the transcripts to ensure continued confidentiality of the participant during the review phase. Participants were also instructed that, if they chose to route additional documentation that they believed further emphasized a response, that they employ the same participant code and to redact identifying information before routing to the researcher.

In most cases, the participants added rich detail to their initial responses and attributed the additional time of reflection as prompting more detailed recollection. Others added additional details to their stories that they believed helped better illustrate a theme or point.

Follow-up Interviews

Additional follow-up interviews were conducted, as required, to clarify emerging themes and trends and consistent with thematic analysis with constant comparison. Specifically, as information was gathered during the interview process, it was analyzed and compared and additional questions were asked to fully capture the theoretical implications of the qualitative inquiry.
Data Coding and Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and imported into the MAXQDA-11 qualitative coding software as soon as the interviews were completed. This process facilitated the iterative, comparative, and interactive approach to data collection and interpretation that are hallmarks of grounded theory. Specifically, grounded theory encourages interaction not only with the subjects, but also with the data. Charmaz (2014) refers to this as “entering into an interactive analytical space.” (p. 115). Finally, data was considered, reconsidered, integrated, synthesized through a series of coding and categorizing activities in order to meet the two criteria for completing grounded theory: Fit and relevance. In this context, fit refers to the utility of the results of the coding and categorizing clarifying or crystallizing the participants’ experience (Charmaz, 2014, p. 133). The term relevance in grounded theory characterizes the sensemaking of the data and the analysis. Charmaz (2014) describes relevance in the context of grounded theory as “an incisive analytical framework that interprets what is happening and makes relationships between implicit process and structures visible.” (p. 133). Additional details regarding initial, focused, and axial coding and thematic analysis are provided later in the procedures sub-section of this chapter.

Target Population and Participant Selection

The target population was comprised of 16 university leaders of a private university in the Southeastern United States. Leaders identified for participation met specific inclusion criteria and were also categorized into two cohorts (i.e., higher effectiveness and lower effectiveness) based on the university’s Organizational Culture
Inventory (OCI) and Organizational Effectiveness Inventory (OEI) administered university-wide every two years. Details of the purposive sampling strategy, criteria for participation, and use of the OCI and OEI for cohort composition are further detailed below.

**Purposive Sampling**

The purposive sampling strategy was appropriate for this inquiry given the objectives of the research in that it allowed the researcher to identify the most productive sample to answer the proposed research question (Marshall, 1996). Further, purposive sampling allowed for information-rich cases to examine the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). The sampling may also be described as extreme group sampling in that the group under investigation was special and set apart from other leaders in some way (i.e., experienced institutional leaders with a minimum number of direct reports and at least five years of leadership experience). Patton (2002) provides a good example of this approach in J. Collins (2001) research of effective business leaders. Collins explored the experiences of eleven highly successful leaders in order to derive a grounded theory of leadership (referred to as "level 5 leaders").

**Criteria for Participation**

The criteria for participation were based on supervisory responsibility, leadership experience, and absence of current leadership development involvement. Each of these criteria is further clarified below.

**Supervisory responsibility.** Participants held a leadership position within the university and had supervisory responsibility of at least two direct reports. The direct
report requirement ensured that participants were responsible for directing the work of others as part of their leadership responsibilities, a key consideration for this inquiry. Further, the university’s Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI) and Organizational Effectiveness Inventory (OEI) did not provide individual-level metrics for any department with less than three employees. This would have eliminated the ability to contrast departmental cultures using OCI scores and compare leaders based on the leader effectiveness scores provided by the OEI results.

**Leadership experience.** Participants were required to have no less than five years of leadership experience to ensure that there was a minimum leadership experience threshold. This criterion was established to help eliminate inexperienced leaders or those who may not continue in leadership after their first experiences from the sample.

**Leadership development involvement.** Participants who were, at the time of the inquiry, involved in a leadership development program (either internal or external to the university) were not included in the sample for two primary reasons. First, involvement in the leadership development experience might have primed interview responses or made certain themes more salient than others based on the content and focus of the leadership development program. Second, the internal leadership development program has been co-facilitated by the researcher for the past ten years. Targeting current members of the leadership development cohort might have created potential coercion to participate in the program, or might have appeared to do so, given the researcher’s role in the program.
Recruitment and Selection

To minimize or eliminate risks of coercion or conflict of interest, study participants were initially recruited blind to the researcher. Specifically, the university’s associate vice president responsible for institutional effectiveness and research prepared a listing of potential candidates based on the selection criteria provided by the researcher. The University representative then routed the initial invitation and only recipients interested in being involved with the research contacted the researcher directly.

Initial invitation. The university representative contacted eligible candidates via e-mail with a description of the research project, credentials of the researcher, how the information would be shared and used, and the researcher’s contact information. The e-mail also informed potential participants that the study might take up to three hours and involve advance consideration of the interview questions (approximately 30 minutes), an initial face-to-face interview with the researcher (approximately 90 minutes), audiotaping of the session, and one possible follow-up interview (approximately one hour) to clarify any questions or emerging themes from the first interview. Prospective participants were provided with the researcher’s contact information and instructions on how to reach the researcher to express interest in participation. Candidates were given a time period in which they will be required to notify the researcher of their interest and a project schedule should they be included for participation.

Interested candidates contacted the researcher over a two-week period following the university invitation e-mail. After interested candidates were identified, the researcher submitted the list of respondents to the university representative for additional
screening and categorization. The university representative evaluated the interested candidates based on the most recent university-wide OCI and OEI results to create two study cohorts: The first cohort comprised of leaders who led departments with OCI ratings that were closer to the ideal than the university’s mean culture ratings and individual leadership effectiveness ratings higher than the mean effectiveness ratings as measured by the OEI. The second cohort was comprised of leaders who led departments with OCI measures rated lower than the university’s mean culture ratings and with leadership effectiveness ratings lower than the university mean as measured by the OEI. Details of the use of the two measures to determine cohort composition are further described below.

**Use of the OCI for cohort membership.** To identify the placement of participants into the two effectiveness cohorts, two levels of data analysis were completed. First, a university representative conducted a cluster analysis that was applied to the OCI data from the University’s 74 departments of employees to determine the natural groups of departments in terms of their cultural style. The 120 statements comprising the OCI were ranked by the respondent to identify the department’s culture against the three primary styles: Constructive, Passive-Defensive, and Passive-Aggressive (Human Synergistics, 2003).

Constructive culture styles describe interactions and work approaches that are designed to help staff meet their higher-order needs for satisfaction and growth and includes four subcategories of norms and expectations including Achievement, Self-Actualizing, Humanistic-Encouraging, and Affiliative behaviors. Developers of the OCI
have been found that constructive culture styles to be correlated with employee engagement, safety and reliability, successful merger integration, creativity, adaptability, and customer satisfaction (Human Synergistics, 2012).

In contrast, aggressive-defensive culture styles describe interactions and approaches that are competitive, conflict-oriented, and forceful in nature. This cultural style attempts to promote members’ status and security through four sub-categories of norms and expectations including Oppositional, Power, Competitive, and Perfectionistic behaviors. The aggressive-defensive style has been associated with diminished employee motivation, stress, dissatisfaction, poor intra-unit cooperation, low retention and poor product/service quality (Human Synergistics, 2006a).

Finally, a passive-defensive culture style describes a cautious and tentative way to interact with others and is comprised of four subcategories of norms and expectations including Approval, Conventional, Dependent and Avoidant behaviors. The passive-defensive style has been associated with role ambiguity, role conflict and turnover, problems with motivation and satisfaction, work avoidance and inferior product and service quality (Human Synergistics, 2006b).

Mean scores from the three levels of cluster analysis revealed that participants comprising cohort 1 (higher effectiveness) were leaders of departments whose overall constructive style score was equal to or higher than the university mean of 54, passive-defensive style scores equal to or lower than the university mean of 36, and aggressive-defensive style scores equal to or lower than the passive-defensive mean of 27.5. Conversely, Cohort 2 members included those members with OCI scores that were lower
than the mean for constructive styles, and higher than the mean for passive-defensive and aggressive-defensive styles.

The use of the OCI in this manner represents a more rigorous way of evaluating differences in leader effectiveness by contrasting cultural climate of departments that they lead. Although an improvement over prior research in leader self-identity that failed to contrast leader identity development of effective leaders with less effective leaders (e.g., Komives et al., 2005), it is not a foolproof or complete methodology. Specifically, other extraneous variables may have accounted for department scores lower than the University’s mean culture scores that may fall outside of the leader’s authority and influence. For example, planned turnover, shifting priorities, unanticipated changes, budget issues, or the introduction of new staff and managers, may have impacted the OCI scores that are not the direct result of leader behaviors. To help address these issues, the Organizational Effectiveness Inventory (OEI) was also used in tandem with the OCI to help determine the composition of cohorts.

Use of the OEI for cohort membership. The OEI is a companion to the OCI and was used to further confirm distinctions between cohort assignments. The OEI assesses 31 specific factors found to be highly correlated to constructive culture development. These 31 factors are further categorized into five clusters including Mission and Philosophy (i.e., how well the organization successfully defines its identity and values to its members), Structures (i.e., how well people, roles, and activities are arranged to create organization, influence, empowerment, and employee involvement), Systems (i.e., how systems and procedures are used to support core activities and problem solving and
include human resource management, appraisal and reinforcement, and goal setting),

*Technology* (i.e., how the inputs are converted into successful outputs through job design characteristics, interdependence among members, and use of technology), and

*Skills/Qualities* (i.e., how members in leadership positions influence results through communication, leadership, and sources of power). Each of the categories of the OEI include sub-categories that were rated by the leader, the leader’s supervisor, and the leader’s staff members; creating a 360 degree evaluation of leader behaviors found to be associated with the development of constructive cultures (Human Synergistics, 2003).

For candidate selection, members of the higher effectiveness cohort had higher scores across the five clusters of OEI factors (e.g., Mission and Philosophy, Structures, Systems, Technology, Skills/Qualities) than leaders comprising the lower effectiveness cohort. An independent-samples t-test was then conducted to compare the mean of the OEI responses for members from departments reflecting the University’s ideal culture with those who were from departments that did not reflect this ideal. Please see Table 2 for results.

As summarized in Table 2, there was a significant difference in the average OEI scores for the ideal culture group (M=3.64, SD=.072) compared with the non-ideal culture group (M=3.42, SD = .034); t(44)=-5.67, p = .000. This provided additional verification that the leaders comprising cohort 1 (higher effectiveness) not only led departments that were closer to the ideal university culture but also exhibited leader behaviors determined by supervisor and subordinate ratings to be higher in effectiveness than leaders comprising cohort 2 (lower effectiveness).
Table 2.

**Independent Samples T-Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average OEI Score</th>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>5.620</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>-5.670</td>
<td>43.849</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: $t(44) = -5.67$, $p = .000$

**Final invitation.** After confirmation of cohort composition determined by the university representative that ensured equal numbers of participants representing the higher effectiveness and lower effectiveness cohorts, an initial sample of 24 candidates responding to the university e-mail was formally invited to participate in the study by the researcher. The invitation targeted 12 candidates for each of the two cohorts and provided them with additional details of the purpose of the study, use of information, confidentiality, and other disclosure and participation requirements of the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) process.

From the larger group of 24, the candidates were selected for participation through a first response protocol. The first six from each of the two targeted cohorts to contact the researcher became initial participants. The selection process minimized the introduction of potential researcher bias by eliminating known names or other potential subjective criteria that could have resulted from selecting from a larger candidate pool.
Participants who contacted the researcher as a result of the university e-mail and were not among the initial sample of 12 respondents received an e-mail reply indicating that they were not selected for the first round of interviews but would be contacted in the event that additional participants for the study were required. As data collection began and the majority of interviews were completed, an additional four participants (two from each cohort) were selected to achieve theoretical saturation. This selection was made based on the order of participants’ responses to the initial interview invitation for each of the two cohorts and resulted in a total sample size of 16. Once theoretical saturation was achieved, no further participants were required and the researcher notified the remaining candidates that the project had ended and thanked them for their interest.

**Procedures**

Each final candidate was contacted via e-mail directly from the researcher and provided with a pre-interview packet. The pre-interview packet reviewed the purpose of the study, the timeline for study participation, the forms required for the IRB process for both the sponsoring University and the University in which the research was conducted, the informed consent process, the questions to be addressed in the interview, and a recommendation to consider the questions in advance of the interview in order to be better prepared to answer. Participants were encouraged to preview the questions prior to the interview given the retrospective nature of some of the response items.

Participants were provided with a brief demographic questionnaire that requested participant age, ethnicity, number of years of employment, number of years of leadership experience, number of years at the university, number of direct reports, and academic
degrees to aid in the analysis of the results. Participants were also given a range of times to set up the initial interview and to e-mail that researcher of a time that was convenient for their schedule. The researcher confirmed the interview time within 24 hours of the participant’s response and also identified a tentative location of the interview (e.g., private conference room or private office on campus) but also gave the participant the option to choose an alternative, private location of their choosing. As a result, most of the interviews were conducted in the participants’ private offices.

**Pre-Interview Discussion**

Immediately prior to the start of the interview, the researcher reviewed the pre-interview packet provided earlier to the participant. Participant understanding was ascertained regarding the purpose of the study and other considerations regarding participation and confidentiality. The informed consent information was reviewed and participants were given an opportunity to ask questions. Participants were then asked whether or not they were willing to have their interviews audiotaped for the purposes of data analysis. The confidential labeling, storage, and handling of the audiotapes was emphasized and written consent for recording was obtained.

Participants were informed that they would receive transcripts of the interview and that they were encouraged to modify their responses if they so chose. They were instructed on redacting any identifying information in their editing of the transcripts. No participant indicated any problems with consenting for the audiotaping of the sessions. After audio recording consent was obtained and no further questions were asked by the participant, the researcher conducted the semistructured interview.
**Initial Interview**

The duration of the semistructured interview ranged from 60 to 120 minutes with an average duration of 90 minutes. Interview questions were designed to elicit events and experiences that the participants believed were instrumental in forming their leader identity. Specifically, interviews were designed to document each respondent's individual leadership journey--with emphasis on experiences and events that helped to inform their leader self-construct, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-consistency (all elements of self-identity). Qualitative interviewing, in particular, is a useful tool for grounded theorists given the emergent and inductive nature of the process. Open-ended questions helped to prompt participants to explore, in-depth, the meaning of their own narratives while providing the interviewer some analytical control over the process (Charmaz, 2001). Through interviews, the leaders were asked to not only give rich detail about their leadership but also to describe times when they felt highly effective, or highly ineffective, as leaders. As findings emerged, interview participants were asked follow-up questions to further clarify and expand explanations.

**Follow-Up Interview**

An additional follow-up interview was conducted, as required, to clarify or expand emerging themes and trends. Consistent with thematic analysis with a constant comparison methodology, as information was gathered during the interview process, it was analyzed and compared with emerging themes both within and between interviews. Additional questions were asked to fully capture the theoretical implications of the qualitative inquiry. In addition, the follow-up interviews were used to fill in gaps in
participant narratives and to capture elements of responses that were not fully developed or that were overlooked during the original interview.

Measures

As the data collection method for the grounded theory inquiry, interviewing helped to explore complex phenomena and lived experiences and the associated meaning that individuals applied to those phenomena and experiences. In particular, interviewing is useful in exploring social abstractions, such as leadership, given that these abstractions are founded on the very lives and experiences of the participant (Siedman, 2013). The flexible and open-ended nature of semistructured interviewing allows the interviewer to go more in depth, to be creative, and to be flexible in order to ensure that each participant’s story is fully captured (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

Questions were arranged and structured to reflect Siedman’s (2013) three-interview series for qualitative inquiry. Specifically, participants were asked to provide a focused life history relating to their leadership experiences through questions that asked them to recall when they first began to think of themselves as a leader and their leadership journey from that initial event to the current time. Second, participants were asked to provide specific details of the experience through questions that prompted the identification of influences (both people and events) and also explored elements of the participant’s leader self-identity (e.g., self-construct, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-consistency). The timeline of these leadership events were also documented for the central purpose of outlining the process over the course of a career. Finally, the interview included items that asked the participant to reflect on the meaning of their leadership
journey through questions targeting lessons learned, what they had to change to be the leaders they are today, and how their views of leadership have changed over time. Although not conducted in three separate interviews, the structure of the 90-minute face-to-face interview gave consideration to each of Siedman’s three focus areas of inquiry.

Research Questions

The driving research question that formed the basis of this inquiry was: *What is the process of leader identity development among college and university leaders?* As described immediately above, semistructured interviews were conducted with each participant and comprised of a series of open-ended questions that asked participants to recount developmental milestones and experiences associated with their path to becoming leaders along with questions regarding the development of aspects of their leader self-identity. The specific questions asked in the interview are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3.

*Semistructured Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process of Leader Identity Development</td>
<td>1. When did you first begin to think of yourself as a leader? What specific activity, event or circumstance first led you to consider that you might be a leader?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Beginning with that initial experience, describe your leadership journey since then--including the experiences that helped you clarify, refine, and grow in your leadership approach over the years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. If not specifically addressed in your answer above, please share what one experience has had the most impact on who you are as a leader today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Who, if anyone, most influenced the type of leader you are today? Tell me about how they influenced you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Area</td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Self-</td>
<td>5. How do you describe what you do (as a career) to others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>6. Is it important to you that others see you as a leader? What makes that important or not important to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Briefly describe your overall leadership philosophy—what values and principles are most important to you as a leader?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. In what aspects of your life do you most see yourself as a leader? Are there areas of your life in which you do not view yourself as a leader?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Self-</td>
<td>9. What, if anything, did you have to overcome or change to see yourself as a leader?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>10. What do you think you do well as a leader? What leader characteristic do you most value about yourself now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. What do you think you do not do well as a leader and how do you compensate for this challenge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. When have you failed in leadership? Describe the most important lessons you learned from this experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. What equips you to be a successful university leader? What leadership skill do you possess that you believe differentiates you from other leaders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Self-</td>
<td>14. Tell me about a time or an event where you believe what you did as a leader was in conflict with your personal values and beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>15. How have your career intentions changed over time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. How have your views of leadership changed over time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. What practices or behaviors do you routinely do to stay up to speed with your leadership skills?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Questions</td>
<td>18. Talking to someone just moving into a leadership position, what is one thing you would tell them that is important for them to be an effective leader?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. Is there anything that you wished or expected me to ask that I didn’t?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As clarified in the methodology section, the interviews were conducted in a private and safe location on the university campus following the general order of the questions provided in Table 3 above. At the close of the interview, two additional
questions were asked. The purpose of the first closing question, *Talking to someone just moving into a leadership position, what is one thing you would tell them that is important for them to be an effective leader?* provided a way to transition the interview for closure that honored the participant’s story, lessons learned, and their role in helping future leaders. The final question, *Is there anything that you wished or expected me to ask that I didn’t?* provided an opportunity for the participant to share any additional thoughts that may have been prompted but not shared during the interview.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Upon completion of the interviews, the audiotapes were transcribed and then imported into the MAXQDA-11 software to facilitate the coding and analysis of qualitative documents. Interviews were scheduled, when possible, to allow for a two to three day break in order to transcribe the interview and enter the data into the MAXQDA-11 system.

**Coding**

Per the guidelines of constructivist grounded theory, a three-phased process of coding the transcripts was employed. Initial coding involved a line-by-line analysis of each of the interview transcripts with the goal of categorizing each segment of data with a description. Initial codes, as defined by Charmaz (2014), are “provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data.” (p. 117). Over 600 initial codes were constructed from the analysis of the transcripts and from field notes, observations, and participant-provided supplemental documentation.
Following the initial coding, a process of focused coding was conducted. The focused coding phase involved synthesizing the results of the initial coding and the construction of categories that began to make sense of the data. The most significant or frequent initial codes were combined, sorted, and integrated to create a new set of focused codes to help define emergent theory. To facilitate the focused coding process, the focused codes were defined using gerunds, or nouns made from a verb by adding the suffix -ing. Originally defined by Glaser (1998), coding with gerunds helped to identify emerging processes and to stay true to what was being described by the data. Further, the use of the nouns turned actions into topics (Charmaz, 2014).

With each coding pass, questions were asked of the data including: What process is at work here? How can it be defined? When, why, and how does the process change? What are the consequences of the process? What are the common elements of the process across participants? As insights emerged, memo writing was employed using the feature provided in the MAXQDA-11 software. Memos were assigned to a code and associated with specific segments of data or entire portions of transcripts. Finally, theoretical coding was conducted, or rather, emerged, from the focused coding and memo writing. Theoretical coding conceptualized how the primary categories grounded in the data related to, and interacted with, each other; suggesting an emerging theory (Glaser, 2002; Glaser & Holton, 2004). Although there is some debate regarding whether theoretical coding is applied or emerges, the use of theoretical coding can provide precision, clarity, a sharp analytic edge, and coherence to the research if done skillfully (Charmaz, 2014).
Ethical Considerations

The value of this grounded theory inquiry, as with most any qualitative research, is predicated on the candid, comprehensive, and honest responses of the participants. Participants shared their individual stories of leadership with a tacit understanding that they, and the information they shared, would be handled appropriately. Accordingly, several ethical safeguards were put into place to ensure that the participants and their contributions were protected throughout the process.

Participation

To ensure that there was no coercion to participate in the study, the initial recruitment process was conducted outside of the purview of the researcher. The university representative made the initial contact with the participants. None of the participants fell under his supervision nor were they members of his department. The researcher was not made aware of potential study candidates until they initiated an e-mail indicating interest in participating directly to the researcher. Because of my role in delivering the university’s leadership development program, exclusion criteria for participation included members of the current cohort of the leadership development program. Although in this role, I serve as an independent contractor with the university and have no direct reporting relationships with participants and do not control, influence, or direct compensation or performance evaluations, this safeguard was put into place to remove the potential of any current leadership development member to feel coerced to participate. Finally, in addition to simply ignoring the initial invitation to participate,
candidates had multiple opportunities to decline involvement up to, and including, the actual time of the interview.

**Interview Question Design**

Care was taken in the design and formulation of the 20 core interview questions to ensure that questions were not overly personal or sensitive in nature. The open-ended nature of the questions also allowed the participant to have some autonomy over the scope and depth of their responses. Throughout the interview process, the participant was reminded that they could skip responding to any question that made them feel uncomfortable.

**Informed Consent**

The informed consent was routed to each participant at least two business days prior to the scheduled face-to-face interview. The informed consent detailed the purpose and scope of the study, the contribution being sought by the project, and provided a comprehensive review of the rights of the participant; emphasizing that participation was strictly voluntary and ensuring confidentiality of their identity and their interview responses. A hard copy of the informed consent was provided to the participant at the beginning of the interview with a designated time to review and discuss the document prior to signing to ensure that the participant had full understanding prior to interview. Further, because audiotaping facilitates the capturing of rich, phenomenological data, the informed consent outlined the researcher’s request for permission to audiotape the interview, and how the audiotapes would be stored and managed to protect confidentiality. Participants reviewed the audiotaping consent at the beginning of the
interview and were given an opportunity to accept or decline audiotaping before the interview began. All participants consented to having their interviews audiotaped.

**Participant Confidentiality**

The privacy and confidentiality of participants was emphasized throughout each stage of recruitment through to data collection, analysis, and the distribution of findings. Participants were instructed that only codes and pseudonyms would be used to label the audiotapes, transcripts, pre-data demographic questionnaire, and any other documentation created from the research, including the actual dissertation itself. The pre-interview questionnaire was limited to information about the participant’s age, ethnicity, highest educational degree attained, number of years of employment, number of years of leadership experience, number of years at the university, number of direct reports, and number and types of prior leadership development initiatives. Job titles were collected as part of the questionnaire but not referenced in the dissertation given that some job titles were so specific that it would not have been difficult to identify the participant. No other identifying information was requested or collected.

Although participants were aware of their personal departmental rankings from the Organizational Culture Inventory and their individual leader rankings from the Organizational Effectiveness Inventory, care was taken not to elaborate on their cohort assignment as part of their participation. The primary value of having two cohorts comprised of leaders with departmental culture ratings and individual effectiveness ratings either higher or lower than the university average was to be able to contrast the identity development process between categories based on effectiveness. Although
university leaders meet with designated personnel every two years to go over the results of the OCI and OEI surveys and university-wide results are made public to the university community, care was taken to limit detailed information about cohort assignment.

MP3 files of the audiotaped interviews and the resulting transcripts were labeled with a participant code. During the interviews, care was taken not to use the participant’s name or other identifying information. Prior to submitting the transcripts for participant review, any identifying information, including the names of coworkers, supervisors, peers, work locations, and other identifying information were redacted from the transcript.

When importing the transcripts into the MAXQDA-11 coding software, the documents were entitled using only a participant code. MP3 audio files, transcripts, and the coding software were stored on a password-protected computer owned and operated only by the researcher in a privately owned office. The files were placed in an encrypted, password-protected folder, prohibiting access by unauthorized users. Data associated with the project was stored consistent with applicable university regulations and governing rules for data storage and will be destroyed seven years after the publication of the dissertation.

**Emotional Distress**

Given the possibility, albeit a remote one, that the interview questions might have evoked an emotional response requiring further intervention, the researcher contacted the university’s counseling department to arrange for the option to refer any participant indicating a desire for further assistance. No participant indicated any level of emotional
distress during or after the initial or post-interview but the counseling information was provided as a safeguard.

**Expected Findings**

Grounded theory is an inductive process. Theoretical categories are created from the interactions between the researcher and the participant and between the researcher and the data. It is an iterative, interpretative, and comparative process grounded in the narratives of the participants (Charmaz, 2014). As such, preconceived notions held by the researcher need to be controlled in order for themes to emerge naturally from the data. The researcher actively worked toward suspending any expected findings of the research in order for the qualitative process to be of maximum utility. As detailed in Chapter 1, to help manage preconceived notions, expected findings, and other potential biases, a process of self-reflection and reflective journaling was maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis phases of this research. These practices have been shown to be successful in managing biases throughout the course of research (R. B. Johnson, 1997, Teal et al, 2010). Any expected findings and predictions informed by leadership theories and prior research were actively suppressed to allow the richness of the grounded theory process to flourish.
CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter outlines the results of the data collection and analysis and details key research findings. A summary of the study is provided followed by an overview of researcher credentials and experience, participant descriptions, the research methodology applied to the data analysis, and a presentation of the data. This chapter concludes with a brief summary of the unifying themes and emerging grounded theory borne from the data analysis.

Introduction: The Study and the Researcher

The Study

The genesis of the study was influenced by years of interviewing leaders of institutions of higher education and making informal observations about their effectiveness, leadership style, behaviors, and developmental experiences. In response to growing empirical support among leadership researchers about the connection between cognitive self-views and the performance of leadership (D. T. Hall, 2004; Shamir et al., 1993; van Knippenberg et al., 2004), these interactions soon expanded to incorporate questions about the leaders’ self-identities. Specifically, how these leaders perceived themselves in the leadership domain? Are there links between the strength and clarity of these self views with leadership effectiveness? And, perhaps most importantly, if there is
a connection between the clarity and strength of a leader’s self-identity with leadership effectiveness, what are implications for leadership development? Research into the topic in preparation for this project revealed that there was very limited research focusing on leader self-identity development and an equally limited body of research that employed qualitative techniques to capture the rich phenomenological detail inherent in the experiences and dimensions of leadership. Focusing this inquiry on leaders of institutions of higher education is particularly critical given the increasingly complex, dynamic and layered challenges they face (Hertnecky, 2008). It is hoped that the grounded theory that emerged from this qualitative inquiry will offer new considerations for leader development, leading to next-and-best developmental programming to better equip leaders for present and future challenges.

The Researcher

For the past 31 years, the researcher has worked with leaders in a variety of settings, both internal and external to the organization. Initial career experiences involved leadership roles in social service agencies serving mentally ill adults, at-risk, delinquent, and emotionally disturbed youth, and people in crisis. As opportunities for senior leadership responsibilities were provided, career intentions shifted to the development of systems, structures, and staff to meet organizational objectives. The researcher obtained an MBA to better respond to the challenges of executive leadership. In these roles, opportunities to inform how leaders could be effectively developed became a central concern. This spurred an ongoing interest in developing leaders.

For the last sixteen years, the researcher has served as a principal partner in a
professional services firm specializing in individual, team, and organizational development initiatives. The focus of the practice involves coaching and training leaders in both for-profit and not-for-profit settings. A predominant category of clients includes leaders of colleges and universities. When the consulting firm was first established, the frameworks used to design developmental strategies and programs were culled from popular theories and approaches and anchored in the strategies and perspectives of prominent thought leaders publishing in the practical leadership domain. Although some of the work used to inform the initial practice was empirically supported, some techniques and perspectives came from popular writers but void of robust testing and verification in the field.

Over time, the demand for evidence-based practices and demonstration of a measurable return on every training dollar has reinforced the need for employing a scholar-practitioner approach to leader development. To better prepare to make this transition to a scholar-practitioner, doctoral programs were explored that were uniquely tailored for the transition of a mid-career working professional that followed a scholar-practitioner model. The specialization of I/O psychology, in particular, offered a field where prior practitioner experience and business education could be enhanced by a better grounding in theory, methodology, and the scientific method. Today, the researcher consults for hundreds of organizations, colleges, and universities with a particular interest in developing evidence-based, long-term leader development initiatives designed to prepare leaders for the specific requirements of their industry, institution, or sector.
Description of the Sample (Participants)

Initially, the purposive sample was comprised of 12 university leaders. As data coding and analysis progressed, there was concern that theoretical saturation had not been fully reached with the initial sample. Therefore, an additional four participants were interviewed. After this round of interviews, theoretical saturation was achieved; defined by the absence of any new ideas about the developing theory based on the additional data (Bowen, 2008).

The participants had a mean age of 51 years, an average of seven direct reports, and an average of 28 years of employment experience. Participants had an average of 20 years of leadership experience with an average of 11 years of experience at their current university. Thirteen percent were African-American while the remaining participants were White, Non-Hispanic. The gender of participants was equally distributed with 50 percent female and 50 percent male. Fourteen participants held Master’s degrees with one participant holding a Bachelor’s degree and one participant at the Ph.D. level. The range of previous leadership development experiences varied significantly from one to over 14 events. The average number of prior leadership development programs for the sample was three. Table 4 provides a summary of participants.
Table 4.

*Description of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subj.</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Highest Degree Attained</th>
<th>Number of Direct Reports</th>
<th>Years of Employment</th>
<th>Years of Leadership Experience</th>
<th>Length of Service at University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P001</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P002</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P003</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>M.Div.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P004</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P005</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P006</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P007</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P008</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P009</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P010</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P011</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P012</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subj.</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Highest Degree Attained</td>
<td>Number of Direct Reports</td>
<td>Years of Employment</td>
<td>Years of Leadership Experience</td>
<td>Length of Service at University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P013</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White-Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P014</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>B.S</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P015</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P016</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All of the participants were employed in an executive or administrative leadership role with the university and occupied such jobs as vice-president, associate vice president, center leader, and program director.

**Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis**

Digital recordings of the interviews were taken of each of the interviews to ensure no details were lost in note taking. Field notes that documented perceptions and observations of the participant during the interview process were also collected. Care was taken to identify the participant only by a unique code at the beginning of each recording and to remove any names and other identifying information in the MP3 recording after uploading the recording files on a password protected computer. Digital files were then transcribed by the researcher and imported into MAXQDA-11, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software distributed by VERBI Software headquartered in Berlin, Germany, for analysis.
**Initial Coding**

During the initial coding phase, each interview transcript was reviewed and notated with code labels for each key word, phrase, and segment of data. The coding continued, following a line-by-line coding process to help sort the data into meaningful parts. As outlined by Charmaz (2014), the underlying actions, tacit assumptions, implications, significance of problems, comparing data with data, and identifying data gaps occurred as part of the line-by-line coding process (p. 125).

Facilitated by the data labeling and retrieval tools provided by the MAXQDA-11 software, initial inductive coding was performed on each of the interview transcripts after being imported into the software. Initial inductive coding with MAXQDA-11 involved creating codes while reading the transcripts in sequence. The codes were then organized into hierarchies, similar codes were linked together across transcripts, and common segments of data were then assembled by theme, action, event, or assumption into sets. Text retrieval was then conducted by activating certain codes in the MAXQDA-11 software and running queries to pull the lines of text assigned the specific codes into one document.

Over 600 segments of code were identified from the 16 transcripts and from field notes, supplemental participant provided documentation, and observations taken during the interviews. These initial codes were then evaluated using the code frequency table feature of the MAXQDA-11 software that ordered the codes hierarchically based on the most frequently cited to the least frequently cited.
Focused Coding

The 600 coding categories identified during initial coding were then individually and collectively analyzed to determine possible relationships with other codes. Charmaz (2014) noted that the focused coding phase sets the stage for the emerging analysis. By examining the initial codes and making decisions about relationships with those codes during the focused coding process, the theoretical direction of the work is established and advanced (p. 141). The features of the MAXQDA-11 software facilitated this focused coding by allowing the researcher to examine the initial coded segments in greater detail. Tools in the software allowed for retrieval of codes by the individual occurrence in the interview transcripts, by category across all similarly coded narratives, and by attribute (e.g., retrieving code segments from the interviews of the women participants only).

Queries were run to isolate the occurrence of one category or a cluster of related codes into one document populated from retrieved segments from interviews where the codes or category occurred. For example, there were 22 initial codes identified in the narratives that described factors associated with participants’ initial thinking about leadership. Of those 22 codes, six codes specifically identified a family member as being integral to this process. Codes including *father’s example*, *mother’s example*, and *grandmother’s example* were then combined under a focused code entitled *family influence*.

Similarly, ten additional codes under the same question were analyzed and integrated. The initial codes labeled *coach’s influence*, *mentor’s influence*, *troop leader’s influence*, and *pastoral influence* in the initial coding phase were combined and labeled
authoritarian influence in the focused coding phase. In this manner, the 600 initial codes were synthesized and integrated into approximately 36 categories across each of the 20 questions identified in the response set.

Theoretical Coding and Memo Writing

The 36 categories were then examined for emerging theoretical constructs. For example, the focused codes of family influence and authoritarian influence were further clustered with the code categories of military experience, stretch (work) experience, and advancement opportunity. These focused codes shared a theoretical function of sparking thinking about leadership (later identified as antecedents in the proposed theoretical model of self-identity development). A memo was written to capture an insight that the cluster of antecedents appeared to share a similar function of sparking the trajectory of leadership for participants. As the focused coding was completed for each transcript, memos were written to capture initial impressions, analytical insights, and emerging themes culled from the codes. Memo writing helped prime for theoretical coding that was conducted as the final stage of the analysis process.

Each of the categories and associated memos were critically analyzed and inductively evaluated by the researcher. Charmaz (2014) has described this process as “entering into an interactive analytical space” as the data is scrutinized to identify emerging theoretical perspectives. (p. 115). The MAXQDA-11 software facilitated this analysis by providing ways to retrieve, contrast, and compare data segments, lines, codes, clusters, and memos through various filters including code frequency and participant attribute (age, gender, years of leadership experience). Although not an analytical tool in
the functional category of SPSS software, MAXQDA-11 facilitated data coding, retrieval, and review in order to facilitate the researcher’s analytical process.

Similar to the category entitled *sparking*, gerunds were created for common theoretical elements found across the leadership narratives of the participants. As defined in the previous chapter, gerunds are nouns made from a verb by adding the suffix -ing. Coding with gerunds facilitated the identification of emerging theoretical connections and processes and helped to turn actions into topics for analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Gerunds were used for each of the theoretical codes that emerged from the data including *sparking* (later renamed *antecedents* in the resulting model), *acknowledging*, *aspiring*, *acquiring*, *applying*, *adapting*, and *assimilating*.

Theoretical categories were then reviewed for their connections between and within codes. Questions were addressed in the theoretical analysis including: *What are the relationships between theoretical categories?* *What is being revealed by the emergent theory?* *What process is being described?* *Is there alignment, fit and relevance in the emerging theory?* For the current research, it became clear early in the analysis that a specific theory regarding the process of leader self-identity development was emerging from the data—one that described common milestones, experiences, and pathways across the leader narratives represented in the studies. Although there were nuanced differences in each person’s leadership narratives, common thematic categories were present in the majority of the interviews. These and other findings of the analysis are described in greater detail in the following section.
Presentation of the Data and Results of the Analysis

The structured interview questions were designed to address both the process of leader identity development and specific elements of this identity driven by the research question: *What is the process of leader self-identity development among college and university leaders?* Key trends were identified regarding initial cognitive connections of the self as a leader, and included common elements that emerged from the data to suggest a process of identity development that began with *antecedent events* that sparked cognitive consideration of leadership, an *acknowledgement* that the person could be a leader, an *aspiration* to pursue leader opportunities and competencies, followed by specific phases that fostered leader identity development over time. These phases included *acquiring* leadership skills, *applying* the skills in the workplace, *adapting* to new circumstances, experiences, and requirements, and *assimilating* the evolving leader identity as a component of their core identity. Each of these elements and phases are described in detail below with excerpts of the interviews to help illustrate how the themes emerged from the research.

**Antecedents**

Participants were challenged to remember details that, in some cases, were decades ago in response to the question: *When did you first begin to think of yourself as a leader? What specific activity, event or circumstance first led you to consider that you might be a leader?* The provision of questions in advance of the interview helped most participants’ recall a specific time period, if not a specific event or experience, that prompted thinking of themselves as leaders. For example, Participant 1, a 45-year-old...
woman, recalled the importance of her grandmother in helping her to begin thinking about leadership. She noted:

I was highly influenced by my grandmother who was very accomplished, very smart, and a career woman. She did not accept the typical limitations of her time and showed me that you could be influential...that you could be powerful...and that others would listen to you. I think she is the person that, by her example, had me begin to think about what it meant to influence others---to lead others. I wanted to mimic some of the things she did because I was in awe of her abilities. Everyone liked her. Everyone respected her. She had a great deal of influence in her town.

In her example, she wanted so much to be as influential as her grandmother and would mirror actions that she observed in the hopes of being like her. Similarly,

Participant 5, a 65-year-old woman, shared that her father served as an antecedent for her leadership career. She shared:

My father was a leader in higher education. He had this role for over 30 years and I can recall going to his office or touring the college and observing how people reacted to him. He was respected and well liked and I was proud of this. It gave me an example of what leading looked like—and specifically what a leader in a university looked like.

For many, leader behaviors were separate from claiming the title of leadership, which often occurred much later than those initial leader experiences. For example,

Participant 2, a 38-year-old woman, noted:

I think at first it was probably seen as “bossy” growing up... trying to control whatever situation was going on. In the sixth grade I started to coordinate a kickball group... I can remember deciding that it needed to be organized and taking the initiative to try to set something up to set up teams and schedules and how we were going to do it and things like that but that’s the first time I can consciously remember taking on something and being the head of it and leading other people. But I didn’t think of it as being a leader...

Similarly, Participant 8, a 57-year-old man, recalled skills associated with leadership at a young age but, like the previous participant, did not immediately connect these skills with
the domain of leadership until early in his college career. He noted:

Growing up, for most of my life, I was a swimmer and I had always been in a captain or co-captain type of thing but it was more based on my swimming ability than my leadership abilities. So when I first thought of myself as a leader I became an RA [Resident Advisor], halfway through my freshman year. So that was probably the first time where I go back and say, “You know, that’s when I became a leader.”

Participant 12, a 60-year-old man, recounted a similar experience of not initially linking leadership actions and activities with the performance of leadership:

I was the manager of the swim team in high school… In the course of that experience all of a sudden I was doing more things as a coach, meeting contractors, picking people up for swim meets, I was running swim meets…One of my best friends was the other manager and we looked at each other and said “We are running high school swim meets.” I was literally putting the paperwork together, making announcements, doing the scoring. With that said, I didn’t connect what I was doing with leadership. It was more responsibility. It was later that I equated the two together—probably in my first job.

Participant 15, a 60-year old man, as with the prior participant examples, did not immediately evoke the term of leader as a self-description but later came to associate the leader actions with the title:

I can remember doing things that were “leadership” but I don’t think I thought of myself as a “leader” or “not a leader”—that conceptualization came later. When I was in grade school and in cub scouts and doing the color guard at the PAC meeting—I was the one who, by fifth or sixth grade, was instructing other cub scouts on how to march properly with the flag and do all that. I tended to take charge but I don’t think I thought of myself as a leader. Instead, I thought “we need to do this so let’s just do it.”

The majority of participants recalled demonstrating leadership skills and abilities early on but there was some variation in the timeline of using the term leader as a self-description. What is noteworthy, however, is that even with delays in evoking the title as self-referent, men in the study indicated a time period much earlier in their careers than women (addressed in more detail later under the subheading of “Gender Differences.”) Most
reported receiving affirmation for behaviors they would later would categorize as leadership. All of the participants, however, were able to recollect a specific event or a range of antecedent events that informed their self-view as a leader.

An antecedent event or cluster of events serves as the beginning of the process of leader self-identity development. The self-declaration or claiming the title of leader as a component of self-identity tended to follow a specific initiating event or influence. For example, Participant 4, a 52-year-old man, recalled a specific time when the role of leader became a possibility and a possible element of his identity:

I was in awe of this older peer in my church youth group. When he spoke, the others listened and he had this way of getting people to do things willingly. He made everyone feel important and valued and he had this incredible sense of responsibility, of duty, for someone who was probably, at the time, only 17 or 18 years old. I was probably 15 at the time and “Rob” praised me in front of the group for how I solved a problem and that he predicted I would be a future youth leader. He used those words and I remember feeling incredibly proud. And I remember beginning to act differently in our group events, mimicking Rob’s behaviors because I really wanted to be like him.

Similarly, Participant 2, a 38-year-old woman, described the period in her career when she first made this cognitive connection to leadership:

I was the case manager for a dropout prevention program…the director of the program…was transitioning and deciding that she wanted to retire. So after a year, she asked me if I would consider her position of director. That’s when I started being more conscious about the responsibilities that I had and when I started considering myself as a leader

All of the participants were able to define an antecedent relationship, experience, event, or series of events that helped to prime thinking about themselves as potential leaders. Many cited relationships as the primary antecedent, frequently citing an influential family member, supervisor, or professor as influential in their initial thoughts about leaders and leadership. Others shared that a stretch experience, an advancement
opportunity, or military service provided the spark for leadership interest. One participant, Participant 16, a 61-year-old woman, described her antecedent event as being driven by the need to be different from other members of her family. She shared:

I think I was a rebel, if you will. I was girl number five. I was not going to do what the other four did. So whatever the other four did, I purposefully did not do. My dad was a teacher and then an administrator in a high school. Two of my sisters even had him for class. My oldest sister was a teacher and later a librarian for 45 years. Her husband was a teacher. She just retired. All my other sisters were teachers. My brother is a dean of business at [university in southeast]. He has his PhD in organizational behavior. So I steered clear of whatever they were doing. If they took Spanish, I took French. They all went into teaching; I went into math and technology. I vowed I would never teach, but I have, I have. I just didn’t aspire to it. I aspired to charting my own course.

The antecedent event or influence led to a conscious, and often powerful, acknowledgement to the self that leading was achievable, attractive, or worthwhile. It represented the part of the process where the participant considered the concept and role of leader and decided that he or she has the capacity to be a leader. For Participant 16, it represented a way to carve an independent identity from her family, a family filled primarily with educators. Leading an information technology team was unclaimed ground in her family, providing her an opportunity for differentiation, and significance.

**Acknowledging**

As part of the process of leader self-identity development, acknowledgement is simply claiming the possibility that one was or could be a leader. Again, the time between the antecedent event and the eventual acknowledgement of *self as leader*, varied widely with many of the participants not applying the title of leader to themselves until well into their careers. For example, Participant 9, a 50-year-old woman, described the antecedent events that lead to her eventual acknowledgement of herself as a leader as
occurring during a period of working closely with a VP over a few months. She recalled:

I remember thinking of myself as a leader after a few months in my first job in financial aid. I was a financial aid counselor and I had a director over me who was the VP for the department. He would skip over my director and come to me for questions on specifics. The more I worked on that and with him, he would tell me that when before my supervisor retired, he wanted to go ahead and promote me over her so that I could learn her job. It wasn’t until I worked with him that I was able to stretch my wings. I felt, for the first time, that I could do the work required of a leader—meet those responsibilities. And that is when I started really becoming a leader.

Similarly, Participant 7, a 38-year-old man, captured the connection between antecedent events and eventual acknowledgement of leadership when he described a career-changing event that occurred during his early 20s.

I had specific plans to continue with my graduate degree and a family crisis happened with the unexpected loss of my father. It was a difficult time emotionally and financially and I had to make some decisions that included withdrawing from school for a time. I ended up going and working at a business of a close family friend to make some money for tuition. I had no intentions of working in that particular industry but the more I was there and surrounded by really good people, especially good leaders, the more I thought “I could do this.” And I began to see that being a leader was really something that I think I wanted to be.

In these examples and throughout participant narratives, there were clear connections about what being a leader was and an awareness of the possibility of being like that person who demonstrated leadership. Even if the actual title of leader was not immediately evoked or claimed, all participants recalled when they first experienced the example of leadership and when they began to think of leadership as a phenomenon, experience, or possibility.

Aspiring

As illustrated in Participant 7’s closing comment immediately above, the
acknowledgement of leadership was quickly followed by an aspiration for leadership.

And this connection was found in the majority of the interviews. For example, revisiting Participant 4’s recollection of youth group leader, “Rob’s” influence on him in his church group, the participant further shared:

I decided shortly thereafter, or maybe right on the spot that I wanted to make Rob’s prediction about me come true. And I hadn’t really thought about this in years until I got your questions, but I think that very event led me to the career path that I eventually took. It shaped so many early decisions in my career. I wanted to be an influential, respected, and effective leader—just like Rob. Kind of like self-fulfilling prophecy—or maybe Rob-fulfilling prophecy!

Similarly, Participant 6, a 58-year-old man who did not make that formal acknowledgement that he was a leader until well into his mid-thirties, recalls an antecedent event of receiving a promotion and how this sparked both an acknowledgement of leadership and fueled an aspiration to be a good leader. He recalled:

I was working at a school as the Director of Student Services dealing with jobs, helping students get jobs, activities... and the new director was brought in. For some reason, we connected fairly quickly. After a short time of working together, he asked me to become the Academic Dean. And that was the first time I thought, “I don’t know, but they must see something in me.” I didn’t see it at that time. I was in my mid-thirties and I had done some coaching and things like that but then that happened and they saw something and I took the job and I think that was the first time when I thought I could do it. I wanted to lead. I wanted to supervise...The director saw something in me and that made me feel pretty good. I remember during that time that I made a decision to not only be a leader, but to be a really good leader—and to work hard to develop the skills that this would require.

Participant 6’s recollection also illustrated another common element in the process of identity development; one that focused on the acquisition of skills, knowledge and experience in order to fulfill the charge of leadership as described in the next sub-section.
Acquiring

After the acknowledgement of the concept of self as leader and an aspirational connection to pursuing leadership, participants then described a period of skill development. For example, Participant 5, a 65-year-old woman, described a sustained period of learning and development to prepare her for roles of increasing responsibility in her new career path.

After I had made the decision that I was going to be a leader, I took every opportunity I could to become exposed to the roles that I aspired to be in the future. I would ask lots of questions about what this person or that person did on a typical day. What types of problems did they have to solve? I’d ask to sit in, whenever it was appropriate, on special meetings or workgroups discussing things that were required of that next level of leadership. I took additional courses in higher education leadership. I joined a couple of professional groups to get a broader perspective. I read as much as I could about various aspects of the job. I guess it was just this period of intensive learning that really equipped me for the job that I had but also prepared me for the jobs that I wanted. I was fortunate to have a mentor that would answer every question and who rarely said “no” when I wanted to be a part of something.

Similarly, Participant 11, a 44-year-old woman, shared that her leadership journey was characterized by a period of intensive learning and training. She noted:

Once I decided that I was going to move from being a team member to being a leader, I thought there would be a smooth transition. After all, I had high technical skill and it was this skill that got me on the radar for the promotion to begin with. I quickly realized that I wasn’t as equipped for that part of the job as I was with the technical parts of the job. There was so much I needed to learn about getting the team to move forward, how to set a direction, how to implement strategy, how to evaluate progress…all those big things that leaders are responsible for. I then worked hard to learn what I could from other leaders that I respected and to be a fly on the wall—to observe others who were leading in ways that I just felt intuitively was the right way. There wasn’t money in the budget to take any external training or attend conferences about leadership in [my field] so I had to learn this way. And I read a lot. I mean a lot about leadership. And I asked others to give me recommendations on what I should read to help me be a better leader. I still do this—ask people what they are reading, what I should be reading, what I should be learning.
Applying

In tandem with the acquisition of leadership skills, knowledge, and experiences, participant narratives also described periods where new learning was consciously applied on the job, suggesting a trial-and-error process through which they continued to hone their skills, accept new challenges, and expand their knowledge and competencies. For example, Participant 13, a 34-year-old woman, noted an intensive process of applying leadership skills during her college experience:

At college, I was involved in student government. I learned a lot about group process and leading groups. I was also working at [retail store] and joined the national leadership honors society where I had the chance to go to a leadership conference my junior year at college. This was the first time I was involved in an actual leadership development activity. I also wrote a paper and presented it at a conference and was awarded academic achievement in my major when I graduated. When I was working at [retail store] I went from sale associate, to lead cashier—like a manager—and I did scheduling for the other cashiers. Then I became an office manager. Throughout this period of my career I was just putting into action all the things I had learned from my prior leadership experiences in junior high and high school and later in college. When I got the university, I received several promotions and eventually was promoted to director—three promotions in nine years. And with each job, I was conscious about taking advantage of learning opportunities and solving problems and trying new approaches that I would eventually need to use in the next job.

Participant 5, a 65-year-old woman, shared a similar experience of applying new learning in the domain of leadership and growing in both her confidence and clarity as a leader:

During my first few months as an RA at [university], I had to learn quickly how to be assertive with residents—confronting behavior, addressing code violations, being the authority that told them stuff that they didn’t necessarily like or want to hear. I had several situations occur in this first year that really challenged me and gave me the opportunity to solve problems and develop better leadership skills. I learned a great deal of how to be a leader during that time period. I asked a lot of questions and I relied on both my supervisor and fellow RAs to figure things out. The more challenges I successfully managed, the more I wanted to learn and tackle.
Participant 5 demonstrated a common element of the process of identity development—
honing and expanding leadership skills. With each successful challenge that was met,
additional challenges and experiences were available to test and grow her ever-expanding
leadership skill set.

**Adapting**

As new skills and knowledge were applied, participants also described times
when they had to adjust their style, approach, and methods to address unintended
consequences, sub-standard outcomes, inefficiencies, or changes in systems, structures,
environments, and staff. For example, Participant 1, a 45-year-old woman, described a
period where she had long relied on a skill of engaging and entertaining clients through a
disarming mix of humor and welcoming behaviors. When she obtained a new position,
this highly social approach to working with clients was off-putting to the new supervisor,
requiring her to adjust. She reported:

> What had worked for me in previous positions, engaging and entertaining
> clients—particularly those that were not all that engaging—had become a
deficiency. My new supervisor did not want me to be the social and
> entertainment coordinator. I think he saw it, to some degree, as unprofessional.
> He said I seemed too familiar with clients and he asked me to reel it in a bit. And
> I did. There were many adjustments like this that I had to make to be successful
> in the new job—or more to the point—with the new supervisor.

Several participants shared periods of adapting, both through the initial questions
documenting their leadership journeys but also in response to the question: *How have
your views of leadership changed over time?* The majority of participants described a
process of moving from being an individual contributor to being a delegator and leader of
others as significant milestones in their leadership development. For example,
Participant 4, a 52-year-old man, illustrated this theme when he shared:

I think the biggest thing that changed for me over my years at [previous employment] was that I had to move from being an individual contributor to a team leader. I was given several promotions because of the level of my individual contributions but it became clear in my first few months on the job that this would no longer be enough. I can distinctly remember writing my first progress report for my division. I started by writing it from my perspective—what I had done in the first 30 days—just like I had written many progress reports as an individual contributor. But there were several sections asking for collective outcomes and input from team members. And I just didn’t have the information. I had to backtrack and ask for reports from my team and I was clumsy about it. It took a couple of months for me to adapt my style but eventually, the reports were written by my unit leaders and I just assembled them together and submitted. This was a defining moment for me in terms of having to adapt and change to be successful as a young leader.

Key characteristics in the adapting phase involved adjusting to changing conditions, people, and responsibilities in order to continue to maintain the level of success that lead to the leadership opportunities in the first place. Several participants suggested that adapting remained a critical competency for them throughout their careers. This tracks with D. T. Hall’s (2004) description of adaptability as a key meta-competency for leaders.

Assimilating

Participants shared periods of integrating and synthesizing their leader identities in response to changes and adjustments in skill, learning, knowledge, changing conditions, and contexts both in response to the questions designed to document their leadership journeys but also in response to the question: What, if anything, did you have to overcome or change to see yourself as a leader? Participants used several words to approximate the concept of identity assimilation including evolving, integrating, and synthesizing. Participant 5, a 65-year-old woman, described it as a process of editing and
She noted that, although her core leader identity remained relatively stable over time, she did edit aspects of her approach as she grew and learned. Similarly, Participant 2, a 38-year-old woman, described an evolving view of leadership in general, and herself as a leader, in particular, when she shared:

I think [my views of leadership] have evolved, I don’t think I really consciously thought of leadership but I think I’ve gone from not having a real conscious view of leadership to now having that view, particularly in respect to seeing myself as a leader. I do think I’ve looked at other people and have had judgments about whether or not they were effective leaders and I do think that being in a leadership role my assessments of other leaders is less critical than it used to be. That has evolved over time. Before, I would be very critical of leaders in the respect that they would be expected to say the right things, do the right things, make the right decisions, and know the right decisions because they are the leader. And now, having evolved in leadership roles, that has definitely changed and now it is more of a collaborative thing. The leader can be anyone at anytime. It should be able to be shared amongst all of the people who are involved. So I think that’s changed a lot because I have the responsibility now so I have more understanding of other leaders and their decisions.

Participant 12, a 60-year-old man, shared his own evolving leadership, suggesting an ongoing process of identity assimilation. He noted:

Early in my career, I had a job where I was judged on my personal performance and there wasn’t much incentive to work as part of a team. Sales is often like that. So I set goals for myself that were very personal. After a year in this job, I noticed that when I did share parts of my responsibilities with others, I ended up getting more done and done well. And I helped others do the same. So I started to act more like a team member even though I was being evaluated on my personal sales performance. That idea of being a team member regardless of the circumstance is something that is now a big part of who I am as a leader. I also had a situation of being part of a project team that failed in a really big way. We missed our mark performance-wise by a long shot. It was embarrassing. And I learned a lot of it had to do with the lack of communication ability of the project leader. I thought of myself as a good communicator at the time, but this experience fueled a commitment to being the best communicator that I could—so that I would never lead like [supervisor] did. It changed everything about my leadership and how I see myself—even to this day.

In his case, good experiences including getting more done as a team member, and bad
experiences such as the bad project communicator, were used to modify his approach to leadership and eventually became inexorably integrated to his self-view as a leader.

**Self-identity as a Cyclical Process**

As each leader defined their leadership journey, it was noteworthy that in most all cases, the progression appeared somewhat linear, moving from the idea of leadership, to wanting to be a good leader, to developing required skills, attaining useful experiences and knowledge, and applying that experience and knowledge to real-world problems. What was unexpected was how participants’ stories described an evolving, iterative, cyclical process rather than a fixed and unidirectional one. It appeared that participants made several acknowledgements about leadership throughout their career. Although the initial acknowledgement, for example, *I could see myself as a leader*, may have helped begin a process for leader identity development, what emerged from the data is that there were several subsequent acknowledgements that began the process anew. For example, Participant 5, a 65-year-old man, who, in the section under acquisition, described an intense period of observing and learning, provided an example of how the entire process of self-identity development is cyclical and recurring.

I guess my journey, as you put it, takes a similar path each time I want to change my career direction or go after a new opportunity. For example, a few years ago, I had a conversation with my boss about my career plans. She asked me what did I want to do in the future career-wise and whether I could see myself in her role when she retired. I had not really thought about that before she asked me and I was flattered that she believed in me [Acknowledging]. I guess I started having conversations with her about the possibility—which eventually just became the plan and I was looking forward to taking on those new responsibilities [Aspiring]. I really took advantage of the time we worked together to learn everything about her job that I needed to know…[Acquiring].
Participant 5 further illustrated the recurring nature of application and adaptation when she continued:

So I learned as much as I could and, it became sort of urgent a few months in because she had decided that she was going to leave sooner than we had originally thought. So she gave me opportunities to lead committees and complete some reports that I would have to complete in the new position [Applying]. She helped me by reviewing my work and then showing me what I needed to change or improve upon [Adapting].

As the process began and progressed, again and again, based on the various career aspirations of the participants, their leader identity would be further expanded, clarified, and integrated. This is perhaps best illustrated in the narrative of Participant 3, a 68-year-old man who had begun his leadership career as the youngest officer involved in combat during the Tet Offensive. His narrative describes a progressive journey toward refining his self-identity beginning with learning emotional intelligence from a family comprised exclusively of women (i.e., four sisters and a mother), to his time in Vietnam, through a period of serving as a chaplain, and later as a university leader. Through each cycle of acknowledging, aspiring, acquiring, applying, and adapting over the course of his varied career, he describes how each cycle led to a greater understanding of who he is as a leader.

I guess you could say that every path I took as a leader led me to a better understanding of myself. When I got back from Vietnam, I received the Silver Star, the highest honor you can receive without being dead. And here I was in college when they were burning flags and caskets—and I am a decorated veteran. I learned during that period about the value of different perspectives. I could see their point and, since I had been there literally on the front lines, I could see the other side. And this was a powerful initial lesson for me as a leader. There are many different ways to see a situation. I keep a prism on my desk that was given to me by [my supervisor] because it is a reminder that you have to look at things from different perspectives—and others will as well. So after college, I went to get my masters degree at seminary—that was my next goal. And then I decided
that I wanted to take on different ministries throughout the country so I would learn what I could and prepare myself to do that. And then I taught autistic children and this led to wanting to lead in the field of education. And the teaching then led to wanting to teach and lead at the university. And the same lesson played out and became clearer in each role. Each ministry and position was different and required something different of me and helped to strengthen some things I already believed but also to discover and learn some new things about myself. Someone looking on the outside may think that I jumped around a bit—but there is a method here—everything seemed to combine to put me exactly where I am supposed to be today.

Participant 13, a 34-year-old woman, also illustrates how new acknowledgements were formed that prompted the cycle to continue. She described a time when she was being considered for a promotion as one of the most influential periods in her journey as a leader:

The most impactful moment happened when I was Assistant Director. There were a lot of things that the team I was part of was not satisfied with regarding our current leadership. When I was being considered for director, I had to really think about what this meant for my team. The promotion was a defining moment for me to think about what I wanted to do in my professional career and what I wanted to do for my team, and what additional learning I needed to complete in order to be equipped to handle the new responsibilities. I had to think about the time commitment, and other things—and to really see myself in the new role. Once I could see myself in the role, I was able to get some excitement about it and to pull my team together and do what was required to be successful.

The participant described an event (promotion opportunity) that served as an antecedent for a new level of acknowledgement. In this case, it was to be able to see herself in the role of Director with its additional challenges, responsibilities, and duties. She describes a period where she had to think deliberately about what this would mean to her, her team, her schedule, and the impact on the life she had created as the Assistant Director. Once she could see herself in the new role, she then described an excitement that came with the aspiration to move toward the promotion.
**Gender Differences**

One compelling finding of this inquiry was the initial use of the word *leader* as a self-construal description between the male and the female participants. Although, as described earlier, both male and female participants had varying time periods during which they claimed the title, the women, without exception, reported having begun a career and serving in roles that involved leadership responsibilities well before describing themselves as leaders. For example, Participant 2, a 38-year-old woman, noted: “I didn’t think of it as being a leader, I don’t think. I don’t think I ever really saw myself as being a leader until I started getting into formal leadership titles, honestly. I never thought what I was doing was leadership.” She further noted:

Well, I will say that, even to this day and the job that I have now, one of the reasons why, just reflecting back, I never saw things I did as leadership or leadership qualities, is because I always identified leadership with people who wanted to be the head of things--people who actively wanted to be the president of this class or to be the head of the yearbook staff. So people who actively went after leadership opportunities, whereas I am a little different than that in the sense that my leadership journey has kind of been one where other people have identified me as a good leader and then proposed to me leadership positions so I have had to evolve to see myself as a leader because, in my head, I never initiated leadership roles. In high school, I have a big personality, but I was in a lot of bullying situations so a lot of what I did in high school was sort of to keep attention from being on me, as much as possible.

Similarly, Participant 16, a 61-year-old woman, described still having issues with applying the title of *leader* to herself.

I have gotten more comfortable very recently with seeing myself as a leader, and a lot of this came from my participation in [the university’s leadership development program]. Before, I saw myself more as an advocate, a problem-solver, and a connector. I still see myself in this way but now I know that these are all elements of leadership and that it is okay that I use this label to define myself. I’m not sure why I had such resistance through much of my career—but I went well over 40 years without using this title to describe myself and I have been in situations where I had responsibilities for multiple groups of people. I guess I
thought about leadership roles as being hierarchical in nature. Something about it, or maybe more accurately, my preconceived notions about what it was, made it difficult for me to use it when describing myself.

Seven of the eight women who participated in the study shared similar stories of initially rejecting or not seeing the applicability of the title of leader to what they were doing even though most were quick to identify specific behaviors they routinely demonstrated to influence, guide, and develop followers, projects, and programs. The one exception, Participant 13, a 34-year-old woman, shared that she attributed the use of the term early on as part of her experiences with girl scouts. She shared that the Girl Scout materials had been revised to reflect leadership throughout the curriculum and guidelines and she can remember the words being used frequently in her earliest Girl Scout experiences. She attributed this to her early acknowledgement of self as leader. This gives more credence to the need to evoke and apply the word leader and to create deliberate leader experiences as early in a person’s lifetime as possible, even if the person eventually chooses not to forge a path to leadership.

In contrast to the seven female participants who were well into their careers before they used the term as a self-descriptive adjective, only two of the male participants delayed applying the title leader to themselves. Specifically, six of the eight men in the sample claimed the title of leader relatively early in their careers, demonstrating a connection between the work they were doing (organizing, influencing, guiding) as leadership. Although the scope of this project and the sample size of the participants is too low to generalize findings to a broader population, process and timing differences regarding when male and female leaders first begin to apply a leader self-construct would be an important topic for further research. In particular, research that identifies the
common elements that serve as barriers to men and women evoking the title of leader should be examined with consideration given to identifying the sources and causal factors leading to those differences.

**Differences in Leader Effectiveness**

The data revealed very little, if any, difference in the process of self-identity development between the higher effectiveness cohort and the lower effectiveness cohort. Both groups revealed similar pathways for self-identity development and described journeys that were aligned with the phased, cyclical process (i.e., antecedent, acknowledging, aspiring, acquiring, applying, adapting, and assimilating). The narratives of each cohort revealed elements that were aligned to each of the recurring steps of the process.

Similarly, data from the two cohorts was largely consistent across the questions designed to examine components of leader self-identity (i.e., self-construct, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-consistency along with self-descriptiveness, importance, and certainty of self-views). The majority of participants in both cohorts shared confidence in their ability to execute the role of leader effectively (leader self-efficacy) and the majority of both cohorts felt good about their contributions, skills, and knowledge about leadership (leader self-esteem). There were, however, some differences in sub-elements of identity. These differences were found in the clarity of the self-descriptions of leadership, the volume, quantity, and variety of prior leadership experiences, and the use of individual versus collective pronouns in describing the leader role. Each of these differences are examined in more detail below.
Clarity and Certainty of Leader Role

The first element of self-identity that appeared markedly different between the lower effectiveness cohort and the higher effectiveness cohort was the clarity in which the two groups defined their leadership identity, differentiators, approach and philosophy. These areas of self-identity were solicited through several of the questions including: 
What equips you to be a successful university leader? What leadership skill do you possess that you believe differentiates you from other leaders? and Briefly describe your overall leadership philosophy—what values and principles are most important to you as a leader? The majority of the members of the higher effectiveness cohort (seven of the eight) were very certain in their responses to the questions and were clear about their leadership philosophy and point of view.

In contrast, six of the eight participants in the lower effectiveness cohort exhibited difficulty in providing responses to these questions. Prior research has shown that certainty of the self-concept in a particular domain is an important part of identity (e.g., Swann & Pelham, 2002). Although the qualitative methodology and sample size limit the range of conclusions that can be drawn from this difference, the finding tracks with prior qualitative research differentiating certainty as an element of a strong self-identity (Pelham & Swann, 1989).

Volume and Variety of Leadership Experience

One finding differentiating the lower effectiveness cohort from members of the higher effectiveness cohort was in the description of leadership experiences. The higher effectiveness group, on average, cited approximately six defining leadership experiences
as part of their leadership narrative and an average of five formal leadership development experiences. In contrast, members of the lower effectiveness cohort identified an average of two examples in their narratives regarding defining leadership experiences and an average of two prior former leader development experiences. Although this difference could be attributable to sampling error or other intervening variables (e.g., expressiveness, descriptiveness, extroversion) rather than lower or less clear leader self-identity, the finding does deserve further investigation particularly given research that shows the quality, quantity, and intensity of prior leadership experiences to be associated with strong leader self-identities (Hiller, 2005).

**Individual versus Collective Pronoun Use**

Interestingly, one additional unexpected finding that may suggest differences in the higher effectiveness and lower effectiveness cohorts was observed in response to the question: *How do you describe what you do for a living to others?* Designed to help further elucidate the participant’s leader self-concept, the results showed that six of the eight members of the higher effectiveness cohort used collective pronouns like *us, we,* and *our* to describe their individual role as leaders while six of the eight members of the lower effectiveness cohort used more individual pronouns such as *I, me,* or *my.*

Although the sample size and methodology limits full or more rigorous exploration of this observation, use of collective and individualistic pronouns by different categories of leaders tracks with prior research. For example, R. Johnson et al., (2012) and MacDonald et al., (2008) found connections with collectivist and interdependent orientations as elements of effective leadership. Similarly, early work by Brewer &
Gardner (1996) also found positive effects by priming collective self-identities (i.e., we schemas), suggesting a dynamic self-concept that is sensitive to a variety of priming conditions.

Summary

The coding and analysis of the 16 interviews revealed a process of leader identity development that was grounded in the data. Retrieval of the most frequently cited categories of leader self-identity development paired with a common sequence of these developmental considerations suggested that there is a cyclical, ongoing, and phased process of leader self-identity development.

Figure 1: Cyclical Process of Leader Self-Identity Development (LSID) Model. Represents the ongoing and cyclical nature of six-phased process of leader self-identity development as described by the respondents.
As illustrated in figure 1, the process of leader self-identity development begins with an antecedent event, experience, or relationship that prompts the cognitive consideration that leadership is possible. Referenced in this model as acknowledging, this phase comprises a deliberate, internal discovery, awareness, or understanding about leadership resulting from the antecedent event or relationship.

The aspiring phase involves putting value and intention to the personal pursuit of leadership based on that acknowledgement. This leads to the phases of acquiring (the pursuit of opportunities, experiences, and skills that inform that aspiration), applying (the deliberate application of skills, knowledge and experiences in a real-world leadership setting, and assimilating (clarifying, refining, or modifying self-views of leadership based on the lessons learned from applying those skills). This model and the corresponding emergent grounded theory of leader self-identity development are further considered in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter 5 expounds on the model of leader self-identity development introduced in the previous chapter along with the corresponding leader self-identity development theory with particular emphasis on the implications of the theory for leader development strategies and considerations. By exploring how leaders actually become leaders, it is hoped that new methods for leader development can emerge based on a better understanding of this cognitive process.

The intended value of this grounded theory of leader self-identity development is that the results suggest methods that are founded on internal cognitive structures and processes that can be deliberately targeted in order to help a leader modify and adapt to the shifting terrain of leadership. The cognitive roots of this model of leadership development may facilitate leader agility and adaptability. Through reflective practices and other interventions targeted to address cognitive self-views, leaders can expand their thinking about leadership in general and themselves as leaders. If a leader can be guided to think differently about a leader challenge, he can act differently. And if her thinking expands by thinking differently, her repertoire of leader behaviors expands.

Rather than traditional leader development models that rely on fixed content and models that are often non-transferrable to other contexts and conditions, cognitive leader
development can be directed to help influence and mold cognitive frameworks that are iterative, adaptable, scalable and applicable to a broader set of challenges, contexts and conditions. By harnessing the cognitive views of the self to create more agile and adaptable leadership, it is hoped that leaders can be more effectively equipped for the increasing complexities of colleges and universities and other industries where complex relationships, conditions, and challenges are present.

**Summary of the Results**

The results of the qualitative inquiry suggest common elements across participant narratives. These common events are summarized in Figure 2. Each leader identified some initiating event or circumstance that lead to increased awareness about the possibility of leadership (antecedent). For many, this insight came very early, even during elementary school. For others, this insight came later; often well after the beginning of a career. What is most important is that this antecedent event triggered a cognitive notion that made the idea of leading others attractive, possible, or need fulfilling. This antecedent event, or cluster of events, led to an acknowledgement that the person could see him or herself in the role of leader (acknowledging). This acknowledgement varied from participant to participant but had the common feature of expressing some type of intention that played out in choices and actions over time. This acknowledgement then led to an aspirational desire; an intention (aspiring). For example, after the acknowledgement that the participant admired her father for his influence, charisma, and ability to organize teams around a shared goal, the participant then aspired to be like her father or to have an impact on others like that of her father.
The process of leader self-identity development continued through a period of skill and experience acquisition (*acquiring*), application of skills, knowledge and experience in the leader role (*applying*), and adapting approaches, behaviors, and even self-identity in response to trial-and-error learning (*adapting*). Finally, the process ends with *assimilating*—where the leader clarifies, revises, or refines his or her self-identity in response to the cumulative effect of the other phases of the self-identity development model.

![Figure 2: Actions by phase of the Leader Self-Identity Development (LSID) Model.](image)

These actions emerged through the grounded theory investigation and represented shared events, activities, and milestones that participants described as being part of the process of constructing self-identities as leaders.
Discussion of the Results

The model and corresponding grounded theory of leader self-identity development (LSID) is aligned with several research findings regarding the affect of several factors associated with leadership emergence. D. T. Hall (2004), for example, suggested that key experiences in a person’s career are among the most useful in predicting career and leader development. He posited that critical events and role transitions, in particular, often serve as triggers for personal exploration and reflection that, in turn, may increase the leader’s self-awareness. Among these critical events are failures and setbacks that can often be powerful antecedents for deep self-reflection. His considerations were supported by the proposed LSID theory as participants identified key experiences and relationships as central to their development as leaders. Further, they were also able to identify failures and missteps among those developmental milestones that helped them to refocus and refine their leader approach. The recurring nature of the LSID theory and associated six-phase model suggest this process of ongoing refinement of self-views, skills, and experiences.

With regard to the acknowledging and aspiring phases of the proposed model, the acts of claiming a leader identity and sharing aspirations to become a leader appear to be a central consideration for future leadership pursuits. DeRue & Ashford (2010) suggested that leader self-identity was co-constructed in organizations and began when leaders claimed, and organizations granted or facilitated this identity. They posited that the reciprocal process of claiming and granting between organizations and leaders facilitated the deep-structure identity of leaders. Examples of this interaction were
present throughout the majority of narratives collected for this investigation. Participants described seminal moments involving conversations with key decision makers about what they wanted to do and the role they wanted to achieve. These discussions often led to opportunities (e.g., stretch experiences, promotions, transfers, training opportunities, and support) provided by their employers to grow and achieve the claimed role.

The recurring, cyclical nature of LSID model was an unexpected finding of the project. The process illustrated in Figure 2 earlier in this chapter was not just applicable to the participant’s first foray into the leadership domain. Rather, the process explained the very nature of leader self-identity development over multiple years and over entire careers. New antecedent events prompted the cycle to begin again, new aspirations were set, new skills and experiences were acquired, applied and adapted, and new aspects of self-identity were incorporated. The interviews suggest that this cycle may occur several times over a person’s career.

For example, a leader may decide that he or she wants to lead in a different context in response to a highly resonant example or opportunity. The individual acknowledges the potential for transitioning into a new leadership role and he or she aspires to make changes to be successful in that new role. This leads to a period of acquiring new skills to help position the leader for her new focus, applying those skills, and adapting to learning from trial and error. The leader eventually assimilates his or her leader self-identity to one more aligned with the new role and then describes his or her style, approach to leadership, and self-concept very differently than when first starting his or her career. With each antecedent or spark, the cycle begins anew.
Given that the average age of participants was 51 and the ages ranged from 37 to 68, the sample was particularly useful for describing the process of leader self-identity development over time. The average length of employment was 28 years and the average number of years of leadership experience was 20 years, addressing a limitation in much of the leadership research cited earlier that relied on student samples to examine leadership events and experiences that the students may not have had. Given that very little research has focused on leader development across a leader’s lifespan (Drath, 2001, Lord & R. J. Hall, 2005), the length of leadership careers represented in the sample provides a unique insight into leader emergence and changes over time.

**Comparison with Prior Research Using Grounded Theory**

As referenced in the literature review, there has only been one other grounded theory study on the development of a leadership identity. Komives et al. (2005) used the methodology to construct a six-stage developmental process for identity development. The researchers collected data from 13 students who were identified as highly relational by faculty at a large mid-Atlantic research university. In the first interview of Siedman’s (2013) three interview series (i.e., life history, detailed exploration of the experience, and reflection on the meaning), the researchers analyzed each student’s response to the question: *How have you become the person you are now?* They then focused on segments that evoked or described leadership identity emergence. This is similar to the initial questions employed in the present study that asked them to recount their earliest recollections of being considered a leader and their leadership journey since that time to
the present. The researchers found that the student leaders progressed through six stages in a linear and non-recurring fashion:

- **Stage 1: Awareness**: Becoming aware that leaders exist.
- **Stage 2: Exploration/Engagement**: Immersion in group experiences, usually to make friends and learning to engage with others.
- **Stage 3: Leader Identified**: The process of viewing and understanding the hierarchical nature of leadership.
- **Stage 4: Leadership Differentiated**: Viewing leadership also as often non-hierarchical or positional, shared and collective.
- **Stage 5: Generativity**: A commitment to developing leadership in others, prioritizing group objectives.
- **Stage 6: Integration/Synthesis**: Acknowledging the personal capacity for leadership and declaring the leader identity, even without a positional leader role.

As briefly examined in the literature review, there were several methodological issues with the selection criteria employed by Komives et al. (2005). The purposive sample was comprised of 13 student leaders who were identified by faculty as effective and highly relational. Less effective or less relational participants were not examined. Further, the very nature of the subjects limited the inquiry into leader self-identity development as the majority had not yet entered employment or led others in a real-world setting. They had not experienced the various complex challenges associated with full-time employment as a leader.
With those limitations in mind, the six-stage approach to identity development presented by Komives et al. (2005) did reveal some interesting connections and contrasts to the proposed leader self-identity development model that emerged from the present grounded theory. First, the researchers’ \textit{Stage 1: Awareness}, suggested an initial cognitive connection that may precede all cognitive connections in the leadership domain—an acknowledgement that leaders exist in the world. Although this initial awareness seems probable and necessary for a person to even have leaders and leadership as part of a cognitive framework, an awareness that leaders exist in the world does not imply that the participant can be a leader or that the participant even wants to be a leader. Their model posited that this part of the process comes through subsequent stages of being in groups and making friends (\textit{Stage 2: Exploration/Engagement}), understanding the hierarchical and positional nature of leadership (\textit{Stage 3: Leader Identified}), appreciating the differences in leadership style and approach (\textit{Stage 4: Leadership Differentiated}), and a commitment to build leadership capacity in others (\textit{Stage 5: Generativity}). Their model suggested that the intention to lead came from these experiences and culminated in a final phase (\textit{Stage 6: Integration and Synthesis}).

Both the theory suggested by Komives et al. (2005) and the LSID theory include a phase where individuals become aware that leaders exist in the world. In the current LSID theory, this phase is considered an antecedent event while the acknowledging phase involves the participant considering the possibility of self as leader. Komives et al. suggest that this consideration of self as leader comes after engaging in group experiences and obtaining knowledge about leadership and hierarchies. The LSID model
suggests that this acknowledgement paired with an aspiration to lead are what typically would motivate an individual to pursue leadership in the first place. Although many may come to see leadership as viable through the process Komives and her colleagues suggest, it is an outcome of group work and knowledge rather than the impetus leadership.

Unlike the current model, Komives et al. (2005) describe a linear and non-recurring process that seems to be specific to nascent leaders. The model does not reflect the impact of changes in context, conditions, experiences, and knowledge nor does it imply a recurring evolution of leader identity. Further, it does not address leader self-identity changes over a career. In contrast, the current model explains the initial leadership cognitive connection and also explains subsequent acknowledgements about leadership made throughout a person’s career, along with the process that culminates, time and again, in assimilation.

Although not designed to explore the process of leader self-identity development per se, the other grounded theory included in the literature review deserves revisiting as it also suggested developmental milestones in the process of leader identity development. Specifically, Hartnett’s (1994) grounded theory investigation of relational leadership among 13 women community college presidents. Hartnett’s work suggested that women community college presidents had to deconstruct and reconstruct their understanding of what it meant to be a leader using relationships with role models, mentors, friends, family and followers to organize these reconstructions. Her theory, reconstructed as relationized leadership, posited that relationships with strong female role models during childhood helped reframe potential for leadership in contrast to prevailing male-centric views of the
time. As these leaders entered adulthood, early experiences and cognitions about leadership would likely lay dormant if not for the influence of a strong relationship with a mentor which served as a trigger for greater self-actualization as a leader. She concluded that early childhood leadership experiences, strong female role models, a mentor, and a focus on relationships as common milestones across leader experiences. Contrasted with the present grounded theory, both Hartnett’s inquiry and the present inquiry both identify the importance of role models, mentors, family and friends in helping to create understanding about leadership. Unlike Hartnett’s theory, the presence of a female role-model was not found to be a primary antecedent for leadership or the participants in this study. In fact, the majority (seven of eight) of female leaders interviewed in the study identified male role models as having the most influence. The sample size prohibited drawing any definitive conclusions and perhaps an expanded study would support Hartnett’s theory that relationships with strong female role models is a more frequently occurring antecedent event for female college and university leaders.

Theoretical Implications and Perspectives

The emerging theory of leader self-identity development advances, and is advanced by, consideration of complimentary theories and perspectives. This includes consideration of symbolic interactionism, a compatible theoretical perspective often incorporated in grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2014). Similarly, core self-evaluations, self-monitoring, and implicit leadership theories can provide theoretical links to leader self-identity emergence. The influence of previous leadership experiences, a variable also associated in prior leader identity research (Hiller, 2005), is also an
important consideration in the context of study findings. Each of these theoretical perspectives and constructs are examined below.

**Symbolic Interactionism.** Symbolic interactionism is an inductive theoretical perspective, rooted in pragmatism, which interprets social realities as constructions of the actions, interactions, and sensemaking of individuals. The perspective is dynamic, iterative, and evolving and is predicated on the agency of an individual to interact with the world, draw meaning, and use this meaning to act and to manifest and reproduce social structure (Charmaz, 2014). Leadership is a particularly applicable phenomenon in which to apply the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism given that it is a phenomenon that is not, in and of itself, a tangible construct. Leadership is viewed primarily through interactions with others (Yukl, 2006). It is primarily symbolic in nature and represents a social construction (Bartölke, 1987). The social construction of leadership may also include reconstructions as leaders re-envision and make meaning of their past, their present, or their desired future (Charmaz, 2014).

In consideration of the emergent grounded theory of leader self-identity development, the symbolic interactionist’s perspective was not applied to the data until after the broad categories had been revealed through the thematic coding process. In considering the various elements (i.e., acknowledging, aspiring, acquiring, applying, adapting, and assimilating), questions borne from a symbolic interactionist’s perspective were then applied. For example, what, if any process is implied in the categories? Symbolic interactionism assumes process (Charmaz, 2014) and this question helped to reveal the natural six-staged process grounded in the data. Similarly, the question of how
interactions with others and the meaning applied to those interactions impact the participant’s self-concept revealed that, in most cases, the antecedent events that preceded the initial and ongoing development of a leader’s self-identity were borne from interactions with role models, coaches, peers, challenging assignments and included interpretations of those events that led to acknowledging the possibility of self as leader.

The research also revealed another precept of symbolic interactionism: How an individual interprets and labels an experience and reflects on that experience can change their perspective and even their identity. Charmaz (2014) noted that “renaming oneself as a particular type of person can make profound changes in self-concept, beliefs, and actions.” (p. 272). This is evident in the narratives of the participants. When the antecedent event led to the acknowledgment of leadership as a possibility, particularly the acknowledgement of self as leader or potential leader, it sparked the momentum of the process of aspiring, acquiring, applying, adapting, and assimilating. What was most compelling was the observation that once the term leader was evoked as a self-referent; the participants began to interact and interpret subsequent events with this new self-identity. As they acted and interacted in consideration of this leader self-identity, they strengthened and expanded that very identity through choices and experiences. Their views of self as leader took on more import and their constructions of experiences helped to advance that importance.

Charmaz (2014) noted, "Symbolic interactionists view the self both as a continual unfolding process and as a more stable object, the self concept." (p. 268). This duality was clear in the narratives of the participants. Not only did participants describe the
enduring and stable parts of their self-identities, such as guiding principles and core beliefs, they also described an ever-evolving process of identity expansion and refinement.

**Core Self-Evaluations.** The leader self-identity development theory that emerged from this research may suggest that core self-evaluations are correlated with leader self-identity. Originally defined by Judge et al., 1997, core self evaluations (CSE) are those cognitive appraisals that individuals hold about themselves, their value, agency, and worth. Although previously not correlated with leader self-identity, the results of the present study suggest that leaders make core self-evaluations throughout their careers. These self-evaluations were clearly evident in the acknowledgement phase but may be present through all of the six phases of the proposed model. These core self-evaluations appear to link directly to aspiring for new, greater, or different leader experiences. More rigorous study is required to determine if CSE is a predictor of strong leader self-identity development and whether CSE moderates or mediates other phases of the self-identity process.

**Self-Monitoring.** Similar to core self-evaluations, self-monitoring, as first described by Snyder (1974), suggests the process by which people are aware of, evaluate, and control how their views of the self are presented to others. Snyder suggested that individuals with high self-monitoring tendencies are primed to notice the reactions and perceptions of others and to respond accordingly in order to ensure positive interactions and relationships. For the present study, the participant narratives suggested a high degree of self-monitoring; specifically an awareness of how their self-views impacted the
perceptions of others. As shared in chapter 4, the example of a participant who had to adapt her engaging and highly familiar style to the expectations of a new supervisor provided an example of the importance of making continuous self-appraisals. Other narratives revealed a process of doing gut checks, reading non-verbal cues, and being highly attuned to the responses of others to verify that the leader’s intentions and style were being effectively translated to subordinates, superiors, and peers. For the current sample, high self-monitoring appeared to be correlated with the progression of the leader through the six stages of the self-identity development process. As with other theoretical implications, more rigorous research is required to determine an actual connection between self-monitoring and self-identity emergence.

Implicit Leadership Theories. Findings support the category of cognitive theory of leadership known as implicit leadership theories (ILT). ILT is based on perceptions of leaders and leadership that individuals use to process information in the leadership domain. Included in ILT is the categorization of leaders based on cognitive prototypes (Lord et al., 1984; Lord, Brown, Harvey, & R. J. Hall, 2001). Also known as symbolic knowledge structures (Rosch, 1975), these cognitive schemas allow individuals to compare, differentiate, interpret, and place value on leader behaviors and attributes (Konrad & Kranjec, 1997). ILT are represented in all aspects of the proposed six-staged process of leader self-identity development. The very act of acknowledging personal leader potential appears to be linked with the participants’ perceptions of leader prototypes. Antecedent events, in most cases, were constructed by observing people or actions and then categorizing them based on their own implicit understanding of what
constitutes leaders and leadership. As a cognitive theory, ILT permeates other cognitive leadership theories because it acknowledges that individual perceptions and mental maps about who leaders are and how leadership works are inexorably linked. Accordingly, the emergent grounded theory of leader self-identity development proposed in this work would be considered part of the emerging cognitive leadership research field, in general, and among research of implicit leadership theories, in particular.

**Previous leadership experiences.** As one of several variables to self-identity development, Hiller (2005) examined the quantity, quality, and density of previous leadership experience as being positively related to leader self-identity. His study found that targeted components of leader self-identity (i.e., descriptiveness, certainty, and importance) were significantly related to each of the four measures used for previous leadership experience. Specifically, the quantity of experience, assessment, support, and challenge/intensity all appeared to be related to self-identity development. In the current study, participants revealed numerous examples of leadership quantity, as evidenced in the narratives by numerous leadership opportunities, leadership roles, and responsibilities as part of the career pathway. Similarly, participants described routinely engaging in a process of self-assessment to determine any gaps between leadership aspirations and reality. Further, all participants indicated supportive relationships and systems over the course of acquiring, applying, and adapting to new challenges, contexts, and conditions.

One difference in the current research between the higher effectiveness cohort and the lower effectiveness cohort, as described in the previous chapter, involved the quality, quantity, and intensity of prior leadership experiences. Both cohorts described numerous
leadership experiences of sufficient challenge and intensity that served to pull them out of their comfort zones, stretch their capacities, and help them further refine their views of capacity, competency, and worth. However, there was a marked difference between the average numbers of these experiences as documented in the narratives of the higher effectiveness cohort compared to members of the lower effectiveness cohort. Clearly, prior experiences were critical in the forward momentum of the proposed leader self-identity development cycle. Further, perhaps there is an additional link between the quality and quantity of these experiences and the development of an effective leader self-identity.

**Discussion of the Conclusions**

The grounded theory examination of the leader self-identity revealed a common six-staged process of leader self-identity development that is substantially different from the prior grounded theory on leader identity development as proposed by Komives et al. (2005). Specifically, the proposed grounded theory suggests a cyclical and recurring process of leader self-identity development that begins with antecedent events followed by acknowledging the possibility of leadership as valuable, aspiring to pursue leadership, and then beginning a skills development arc of acquiring, applying, and adapting. Culminating each cycle completion is a period of assimilation where new learning is integrated with cognitive frameworks, self-views, and beliefs; an assimilation process that continues throughout a person’s career path. In contrast to Komives et al. (2005), the declaration of leadership interest and capacity is near the beginning of the process as opposed to the final stage as outlined in their model.
Strengthened by the leadership narratives of participants, theoretical constructs including self-monitoring, core self-evaluations, and the quality, quantity, and density of prior leader experiences appear to be associated with the development of a strong leader self-identity. Although more exploration is necessary, there appears to be a few essential elements to help engage the self-identity process and to sustain it over time.

As the connection between leader self-identity and effectiveness is more rigorously tested and evaluated, opportunities for new techniques of leader development should continue to emerge. These new initiatives should consider how to engage each of the various stages of the proposed six-stage grounded theory process in order to better equip leaders for the challenges of college and university leadership appropriate to their self-identity development level. For example, the model and resultant theory suggest that antecedent events move the cycle forward, much like a fulcrum moves a heavy stone. To create future leaders, it is important to engage the process early through mentors, examples, and supportive relationships. The deliberate use of the terms leader and leadership in the early years is particularly important given the resistance that participants, particularly female participants, found in using the terms as self-referents early in their career. Challenging young women, and girls in particular, to exercise their leadership capacity, providing opportunities for leadership early in schools, and then clearly labeling those events and any resulting behaviors as leadership will do much to prime the leader self-identity process for future generations.

In addition to creating more antecedent events for leadership, the model suggests additional developmental interventions for more seasoned or tenured leaders as well. For
individuals who have just begun their leadership careers or are in the process of repositioning their careers in response to a new antecedent event, leader development activities could engage the specific phase that the individual finds him or herself in. Leader development programs could help adult learners to more deliberately examine aspirations, create opportunities to better equip them for skill acquisition, application, and adaptation, and help them consider elements of their own self-identity.

**Reflective Practices as a Link to Self-Identity Development**

Elmuti (2004) suggests that leaders must participate in a process of intensive reflection where they are required to analyze learning, experiences, and training activities to make learning more relevant and sustainable. There are multiple ways to employ a cognitive approach to leader development. The intervention could be as simple as journaling, the construction of capstone learning experiences rooted in identity clarification, requiring After-Event Reviews (AERs), or creating learning activities, scenarios, and simulations that prompt deep analysis and learning. These activities must be structured, deliberate, and require critical thinking of the participant to identify how the learning might impact (proactive), or should have impacted (retroactive), their action and performance (Imel, 1992). Additionally, interventions that enhance leaders’ cognitive capacities should also be considered; focusing on divergent thinking, forecasting, causal analysis, sense-making, forecasting, and self-regulation considerations and strategies (M. D. Mumford et al., 2015). In fact, a leader’s cognitive capacity has been identified as one of the best predictors of performance (Zaccaro et al., 2000). These reflective practices are further considered below.
Journaling and capstone experiences. Reflective practices facilitate the deep thinking required for integrating new concepts, techniques, and elements of the self so that they can be sustained over time. Two key examples of the use of reflective practices in college and university leader development involved directed journaling and a leader self-identity statement. In one university setting, journaling has become a central activity for leadership development participants. Weekly journaling is required throughout the yearlong process using a book that integrates journaling topics aligned in focus with the monthly leader development workshop themes. The program culminates with a capstone experience requiring each participant to present a formal declaration of their Leader Point of View to the president of the university and other members of their cohort. The Leader Point of View statement represents elements of the participant’s leader self-identity; what they believe in, how they lead, and why they lead. Similar interventions should be incorporated in leader development programs with greater intensity to ensure that leader self-views are deliberately and consciously evaluated, refined, and integrated into a cogent form that can be shared with others (Sartain & Davanzo, 2013).

After-event reviews. In addition to journaling and capstone experiences that require participants to define and share their leader approach and philosophy, other reflective practices that could be incorporated to address cognitive dimensions to leadership include after-event reviews (AER’s). AER’s involved systematic review of performance, challenges, problems, and issues after a key activity or project and emphasize learning from experience. AER’s have been shown to help develop leader effectiveness (DeRue, Nahrgang, Hollenbeck, & Workman, 2012). Practitioners should
consider the use of real world scenarios with AER’s to help facilitate deep structure learning required for self-identity development. Further, the practice of goal setting as a deliberate and formal part of leader development is recommended to transfer the learning (S. K. Johnson, Garrison, Hernez-Broome, Fleenor, & Steed, 2012). Leader development participants should begin by engaging in a structured process of identifying personal objectives and goals for the learning. Then, activities should be incorporated into the development plan that is designed to achieve these goals and to sustain learning over time.

**Identity workspaces.** Petriglieri (2011) suggests that leader development programs be conceptualized as *identity workspaces* where skill and knowledge acquisition is paired with actions to identify and clarify both individual and collective identities. He suggests that three dimensions of these identity workspaces should be provided: Conceptual frameworks and routines that are designed to help leaders make sense of themselves and their environment that build both competency and comfort; learning communities in which the leaders can belong, interact, be challenged, and grow; and routines, rituals and rites of passage that foster identity development and role transitions.

In a subsequent work, Petriglieri, Wood, and Petriglieri (2011) qualitatively examined the use of identity workspaces that paired MBA students with psychotherapists throughout the program’s duration. Findings suggested that the process prompted the development of self-awareness, self-management, and more self-identity integration.
Primging Effective Leader Identities

As suggested by research outlined in the literature review (e.g., R. Johnson et al., 2012; MacDonald et al., 2008), future leader development initiatives should also pursue methods to prime features of leader self-identity associated with leader effectiveness. By helping leaders practice collectivist and interpersonal communications, for example, the collectivist schemas could be activated and lead to more effective interactions. Because self-identities are dynamic and subject to priming interventions (Brewer & Gardner, 1996), efforts should be made in both leader development curricula and activities to make salient those aspects of leader self-identity associated with positive leader outcomes.

Limitations

A limitation of the proposed research is the potential recollection inaccuracy of the participants. Specifically, the questions were retrospective in nature and required participants to think back as far as 30 or 40 years, in some cases, to identify specific defining moments and antecedent events. Although the provision of the question set in advance of the semistructured interviews was an attempt to ameliorate the effects of time on participant memory, there is potential that key milestones and developmental events were not recalled, and those that were recalled might have some limited accuracy. However, given that the research is predicated on the participant’s own stories and the narrative they have created around their leadership, it is hoped that any inaccuracies or failed recollections did not detract from the findings. It is, after all, the leaders’ stories, their interpretations of those stories, and the value and meaning they associate with specific events that holds the most import in qualitative inquires of this nature.
Another possible limitation involves the questions used in the semistructured interviews. The questions themselves may have primed or made salient certain phenomenon including self-identity. With that said, it is important to note that there is no neutral approach to the study of leadership. The words used the research and the participants—the very structure of the questions and the resulting interpretation—drove the inquiry as with other investigations in the leadership domain.

The sample size of participants, although appropriate for a grounded theory inquiry, may also be a limitation of the research. Leaders and their stories are diverse. Although category saturation was achieved regarding the six-stage leader self-identity development model and corresponding theory, it would be valuable to explore the process through a larger sample. This limitation will be further addressed in the following section regarding recommendations for future research.

The sample, due to an artifact of the purposive sampling, included only executive and administrative university leaders. This did not allow for an examination of any differences in leader identity development among faculty, administrators, and executive leadership. Research has shown that there are leadership orientations and decision-making requirements between administrative, executive, and academic leaders of higher education (Birnbaum & Edelson, 1989). How these different orientations would have impacted the emergent theory is unknown.

Finally, although this work is among the first to contrast identity development between leaders of higher effectiveness with leaders of lower effectiveness, other intervening factors may have affected leader and departmental rankings on the OCI/OEI
that were not in the direct control of the leader (e.g., unplanned turnover, critical work assignment, employee stress at the time of administration). Future research should pursue even more robust attempts to differentiate levels of leader performance over a longer time period and including multiple measures including, but not limited to, large-scale 360 degree evaluation results, performance appraisals, and other measures to document leader performance and effectiveness.

**Recommendations for Future Research or Intervention**

This study represents only the second grounded theory exploration of the process of leader self-identity development. The use of experienced and proven leaders and the inclusion of different leader effectiveness levels differentiated this work from the first grounded theory completed by Komives et al. (2005). As with this study, it is hoped that future qualitative investigations will reveal both broad and nuanced variables associated with leader identity emergence. Recommendations for future research along with recommendations for future intervention are discussed below.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This research provides a preliminary examination into the process of leader self-identity development. It is unique from previous research in the area in that it focuses on seasoned leaders in the workplace and not college or university students or novice leaders, it contrasts differences in self-identity between leaders who are considered to be of higher effectiveness in contrast to leaders consider to be of lower effectiveness, and, given the longevity of the participants in the sample, it provides insights into leader self-identity development over time. Future research employing a range of both qualitative
and quantitative designs would be useful in expanding and further exploring each of the phases of development proposed by leader self-identity development theory. Specifically, more investigations of leader self-identity development employing seasoned leaders, contrasting effective leaders with ineffective leaders, and rigorous longitudinal studies that can follow leader self-identity development in real time across a lifespan rather than relying on retrospective accounts would be useful in contributing to a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. It would also be a compelling research area to identify the process of leader identity development for leaders who elected not to pursue leadership as a career after having made some early level of commitment to its pursuit. Specifically, what are the events and experiences that led the once aspiring leader to choose a different career pathway?

Additional research would also be useful in further examining differences in the process of leader self-identity development based on ethnicity, geography, or gender. For example, preliminary findings in the present project suggest differences in timing of the self-referent use of the term leader. Research has begun to examine the identity conflict exhibited by female leaders but more rigorous examination of antecedents and countermeasures are required (Karelaia & Guillén, 2012).

Another methodological limitation, or perhaps an artifact of the purposive sampling, was the absence of academic leaders in the sample. University leaders, regardless of role or title, were included in the candidate pool as long as they met the criteria (i.e., at least two direct reports, five years of prior leadership experience, not currently involved in a leader development program). These criteria, however, may have
eliminated the majority of academic leaders who could be recruited for participation. As a result, only executive and administrative university leaders were represented in the final participant sample. The sample did not allow for a contrasting of processes by leader category. An examination of differences in leader self-identity emergence between academic leaders and executive/administrative leaders would be an interesting focus of further research.

Future research designs could also consider ways to test the possibility of causal relationships of various dimensions of the proposed model of leader self-identity development. Day (2014b) suggests that making causal claims is a critical component of future leadership research. Causality could be examined between antecedent events prompting leadership as a possibility and subsequent acknowledgement of, and aspirations toward leadership. If future research found that certain leadership antecedents were more potent in sparking the trajectory of leadership, then these events could be targeted as part of a very early leadership development strategy. This would be particularly compelling if any the causal relationships could be deliberately leveraged to positively affect underrepresented groups in leadership fields and positions.

Similarly to the pursuit of causality, Day (2014b) also suggests future leadership methodology should employ temporal design considerations. Specifically, a longitudinal study of leader self-identity development could be designed that follows a group of young participants beginning in their early school years and through various career transitions. A longitudinal investigation, preferably one with mixed methods that would provide both phenomenologically rich detail along with concrete measures of clearly
defined leadership factors, would offer one of the most comprehensive ways to examine leader self-identity development.

This connection of time and leadership is of particular interest for future research. Shamir (2011) noted that time is an underexplored variable in the leadership domain (p. 307). Day (2014b) noted that process models of leadership should incorporate time as a dimension. For the proposed model of leader self-identity development, further research to examine the average time across the various stages of the model could add additional insights into the process. Specifically, future research could not only evaluate the average time of progression from antecedent event to acknowledging, aspiring, and the mastery loop of leadership (i.e., acquiring, applying, and adapting), differences in the timeline for progressing through the stages could be evaluated based on emerging leaders and tenured leaders. Specifically, what is the process timeline for individuals facing their first leadership experiences versus experienced leaders who progress through the cycle due to a new antecedent event (e.g., job change, promotion opportunity, or other transition—be it planned or unplanned)? Further, future research could examine timeline differences in leader self-identity development based on gender, culture, and occupation, among other variables.

Finally, future research should continue to consider a combination of theoretical constructs to provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon of leadership. In their consideration of future directions of leadership theory and research, Avolio et al. (2009) suggested that a more holistic view of leadership is occurring and that the future of leadership will employ mixed methodologies, integrated frameworks, and synthesized
constructs. Accordingly, efforts should be made to integrate factors within the theories (combining traits, behavioral dimensions, and cognitive elements) and between the theories to more rigorously test the complex construct of leadership and provide more robust examination of the phenomenon.

**Recommendations for Intervention**

Perhaps one of the most important implications of this research is how it, and future research in this arena, can inform leader development strategies. Research has previously confirmed the importance of ensuring a heuristic mix of skills, competencies, and knowledge areas focusing on cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral aspects of leading to prepare future leaders. It is also understood that these different aspects may develop at different times and through different learning experiences (Day & Halpin, 2004; M.D. Mumford et al., 2000). Through this inquiry, it is further suggested that leader self-identity development is a dynamic and evolving process marked by milestones and stages that cycle throughout a lifetime. Accordingly, interventions that begin with an assessment of where the leader is or, more importantly where the leader perceives him or herself to be in their development, followed by targeted learning experiences based on their stage of identity development, could provide the most impact for most effectively developing leaders in the future.

This heuristic, developmental, and customized approach is a departure from the majority of contemporary leader development programs, many of which use boilerplate or canned curricula and learning activities. These traditional approaches to leader development provide fixed curricula that become outdated within days and typically do
not consider the individual’s specific stage of development or specific developmental requirements. A cognitive approach promoted by this research and one that focuses on internal, deep structure concepts about leadership and effectiveness may offer a way of equipping leaders for the long haul. Through cultivating experiences to help develop, clarify, or strengthen the leader’s self-identity, the identity then can direct behaviors most appropriate to the specific challenges facing the specific leader at a specific university at any given time.

In light of the growing evidence tying leader self-identity and performance, leader development programs must begin to incorporate the leader’s self-view as part of its interventions. D. T. Hall (2004) asserted “Identity is probably the most important aspect of leader and career development” (p. 154). Lord and R. J. Hall (2005), when discussing how leaders develop deep structures about leadership over time, suggested that the skills leaders acquire are eventually inextricably integrated into their self-identities. Leadership experiences, problems, challenges, and successes all inform the elements of self-identity and these experiences help to create meta-structures that guide more efficient access, understanding, use, and application of the information along with the content of their underlying knowledge. No ship and dip development experience can address the unique nuances of context and circumstance facing today’s leader. It is no longer logical to assume large-scale development programs void of individualization and customization will effectively equip today’s leaders. New leadership development requires going inward to thoughts, beliefs, and the core of identity and to find ways to leverage those components of the self for maximum effectiveness in the leadership domain.
Conclusion

For today’s colleges and universities, the stakes around effectively developing leaders has never been higher. In a recent article written by John Ebersole (2014), president of Excelsior College, a range of white water issues facing higher education will continue to challenge the very nature of university and college leadership. Among the challenges? Exorbitant costs and policy shifts affecting higher education, accreditation and assessment challenges, and shifting student demographics. Ebersole speaks to a specific additional challenge—leadership. He posited that a leadership crisis is looming that calls for a significant effort to prepare new leaders in higher education. He cites a recent American Council on Education report (Cook & Young, 2012) that identifies the average age of college and university presidents as 61, a ten-year increase over the past two decades. This trend anticipates in influx of new leaders who will be required to assume the complex role of leadership and the responsibility and who will evidence significant developmental needs. The report also cited a tumultuous political climate, a wide array of constituents, ballooning enrollments, and escalating fiscal constraints and pressures as additional challenges faced by today’s college and university leaders. I/O psychologists and leadership development practitioners must find, create, and implement new and improved ways of getting the current and future generations of college and university leaders ready for these expanding challenges. They must implement proven strategies and methodologies that will best position them for success. As part of finding new and better ways, techniques and approaches grounded in cognitive leadership may offer the most promise in preparing leaders for these challenges.
The purpose of this grounded theory examination was to identify the process of leader self-identity development among college and university leaders. It was driven by a desire to learn more about how to leverage the growing body of research suggesting a connection between leader self-identity and subsequent leader performance; particularly how this connection could refine or redefine current and future leader development initiatives. The resultant model and grounded theory suggest a six-stage, cyclic process of leader self-identity development. Each stage provides opportunities for developmental intervention to help better prepare leaders for the white water issues of higher education. Scholars and practitioners need to partner to capitalize on the growing findings in the cognitive leadership research to create next-and-best approaches to equip today’s and tomorrow’s college and university leaders. It is critical that the level of sophistication for leader development rise to meet the level of complexity of the challenges facing today’s leaders.
REFERENCES


175


APPENDIX A. STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL WORK

Academic Honesty Policy

Capella University’s Academic Honesty Policy (3.01.01) holds learners accountable for the integrity of work they submit, which includes but is not limited to discussion postings, assignments, comprehensive exams, and the dissertation or capstone project.

Established in the Policy are the expectations for original work, rationale for the policy, definition of terms that pertain to academic honesty and original work, and disciplinary consequences of academic dishonesty. Also stated in the Policy is the expectation that learners will follow APA rules for citing another person’s ideas or works.

The following standards for original work and definition of *plagiarism* are discussed in the Policy:

Learners are expected to be the sole authors of their work and to acknowledge the authorship of others’ work through proper citation and reference. Use of another person’s ideas, including another learner’s, without proper reference or citation constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty and is prohibited conduct. (p. 1)

Plagiarism is one example of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s ideas or work as your own. Plagiarism also includes copying verbatim or rephrasing ideas without properly acknowledging the source by author, date, and publication medium. (p. 2)

Capella University’s Research Misconduct Policy (3.03.06) holds learners accountable for research integrity. What constitutes research misconduct is discussed in the Policy:

Research misconduct includes but is not limited to falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, misappropriation, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic community for proposing, conducting, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. (p. 1)

Learners failing to abide by these policies are subject to consequences, including but not limited to dismissal or revocation of the degree.
Statement of Original Work and Signature

I have read, understood, and abided by Capella University’s Academic Honesty Policy (3.01.01) and Research Misconduct Policy (3.03.06), including Policy Statements, Rationale, and Definitions.

I attest that this dissertation or capstone project is my own work. Where I have used the ideas or words of others, I have paraphrased, summarized, or used direct quotes following the guidelines set forth in the APA Publication Manual.

Learner name and date

__________________
James P. Sartain, August 28, 2015

Mentor name and school

Dr. Jean Brown-Bryant, Capella University