A Look at Leadership through the Lens of Identity

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Abstract

There are many studies on leadership styles, communication dimensions of leadership, and best practices in leadership communication. There is, however, limited research on the relationships between leadership and identity; for example, on those aspects defined by race and gender. This study will examine already established research and theories on leadership, race, and gender to explore specific connections between leadership and a leader’s various identities. Interviews were conducted with 29 young professionals who have been in the workforce for less than 10 years and are engaged in leadership roles. The research will examine how social and cultural identities influence perceived leadership styles and perceptions of leadership practice. This study attempts to contribute to relevant research by providing an in-depth exploration of the relationship between two growing areas of study in communication research and pointing to next steps for future research studies.
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Chapter One: Introduction

When I was growing up, there was one thing my father would always ask me, “Sloan, are you an eagle or a pigeon?” When I lost my campaign for Student Council, when a boss was being unfair, or when I felt lost in what my plan for my life would be, it was always the same response from my father: “Sloan, are you an eagle or a pigeon?” Before I could even answer his inevitable question, he would explain the difference between the two birds: eagles fly high above everyone else; they are not concerned with what other creatures are doing. Eagles are focused on the horizon, and they know exactly where they are going. On the other hand, pigeons are always on the ground among the throng of other pigeons. They do not stand out and are always concentrated on where the other pigeons are going or what they are doing. My father would then ask again, “Sloan, are you an eagle or a pigeon? I intend on raising an eagle, but if you want to be a pigeon, then go right ahead.”

This one idea that I was taught from a very young age has influenced my leadership style and communication skills ever since I can remember. Throughout my life, these words have stuck with me through my time in college, job interviews, difficult life decisions, and leadership experiences. I constantly tell myself, “Sloan, you are an eagle, so spread your wings and soar.” What I did not realize was that my father was teaching me about identity and group membership.

Identity is defined by Henri Tajfel (2010) in his book on Social Identity and Intergroup Relations: “social identity is a part of the individual’s self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 2). An individual’s
identity comes from his/her experiences and belonging within group memberships, which
can range from race, gender, careers, families, neighborhoods, or religion. These
memberships help people understand and build their various identities (Griffin, Ledbetter,
& Sparks, 2015).

This mindset and lesson are what breathed life into my study. It prompted me to
ask myself what influenced my leadership style, and if others, like me, had similar
experiences that shaped who they were. Did they have similar experiences that shaped
their leadership skills and the way they communicated? These questions made me
examine my own identities and experiences to see if they truly did influence the way I
lead. When I began to ask these questions, I realized I had to start with my earliest
leadership lesson, the one taught by my father, eagle or pigeon. My upbringing and life
experiences have influenced my understanding of leadership—these are the roots and
starting point of this study.

To better understand why my father loved this leadership lesson of eagle or
pigeon, it is imperative to know the kind of life he experienced growing up and the home
life he created for his own family. My father is a first-generation college student from a
southern African-American family. Watching his mother work endless hours, while
raising two kids by herself, instilled a sense of hard work and responsibility, resulting in a
drive to be the best. My father paid for college by working multiple jobs and eventually
enlisted in the military during his sophomore year. Married with two children by the time
he graduated college, he took his draft orders and moved from Abilene, Texas to
Colorado Springs, Colorado. With no family support or a friend in sight, he dug in his
heels and created a life from scratch. After five years in Colorado, my father started his
own remodeling/construction company, and ten years later, had found success as a small business owner and career military man. My father is an eagle: he focused on the life he wanted for himself and his family, and he has never taken his eyes off of the horizon.

Both of my parents came from marginalized and low-income families: my father was raised by a single mother, while my mom was raised in a Hispanic household with six siblings and working parents. My parents worked to make sure their children would have a different life than they had lived. They raised my three siblings and me in a home saturated with leadership lessons and self-development. Every moment was turned into a lesson, whether it was a scratch on the knee or a sibling quarrel. We were taught to always be better than what people expected and to not let people confine us to stereotypes or succumb to ignorance. It was made clear to my siblings and me that we were “the minority,” and that we would face people that would question our status as an eagle and would try and lump us in with the pigeons. Time and time again, my siblings and I were shunted into stereotypes and forced to overcompensate for others’ shortsightedness. Whether it was my sister being sat in the back of the classroom and people being surprised by her intelligence, or my two brothers being known solely for their skills on the football field. We more often than not, I have had to prove my Bi-racial identity to people because I look more like my Hispanic mother than my African-American father.

These experiences have shaped the lives that my siblings and I lead, acting as the fuel that drives us. My family’s cultural and social identities influence every aspect of our leadership styles, and concurrently, our lives. The interconnectivity of race and gender my family has faced turned all of them into eagles in the same way it did me.
My cultural identity coupled with my gender identity influenced my leadership style in major ways, as both a Bi-racial person and a female. My gender was influenced through three main avenues: faith, education and experiences. The first was my faith: I was raised as a Christian and was taught that women were beautiful and strong, but also that women were created to love and serve people. The early parts of my life I was okay with the traditional stereotypes placed on me by my faith, such as the idea that women could do anything that men can do, but that their primary focus was to “be a lady” and wait for a husband to come along and support them. As I grew up and realized that I did not always fit into the mold of that stereotypical traditional woman, it made me question my gender identity. I knew I was an eagle, a leader, and I wanted to be more than “just a lady” or a wife. I wanted to do great things, and I needed to know that my gender would not stand in the way of that. Learning to question the gender identity I was given has made me truly understand what my gender really means. To me, it means I can do anything I set my mind to, and while I do love and want to serve people, this trait makes me a stronger leader.

Following my faith, my education also contributed to the formation of my gender identity. My love for people drew me towards social issues and justice courses throughout high school and college. I focused on understanding how people operated emotionally, mentally, and socially in an attempt to better love and serve those around me. Through these courses I also learned about feminism and the societal struggles facing women and girls. Seeing the effects of gender discrimination firsthand has driven me to be better and constantly push the boundaries of my identity.
The final major influence on my gender identity has been my experience as a woman. I remember my sophomore year of high school in a home economics class that was required for all the girls in my grade; we had to take care of an animatronic baby for a week. Because of the class requirements, I had to take off a week from work in order to put “the baby” first. Throughout this process, it was constantly reinforced that if we wanted a career and a family, then we would be forced to prioritize one over the other or always feel guilty for not giving everything to a family. This lesson has been reinforced time and time again. Even my education repeatedly showed me that society does not support working mothers in the same way as working fathers. Seeing this example in my life has had unforeseen ramifications: when I am in a leadership role, I am more likely to lie to a colleague or superior about wanting kids or starting a family in the near future. Based on experiences and societal pressures, I have been caused to believe that wanting children is a negative attribute that inhibits my ability to lead. Regardless of whether or not every coworker or boss I encounter associates a negative connotation with motherhood, I still feel a compulsion to hide my intentions. Considering my family, racial and gender identity, it is clear that my leadership style has been mainly influenced by a combination of these group memberships.

Why have I spent the beginning of this study talking about my life and identities? Because my leadership is a direct result of my cultural and social identities, and how I lead and communicate is due to my intersectional experiences with those identities and the upbringing I have had. I have many identities that I claim; however, my race, faith, gender, and education have helped me craft my leadership skills alongside my perception of leadership. Nevertheless, the question is: why are my identities relevant to this study?
The answer is simple: if my experiences had such a profound effect on my leadership style, then there could be others whose identities or leadership styles have been influenced in similar ways.

An individual's various unique identities, the various identities unique to him/her, can change the way leadership is learned and expressed. For example, The Black Lives Matter movement, which began in 2015, is exemplary of a social media-based movement designed to draw attention to and garner support against incidents of police brutality in the United States. This movement succeeded in giving a voice to the black community and has allowed people to step into leadership roles and discover their voices. On the other hand is the Police Lives Matter movement that is fueled primarily by white Americans. This movement has also allowed people to find their voices and step into forms of leadership. Both sides have their own way of communicating and spreading their message; however, both movements also allow people to align themselves with an identity and speak out. Movements like this one show the need for a deeper understanding of how an individual's identities influence their leadership. The Black Lives Matter movement showcased that these two different groups view leadership differently, which was shown in how they chose to get their message across.

There is a growing divide in our country between groups: blacks versus whites, Muslims and refugees versus other "Americans," gays versus some Christians opposed to gay marriage. Many of these divisions could be the result of misunderstanding the other group. There is a need for a stronger understanding of people's unique identities and how those identities influence the way they lead. If we can begin to understand how our
identities impact the way we communicate, we can begin to better communicate with each other.

My research set out to uncover in what ways a strong sense of social and cultural identities influence leadership. Researchers have begun to delve into the relationship between identity and leadership by focusing studies on various groups and cultural leadership styles and differences. However, there is a limited amount of research on the potential or actual relationship between social and cultural groups and leadership.

Significance of Study

This study focuses on how an individual’s group membership and identity influences their leadership. Through recording and cataloging stories of experiences from people of various backgrounds, this study sought to uncover a connection between an individual’s identity and his/her form of leadership. The opportunity to explore the relationship between identity and leadership, while helping discover patterns between the two, is what motivated this research study. Though this study is focused on exploring the individual’s unique identities, an exploration of their group membership will be used to better understand their various identities. A review of relevant literature was conducted in order to build a better understanding and focus the study on identifying patterns between an individual’s own social and cultural identities, and his/her perceived form(s) of leadership.

Chapter 2: A Review of Literature

Many people associate specific connotations with the terms “leadership,” “race,” and “gender.” There is research in the leadership field that has determined that racial and social identities may influence the way people communicate and lead. However, there is
limited research that considers that identities may also affect how leadership is learned. Many different areas of study have studied leadership for centuries: philosophy, psychology, sociology, business, and communication. These various areas of study have all had their own definitions of leadership and what influences it. For example, a prominent sociologist stated, “Leaders are cultural agents who bring values to bear on decision-making and policy decisions...they are both the inheritors of established traditions and the transmitters of core values within nations, societies, organizations, and families” (Parsons, 1952, p. 741). Leaders can make an impact on the community around them, from world leaders, such as the president, to young people, such as the student body president of a college.

This study sets out to explore patterns between identity, which is defined as the personal identity an individual has based on their cultural and social group membership (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks), and leadership. Before the study could explore patterns, a thorough understanding of the theoretical frameworks of identity and leadership was needed. The literature examines social and cultural identity and leadership communication. Various theoretical frameworks and research was studied: social identity theory, cultural identity theory, racial formation theory, the evolution of gender theory, role congruity theory, genderlect theory, and the role of communication in leadership theory. The final part of the literature review will examine how social and cultural identity, primarily culture and gender, can influence leadership and overall communication research. The literature review concludes with an overview of how social and cultural identity and leadership can interact together. By using the theories, studies,
and articles already developed, a foundation was built for further research to be conducted.

Social and Cultural Identity

Over the years, there have been many studies across disciplines that have explored how social and cultural identities and groups impact how people communicate, interact, and see the world around them. There have been studies on how diverse groups use different interaction patterns that exist across group members with different backgrounds (Artiz & Walker, 2014). For example, there is a growing interest in studying communication patterns in various groups and cultures, but the majority of this research is broad in nature, and does not always have a narrow scope on a specific group (Artiz & Walker, 2014). Understanding identity is looking at the research and theories that have explored how various social and cultural groups communicate and interact.

Social identity and group membership theory. Several theories have been developed that explore how social groups impact the way a person perceives themselves in that group. Social identity theory, as developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, looks at how group memberships and social categories that we use define who we are, and identity is based upon our intergroup behavior (Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, 2015). Henri Tajfel in his book defines more clearly that, “social identity is a part of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social groups (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (2010, p. 2). Group membership and social categories can range from race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, to careers, families, neighborhoods, and religion. These various groups, whether they are a formal association such as race or
gender, or allegiances such as family, can greatly impact an individual’s communication style (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015). Group membership can impact the way an individual communicates and interacts in the world around them. Various memberships that a person belongs to can form their social identity. Therefore, group membership and social identity impact communication style, and they are both dependent on an individual’s own awareness of their unique social identity and the identities of those they interact with. Tajfel and Turner said, “We often communicate not as individual actors, but as representatives of groups that help define who we are” (1986, p.7). Social identity is a part of how people communicate and how people’s social identity is different from the person they are interacting with. Tajfel and Turner saw personal identity and social identity on a two-sided continuum, with each respective identity at opposite ends. They theorized that if two people in a conversation consider themselves and their conversational partner to be unencumbered individuals acting for themselves a positive conversation would take place. However, if one or both of the conversationalists regards themselves or their partner as a representative of a group of people, the theorists believed that the communication will develop in different directions because of the need of each individual to emphasize their differences, which can lead to a negative conversation or miscommunication (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015). Social identity theory explores how social and cultural groups impact an individual’s self-perception and sense of group identity. Social and cultural identity can also influence an individual’s effective communication with people from various groups.

**Cultural Identity Theory**
An individual does not have one sole identity or group membership. The various memberships both socially and culturally work together to form the individual’s unique identity. *Cultural identity theory (CIT)* has been developed to help build knowledge about the communication process that individuals use to construct, and negotiate their social and cultural group identities (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009). This theory has evolved over the last thirty years since its introduction. The theory created by Mary Jane Collier in the 1980s first argued, “that an individuals’ messages during interactions may contain multiple types of cultural identities, such as national, racial, ethnic, class, family, sex, and gender based, political, and religious...because individuals enact multiple identities, all voices within each identity group do not speak in the same way or have the same recognition by others” (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009, p. 593). CIT helped to expand the way communication was studied, because it argued for the complexity of how an individual communicates in relation to one identity, such as race. The theory took into account that all of an individual’s various identities interact together to form the pattern of communication. CIT also studies how norms have been created based on specific identities. For example, *African American Communication: Ethnic Identity and Cultural Interpretation* looked at African-American identity, and the way that identity was tied to communication patterns. Throughout the text, the authors explored past research and theories on African-American communication patterns. The authors found that the research had norms that they identified as contributors to African-American communication patterns. These patterns were all very similar and stereotypical. The text went on to state that despite norms and stereotypes placed on African American communication style in earlier research, there were actually various ethnic and social
identities contributing to African-American communication. The study concluded that these identities all contributed to the pattern of communication, not just race (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau). This text, and research like it, begins to build the foundation for cultural identity theory (CIT). As with many earlier theories, they evolve over time, this is true of CIT. Formally known as cultural identity negotiation theory (CINT), this modified version adds a new emphasis on how situational contexts and past experiences influence cultural identity with a focus on social equality and justice (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009). This evolving theory shows the importance of all of individuals’ social and cultural identity and how all of those identities can impact communication.

How are identities formed? Henri Tajfel argues they are formed based on self-awareness and group membership. While Harry Triandis asserts they are formed based on cultural and environmental experiences, Mary Jane Collier’s theory claims that identity is not so much about where they are formed, but the understanding that the identities all interact with one another.

Racial formation theory. Another communication theory that explores how identity is formed, primarily in the area of race, is racial formation theory that was developed by Michael Omi and Howard Winant in the late 1970s. This theory “counters views of race as a fixed, objective element of human identity based mainly on physical characteristics such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture...instead, racial formation theory contends that race is an unstable social construct whose meanings change across sociohistorical contexts due to conflicts between dominant and non-dominant groups’ interest and values” (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009, p.823). This theory is relevant to communication because it shows how race is created and formed throughout
U.S. society. Racial formation theory focuses on the process which humans use to create racial meanings. It indicates that the formation of a racial identity is developed through history, past experiences, and conceptions placed by society. These factors, and the impact they have on racial formation, can create conflict over racial meanings and stress connections between the significance of race and social structures (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009). This conflict that arises is due to various groups having different opinions or ideas of what a racial group is and is not. An example of this is the Black Lives Matter movement that was discussed earlier. This movement was launched due to African-Americans feeling that their lives were not as important or valued by the police, because of their skin color. African-Americans and other marginalized groups in the U.S. fueled this movement that felt they were being stereotyped and treated in a more violent manner by law enforcement officers. The movement was combated with Police Lives Matter, which was fueled primarily by White Americans. The Police Lives Matter movement focused the blame off of the law enforcement and put it on the African-Americans in question; the movement focused on what the individual was doing that made the police officer have to react with force. There was a clear misrepresentation from both movements on both African Americans and law enforcement. Both movements had perceptions of the other group’s race, and those perceptions fueled the conflict between the two movements. The Black Lives Matter movement’s perception or formation of what race was very different to that formation or perception that Police Lives Matter had on race. Racial formation theory recognizes that an individual’s upbringing, past experiences, and social constructs influence the way race is formed and perceived by people who do not identify as the individual’s race. This creates a conflict between
various groups because each group has their own experiences that built their racial identity and understanding of other races. Racial identity is heavily studied in regards to communication.

**The evolution of gender theory.** Gender is also just as prevalent as race in the study of social identity and communication. There is a difference between sex and gender, and when studying communication, it is important to look at gender roles over sex, due to the fact that gender roles are socially constructed and sex is biological (Powell, 2011). Ayman and Korabik, in their 2010 article “Leadership: Why Gender and Culture Matter,” acknowledge that gender is multidimensional and multifaceted. “Gender both helps us form our identity and belonging, but it also creates a structure that allows prejudice and injustice to occur” (Ayman & Korabik, 2010, p. 166).

The study of gender has changed and evolved over the last century, even the last few decades. Wendy Wood and Alice Eagly in their 2015 article *Two Traditions of Research on Gender Identity* explored the ways that gender has been studied over the years. The two traditions of gender theory focused on how gender identity is influenced and how an individual self-categorizes their gender identity. The first tradition focused on how gender was studied. Wood and Eagly discuss that early gender studies focused primarily on the differences between genders and used mainly physical differences to determine how gender was studied. However over the years, this evolved into studying more than only physical differences by looking more deeply at gender stereotypes and how that influences perception (Wood & Eagly, 2015). This development provided more information and patterns to be studied in the field of gender research. Leading theorists begin to make more connections with how differences and stereotypes influenced gender
identity. Through the evolving research on gender identity, gender measures begin to emerge; these included education, hobbies, workplace, and everyday activities. These measures allowed researchers to explore what influenced development of gender identity. This became a popular area of study in research (Wood & Eagly, 2015).

The second tradition Wood and Eagly discuss is self-categorization of gender identity. Wood and Eagly define gender group identification “as the descriptive or prescriptive categorization of oneself as female or male, along with the importance of this categorization for one’s self-definition” (Wood & Eagly, 2015, p.464). An individual develops their self-categorization of their gender identity through influencers, such as environment or experiences (Wood & Eagly, 2015). This impacts the development of the gender identity and what Wood and Eagly call direct labeling, meaning that the individual decides what their gender is (2015). The authors state that the process of self-categorization of gender is a similar process to the one discussed earlier with social identity theory. Individuals can adjust their gender identity as their life progresses or as situations arise. For example, a man who identifies as a strongly masculine male may adjust that gender identity when he has a small child. His sex has not changed, but he has adjusted the level of self-categorization to fit his current life situation (Wood & Eagly, 2015). “In essence, gender identity, as a component of the self-concept, provides prescriptive and descriptive standards by which individuals can regulate their behavior. When people self-regulate, they guide their behavior to bring it in line with gender standards, whether these standards reflect gender-stereotypical personal attributes or the normative standards associated with gender categories” (Wood & Eagly, 2015, p. 468). How an individual develops their gender identity, and chooses to claim that identity, is an
area of study that continues to be evolving. Understanding that gender identity is not strictly based on environment, and that there are many factors or measures that influence an individual’s gender identity, can allow for a better understanding of how identity influences areas such as leadership and communication.

**Role congruity theory.** As discussed, the identity that people claim can influence the roles they play in society; gender is no exception. Gender roles are becoming a major influencer on not only self-perceived identity, but also how individuals view others identities in regards to gender. Alice Eagly developed *role congruity theory* from one of her earlier theories, *social role theory*, which is the idea that roles include two kinds of expectations about what members of a group actually do, as well as consensual expectations about what a group of people ought to do (Eagly & Karau, 2002). From this idea, Eagly and Karau proposed/introduced role congruity theory as a way to study these different expectations on gender and its influence on leadership. This theory extended further than social role theory. It considered the congruity between gender roles and other roles, especially leadership roles, as well as to identify key factors and processes that influence congruity perceptions and their consequences for prejudice and prejudicial behavior (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The theory mainly explored prejudice against women in leadership roles and a perceived idea that women could only lead one way. This led Eagly and Karau to conclude that there were two main forms of prejudice: women were perceived less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles, and behavior that fulfills the perceptions of a leader role was seen less favorable when it was enacted by a woman (Eagly & Karau, 2002). An example of these two forms of prejudice would be that a woman is not seen as a good fit for a leadership position and
work so it was given to a male leader instead. Another example of the second form of prejudice is a woman who is more of a dominant leader is seen negatively, but if a male had those attributes, it would be seen as positive. Eagly and Karau state that these prejudices can have consequences on the development and growth of leaders, both male and female. Three main consequences these prejudices can create are that fewer women take on leadership roles or achieve success in leadership, a cycle is created that both genders can fall into, and both genders can fall into gender norms and oftentimes do not lead effectively (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These consequences influence leadership development. When leaders are acting out norms or stereotypes, this can lead to inauthentic leadership, which can lead to less successful leadership. Eagly and Karau add to the conversation surrounding the question of male-female leadership differences, explaining that yes gender does influence leadership. However, gender should not limit a leader or how that leader is perceived. Both genders provide skills and attributes that contribute to strong leadership, and prejudices should not stand in the way of that (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

**Genderlect theory.** The idea of gender is one that is studied by many disciplines, including communication. One communication theory, *genderlect theory*, looks at how different genders elect different ways to communicate and how that can cause miscommunication among genders (Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, 2015). This theory, developed by Deborah Tannen, was designed to help bridge the gap between gender communications. Deborah Tannen observed, in her interactions with both genders, that there was a common disconnect in regards to communication. Tannen looked at research and stereotypes that stated that women talked more than men. However, in the context of
meetings, the classroom, or other public spaces, women actually spoke less (Tannen, 1991). This led Tannen to dive deeper into how communication changes based on gender and the environment. The genderlect theory identifies that oftentimes gender groups do not acknowledge the differences in communication patterns between opposite genders. These differences can occur in all forms of communication, such as public speaking, private conversations, listening, asking questions, and conflict (Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, 2015). Each of these forms of communication can seem different based on the gender of the individual. Tannen explains the differences in how someone communicates can come from two main areas. The first is the reason or desire behind the communication; with women, communication is often driven by connection, whereas with men, communication is often driven by status. Tannen does not mean that is always the desire, but if there is a difference in communication, it may be caused by a difference in desire or reason.

The second area Tannen discusses is speech environment, which can impact the way an individual learned about how to communicate based on their gender (Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, 2015). The way an individual experiences their culture teaches them about how to communicate based on that culture. The same is true of gender. Men and women are taught throughout their lives how to communicate based on their gender. This can range from how to handle conflict to how soft or loud someone should speak. An individual’s gender can influence the way they choose to communicate. Often the individual is aware of this influence, but sometimes it can be more hidden (Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, 2015). There is no better or worse communicator among genders, because it is not about who is better, but rather about understanding differences in gender.
When someone is aware of the differences, and the way that communication patterns might have been formed, it can allow for stronger communication (Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, 2015). When leaders have an understanding of gender differences in communication, it can allow for strong communication to occur.

An individual’s social and cultural identity can impact communication style and effectiveness. That identity can also be linked to leadership and the way an individual communicates effectively as a leader.

**Leadership Theory**

There are numerous definitions of leadership, as seen from the perspectives of a wide variety of disciplines, such as, business, psychology, political science, and sociology. Communication is also one of the disciplines that studies leadership; specifically, effective leadership communication. Leadership communication can be defined as “a contextual process involving the performance of talk and/or action that other people see as moving toward progress on certain important tasks...as such, leadership is co-created among people” (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009, p.593). The study of leadership is a large and still expanding area of study in communication. Communication theorists often view leadership from an essentialist viewpoint, focusing on how people and situations impact leadership communication and leadership characteristics (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009). For example, a leader becomes a great leader not only because of a situation, such as a conflict among followers, but also because of the person’s own leadership characteristics. Both are important parts of leadership communication. Through communicative acts, individuals begin to construct interpretations of situations, such as the first time he/she recognized what a good or bad leader was, and they then can
begin to articulate what counts as appropriate leadership both personally and publically (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009). An individual experiences situations that can begin to form his/her perception of overall leadership communication, but also contributes to developing perceived leadership characteristics or behaviors. An example of this would be if leadership was taught or talked about at home, a person might have a stronger understanding of leadership. Additionally, if a person has been told that they are an effective or strong leader throughout their life, their perception of their leadership might be clearer or stronger.

**GLOBE leadership study.** When a leader has a strong understanding of his/her perceived leadership characteristics, it can allow the leader to understand, engage, and effectively lead those around him/her. The GLOBE Research Program developed the *Global Leader Behavior Theory*, which is constituted of six global leadership behaviors. The theory looks into the different leadership characteristics and behaviors of the individual. GLOBE identifies them as the following: Charismatic/Value-Based leadership, Team-Oriented leadership, Participative leadership, Autonomous leadership, Humane-Oriented leadership, and Self-Protective leadership (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman & Gupta, 2004). Using GLOBE theory, Artiz and Walker (2014) identified five communication styles. They combined Team-Oriented and Participative leadership because the terms shared similar communication styles. The five styles are described as: (1) decisive and task oriented; (2) involvement of others in decision-making process; (3) modest, compassionate, and supportive; (4) independent and self-reliant; and (5) status-conscious and procedural (p.75-76). These show the diversity that can take place in leadership communication. For instance, the communication styles showed that
individuals have not only different leadership characteristics, but also different ways of communicating effectively as a leader. Leaders must be in tune with their personal leadership behavior and communication style, in order for them to be able to lead and communicate effectively. Using the previously mentioned-leadership behaviors and communication styles, a leader should have a good understanding of their perceived leadership style, and in turn, be able to comprehend how their followers need to be led.

**Value-based leadership.** One area that is growing in leadership communication theory is the idea of value based leadership. “There is an implicit understanding that good leadership relies on first articulating personal or professional value orientations” (Sarros & Santora, 2001, 243). Leadership is a part of all aspects of our society, and due to this, it can be influenced by our values and how those values were created (Biggart & Hamilton, 1997). In their 2001 study *Leaders and values: A cross-cultural study*, James Sarros and Joseph Santora examined if value based leadership really did have an impact on organization and group success. The study had major findings that revealed when leader’s values were grounded in fundamental human virtues, such as honesty, but also retained a need for personal gratification and success, they were closely related to success and a stronger connection to the team they were leading (Sarros & Santora, 2001). This study was able to show that a leader should have a strong sense of their values and how those values tie into their leadership.

Every individual perceives leadership in a different light (Porterfield & Kleiner, 2005). Everyone has their own perspective on what leadership is; the difference in perspective can come from various external and internal influences, such as the social and cultural impact of the group being led or the leader’s own social and cultural identity.
Exploring the link between social and cultural identity and effective leadership communication may allow for an overall better understanding of both areas of study.

**Working Together: Identity and Leadership**

“If leaders are to be effective in a diverse society, they need to understand their own preferred style and behaviors and how these may differ from those preferred by others. Otherwise, their interactions with others are likely to be fraught with misattributions, misunderstandings, and misinterpretations” (Ayman & Korabik, 2010, p. 157). Ayman and Korabik in their 2010 study *Leadership: Why Gender and Culture Matter* showed how leadership is impacted by social and cultural identity, mainly in the areas of gender and culture.

Leadership has been studied for decades; however, it has not always been studied through the lens of gender and culture. Ayman and Korabik explain that to build the argument continued research needs to be done in the area of leadership and how it is influenced by gender and culture. They start their study with presenting the argument that many theorists have: leadership is a phenomenon that is primarily gender and culture neutral. Thus, many leadership studies have shown similarities, rather than differences, among male and female leaders and leaders from various cultures (2010). The researchers argue that there are factors that influence how gender and culture influence leadership (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). The research looked to support the argument that these factors, as well as gender and culture, need to be studied when studying leadership.

A 1951 study by C. Kluckhohn provides a definition of culture as, “culture is an acquired and transmitted pattern of shared meanings, feelings, and behavior that constitutes a distinctive human group” (Ayman & Korabik, 2010, p. 158). Ayman and
Korabik break this definition into two ways culture can be studied and administered. The first is by characteristics that are visible or physical such as, skin color or an accent; the second is by invisible characteristics, such as values or personalities (2010). The idea behind these is that someone who spends the majority of their time with people that have similar visible and invisible characteristics will have similar values and success. However, many people live and work in a diverse community. Therefore, issues can arise when someone's characteristics do not match up with someone else's, and this is where stereotypes or prejudice can come into play. In leadership research, culture is often studied using one factor of a person's culture, versus looking at an individual's many factors that influence their cultural identity, such as visible (skin color) and invisible (values) (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). The study argues that leadership research needs to focus on more than one factor of culture, in order to better paint the picture of the relationship between culture and leadership.

Both gender and culture have visible and invisible components. Both of these influence identity, access to power, group identity, and resources (Ayman & Korabik, 2010, p. 158). Therefore, it is crucial that the components be included when looking at how a person leads. Ayman and Korabik researched three leadership theoretical perspectives that gender influences: intrapsychic perspective, which focuses on internal characteristics of leader such as gender schema; social structural perspective which focuses on different social roles that are expected to be played in society; and interpersonal interaction perspective which focuses on how leaders interact with their superiors, peers, and followers (2010). The authors then combined the three perspectives to create one gender leadership perspective that showed how “leadership is seen as a
social interaction between leaders and their supervisors, peers, and followers. The nature of these interactions is influenced by intrapsychic processes in all of the parties. However, these processes are not salient and observable as is someone’s sociodemographic gender” (2010, p. 160). Ayman and Korabik’s research showed the fact that gender and leadership, much like culture, are not a one-dimensional study. There are many factors that must be taken into consideration when looking at how gender influences leadership.

There are many stereotypical ideas about gender differences. As Gary Powell states in his book Women and Men in Management, early definitions of gender stereotypes were defined as “shared beliefs about psychological traits that are characteristics of each sex” (2011, p. 46). A study was conducted by Inge Bowerman to study gender stereotypes. The study found that men were seen as more competent and women seen as more warm (Powell, 2011). This study’s findings are similar to the gender differences that Porterfield and Kleiner’s A New Era: Women in Leadership study found. Their study addresses that not only are some of these stereotypical gender differences often correct, but some of these characteristics are in high demand (2005). In an article done by the Harvard Business Review, the business world stereotypical female behavioral characteristics, particularly collaborative and nurturance have become more appropriate and desired for managers, rather than stereotypical male power or control characteristics (Porterfield & Kleiner, 2005). As Powell mentions in his book, people like to categorize themselves and others into groups, and when grouping people like to compare their individual groups to others. This is where issues can begin to form. Porterfield and Kleiner say that these stereotypes are not hurting women in leadership as
much as they used to; instead, these gender differences are helping to create more space for women in leadership (2005).

Porterfield and Kleiner talk about gender differences in their 2005 study in the area of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership. Both of these areas are growing in demand in the leadership fields. The authors state that females tend to have a higher emotional intelligence than males, as well as have traits that lend more towards transformational leadership. The article used research done in 1999 by Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey that found women scored higher on emotional intelligence assessments than men. The study found that females might be better at managing their emotions and the emotions of others, which can lead to a higher emotional intelligence overall (Porterfield & Kleiner, 2005). The Porterfield and Kleiner study built upon the idea that women tend to have a higher emotional IQ that lends itself towards being a stronger transformational leader. Porterfield and Kleiner even state that women leaders who use a transformational approach might excel more as leaders (2005). The idea that women can use these gender differences in the area of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership skills to improve and grow as effective leaders is the key area of focus in this article.

Ayman and Korabik also bring up the argument that leadership and culture are oftentimes studied using only an etic approach, which is the idea that you take one general theory and apply it to large groups of people. They argue that more gender and cultural research needs to be done from an emic approach, meaning studying more specifically one group. In order to have a more in-depth inclusive leadership theory, researchers need to use both approaches (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). The only way this is
going to happen is for researchers to understand the impact that gender and culture have on leadership.

Communication has begun playing a more central role in leadership theory and research. This is, in no small measure, to the emergence of the social and cultural lens that is focusing on how culture and social interaction impact leadership, particularly, through the lens of the individual perspective (Fairhurst, 2007). There appears to be important links between social and cultural identity and leadership communication. A leader should be aware of social and cultural norms and how those norms can impact effective communication. Without this understanding, there can be a gap between the leader and the follower. It is important for a leader to have a grasp on cultural differences in order to lead effectively. For example, Smith and Peterson (1988) showed that with respect to the Performance Maintenance Model of leadership, when someone was criticized privately in a work conflict, it was seen as considerate in the United States, an individualistic culture, but inconsiderate in a collectivist culture such as that of Japan. Research such as GLOBE’s study on leadership characteristics highlights the importance of understanding one’s own perceived leadership skills, and that includes social and cultural understanding as a way to become an effective leader (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman & Gupta, 2004). For example, if a leader is having a miscommunication with another leader or follower, and they are not able to get past the miscommunication, looking at the various influences that are creating the miscommunication is a good first step. If the leader can begin to understand the differences between themselves and the people they are working with, they will be able to communicate more effectively and have a better understanding of the influences that impact their leadership communication.
As highlighted in the literature review there are extensive theories and research that explore social and cultural identity and leadership communication. Both areas are growing, meaning that there is still a lot of research to be pursued. There is room for exploration in the area of studying the question: How does social and cultural identity impact leadership communication? Researchers have begun studying links between social and cultural identity and leadership. However, it is on a very limited and macro level of study. For example, in studying business communication, researchers often study the difference in leadership between international cultures, such as the United States and Asia. There is little research that focuses on social and cultural identity of the individual. Rather, it focuses on the overall cultural and social identity of the group. Ayman and Korabik (2010) explain that intercultural leadership studies often take an etic approach, when a theory or a measure is developed within one social group; it is validated in the other. Moreover, when validating theories on other groups or countries, the interest has not been to understand how the theories worked, but only to see that they worked. Leadership researchers rarely have pursued cross-cultural studies to learn the limitations of their theories. Due to this, a limited amount of research is available on the subject of the relationship between social and cultural identity and leadership. There is also limited research on how various social and cultural groups perceive themselves as leaders on an individual level. Communication theorists and researchers are beginning to consider cross-cultural and international dimensions when studying leadership. This is in large part due to the growth of international business and the growing diverse workforce. One such area that is sparking scholarly conversations is the question of whether universal attributes of leadership, such as charismatic or transformational leadership, can truly be
discerned across cultures and/or whether some features of leadership are culturally contingent (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2013). There is a growing interest and place for more individualized and cultural focus in regards to leadership.

**Research Questions**

“Leadership is embedded in social and cultural beliefs and values, and cannot be fully understood apart from the context in which it exists” (Biggert & Hamilton, 1987, p. 437). Leadership and identity seem to have a relationship that could impact effective communication styles. An understanding of the social and cultural identity that a leader comes from will help in understanding the way a leader communicates and perceives themselves as a leader. As previously noted, there is lack of research on specific social and cultural groups and how they perceive leadership. This study explored for patterns that help identify how race, gender, and various group identities can impact an individual’s self-perceived leadership style. This may also provide a better understanding of not only how individuals lead, but also how leadership is perceived through the lens of social and cultural identity.

Thus this research seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ: How does an individual’s overall identity impact leadership style, including self-perception of leadership?

RQa: How does an individual’s racial identity impact leadership style, including self-perception of leadership?

RQb: How does an individual’s gender identity impact leadership style including self-perception of leadership?
The results from this study will help provide information for further research in the area of leadership studies with an emphasis on social and cultural identity. It will also help to discover patterns or themes between leadership communication and social and cultural identity that will help provide direction on what areas could be researched in more detail.

**Chapter 3: Methodology**

Qualitative research has not been fully utilized in leadership research and theory-building. There are a few reasons for that: leadership research has focused primarily upon using quantitative methodologies associated with psychology, and the psychological approach has dominated leadership research. Quantitative methodology has been used in leadership research because there was need for a methodology that provided a wide depth of data that could be studied and examined, and that could help focus on social influence and diverse information. For many years, quantitative research has been the methodology of choice in regards to studying leadership. However, qualitative research brings a different perspective that allows a deeper examination of the study of identity and leadership (Parry, 1998). Qualitative research can allow for a deeper examination into areas of study such as social and cultural identity and leadership communication. Qualitative research provides tools, such as interviews and focus groups, that can provide researchers a new lens to view previously studied material and build on discoveries and theories.

The growth of qualitative research, in regards to leadership, came about when terms such as charismatic and transformational became more popular in areas of leadership research (Parry, 1998). Leadership studies began looking past psychological
experiences and focusing more on emotional influences. An area of interest was that leadership is about transformation. The leader transforms views, beliefs, attitudes, and motivations of followers. Leadership is centered on change, and if leadership is centered on change, how does the leader influence followers towards change? Qualitative research lends itself to the ideas of transformation, inspiration, beliefs, and values (Parry, 1998). It allows researchers to explore deep under the surface of what is effective leadership communication. Qualitative research also allows for a deeper look at the emotional impact in leadership that drives change, and therefore, impacts how people should be led.

**Sample**

A total of 33 individuals, who have been in leadership roles, were surveyed and 29 of the 33 were interviewed. The ages of the participants ranged from 18-39, with 33% being 18-24 years of age, 57% being 25-34 years of age, and 9% being 35 years of age or older. The participants came from various sectors of business, education, and nonprofit communities. All participants were currently in or had been, engaged in professional leadership roles and came from diverse backgrounds. The participants’ racial or cultural identities were used to form five groups: 48% identifying as White/Caucasian, 18% identifying as Latino/Hispanic, 15% identifying as Bi-racial, 10% identifying as African-American/Black, and 9% identifying as Asian. The participants identified with either male 45% or female 55%. Additionally, 12% of participants identified their sexual orientation as gay.

**Procedure**
To recruit participants, I contacted local young professional groups, university leadership programs, and organizations. Participants were also recruited through social media and word of mouth. As individuals began volunteering for the study, each participant was asked to complete an online survey (see Appendix A) and sign a consent form for the survey. The online survey was comprised of fifteen questions that focused on participant’s pre-demographic information, leadership experience, and social and cultural identity awareness. The reason behind the online survey was to provide additional information on the participant that I could use in the interview. The survey questions focused on the participant’s demographics, leadership experience, and overall understanding of identity. The survey results determined an individual’s overall understanding of general leadership terms and overall self-perception of leadership skills. The participant’s social and cultural identity awareness was evaluated based on their answers to such questions as, “Would you say your gender identity impacts your day to day life, such as the way you communicate?” The survey answers provided background on the participants to help in the creation of individualized interview questions. When participants completed the survey, they were contacted to see if they would be willing to participate in a face-to-face interview. Once the participants confirmed their intent on doing the interview, they were asked to sign a consent form; once the consent form was received, the participant worked with the researcher on setting a date and time for their interview. Four participants opted to not do the face-to-face interview.

Previous research pointed to the fact that qualitative research was an effective way to study leadership, particularly when the focus of study had a social or cultural perspective (Parry, 1998). It also helps to identify more successful ways of studying the
relationship between social and cultural influences and leadership. “Qualitative interviewing is heavily influenced by a constructivist theoretical orientation which considers reality to be socially constructed; from this perspective, respondents are seen as important meaning-makers rather than passive conduits for retrieving information” (Brennen, 2013 p. 28). The idea of participants being meaning-makers and storytellers is what fueled the decision to do interviews over other qualitative methodologies, such as focus groups. The methodology of this study was influenced by a series of other studies that effectively conducted semi-structured interviews.

One such study was Christopher Brown’s (2011) study on how white male elites perceive President Barack Obama. The process that Brown used during selecting, creating, and conducting his interview helped to create the structure of this study’s interview process. Brown focused in his study on understanding his participants and crafting questions that created a space where the interview had a structure to support finding a pattern. At the same time, he allowed for the interviewees to be able to share their story and create patterns of their own. Through studies like Brown’s, a semi-structured interview model was used. A semi-structured interview is a balance between pre-established questions and flexibility for researchers to dive deeper on some questions based on the participant’s response (Brennen, 2013). This type of interviewing provided a good foundation for solid questions that address the research questions, and at the same time, allowed participants to share stories, past experiences, and views on leadership and identity.

The interviews in the present study were conducted either in person or via Skype and lasted an average of 25 minutes, ranging from 16 to 45 minutes. The length of each
interview was dependent on the participant’s answers and whether or not they provided the researcher with enough detail. During the interview, participants were asked ten pre-established primary questions broken into three sets of questions (Appendix B). The first section asked participants questions pertaining to their leadership experiences and styles. Questions included: “Who would you say has most influenced your leadership style and how?”; “As a leader, how do you gain respect from your followers?”; “As a leader, how do you motivate people you are responsible for to complete tasks and projects?”; and “Is there a particular experience you would highlight that has impacted your perception of your leadership style, either negatively or positively? If so, please describe the event or episode.” These questions helped form the foundation of the interview and allowed participants to become more comfortable with me and the interview process. The second set of questions focused on the participant’s identities that they had identified in the online survey and throughout the interview. These questions first looked at the individual’s social and cultural background and whether or not they thought their identities influenced their leadership. Questions included: “Would you say that your racial identity impacts the way you lead? If so, how?”; “Would you say that your gender identity impacts the way you lead? If so, how?”; “Would you say that your family and upbringing influenced the way you learned about leadership and how you lead?”; and “Would say that these various identities (both given and learned) influence the way you communicate as a leader and your overall perception of your leadership style?”; These questions began to paint a picture of their social and cultural background and the connection it has to leadership. The final set of questions was tailored to the participant. The questions here mostly served as probing or follow-up questions to the responses
provided by participants in the survey and at the beginning of the interview. The final questions were also used to ask questions regarding patterns that I began to identify during the interviews. During the interviews, patterns began to emerge when participants would talk about what other identities had influenced their leadership style. This led to me conducting follow up interviews with thirteen participants: these participants were contacted and asked to do a five-ten minute follow up interview. The follow-up interviews were done either in person or over the phone. The follow-up interviews allowed me to further explore some of the patterns that were occurring in the interviews. All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed using a site called rev.com. Once the interviews were transcribed, I began data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Thematic network analysis was used in the interviews. “Thematic analyses seek to unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels, and thematic networks aim to facilitate the structuring and depiction of these” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387). These networks are comprised of three themes that work together in levels to form clear patterns and relationships in qualitative research. The themes are basic theme, the lowest or most basic theme that is derived from the textual data, they say very little about the text as a whole. That is where the second theme comes in; the organizing theme is the middle-level theme that organizes the basic themes into clusters of similar issues and looks for significance to find a broader theme. This leads to the final level: the global themes are super-ordinate themes that encompass the principal metaphors in the data as a whole, and these final themes help to build the argument or final findings (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Once the transcriptions were completed for all interviews, I searched for any common
themes throughout the interviews that might show a relationship between leadership and social and cultural groups. To help discover these themes, I read through the interviews and identified and coded the findings into the three levels of themes discussed above. The themes were then used to help answer the research questions. Once the interviews had been conducted, transcribed, themed, and analyzed, I then identified if the research questions had been answered, and if so, explored deeper into what the key questions were that helped to identify these responses.

**Chapter 4: Results**

All interview transcripts were analyzed using the thematic network analysis model, as previously described. The interviews were analyzed based on the research questions, looking to see if there was a relationship between leadership and identity with a focus on race and gender. To help better analyze the transcriptions, leadership was viewed through four main codes: (1) leadership lessons, (2) core leadership values, (3) positive experiences, and (4) negative experiences. Identity was examined through four main codes: (1) identity lessons, (2) identity drivers, (3) positive experiences, and (4) negative experiences. To analyze and explore for patterns around race and gender, additional codes were developed: (1) race, (2) gender, (3) privilege, (4) awareness, (5) break stereotypes, and (6) moved to change. Additional patterns around identity and leadership were discovered in the transcriptions that needed to be addressed. They were coded as: (1) sexual orientation, (2) group membership, (3) family, (4) sports involvement, (5) military, (6) faith, (7) gender specific leadership, (8) adaptive leadership, and (9) education. Utilizing the codes developed, and the thematic data analysis, I was able to identify basic themes. From those basic themes, patterns emerged
allowing for global themes to be identified. Using the patterns and themes developed, the research questions were answered. Table 1 outlines the codes and the number of participants out of the twenty-nine interviewed that addressed the various codes. Table 2 outlines the thematic network analysis used to analyze the codes into the three main levels: basic themes, organizing patterns, and global themes.

Table 1 Primary and Secondary Themes in Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Themes that emerged in interviews</th>
<th>Number of Participants that Discussed Themes</th>
<th>Secondary Themes that emerged in interviews</th>
<th>Number of Participants that Discussed Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racial Identity</td>
<td>26 participants</td>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>13 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Identity</td>
<td>26 participants</td>
<td>Privilege</td>
<td>11 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Lesson</td>
<td>23 participants</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>11 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Driver</td>
<td>23 participants</td>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>7 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Lesson</td>
<td>26 participants</td>
<td>Moved to Change</td>
<td>20 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Leadership Value</td>
<td>29 participants</td>
<td>Gender Specific Leadership</td>
<td>11 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Experience</td>
<td>23 participants</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>4 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Experience</td>
<td>22 participants</td>
<td>Break Stereotypes</td>
<td>12 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Influences</td>
<td>24 participants</td>
<td>Group Membership</td>
<td>8 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Difference</td>
<td>23 participants</td>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>7 participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Thematic Network Analysis of Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes as Basic Themes</th>
<th>Organizing Themes</th>
<th>Global Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Positive or negative experiences usually tied directly into a leadership/identity lesson from the experience and lesson the core leadership value or identity driver emerged.</td>
<td>1. Core leadership values are learned through leadership lessons which come from positive or negative experience</td>
<td>1. Core leadership values developed through experiences and leadership lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Leadership lessons came from a positive or negative experience.</td>
<td>2. Education can influence leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Education had a factor in overall awareness leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Everyone had 1-2 core leadership values</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. People had 1-2 identity drivers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Everyone leadership was influenced by either their race or gender or both</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. People had a significant identity lesson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. An identity lesson was usually tied to the development of an identify driver education had a factor in overall awareness of personal and others identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. People who experienced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Identities are learned the same way as leadership through experiences</td>
<td>2. Race and gender do influence leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Stronger awareness of identity produced stronger leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Race does influence leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Gender does influence leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
negative identity lessons were often times moved to change or break stereotypes and this lead to a strong identity driver

11. People had a strong awareness of their own identity as well as others

12. People talked about sexual orientation as an identity that influenced leadership

13. People talked about faith as an identity that influenced leadership

14. Family played a strong positive or negative influence in the development of identity and leadership

15. People talked about group membership as an influencer on leadership

16. People talked about sports as an influencer on leadership

17. People mention military as an influencer to leadership

18. Many people talked about the fact that it was not one specific identity the drove their leadership but all of their identities working together

19. People had a strong awareness of their own identity as well as others

20. People who experienced negative identity lessons were often times moved to change or break stereotypes and this lead to a strong identity driver

1. Identities such as sexual orientation and religion influence leadership

2. Identity influencers can also influence leadership

3. Family played a large role in how leadership was learned.

3. Additional identities also influenced leadership development

4. Leadership is influenced by an individual multiple identities, not just one

Themes and Patterns of the Study

Throughout the interviews, there were larger themes that continually emerged. These themes were identified as larger themes, when over seventy percent of the participants identified with that theme.

Leadership. The theme that every participant talked about was a concept I called core leadership values. The values were identified when a participant would repeatedly mention a leadership trait or skill, such as listening, team work, or leading by doing. All of the participants had diverse leadership styles and traits; however, every single one of the participants talked about one to two core leadership values. These core values were
the foundation of the individual’s leadership. Another large pattern that tied into leadership was the discovery that ninety percent of the participants had experienced what the researcher called a leadership lesson. The leadership lesson ranged from modeling their leadership after their parent or family member, to having a terrible boss that they learned from on how not to be a leader. Thus this leadership lesson was what the leader began to build their leadership from. A clear pattern emerged between core leadership values, experiences (both positive and negative), and leadership lessons.

It became apparent in the interviews that many individuals had either positive or negative experiences. From those experiences, the individual turned them into a leadership lesson. From that lesson, their core leadership values were developed. The final participant to complete the interview was a perfect example of this pattern. This participant - a white male that was raised in a Bi-racial household by an African-American step-father that was in the military - talked about growing up in a home that was based on the idea of you-do-what–I-say-and-do-not-question-me. This philosophy of the participant’s step-father was one that the respondent talked about in great detail, saying that he spent the majority of his youth fighting back against this philosophy. This experience of struggling with why his step father would tell him what to do and not give a reason, spurred this participant’s main core leadership value, which is making sure the people he leads understand the reason behind the direction. Throughout the interview, the participant talked about knowing “the reason why” more than ten times. It was a clear core leadership value that came from the participant’s negative family experience. Another example comes from a participant who experienced a negative leadership lesson through sports and only having coaches that were focused on winning. Through the
experience she developed a core leadership value that she discussed throughout her interview. Her core leadership value commitment was focusing on people and helping them to discover their potential.

I was in band. I did art. I did a myriad of things, which helped me. What I came away with it is that I think some leaders; they only work with the “good staff members”. Sometimes if you have a team member that’s not doing as well, that’s absent, that’s late, some leaders dismiss them. Being the kid that had to like…that wasn’t always the star, I knew that if somebody sat me down and talked to me a little bit and worked with me, I could have done more. I think as a leader we have to, not focus on the people who aren’t doing well because that does take away from the people who are showing up and working hard, but not everyone is a star. Look at their abilities. Is someone that’s just a chatterbox at work and they’re distracted, do we just need to keep them busier? Let’s not write off the people who aren’t the immediate star and see where we can use everyone talents.

**Identities.** Throughout the interviews this theme of how core leadership values were developed emerged, why is this theme relevant to the question of identity and leadership? For one, it became clear through this pattern that leadership is an identity that many of the participants claimed. They would make statements such as, “I am an authoritarian leader” or “I am a servant leader”. Declarations like these were made with the same clarity and pride as an individual who identified by their race or gender. Secondly, when it was discovered that leadership could be viewed as an identity, it made me probe into the development of core leadership values applied to the process of discovering identity. This led to the development of the identity codes: identity lesson an
experience regarding the participant’s identity that they turned into a lesson and identity
driver, much like the core leadership value, identity drivers were main identities that were
continually mentioned by the participant. Coupled with experiences I began to see a
similar pattern between experience, identity lesson, and the development of identity
drivers. The same pattern developed throughout the interviews; participants would share
a positive or negative experience, and from that experience, they would learn more about
their identity. From that lesson, a core aspect of their identity was developed, something
I called an identity driver. An example of this process comes from a female participant
who had an interesting identity lesson that turned into an identity driver.

I always just thought it was a fact that girls just don’t think to do math and
science. Their brains really don’t work that way. It’s like we can do it but we
won’t thrive and that was just always the mentality that I had and I have no idea
who was the person who told me that or where I heard that. I was just, “oh, yeah.
Girls...” I thought it was a scientific fact that girls just think more in terms of
literature and language. Boys think more in terms of math and science. I just
thought it was something I had to get through. Now it is interesting being on the
other side of it and really pursuing and pressing into math and science. I think I
might actually enjoy this. I can do this and I am smart enough to do it because I
just never thought I was smart enough really or that I could handle it.

This participant’s various experiences as a woman taught her what women could and
could not do in regards to science. These lessons influenced her identity and the way she
lived her life. When she experienced science in a new way, this taught her a new lesson:
women could excel in science, leading to a stronger sense of identity and self.
Racial identity. Ninety percent of participants identified that their race influenced the way they communicate and also the way they lead. Participants talked about race based on their racial identity. Participant who identified as Black, Hispanic, Asian, or Biracial spoke about race in terms of how their racial or cultural experiences influenced their leadership. Many of the participants had negative or challenging experiences based on their racial identity. Through these experiences, many participants’ identity drivers became focused on breaking stereotypes. Or they felt moved to change, meaning that the participant felt the need to make sure no one else had the same difficult experience they had. This drive to break stereotypes and make change influenced their leadership and reasons for leading. An example of this came from a participant who was running for student government at her university and had faced many challenging experiences as an African American female who was striving for leadership roles. When asked her final thoughts at the end of the interview, this is what she shared:

One main thing I want to say is that it’s really important for me to break the stereotype that is portrayed of minorities and African Americans, Latinos; whomever they may be, of these individuals that hold leadership positions. I want to break the stereotype that we are all ghetto, or that we’re all hood, or uneducated, or these different things, or can’t speak properly or format a resume correctly or interview nicely. I want to be the one to let other individuals know that everybody is the same and that every race has their group of uneducated people, but they also have smart, brilliant, amazing individuals with great minds despite the color of their skin.
If a participant identified as White, they often spoke about race in reference to an awareness of differences, privilege, or guilt about their leadership not being influenced by their race. These participants talked about having awareness that because of their race, they had different experiences from other races. Some participants talked about this in terms of privilege and how that awareness of privilege influenced their leadership. Some participants talked about the fact that they oftentimes changed their leadership based on the diversity of the group. I called this an adaptive leadership style. For example one participant a white male baseball coach stated:

When I am coaching a diverse population I think my verbiage changes. I just... I try not, but it comes natural to assimilate and try to use verbiage, and language that they are accustomed to. I think it is a. Just this wanting to connect on a different level and trying to not let them to see me as just a white male.

Another participant, a white female college educator, talked about using an adaptive leadership when working with her students.

I find sometimes that I’m a little more lenient if I have someone of a different race. Because I didn’t grow up around hardly anyone of a different race. So I feel like I have to be a little more cautious, and that’s from nothing that is coming out of me. I don’t know why I feel like that. Even students in class, oh I have an African American student... It’s not that I grade them differently; it’s just that I feel like I have to be more over sensitive, because I don’t want to offend anyone at all.

Though participants had various ideas on how their race influenced their leadership, the pattern remained the same despite the different answers: race did influence
leadership for the majority of participants. Answering research question 1a, “How does an individual’s racial identity impact leadership skills, including self-perception of leadership?”, an example to help show how racial identity impacts leadership skills and self-perception of leadership is a Hispanic female educator who talked about her journey of discovering her racial identity and how that identity drives her core leadership value, inspiring her students.

I think it’s even more important for me to share my background, to share where I come from and use that confidence that my parents installed in me at a very young age and use it to identify with my kids and validate their experiences and be like, I understand if your parents are new to this country, I understand if you have an accent when you read, I understand if you’re worried because your parents have to find another job or if immigration come. I understand all these worries in the world for you, but you can still make it.

**Gender identity.** Much like race, ninety percent of participants identified that gender influenced the way they communicated and led. Participants that identified as males tended to answer that their own gender did *not* influence their leadership style directly. However, once they began to share stories and examples, a pattern emerged. Despite first stating that their identity did not influence their leadership, they discovered that gender as whole did influence their leadership. Many male participants talked about having an adaptive leadership style, meaning that when they worked with females, they often changed the way they communicated or led because of the gender of the group. Other male participants talked about not having a typical masculine leadership style. Finally, some participants talked about their privilege as a male and how that influenced
the way they led and viewed women in leadership. These male participants spoke about how they understood that they did not need to think about the way they lead based on their gender. However, that was not always the case for female leaders. This led some male participants to be more supportive and aware of women leaders. An example of this came from a white male participant who spoke on his privileges as a white male.

I may be privileged but there are still areas where I’m not the best, right?
Understanding when to kind of defer to others and not kind of press my advantages that all kind if played into my leadership.

Through the very different responses from male participants, the pattern remained that for the majority of participants’ gender did influence their leadership. An example of how gender did in fact influence male leadership comes from an African-American male, who stated in his pre-demographic survey that his gender did not impact the way he led, but by the end of the interview, he had a different answer to that question.

Being a male, dealing with females, you can’t deal with females the same way you deal with males. Females take things a different way, males take things a different way, if that they’re both different characters. I might be able to say something as a male that I can’t say as a female. I think being in that position I have to be sensitive and make sure that I’m able to relate to both genders.

Participants that identified as females talked about gender in more detail and how their gender identity influenced their leadership. Female participants talked about experiences, either negative or positive, in regards to how their gender identity was developed. From that development, many female participants talked about how those experiences added to their leadership. For some, it was a positive identity lesson. They
had a role model who modeled and encouraged them in being a female leader. For others, it was a negative identity lesson of someone telling them they could not be a leader or someone treating them negatively because they were a female. Consider one Bi-racial female participant’s story, when she talks about her experience as student body president of her university and the negative experiences she faced that have changed the way she views leadership and gender.

I would say that my gender impacts the way I lead… I found this to be the most when I was student body president at my college and my vice president was a white male. There were times when I would give a direction and people would refer to my VP, and I was like, “no, no. no. I am the one who calls the shots on this,” I am the one questions should be directed to. It was always this twisting of authority in his favor. When we were introduced one time to the board of trustees, someone was like, “Oh, this is the student body president and vice president.” The chairman of the board immediately went to my VP and shock his hand and was like, “Nice to meet you President”. My VP was like, “oh no, she is the president.” Just the first assumption being that the white male is the president, when in actuality I was, was something that took me aback. I wasn’t angry about it. I was just a little flustered. I had to keep my cool in that moment, but it was something that definitely made me think more broadly in terms of how men see women in leadership roles.

This story is a snapshot of a similar pattern that developed throughout the interviews from female participants. The pattern that I called gender specific leadership began to emerge in stories like the ones shared, that both male and female participants often had
ideas about specific leadership traits that were more appropriate for a specific gender. Both genders seemed influenced by the idea of gender specific leadership. Take two participant examples, one a Hispanic male who is still developing his leadership.

I’m kind of more quiet. As a male, I feel like I am expected to be more extroverted and authoritarian maybe. I feel like I don’t really portray those as much. Not meeting that expectation could kind of surprise people maybe. I feel like if I was a female, there’d be different expectations as well.

And a white female who has been in a series of leadership roles.

Being that I am a female, you have to be aware of the audience that you’re talking to especially if the majority are men and depending on their age group. You have to know exactly how to address them and show them the respect. If things get heated you’ve got to watch how you respond because if you show that you’re emotional about a situation and you can off emotional then they tend to lose more respect for you.

Gender-specific leadership often spurred both genders, but mainly female participants, to break the stereotypes of what a leader should be based on gender. Though participants had various experiences and viewpoints on how their gender influenced their leadership, the pattern remained the same despite the different answers. Gender did influence leadership for the majority of participants. Research question 1b was answered “How does an individual’s gender identity impact leadership skills, including self-perception of leadership?”, an example that shows how gender identity impacts leadership skills and self-perception of leadership comes from two female participants that both talked about their power in regards to their gender identity and leadership.
I guess as a woman you have that constant need to, “okay, if I’m in a position of power, I really need to let it be known that I am in a position of power”, because as history, women have not been able to do that as much.

Being a woman with power, feels like I’m doing something right. It encourages me to work harder. Be on the same level as say, men in my office or the guys around me. It encourages me to be a stronger leader and to lead and not take the fall back and follow. I don’t like that.

**Additional patterns in identity.** Additional identities were discovered that play roles in the development of an individual’s leadership. The additional identities that were discovered were: faith, sexual orientation, and military background. Participants that discussed these identities in their interview talked about them with the same passion as those participants that discussed race or gender. For example one participant, a white Christian female talked about faith as a primary identity that influenced her leadership.

In a Christian faith culture, Jesus is seen as somebody who leads by being a servant. If I, in my life want to be like Jesus, I want to do the things he’s doing. That means putting others before me. Viewing others as more important than yourself. That affects, then how I operate.

Another example comes from a Hispanic male that identified as gay. He spoke on how his sexual orientation and experiences influenced his leadership.

The reason why I say that is because I feel like my experiences have me understand what people go through and the importance of being a leader, the importance of having someone to stand up and step up. The reason for this that is,
when I was growing up I would not say anything if some would say, "That's so gay." I would listen and observe, but wouldn't say anything. I realized being gay is okay. After that, I started writing essays about Don't Ask Don't Tell and I started doing presentations on gay adoption. I started challenging people when they would say things like, "That's so gay." That's where I found that I would step up and realize this stuff was going on around and that someone needed to say something, you just cannot ignore it. That definitely shaped me wanting to stand up and step up, even wanting to be that person who was there for a young person and be that support for them because I didn't have that.

Both of these participants talked about their identities the same way individuals talked about their racial or gender identity. These identities were also developed the same way: through an experience either negative or positive, and through that experience, their identity driver and core leadership value was formed. It became very clear through the interviews that these identities, although not the main focus of this study, did influence the participants' leadership skills and overall self-perception of leadership.

**Identity Influences**

Identity influences emerged throughout the interviews. These were various factors or group memberships that influenced the way identity was discovered and learned. These identity influencers were: family, involvement in sports or other group membership type programs, and education. An example of how family influenced leadership came from a Hispanic female participant who grew up with first generation parents that influenced her leadership in both a positive and negative way.
My parents installed the value of hard work and ethic, a hard work ethic, in my life. They always encouraged me to want to do better, but I also think there was a double standard. Because I am a woman I was also expected to make sure that I knew how to cook, to make sure I knew how to clean, to make sure I knew how to provide for my husband because one day I will get married and this husband and kids.

Another identity influence that arose in regards to how leadership was developed was the involvement in sports as an influencer to how leadership was developed. An example of this comes from an African-American female whose core leadership value was focused around developing a strong team.

There’s this thing about athletics where whether you’re competing individually in track and field or on a team playing basketball... it’s just you’re competing for a goal that you’re doing together as a team. You have different personalities, people from different backgrounds... It was just seeing that you come together for one goal, no matter what background that you’ve come from, and you accomplish one thing of winning a championship or going from a 0-25 season to a 25-3 and whatever may be. I just feel like it takes certain leaders within the team to be able to help the team stay cohesive and get there and all work together.

Another example of an influence related to identity was learning about leadership through involvement in group activities, such as band or Girl Scouts. One example comes from a Hispanic female that identified as gay who learned she was as leader through her experience as a Girl Scout.
I got the sneaking suspicion that not much was expected of me as the daughter of Columbian immigrants who had a college degree but wasn’t really… my wanted me to iron for my dad when I was like 7, so she taught me how to do that. In Girl Scouts, I found the value of my voice within that tiny group because the structure of Girl Scouts is completely democratic. I was lucky enough to have a very democratic experience with leaders who let me go, just let me do. That was great. I went all the way through. Once I felt free, I got my hands on everything I could. Every leadership opportunity that I could take even when I didn’t know what I was doing, I felt like it was safe to make mistakes there because I wouldn’t be scrutinized and they did not care that I was gay. I had to overcome how I felt with it at first and then I could do something. It turns out; I’m really good at it. I feel like a good leader.

The final source of influence that was talked about through many interviews was the impact of education or the development of both identity and leadership. One participant described his education as the key to him understanding who he was as a person and a leader.

I think when it comes down to leadership I think a lot of it is education. I think a lot of the times we end up identifying with the groups that we socialize with, really construct how we act as a person and even our leadership styles because we want to communicate with them. I think when you are educated properly and even life experiences change I think you realize that you have to be flexible, and you have to be aware that other individuals and other personality types won’t always respond to the type of leadership qualities that you are used to. I think you have to
be able to adapt, and I think that comes with education, education on other
cultures, genders and definitely race. I think the more you can be educated on all
those things I think the better leader you can be.

These influences, though different for the various participants, impacted how identity and
leadership was learned and developed.

The final pattern that was discovered throughout the interviews was that
leadership was not influenced by only one specific identity. The interviews showed that
their leadership was fueled by the various identities they claimed. These varied by
participant. For some, it was race, gender, and faith, for another, it was gender, sexual
orientation, and education. Though the participants’ identities were not the same, the
majority of them stated that their leadership was influenced. As stated by a participant
that identified as a Hispanic, gay, female when asked her final thoughts at the end of the
interview stated:

You know, I think it all does wrap up into one thing, your race and your gender
identity. I think that makes a larger impact on who you are professionally,
because of you’re not comfortable with yourself then you probably not
comfortable stepping outside of you comfort zone at work.

This pattern allowed me to begin to answer the main research question and see the
relationship between identity and leadership.

Global Themes of the Study

Based on the themes and patterns previously discussed, larger themes emerged,
which directly tied to the main research question. Research question 1, “How does an
individual’s overall identity impact leadership skills, including self-perception of
leadership?” was addressed throughout all of the interviews. Through stories, examples, and experiences, the participants helped show the connection between identity and leadership. Four clear global themes emerged throughout the study: (1) leadership was often developed through experiences and leadership lessons; (2) race and gender were strong influences on leadership; (3) additional identities such as religion, sexual orientation, and class also influenced leadership development; (4) leadership was not influenced by one specific identity, but by a mixture of various identities unique to the individual. From the patterns, it was made clear that an individual’s unique identities can influence leadership skills and an individual’s perception of leadership.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter five will review the previous chapters in this research and discuss the importance of the findings. This chapter begins with a discussion of the purpose of this research and an interpretation of the findings; it will then review the results and research questions that guided the study. Next, the chapter will look at how the findings in the study can add to the theoretical framework of identity and leadership, ending with a review of limitations and recommendations for further research.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative semi-structured interview study was to explore to see if there was a relationship between identity and leadership. The study set out to identify patterns between the areas of study, with a focus on race and gender. A primary factor in this study was to explore leadership through the lens of the individual. The purpose for this was to provide a different vantage point not often offered when studying leadership and identity. By conducting interviews with a diverse group of leaders, the
study was able to answer the main question of this research: “How does an individual’s identity influence their leadership?” The findings showed there were several ways that identity influenced leadership. The interviews allowed the researcher to focus on the individual participant’s experiences, stories, examples, and overall understanding of their identity and leadership; this allowed for clear patterns to appear and be analyzed.

**Theoretical Implications**

The foundation of this study was existing research in the fields of identity and leadership. The literature that was utilized had a focus of social and cultural identity and leadership through various theoretical frameworks and research studies. The literature reviewed helped conclude that social and cultural identity and leadership did have a relationship.

Building on the theoretical framework, I was able to show the patterns that developed throughout the study and that supported a relationship between overall identity and leadership. The findings in this study can help build a strong understanding of identity and leadership research. One example of how the research findings can build on existing theory is with Henri Tajfel and John Turner’s social identity theory, which studied how group memberships and social categories define who we are, and that identity is based upon intergroup behavior (Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, 2015). The bulk of this research examines the emotional significance tied to group membership; the findings in this study support this research. The process called discovering identity drivers showed that individuals had a positive or negative experience due to their identity. That experience was turned into a lesson on their identity, and through that lesson, a key identity driver emerged. This pattern that was discovered provided a clearer lens to
examine social identity theory and will provide a way to help both researchers and practitioners understand how identity is developed and fueled on a deeper level.

Above all, this study explored the potential relationship between leadership and racial identity. One theory discussed around the area of racial and cultural identity was Mary Jane Collier’s cultural identity theory (CIT), which focused on helping build knowledge about the communication process that individuals use to construct and negotiate their social and cultural group identities (Foss K.A.; Littlejohn, S.W., 2009, p. 260). The theory presented by Mary Jane Collier is supported by the process that was discovered in not only identity as just discussed, but also a similar pattern that arose for leadership. The pattern showed that individuals’ core leadership values were developed through leadership lessons that came from either a positive or negative leadership experience. This similar pattern between identity and leadership helps to support the relationship between the two. It also provides new ways to study identity and leadership. Based on the similarities on how identity and leadership are developed could allow researchers to study the development of leadership, utilizing identity theories such as social identity and cultural identity theory. In addition to cultural identity theory, this study also supports the evolved theory of cultural identity negotiation theory (CINT), which adds a new emphasis on how situational contexts and past experiences influence cultural identity with a focus on social equality and justice (Foss K.A.; Littlejohn, S.W., 2009, p. 261). This theory was supported through the pattern that individuals, primarily from marginalized groups in society who had negative experiences due to their identity, were moved to change. These same individuals often felt the need to change the perceptions people had of their identity or to break stereotypes that were placed upon
them. This pattern supports the main premise of the CINT theory—that individuals’ past experiences influence their drive for social justice, or in the case of this research, could drive their core leadership values.

The second focus of this study was the potential relationship between leadership and gender identity. The primary theory discussed was Deborah Tannen genderlect theory which examines how different genders elect different ways to communicate and how that can cause miscommunication among genders (Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, 2015, p. 435). This theory was helpful when conducting the interviews with participants. Many participants discussed how gender can cause a break in communication, and therefore, can influence leadership. Some participants even talked about how they adapt or change their leadership based on the gender of who they are working with. The findings in this study supported Deborah Tannen’s theory that women are more likely to adapt or change communication than are men (Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, 2015.) This was true throughout the study: women participants tended to talk more about adjusting their communication or leadership when working with men versus women; only a few men in the study discussed changing communication based on the gender of the group.

As identified in the review of literature, leadership is a growing field, especially in the area of communication. Leadership can influence various sectors of the community, and the desire to understand more about leadership continues to grow. The findings in this study will help to build that knowledge by providing not only patterns between identity and leadership, but also by providing specific areas to focus on for further research for both areas of study.

**Practical Implications**
As mentioned in previous chapters, there is a growing need for leaders to have an overall understanding of how their identities influence their leadership. Many organizations offer or encourage leadership programs. Many employers also encourage employees to know more about their leadership style, such as having employees take leadership assessments, including the Myer Briggs Behavioral Assessment. Though employers encourage, and oftentimes teach, leadership to their employees, there is not always a focus on how identity influences those leadership skills or characteristics. These findings in this study can help employers understand the importance identity and experience play in leadership development. More importantly, this study shows the importance of focusing on the individual’s unique identities when teaching or practicing leadership.

There are a few benefits for leaders that can add to overall self-development, stronger leadership skills, and a better understanding of followers. This study showed that people who had a strong sense of their identity typically had not only a stronger sense of their leadership, but also how that leadership was learned. When leaders take the time to look at how their unique identity and experiences influence them, they can begin to apply that to their leadership and communication. This can allow for more intentional and authentic leadership style. This study and additional leadership research supports the fact that the more self-aware a leader is, the stronger leader they can become. This self-awareness, primarily in regards to identity, can allow a leader to look at their leadership style and see if it is suitable to their identity and values as a leader. Finally, when a leader looks at themselves and their experiences, both negative and positive, they are able to see how their leadership is influenced by these experiences. When a leader understands the
reason behind why they lead the way they do, it can allow for a more authentic leadership
development to occur.

Although this study did not focus on the role of the follower in regards to
leadership, the findings in this study can impact the follower and their relationship to the
leader. The same way a leader with a strong sense of self is tied to successful leadership,
the same can be true when a leader has a strong sense of their followers. A leader should
take the time to look at their followers as individuals, and how their unique group
memberships and identities influence them. When leaders and employers explore what
drives their followers, a stronger relationship can be built. In many of the interviews
conducted, participants talked about the importance of knowing their team, what
motivates them, how they want to receive feedback, and the overall importance of
building that relationship between the leader and their followers. It is important for
leaders to be self-aware of how their identities influence their leadership. It is equally as
beneficial for a leader to be perceptive of how their followers are influenced by their
unique identities. The results of this study can provide new ways to understand and teach
leadership, whether that is in leadership training or the actual practice of leadership. The
exploration of how identities and group membership influence individual leadership
styles can help to create better leaders.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to this study. The first was the sample size: the
study only interviewed twenty-nine participants from a large diverse population group.
This limitation could be avoided by asking more people. The twenty-nine interviews that
were conducted provided a strong foundation for future research to build on. The second
limitation is that every participant had various levels of understanding of their social and cultural identity or leadership styles; this could have impacted their answers during the interview. The pre-demographic survey helped me to see where participants were in their understanding of leadership and identity. Despite the varying differences of understanding and experiences. This provided a rich pool of experiences and stories for me to explore. Due to the experimental design and size, there may be limited generalizability, but transferability may be assumed by those with similar experiences to those in the study. The final limitations were interview length; the interviews ranged in times, and this impacted the content of the interview. Future research should have more questions that can allow for more in-depth interviews. For future research, it is also recommended to have a larger sample size featuring a more diverse grouping of participants.

**Further Research**

As previously mentioned, one of the limitations for this study was the sample, including both the size and diversity of the participants. A larger, more focused sample is suggested. This type of focused sampling would allow a more in-depth exploration on specific groups, not just a large diverse group. For example, having a sample of African-American women would allow for a more detailed examination at those identities and their leadership.

Another recommendation for further research focuses on studying the patterns that emerged throughout the study. These patterns focus around identity influencers, such as family, sports, and group involvement. These identity influencers showed up in the majority of interviews conducted. Further research should consider how both family and
family experiences negatively and positively influence the way identity and leadership is taught and developed. Family experiences seemed to have a strong influence on the participant’s evolution of their identity and their leadership. Also, the lessons and experiences provided by sports or other group membership programs such as band or Girl Scouts greatly influenced the way leadership was modeled and taught. Participants that talked about these experiences all tied them to why they lead the way they do.

Another recommendation for further research would be to look at age as an identity. The participants in the study all came from the millennial generation, ranging in age from 18-35. Though age was not a focus of this study, further research could explore how identifying and belonging to the millennial generation influences leadership. There is a growing interest and need for research on leadership and millennials; the findings of this study can provide building blocks for future millennial research. Additionally, further research could explore the same patterns, but with a wider age range. This would provide additional research to support the relationship between identity and leadership.

Another recommendation for further research comes from one of the primary identities studied: race. One interesting pattern that arose would allow for fascinating and important research referencing Hispanic participants. Every participant that identified as Hispanic, both male and female, all talked about breaking the stereotype of what one participant called “a stupid Mexican.” The Hispanic participants all talked about their drive or reason behind their leadership was to prove that they were not that “stereotypical Mexican” who was uneducated, did not speak the language, or was lazy. Similar racial groups, such as African-Americans, made similar claims about wanting to break the stereotype attached to their racial identity, but not as strongly as those Hispanic
participants. Further research on why this pattern exists would allow for a stronger understanding of a growing community and why they lead the way they do.

The final recommendation for further research is to continue studying how identity influences leadership with a focus on an individual’s various identities. One way to do this would be to study how identity influences leadership assessments, such as GLOBE or MBTI. Both of those assessments and others like them focus on the individual’s leadership traits and behaviors. If more leadership assessments focused on identity, more could possibly be learned about leadership and leadership development.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was focused on how an individual’s group membership and identity influenced their leadership. Through recording and cataloging stories of experiences from people of various backgrounds, this study sought to uncover a connection between an individual’s identity and his/her form of leadership. The opportunity to explore the relationship between identity and leadership, while helping discover patterns between the two, is what motivated this research study. Though this study is focused on examining the individual’s unique identities, an exploration of the individual’s various group memberships was looked at to better understand these identities. While this study uncovered a relationship between the individual and group membership, there is a clear tension in identity research between the individual and group membership. Though this study looked primarily at the individual’s experiences and identities, group membership was also explored. An individual’s identity is influenced by their group membership and experiences in that group. These group memberships influence how an individual communicates and express their identity and leadership.
This study helped show the important role that group memberships play in the development of an individual identity and leadership. This study examined identity with a focus on race and gender. Twenty-nine participants participated in this semi-structured interview study. The analysis of the study led to the discovery of patterns between leadership and individuals’ identities. In addition, results also showed that an individual’s leadership can be influenced by multiple identities, not simply one singular identity, such as race. The results showed that the most significant pattern existed in the process of learning identity and leadership. Further research is necessary in order to gain a better understanding how an individual’s various unique identities influence their leadership. The finding of this study can provide building blocks for not only further research, but also can provide tools for leaders to better understand their identity and leadership.

The idea that started this study was a simple question asked to a Bi-racial female by her father: “Are you an eagle or a pigeon?” This question sparked my interest in leadership and how a simple question could influence my identities and my leadership. This simple idea of wanting to see if others had similar stories and experiences is what helped fuel this research. It drove my desire to learn and listen to others stories and experience in order to explore how people’s unique identities and experiences influenced their leadership. This study opened the door to many stories both similar and different from my own. However, these stories exposed how deep of a relationship identity and leadership truly have.
References


73(11), 461-473. doi: 10.1007/s11199-015-0480-2
Appendix A

Pre-Demographic Survey Protocol

*Distributed in the form of an online survey through survey monkey.*

1. What city were you born in?
2. What city did you grow up in?
3. What is your age?
4. What is your gender identity?
5. Did your gender identity impact the way you grew up?
6. Would you say your gender identity impacts your day to day life, such as the way you communicate?
7. What is your racial identity?
8. Did your racial identity impact the way you grew up?
9. Would you say your racial identity impacts your day to day life, such as the way you communicate?
10. Are you in a currently leadership or management position?
11. If yes, how many people do you supervise on a daily basis?
12. How long have you been in your current position?
13. List three words that you would use to describe your leadership style?
14. Where did you learn about leadership? (i.e. school, home, work, etc.)
15. Contact Information: Name, phone, email
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Introduction to interview: Thank you so much for your time today. My name is Sloan and I will be interviewing you today. We will begin with a few questions pertaining to your leadership style and will then talk about your group identities that you told us about in the pre-demographic survey. Do you have any questions before we begin pertaining to either the consent form you signed or any other details of the study?

1. Who would you say has most influenced your leadership style and how?

2. How would you describe your leadership style?
   Follow up: Is this the way you think others would describe your leadership style? Please explain.

3. As a leader, how do you gain respect from your followers? (meaning those from whom you are responsible for)

4. As a leader, how do you motivate people you are responsible for to complete tasks and projects?

5. As a leader, how do you offer feedback to those who you report to or work with?

6. Is there a particular experience you would highlight that has impacted your perception of your leadership style, either negatively or positively? If so, please describe the event or episode.

Transition: Now that we have talked about your leadership style, the next set of questions relate to the answers you gave in the pre-demographic survey with a focus on your racial and gender identity. Are you ready to begin?
7. Do you remember when you became more aware of your various group identities? If so, please explain what occurred.

8. Would you say that your family and upbringing influenced the way you learned about leadership and how you lead?

9. Would you say that your involvement in sports, after school programs, or activities influenced the way you learned leadership and if so how?

10. Would you say that your racial identity impacts the way you lead? If so, how?

11. Would you say that your gender identity impacts the way you lead? If so, how?

12. Would say that these various identities both given and learned influence the way you communicate as a leader and your overall perception of your leadership style?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add or mention?

Wrap up: Thank you so much for your time today. Do you have any final questions or any final things you would like to say? For your information the study will be complete in Spring 2016. Would you like to be contacted when the final study is complete? Thank you again for your time and willingness to help better understand this research.
Appendix C

Codebook

1. Family
2. Sports
3. Identity Lesson
4. Awareness
5. Negative Experience
6. Positive Example
7. Privilege
8. Race
9. Gender
10. Leadership Lesson
11. Identity Driver
12. Education
13. Sexual Orientation
14. Moved to Change
15. Core Leadership Value
16. Gender Specific Leadership
17. Faith
18. Adaptive Leadership
20. Military
21. Group Membership
IRB PROTOCOL NO.: 16-083
Protocol Title: A Look at Leadership through the Lens of Identity
Principal Investigator: Sloan Gonzales
Faculty Advisor if Applicable: Irina Kopaneva
Application: New Application
Type of Review: Expedited 7
Risk Level: No more than Minimal Risk
Renewal Review Level (If changed from original approval) if Applicable: N/A No Change
This Protocol involves a Vulnerable Population: N/A (No Vulnerable Population)
Expires: 6 December 2016

*Note, if exempt: If there are no major changes in the research, protocol does not require review on a continuing basis by the IRB. In addition, the protocol may match more than one review category not listed.

Externally funded: ☒ No ☐ Yes
OSP #: Sponsor:

Thank you for submitting your Request for IRB Review. The protocol identified above has been reviewed according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations. The review category is noted above, along with the expiration date, if applicable.

Once human participant research has been approved, it is the Principal Investigator’s (PI) responsibility to report any changes in research activity related to the project:
- The PI must provide the IRB with all protocol and consent form amendments and revisions.
- The IRB must approve these changes prior to implementation.
- All advertisements recruiting study subjects must also receive prior approval by the IRB.
- The PI must promptly inform the IRB of all unanticipated serious adverse (within 24 hours). All unanticipated adverse events must be reported to the IRB within 1 week (see 45CFR46.103(b)(5). Failure to comply with these federally mandated responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of the project.
- Renew study with the IRB prior to expiration.
- Notify the IRB when the study is complete

If you have any questions, please contact Research Compliance Specialist in the Office of Sponsored Programs at 719-255-3903 or irb@uccs.edu

Thank you for your concern about human subject protection issues, and good luck with your research.

Sincerely yours,

Zek Cypress Valkyrie

Zek Cypress Valkyrie, PhD
IRB Reviewer
IRB PROTOCOL NO.: 16-083
Protocol Title: A Look at Leadership through the Lens of Identity
Principal Investigator: Sloan Gonzales
Faculty Advisor: Irina Kopelev
Application: Report of Change (1)
Type of Review: Expedited 7
Risk Level: No more than Minimal Risk
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This Protocol involves a Vulnerable Population: N/A (No Vulnerable Population)
Expires: 6 December 2016
*Note, if exempt: If there are no major changes in the research, protocol does not require review on a continuing basis by
the IRB. In addition, the protocol may match more than one review category not listed.
Externally funded: ☒ No ☐ Yes
OSP#: Sponsor:

Thank you for submitting your Request for IRB Review of a proposed change to your original IRB protocol. The protocol
identified above has been reviewed according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal
regulations. The review category is noted above, along with the expiration date, if applicable.

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Zek Cypress Valkyrie, PhD
IRB Reviewer