Leaders of the New School: Exploring the Origins of Leadership Qualities in First Generation Black Male College Students

Rahjaun J. Gordon
Montclair State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/etd

Part of the Family, Life Course, and Society Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Montclair State University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations and Culminating Projects by an authorized administrator of Montclair State University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@montclair.edu.
Leaders of the New School: Exploring the Origins of Leadership Qualities in First Generation Black Male College Students

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of Montclair State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

RAHJAUN J GORDON

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

May 2021

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Pearl Stewart
MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

DISSEERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

Leaders of the New School: Exploring the Origins of Leadership Qualities in First

Generation Black Male College Students

of

Rahjaun J. Gordon

Candidate for the Degree:

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program:
Family Science and Human Development

Certified by:

Dr. Scott Herness
Vice Provost for Research
Dean of the Graduate School

May 7, 2021

Date

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Pearl Stewart
Dissertation Chair

Dr. Robert Reid

Dr. Michael Hannon
Abstract

This qualitative study explored the origin of leadership qualities in Black male first generation college student leaders at a Predominately White Institution. The participants were identified as student leaders in various leadership roles on their college campus. The study explores the participants pre-college experience to identify any influences, primarily in their family, peer relationships, and communities to identify how their leadership qualities formed and originated. Analysis of 12 individual interviews highlighted 5 themes: 1) leadership qualities defined and utilized, 2) self-awareness, 3) family influences, 4) mentorship, 5) the importance of exposure. This work has implications for the exploration of the use of agency to real goals that inspire leadership qualities in Black male first generation college students.

Keywords: Black males, first-generation college students, leadership, education
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I have to give complete praise and glory to God Almighty. Knowing my story is to know God is real and has been blessing me abundantly through this process despite my shortcomings. Next, I want to give thanks and gratitude to my amazing committee Members Dr. Robert Reid and Dr. Michael Hannon who have pushed me to be exceptional beyond measure through their expertise and guidance. Lastly from the committee I must extend the most admiration and gratitude to my first mother-in-academia Dr. Pearl Stewart. You have counseled and supported me from my first days in this program and poured into me tirelessly as a student, an advisee, and even as kin at times. I and forever grateful to have met you and more excited on the work we will do in the future. To my colleagues in the FSHD program, I appreciate all your motivation and support over the years through this journey. I want to give a special thank you to Sandy Dawoud who introduced me to this program; she has been an amazing colleague, friend, and writing/class partner as we encouraged each other to persevere through.

Mentorship has been essential to my journey and there are a few who supported me through this process that I want to highlight. First, Dr. Daniel Jean who selflessly assured I was always taking time for myself to complete my studies and providing me with a space to vent and share my triumphs/shortcomings every PhD student faces. Dr. Jean is the mentor I needed, and the support I could not live without during this season of my life. Next, Dr. Jermaine Monk who was the exemplarity vision of a Black male PhD recipient. Dr. Monk has always challenged me to reach higher heights and always provided wise counsel to me assuring I was pushing towards excellence. Dr. Ijeoma Opara who was my colleague/mentor. Dr. Opara infused the belief within me that I belonged in the program; as I went through coursework, she prepared me for the future
steps within the program through guidance, support, scholarship opportunities, and affirming my sense of belonging in the program. Lastly, one of my oldest mentors, Duane Williams. Mr. Williams began molding me as an undergraduate and selflessly continues to pour into me at each level of my professional and personal growth.

Family has been a huge portion of my support system which guided me through this journey, so I must give praise and love to my mother for always seeing more in me than I could see in myself and my brothers who have supported all my endeavors and continued to applaud all my accomplishments. Within my extended family, huge thank you to my closest friends who I consider brothers, many from Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated. To my friends/ sisters who have always supported me and believed in my abilities, I thank you. Finally, to the person who only sees greatness in me; from the beginning of this journey and beyond supports me in everything I do and is my voice of reason and my place of peace, I thank you.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my Black male participants and Black boys/gentlemen looking for direction towards their next steps, I am committed to providing you all a blueprint. Lift as we climb.
## Contents

Chapter ONE: Introduction  
- Context  
- Brief Literature on Black Male Students  
- Problem Statement and Research Question  
- Purpose of the Study  
- Significance of the Study  
- Chapter Organization  

Chapter TWO: Review of the Literature  
- Black Males in Education  
  - Black males in K-12 Education  
  - Classroom experience  
  - Black Males in College  
- Family Involvement for Students and Black Family Traditions  
  - Parental Involvement  
  - Black Families’ Traditions  
  - Parents of First-Generation College Students  
- Community Organizations & Peer Relationships  
  - Community Organizations  
  - Peer Relationships and Networks  
- Identity: Exploring Identity of Black males through Class, Race, and Gender  
  - Black Male Identity  
  - How Race affects Blacks males  
  - Understanding the lens of Masculinity: a gender perspective  
  - Socioeconomic status and the effects on Black males  
- Leadership Involvement and Development  
  - Leadership Origins and Development  
  - Defining Involvement and Leadership in college  
  - Leadership involvement for Black males in college  
- Theoretical Frameworks  
  - Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST)  
  - Intersectionality Theory  
- Conclusion  

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology
CHAPTER FOUR: Findings

Theme 1: Leadership qualities defined and utilized
- Communication: Listening, Learning and Building
- Trust as a leadership quality
- Being a team player
- Participants Perception of themselves as leaders

Theme 2: Self Awareness
- Self-Awareness and Self-Reflection
- Use of Agency to navigate their environment

Theme 3: Family influences
- Parental influences instill strong qualities
- Doing it for my siblings/family
- Leading by Example

Theme 4: Mentorship
- Family-based mentorship
- School based mentorship

Theme 5: The Importance of Exposure
- Team Participation
- Religious-based influence and involvement
Exploring the Origins of Leadership Qualities in First Generation Black Male College Students

Chapter ONE: Introduction

Context

As I sat and watched a Black, male, first generation college student (FGS) inaugurated as the Student Government Association President for over 16,000 undergraduate students, I reflected on his journey. He grew up in an urban area of New Jersey. The area is notorious for its high crime rate and poor education system. I said to myself “this is incredible but how did it happen? How, in less than 3 years did this student gain the skills and qualities that led him to the highest leadership position for undergraduate students?” This moment shaped my curiosity and need to examine the origins of leadership qualities as well as how leadership influences Black, male, first generation college students (FGS) and college success.

First generation students (FGS) are defined as students whose parents did not attend a four-year college (Gibbons et al., 2019; Palbusa & Gauvain, 2017; Bui & Rush, 2016; Bryan & Simmons, 2009) and/or whose parents did not graduate from a four-year college (Ishitani, 2003). FGS are more likely to be racial and/or ethnic minorities who come from lower socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds (Gibbons et al., 2019; Sy et al., 2011; Lundberg et al., 2007; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). This group of students are more likely to drop out of college than their non-first-generation counterparts (Palbusa & Gauvain, 2017; Ishitani, 2003).

Because many FGS are from low socioeconomic environments, they lack access to many of the opportunities that equip their higher income counterparts to navigate the rigor of college academics (Owens et al., 2010). Many FGS reportedly struggled with time management, exhibited lower self-esteem (Gibbons et al., 2019), as well as a lack of academic preparedness
because of limited social capital related to college (Owens et al., 2010). College related social
capital is defined as access to resources, knowledge of the college environment, general
familiarity, and functions of a college or institution (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Pascarella et al.,
2004). Black FGS reportedly suffer from alienation and lack a sense of belonging (Owens et al.,
2010). The tradition of American higher education encourages students to embrace their
individuality and to break away from their family traditions and obligations. This is particularly
difficult for FGS, many with cultural traditions that lean toward collectivist belief systems.
Regardless, FGS reported their families to be key components in their support and decision to
attend college (Sy et al., 2011).

This study will explore the origins of leadership qualities of Black, male FGS leaders at a
predominantly white institution (PWI). The term student leader will be defined within an
outlined criteria at the institution drawn from leadership literature and a collective definition of
leadership based on student leadership literature that focuses on students in college.

**Brief Literature on Black Male Students**

Black men are marginalized and sometimes ostracized in American society because of
the stereotypes connected with their race and gender (Strayhorn, 2009). This population is
perceived as troublemakers, menaces to society, and on many occasions targeted by law
enforcement, educators, and lawmakers (Howard et al., 2012; Whiting 2006). For example,
Black male P-12 students are disciplined or suspended more frequently than other student
subgroups (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018; Johnson, 2015; Rashid, 2009). As a result, Black male
students have the lowest graduation rates of all race and gender groups in the United States
(NCES, 2014; Strayhorn, 2009; Dancy & Harper, 2006). They are also imprisoned at higher rates
than any other group (Dancy, 2014; Harper, 2006).
The challenges Black male students face in educational spaces are a result on their intersecting identities which include their race and gender. These challenges have led to the negative experiences in education, discrimination, and lack of academic support (Watkins et al., 2016; Scott et al., 2013; Harper, 2009; Harper et al., 2009; Solorzano, 1992; Cropper, 2000). Black male students who graduate high school and continue to college still face some of these same barriers. With the barriers Black male students face, college enrollment and persistence to graduation are lower than their Hispanic and White counterparts (Hilton & Bonner, 2017). In 2013, Black male college students accounted for 12% of all college male students with a 30% graduation rate (NCES, 2014). For Black male students, a college atmosphere has a specific set of challenges such as microaggressions, discrimination because of their race and gender (Brooms, 2018; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Nadal et al., 2014), but being a FGS at a predominantly white institution (PWI) can increase some of those challenges. FGSs have reported feeling like an outsider, unable to navigate the college environments, which lead to this population being twice as likely to leave four-year intuitions prior to their sophomore year (Lundberg et al., 2007; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Ishitani, 2003). Black male FGS may have different experiences than second and or third generation Black male college students.

A college degree is directly correlated with higher income and higher socioeconomic status (SES) (Prospero et al., 2012). More first-generation students (FGS) are realizing in order to seize opportunities for higher income and SES status, they may need to obtain a college degree (Sy et al., 2011; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006); for Black male college students, this would equate to better quality of life and opportunities.

Student involvement and leadership can increase overall college development that will increase retention and graduation rates of students (Preston, 2014). Black students value their
membership in leadership positions and student organizations because it allows them a space to feel comfortable and connected to the campus as well as create various opportunities for other Black students (Guiffrida, 2003). Black males can enhance their collegiate success by becoming involved with clubs and organizations to support their endeavors (Hilton & Bonner, 2017).

Another protective factor supporting the retention implications of student involvement in reference to enhancing the academic success of Black male FGS is family involvement and peer relationships prior to them entering college (Byron & Simmons, 2019).

**Problem Statement and Research Question**

Black male college students have lower college retention and graduation rates than any other racial group. These students account for 4.3% of college students and only one third of Black male’s graduate from college (NCES, 2014). First Generation Students at Predominately White Institutions suffer from lack of sense of belonging, discrimination, and low cultural capital on college campuses which has led this population to exit colleges at high rates (Brooms 2018). Research has pointed out the mistreatment of Black boys in K-12 education and the lack of support for Black males in the college setting (Goings et al., 2015; Nadal, 2014; Harper & Davis, 2012; Harper 2009). Additional research identifies leadership and involvement on college campuses as a mediating factor that can inspire a sense of belonging, positive identity, and increased academic aspirations and achievement (Preston-Cunningham et al., 2016; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015) but it has not explored how these qualities originated in students.

Parental involvement plays a pivotal role in academic achievement of college students (Byron & Simmons, 2019) and family encouragement enhances academic aspirations in K-12 students (Animosa et al., 2018; Altschul, 2011). Guiffrida (2005) conducted a study with Black college students and the impact of family support. This research uncovered how important
parental influence was to the academic success of the participants (Guiffrida, 2005).
Furthermore, positive peer groups, community engagement and interaction have created protective factors which enhance Black males’ academic achievement (Animosa et al., 2018).
The issue which is not addressed within the literature is the possibility of leadership qualities which may have been influenced by pre-college relationships between their family, peer, and community interactions/influences that may have enhanced their leadership involvement possibilities on college campuses. This gap leads me to this research question: What are the pre-college leadership qualities of Black male FGS at predominantly White institutions and how do these qualities support their aspirations to become student leaders at their institutions?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the origins of leadership among Black male FGS at a predominantly white institution. Through qualitative methods, the author will investigate whether family, school, social circles, and close relationships during the participants’ pre-college years were influential in the participants decision in becoming student leaders on their college campus.

The questions that will provide a focus for the study are:

1. How do the participants define the qualities of a leader?
2. What are the origins of leadership qualities in participants of the study?
3. How do leadership qualities influence their involvement on campus in leadership?
4. Have any family, peer, or community involvement influenced participants’ leadership qualities?

**Significance of the Study**
Much of the literature that references Black males in education largely focuses on the school to prison pipeline, truancy and suspension rates among Black males, low graduation retention and attrition rates (Hilton & Bonner, 2017; Johnson, 2015; Owens et al., 2010; Rahid, 2009). The goal of this study is to contribute to the literature that informs Black male student success by studying the origin of their pursuit of leadership positions on campus. Studies currently demonstrate that involvement on campus and leadership positions on campus serve as a retention tool (Preston, 2014) that deepens students’ connection to universities and helps them persist to graduation (Hilton & Bonner, 2017; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Strayhorn, 2013).

The second goal of the study is to examine family involvement in Black male college students. Studies have shown how families, positive community involvement, and positive peer groups enhance the educational endeavors of Black males (Animosa et al., 2018; Brooms, 2015). If there is a strong correlation to Black males’ influences/influencers and their decisions to become leaders on their college campuses, there may be implications that could lead to higher retention and graduation rates for this population. The gap in reference to family, community, and peer groups that influence Black males do not address how colleges have/can use these groups to build relationships to inspire Black male student leaders. The literature on FGS is extensive highlighting overall their imposter syndrome in the college environment, lack of support on college campuses nationwide, as well as high attrition, low retention, and low graduation rates (Palbusa & Gauvain, 2017; Ishitani, 2003). The family involvement tends to be lower in FGS and literature suggests they are less academically prepared, primarily from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and largely ethnic minority students with Black and Hispanic students making up the largest percentages (Gibbons et al., 2019; Sy et al., 2011; Lundberg et al., 2007; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). However, educational attainment is positively correlated to
higher incomes, which illuminates the importance of college (Bui & Rush, 2016). Therefore, in order to support and encourage this population, positive solution-based literature should focus on how to combat negative narratives and use positive narratives to increase awareness and graduation rates among FGS who are Black males. Higher retention and graduation rates will be not only beneficial to the student, but the university as well. The gap in the literature addressing origins of leadership qualities of Black male FGS will hopefully provide frameworks and implications on supporting this population of students.

Black families have unique traditions and systems of support that are seemingly broken through the mantra of college. Black families have specific cultural heritage and traditions (Cash, 1995) that translate into their experience with education. Family relationships are reported from Black students as important components in their culture and strength of their family as well as academic ability to succeed (Brooks, 2015). The literature does not address how these specific traditions can be duplicated for Black students to feel more sense of belonging on college campuses.

The final goal is to understand the influences/influencers of a Black male and if they may be correlated with leadership qualities. Some influences that students may use in college could have larger implications on the necessity of families, communities, and other positive actors to the college process or even creating collaborative support networks between universities and various support systems. Some literature speaks to the importance of mentorship serving as a mediating factor supporting Black males in college and other literature speaks to positive peer networks among other solutions (Dahlving, 2010; Sanderson & Richards, 2010; Strayhron, 2007). The overall goal is to understand the leadership origins of Black males which they use in
college, and the literature assists shaping the research question in regarding to Black males in educational spaces, their influences, and their overall identity.

**Chapter Organization**

Chapter two will explore the following areas: the historical literature of Black males’ educational experiences from K-12 education through college within the United States. The literature will also explore adolescent influences Black males encounter that could encourage their decision to enter college. Chapter 2 will also explore the influence of family involvement, community engagement and influence, and peer influence which may influence their decisions to enter college. Furthermore, Chapter 2 will explore the identity in reference to race, gender, and socioeconomic status of Black males. The theoretical perspective that will guide the student will be Intersectionality Theory and Phenomenological Variant Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST). Finally, Chapter 2 will explore leadership literature for college students and how those leadership experiences may serve as a protective factor for Black male FGS. The methodology for the study will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four will be a presentation of the findings within the study, highlighting themes analyzed, and trying to identify what information emerges from the study in relation to the study questions. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of the findings and future implications for further exploration and research.
Chapter TWO: Review of the Literature

This chapter will review the literature regarding Black males in education and leadership experiences and exposure to leadership. The review will include statistical standing in reference to retention, persistence, and graduation of the population. There will also be a presentation of research regarding how campus leadership positions can be a mediator to support Black male persistence to graduate college. The chapter will also critique the lack of exploration in literature regarding scholarship highlighting leadership origins in Black males from adolescent years and beyond. In addition, this chapter will display both theoretical perspectives and their justification of use within this study. In addition, this chapter will point to gaps within the current literature involving leadership qualities and positions of Black males in college. In conclusion, the chapter will detail the purpose of the study which includes the problem statement and research question in reference to understanding leadership origins.

Black Males in Education

This section will present research regarding Black males in K-12 education settings which will include their overall experiences, classroom experiences, and education rates/disparities between their white counterparts. In addition, this section explores some of the protective factors suggested in various research regarding this topic as well as the lack of research examining Black males in K-12 education examining involvement and leadership qualities.

Black males in K-12 Education

Access to quality and supportive K-12 education is a significant step towards success in college. Yet, Black males are not well served or supported in the K-12 educational settings (Brooms, 2014; Jenkins, 2006). Educational research about experiences and performance of
Black male students across K-12 settings frequently includes discursive narratives of Black male educational abilities from a deficit lens (Goings et al., 2015). The negative tone and deficit approach present in the literature on Black males suggests they are not worth the educational investment (Goings et al., 2015). Although the literature highlights various issues related to educational rates and outcomes of Black males in America, the literature seldom examines the qualities Black males may exhibit that may mitigate some of the disparities within Black males in K-12 education.

**Classroom experience**

This section will detail the classroom experience of Black males in K-12 education. The literature highlights the failure of teacher preparatory programs to provide the cultural competency training necessary to understand and support Black males in the educational system (Goings et al., 2015; Harper & Davis, 2012). Their direct experiences may have effects on their abilities and opportunities to become involved and presented out of the classroom experiences. Because of this lack of understanding, many Black males do not experience positive staff interaction in their educational experience (Goings et al., 2015; Whiting 2006).

The teachers serving as educators to this population are largely White and female (Bryan, 2017) and without cultural competency training, those identity factors may play a role in teacher perception of and reaction to student behavior. A study conducted detailed through student teacher observations uncovered the difference a White female teacher spoke to a black male student than his white counterparts for the same infraction (Bryan, 2017). During the interaction, white male students stepped out of line in a hallway and were gently told to please step back in line while the Black male student stepped out of line and was yelled at by the teacher for stepping out of line. Bryan (2017) added how the teacher also noted to the student teacher
assigned to observations that the Black male student was failing miserably and was not prepared academically. Other studies have also revealed practices that show how Black males are singled out in classroom settings. Barbarian & Crawford (2006) detail through their classroom observations of pre-schools how Black boys were regularly singled out in the classroom sitting at a separate desk from the group next to the teacher because of reports of disruption and difficult behaviors.

There are studies that look at Black males in education from a non-deficit lens to identify protective factors which support them in education. A qualitative study by Allen (2015) examined the motivation of high achieving Black males in college. The study uncovered how these high achievers attributed their success to their parents, to understanding the linkage between education and middle-upper class lifestyles, and to extracurricular activities (Allen, 2015). This study was important because it highlighted protective factors of high achieving Black males which insinuates in order to turn Black males into high academic achievers, these protective factors should be considered. However, the focus on high academic achievers, may leave the audience with limited information about what might be needed to assist underperforming or under supported Black males or Black males who are deemed disruptive and disrespectful are not included to understand how we can support all Black males in education. Furthermore, as we notice in this study, extracurricular activities were also contributors to their academic success Allen, 2015). It is also important to further examine involvement and leadership opportunities in depth for K-12 Black males. This study lists involvement as a factor which highlights academic success among Black males (Allen, 2015), but it does not focus on the origins of these qualities in order to make a stronger connection to academic success for all Black males.
Out of the classroom experiences in high school or extracurricular involvement could assist with engagement and involvement in the classroom. Out of the classroom experiences with leadership training/skills can give these Black males introductions to experiences which would make them more confident within their abilities (Harper, 2005). Harper (2005) states in his study of high achieving Black college males, these males reported being heavily involved in high school activities and sports which aided their engagement and leadership experiences in college. As Harper (2005) understands how important involvement is from high school experiences to success in college for Black males, the study did not trace how these experiences began and how they were introduced. Examining leadership qualities early in a Black males’ educational career could be the necessary protective factor that can support Black males’ development and belief in their ability to enter college and be successful.

**Black Males in College**

There are large disparities in enrollment and graduation rates between Black male college students and their white counterparts (Brooms, 2018; Harper & Davis, 2012; Owens et al., 2010). Black males account for only 4.3% of college students (NECS, 2014; Palmer et al., 2011). Lack of academic rigor in the K-12 system has been linked to these low enrollments (Harper and Davis, 2012) and many institutions struggle to retain those students who do enroll (Palmer et al, 2011; Harper 2006). College completion rates among Black males are the lowest of any ethnic and gender group (Owens et al., 2010) as only one third of those males finish college (NECS, 2014).

The overall experience of Black males who attend PWIs are impacted by both race and gender. They are subjected to racism and to the stereotypic scrutiny that they face as Black males in the larger society (Brooms, 2018). Black males at PWIs experience psychological distress and
struggle with adjustment in these environments (Harper, 2009). The Black males at PWIs historically have faced microaggressions, blocked opportunities, and overall environmental stress (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Nadal et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2011; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). These microaggressions come from their White counterparts, faculty members, and administration (Nadal et al., 2014; Solorzano et al., 2000). To add to the microaggressions, Black males experience a low-level of sense of belonging at PWIs (Harper, 2009).

While Black males face significant barriers to success in higher education, campus involvement has been identified as a protective factor (Strayhorn, 2013). These opportunities of involvement and leadership maintain levels of responsibility and trust which is not gained simply because someone has entered college. They are qualities that may have been existing in various facets of young Black males’ lives. So, the examination of literature should focus on the pre-existing relationships prior to college. One perspective to try and understand Black male students' protective factors would be examining if their community has any influence(s) on their lives as well as their peer interactions.

Family Involvement for Students and Black Family Traditions

Parental Involvement

With respect to education, parental involvement is defined as parents participating in the academic efforts of their children (Bui & Rush, 2016; Jeynes, 2007; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Epstein (1992, 1996) identified 4 different levels of parental involvement which include: 1) basic obligations, 2) school to home communications, 3) parental involvement at school 4) parental involvement in learning activities. Parental involvement has proven to be a factor in improving academic outcomes of children (Bui & Rush, 2016; Altschul, 2011; Jeyens, 2007; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Desimone, 1999).
Parental involvement and its importance extend to adolescent years. Fan & Chen (2001) conducted a meta-analysis which compared parental involvement to academic achievement and found a positive correlation between parental involvement and their child’s academic achievement. Bui & Rush (2016) used the same meta-analysis framework Fan & Chen (2001) created to study families from urban communities and found that parental involvement served as a positive contributing factor in expanding variation for students with lower SES but higher academic achievements. This confirms the importance of parental involvement in supporting and enhancing the academic achievement of their child but there was no mention in the study of any evidence linking parental involvement to the acquisition of leadership qualities.

Parental encouragement is essential because it can play a role in college enrollment for adolescents. Positive parental behavior and attitude regarding their involvement with activities such as homework can raise the self-efficacy of the child (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Self-efficacy can be defined as one’s own belief in their ability to execute tasks or goals and has been proven to be an important indicator in academic achievement (Komarraju & Naddler, 2013; Turner et al., 2009). Parental involvement is also described as parents being positive models and partners in the learning process which increase a student’s own ability to succeed (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005). Black males graduate at higher rates when there is a higher level of parental involvement and support as well as when they are exposed to individuals in their communities who have excelled in educational pursuits (Goings et al., 2015).

The home environment parents provide for their children is crucial to their educational aspirations and outcomes (Toldson et al., 2009; Toldson, 2008). Black boys raised in homes where parents were authoritative have a higher rate of academic achievement (Mandara, 2006). Therefore, parents should also be involved in school-related activities and meetings to help
address issues that may occur and to assure their adolescent is being treated fairly (Altschul, 2011). The activities within parental involvement outlined in the literature focuses on how parental involvement correlates to academic achievement (Toldson, 2018), but it would be interesting to examine some qualities parents exhibit in the home that could link to leadership qualities naturally inherited based on the home structures of Black males.

Family involvement will vary with traditions based on various cultures and cultural customs. Desimone (1992) conducted a study examining parental involvement and how it differs based on ethnicity and economic backgrounds. Based on ethnicity and economic differences, there are various beliefs as to what constitutes parental involvement (Desione, 1992). Because of these differences, Sui-Chu & Willms (1996) highlight how studies have recently suggested higher socioeconomic status means more parental involvement based on school participation measures of parents and schools. The literature highlights how parental involvement correlates with higher academic achievement (Komarraju & Naddler, 2013) but not explicitly if there are any implications of leadership skills children gain from their home environments.

**Black Families’ Traditions**

It is paramount to identify the differences of Black families as their own diverse group carrying traditions and cultural heritage through slavery to present day (Cash 1995). These differences enhance an understanding of the relationship between Black families and the ties these parents have with their children. Furthermore, to understand the structure of how the Black family operates, one must consider extended family relations that consist extended friendships (Chatters et al., 1994) in addition to community, societal, and individual functionality (Hill, 1998). Family relationships continue to be highlighted as an important aspect of Black culture with kinship at the core of the strength of Black families (Brooks, 2015). One of the most
prevalent attached on the Black family was during the late 1970’s when drugs were infesting Black communities leaving Black males incarcerated at enormous rates and Black citizens in these communities largely were influenced by drug use that negatively influenced many families (Rashid, 2009; Jenkins, 2006). Because of the inequalities due to race that plagues the Black family, Black males in education have experienced these effects which has led to their low achievement rates (Friend et al., 2010).

Historically, there have been overarching generalizations regarding Black families and their traditions. Collins (1989) criticized the labor report titled *The Negro Family: The case for national action*, which is a report that loosely pointed out some of the issues regarding Black family’s ascent to success. Collins (1989) highlighted 4 key tenants the report did not account for which were: 1) not accounting for working class and middle-class black family structures, 2) lack of attention for household structures which included but not limited to single parent households and extended family households, 3) the blurred concepts of household and family units, and 4) the historical context of racism and discrimination which created Black poverty. In her analysis of the report, she highlighted the complexities of the Black family which most critics and examiners do not consider (Collins, 1965). Black families typically involve extended family relationships beyond the nuclear family (Stewart, 2015) in order to support children and bridge community.

Caring relationships within the family can be early predictors of positive outcomes for an adolescent child (Animosa et al., 2018; Blum & Blum, 2009). Black families in America historically created their own traditions and bonds within their family unit despite historical attacks and dismemberment of the Black family beginning with slave trades (Jenkins, 2006). However, there were more attacks on the Black family as they tried to gain civil rights as a
people, desegregate schools for better learning opportunities, and access to better living conditions (Jenkins, 2006). The societal issues within the Black community and against Black communities have forced Black families to be open and honest about the perception of Black folks based on history and current stigmas. Parents who speak openly to their Black male children regarding the challenges they may face can increase the chances of them being successful in education spaces (Scott et al., 2013). The cultural differences show the specificity in Black family traditions, but the literature does not highlight qualities past down which could equip the Black children with certain skills they would use to excel in college as leaders on their campus.

**Parents of First-Generation College Students**

FGS who experience positive family and parental involvement reported to have been more likely to attend college (Bui & Rush, 2016). Family plays a critical role in the academic achievement of college students (Bryan & Simmons, 2009) as well as K-12 students (Animosa et al., 2018; Altschul 2011). Guiffrida (2005) examined the impact of family support among Black college students and found that family support plays a vital role in the academic success of Black college students. This discovery demonstrated the significance of family involvement in minority populations (Palmer et al., 2011). Overall, parenting styles and influence in college students remain as important, and in some instances are more important during the adolescent years (Turner et al., 2009). Palbusa & Gauvain (2017) examined parent-student communication among college students and uncovered how first-generation college students reported receiving emotional support from their parents which enhanced their experience.

The notion of complete independence for college students negates factors that differ from first generation students to their counterparts such as the cultural capital needed to navigate
collegiate spaces passed down through generations to multi-generation college students (Stevens et al., 2012). Some studies have shown because of the lack of social capital, parental involvement will be lower in first-generation parents than in non-first-generation parents (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). However, parental support is proven to reduce lower academic and negative health outcomes for students (Sy et al., 2011). Overall Black students attest to strong parental support as contributors to their academic success (Brooks, 2015).

**Community Organizations & Peer Relationships**

**Community Organizations**

The use of community resources has been documented as having positive effects on the development of Black boys. Community interactions at early ages is crucial to the success of Black boys (Goings et al., 2015). Low-income neighborhoods may be perceived as communities with only risk factors for adolescents, but these risk factors could be mediated by positive community organizations, parental involvement, and positive peer networks (Animosa et al., 2018). Community organizations, church leaders, coaches, mentors, and other male leaders can form positive relationships which support Black male adolescents navigating some of the stressors they may face within these communities (Goings et al., 2015). After-school programming is a pillar in the community that possess benefits to adolescents within the community (Sanderson & Richards, 2010). These organizations should work cohesively with parents to assure they are meeting their child’s needs. Parental encouragement still can affect the level of a child’s participation in these activities and programs (Sanderson & Richards, 2010). Programs during adolescent, middle school, and high school years for adolescents can improve school outcomes when parents are equally invested (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, Holbein, 2005).
Black boys also benefit from exposure to positive roles models in the community. The community can create connections with positive male role models that can support the growth of Black boys. Goings et al. (2015) emphasizes that Black leaders in the community need to develop intentional relationships with Black boys to give them the most opportunities to succeed. Within these relationships that are formed, Goings et al. (2015) study highlights the relationship as positive and beneficial. The missing connection for his study would be after they are influenced by these leaders in the communities, are they absorbing some of those leadership qualities as their own?

Peer Relationships and Networks

Peers possess a significant amount of influence in the lives of young Black males (Sanderson & Richards, 2010). During their adolescent years, children typically become more attached to their peers than their parents (Animosa et al., 2018). Spending time with friends can enhance a person’s interest in a particular topic and activity related to education (Sanderson & Richards, 2010). Interactions with peers and building relationships with peers among Black male students correlates with higher student success (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). To maximize success, it is important for Black males to have a strong core group of peers in order to transition well in college (Hilton & Bonner, 2017). These peer relationships in college have been proven to enhance academic achievement of Black males (Harper 2005; Harper, 2004). Furthermore, Harper (2005) refers to a study where high achieving Black student leaders explained how they chose to join their respective organizations because older Black male peers on campus reached out to them when they were freshman students.

As a mediating factor, mentorship and fellowship have been highlighted to support academic success and access to experiences through education (Howard et al., 2016).
Furthermore, programs such as Minority Male Initiatives connect scholars with practitioners to enhance the success of particularly Black/Latino males (Wood, 2013). Black Male Initiative programs primarily focus on raising retention and graduation rates of Black males across college campuses (Brooms, 2018). These programs exposed Black male students to student-led organizations that Black males can be involved in such as Black Student Union, Black Greek letter organizations which help Black students build their own community to combat the microaggressions at PWIs (Brooms, 2018). Within these leadership programs, studies show that Black males reportedly build relationships and build their level of engagement on campus (Barker & Avery, 2012).

Identity: Exploring Identity of Black males through Class, Race, and Gender

Black Male Identity

Since an individual’s identity plays a significant role in all aspects of life including issues related to education and leadership, it is important to explore Black male identity and how it might shape aspirations and actions. Mahalik et al., (2006) found the intersection of racial and gender identity to be integral parts of Black male identity. Identifying as a Black male in the United States has historically come with a series of negative stereotypes as cultural values and behaviors perceived as White have been idolized but Black males are challenged with ‘not acting Black enough’ if their identity mirrors a perceived White individual’s identity (Mahalik, et al., 2006). This has been particularly problematic in educational settings. Howard et al., (2012) expressed how psychological research has not appropriately addressed the challenges of Black males in reference to their identity in educational spaces. The identity of Black males contributes
to their self-esteem and relates to the manner in which they see themselves (Howard et al., 2012; Mahalik et al., 2006).

**How Race affects Blacks males**

In examining identity for Black males in America, it is imperative to examine racial identity, and how it affects Blacks (Howard et al., 2012). Understanding the identity of Black males through the effects of race is important to leadership origins because of the exploration of racial identity and the impact of their development of leadership. Furthermore, because identity can be a heavy influence on Black males overall, and the previous sections discussed issues related to education and Black males. Racial Identity is connected within the racial group an individual identifies; the strength of that identification and societal perceptions and interaction that occur as a result of that identity (Howard et al., 2012). Loury (2009) defines the way Black males are affected by race through the framework of racial stigma. Racial stigma refers to how influences outside of the group can determine how a person views themselves and how it can be destructive to their identity (Loury, 2009). Historically, in any space that is dominated by White people (the dominant group), people of color are subjected to mistreatment based on their race (Smith et al., 2011). Outside of the classroom, in comparison to other racial groups, Black males have faced the highest rates of false criminalization, false arrest, and false imprisonment (Harper et al., 2009; Warren, 2016). In 2009, Black males were incarcerated at rates 6.6 times higher than White males (Howard et al., 2012). These statistics illuminate the importance of examining Black males through a racial lens because of the history of disadvantage among ethnic groups of color, and Black males in particular impedes on their overall experience in society.

To understand the effects of race on Black males in education, scholars heavily rely on Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Howard, 2008; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005;
Solorzano et al., 2000). Although this study does not attempt to use CRT as a theoretical framework, it is important to highlight how CRT shapes the literature surrounding race and education. CRT began as a scholarly legal study (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In reference to education, CRT attempts to challenge traditional paradigms and methods that ultimately impact students of color. The focus of the study of CRT in education infuses women’s studies, ethnic studies, law, sociology and history to further understand systems of discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT can add insight and various perspectives to convert cultural norms in the classroom which have been originated by dominant powers (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

CRT also emphasizes the way teachers refuse to acknowledge how race and issues related to race play a role in the underachievement of students of color by examining ‘colour-blindness’ (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). The use of the CRT framework for Black males examines not only their experiences related to race, but how race has been overlooked as a growing problem in reference to properly educating Black males (Howard, 2008). Howard (2008) suggests that using CRT as a tenant has allowed scholars to explore the educational challenges Black males face. CRT has been used not only to identify race as a construct that needs to be explored when researching educational inequalities of Black males, but also how race plays a larger role in the life course of Black males in America (Howard, 2008). CRT examines race in education almost to perfection but would not be an acceptable framework for this study, as this study examines Black males in college and how their leadership qualities originate; it does not focus on the effects of race and how it is interpreted in education. Furthermore, race can be explored as a possible intersection similar to FGS, student leader, gender, to name a few. If this research project explored race and education exclusively, CRT
would be an appropriate theoretical framework but because it focuses on leadership origins, race is more fitting as an intersection.

**Understanding the lens of Masculinity: a gender perspective**

Men in general are expected to not express their feelings or show weakness or signs of vulnerability (McClure, 2006). Very little focus on masculinity as a construct has been illustrated in scholarship on Black males as most of the theoretical frameworks on masculinity correlating with academics are based on White men (Harper, 2004). These ideals are often unattainable to Black males due to the constraints on resources and opportunities (Harper, 2004). Black males’ masculinity has been measured against what Davis (2019) refers to the ‘Black male crisis’; as cultural adaptations to systematic pressure which pushes the agenda of Black males being correlated with crime, poverty, unemployment, and violence. During the Civil Rights era, Black men were assertive and boisterous leaders with powerful political voices which added to the definition of Black manhood (Hunter & Davis, 1992). Hunter and Davis (1992) detail how this depiction of Black manhood was transformed from a political vehicle to Black rage or dangerous and self-destructive. A study conducted by Hunter & Davis (1994) illustrated how identity and self-development are strong components of a Black male definition of manhood. Furthermore, family was also essential to the development of manhood in Black males (Hunter & Davis, 1994). Black boys are taught to be tough, aggressive, and at times even violent in order to pass as real men (Wallace, 2007). Black boys are also regarded as adults from birth being referred to as titles such as ‘little man’ and giving the view of Black boys like that of an adult Black male perpetuating these little boys cannot act in feminine ways or any way unbecoming of a man (Wallace, 2007).
Various systems in a Black males’ life specifically during his adolescent years should offer guidance and properly debunk myths regarding masculinity and education which have hindered the success of Black males in education (Whiting, 2006). Black male literature compares masculinity to coolness (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). But the perception of how Black males use coolness whether negatively or positively is widely misunderstood or connected to deviant behavior (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). However, in the literature, there are various views on how Black males use ‘coolness’. Patterson (2006) coins the term ‘Doinysin trap’ where he refers to coolness in Black males as being dangerous and paints an illusion of acceptance pushing Black males to destruction. On the contrary, Conner (1995) views coolness as a place of serenity helping Black males cope with societal stress and oppression. This definition of coolness serves as a protective factor which enables strength and confidence among Black males (Conner, 1995).

**Socioeconomic status and the effects on Black males**

This study is exploring Black male FGS, and the literature explains how the majority of FGS students are from low-income backgrounds (Prospero et al., 2012). Therefore, it is important to understand the socioeconomic status effect Black male student leader FGS’. More education correlates to higher income and higher income provides basic needs and provisions for families (Currie, 2009). In reference to first generation students, because their families may not have achieved higher levels of education, their opportunity to earn higher incomes may be lower. Additionally, having lower socioeconomic statuses for children can pose higher risk for mental and health related issues as adults (Boylan et al., 2020). For this study it is important to examine how economic statuses play a role in Black male success, achievement, or lack thereof.
The socioeconomic (SES) status of Black males has historically been lower than other racial and ethnic groups. Furthermore, Black males’ employment rates are also lower than their racial counterparts and even further for those who are not educated (Raphael, 2006). Frazier (1948) examines the history of slavery and oppression which gave birth to structured poverty-stricken environments Black families were forced to live in. These environments lead to a cycle of inadequate Black males as performers in a household and poor family functioning units ultimately because the barriers placed on Black family and males did not give Black males the opportunity to create and discover their own lens and purpose (Hunter & Davis, 1994). Low SES status also affects the choice to enter college. Black males with lower SES enter college at much lower rates than Black males who have higher socioeconomic statuses (Griffin et al., 2010).

Black students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to have less high-level academic opportunities that prepare them for the rigor of college (Rose, 2013). Urban neighborhoods with lower socioeconomic status have lower academic achievement, advancement, and attainment than their suburban counterparts (Rose, 2013). Therefore, Black males are less represented in gifted and talented programs or Academic Placement courses (Rose, 2013; Moore & Flowers, 2012). Low SES students typically lack resources and the advantages higher SES students have taken advantage of during their educational journey (Smith, 2008). To add, during the adolescent years, SES exposed black males to neighborhoods stricken with adversaries such as poverty, violence, drugs, and gangs (Gregory et al., 2010).

Leadership Involvement and Development

Leadership Origins and Development

The development of leadership focuses on continuously developing the skill sets and traits to become a leader (Day et al., 2014). These skills may vary depending on what specific
type of leadership the individual is trying to implement or master. In developing these skills, a leader advances through the stages from beginner to expert leader (Day et al., 2014). Leadership is defined by 3 tenets: motivation, personality, and success (Elmuti et al., 2005). However, these tenets may not be synonymous to all leadership development or could be coupled with other various qualities. Leaders do not need to be classified as ‘leaders’ to act as leaders (Shamir & Eliam, 2005). Their goals and aspirations are the passion that fuels their leadership (Shamir & Eliam, 2005). Leaders undergo a process gaining self-awareness, relationship building, and establishing trust (Day et al., 2014).

Leaders who are effective typically are: vision driven, committed, effective in their actions, express a passion for their improvement and have a high standard of integrity (Elmuti et al., 2005). In order to be an effective leader, leaders typically possess technical skills, wisdom, and cognitive skills which support decision making (Day et al., 2014; Elmuti et al., 2005). One form of a leader is a transactional leader, who focuses on the organization maintaining a steady pace while not making drastic changes (Elmuti et al., 2005). The transactional leader focuses on satisfying the existing needs of the mission and/or followers (Elmuti et al., 2005). Another leadership style is the transformational leader who empowers those they lead, helping them reach higher potentials than they believe they could reach (Elmuti et al., 2005).

Authentic Leadership typically displays self-knowledge and their own points of views that reflects the values and convictions they have (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Authentic leaders understand their emotions and values and how those emotions and values play a role in their leadership style (Day et al., 2014). Authentic leaders do not engage in leadership activities for status or honor, they believe in the mission they want to illustrate. As appropriate to the specific setting, authentic leaders are influenced by societal norms, social influences, peers, parental
engagement, school, and role models (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Shamir & Eliam (2005) have 4 concepts of what they have classified as authentic leaders: 1) leadership identity development is the central of their self-concept, 2) understanding of self and clarity regarding their convictions, 3) their goals are aligned with their self-concept, 4) high levels of behaviors that allow them to be expressive. College students who are leaders on their campus may exhibit a variety of these qualities and styles of leadership throughout their college experience. Specifically, Black male FGS’ may grow into different leadership styles as their environments vary at a PWI.

Defining Involvement and Leadership in college

Student involvement and leadership can increase overall college development in students (Preston, 2014). Leaders on college campuses can be defined as individuals that influence an organization to assist them with being impactful (Nahavandi, 2006). Student leadership qualities for college students are typically developed through experiences and interactions with peers (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Student leadership can be divided into 2 constructs: being a leader and being effective in a leadership role (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Northouse (2016) defines leadership for college student leaders as assuming a position where they are occupying a role in an organization, particularly a student organization. Leadership can be influenced by creating positive learning environments, cultural competency of leaders, and creating leader-member relationships (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). The out of classroom experience of student involvement can increase leadership skills, and self confidence that will boost self-efficacy (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Leadership involvement for Black males in college

Black students value their membership in leadership positions and student organizations because it allows them a space to feel comfortable and connected to the campus as well as create
various opportunities for other Black students (Guiffrida, 2003). Black males can enhance their collegiate success by becoming involved with clubs and organizations to support their endeavors (Hilton & Bonner, 2017). Furthermore, this involvement has positive effects on the overall development of the identity of Black males (Preston-Cunningham et al., 2016; Harper & Quaye, 2009). Black males in college are most influenced by the collection of their racial identity (Preston-Cunningham et al., 2016). Tinto (1993) suggests that student organizations were essential to encourage social integration in college. This integration has a positive impact on retention and graduation (Preston-Cunningham et al., 2016), so it needs to be considered when creating effective measures for Black male retention at PWI. Colleges and universities have imparted the importance of leadership development in their slogans and admissions statements (Preston-Cunningham et al., 2016) but little research has focused specifically on Black males and finding the source of these leadership qualities in this population. PWIs must begin to explore the interactions of Black males and origins of leadership development. To highlight the importance of leadership without understanding the complexities of Black males in reference to their race, class, and gender (Preston-Cunningham et al., 2016) merely attacks the magnitude of the problem without understanding the rooted issues that encumber this student population. Some studies examine ways to develop leadership frameworks for Black college students (Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Sutton & Terrel, 1997) but little research examined Black males in order to attract them to leadership positions.

Research on Black male students in college highlights the importance of leadership involvement on campus in reference to their academic achievement (Harper, 2006; Palmer & Davis 2012). Although various studies point to positive peer relationships (Animosa et al., 2018; Brooms 2015; Dahlving, 2010), Black males’ academic success is a determinant of their peer
relationships as well as campus involvement in activities and student organizations (Strayhorn, 2013). Leadership positions can inspire and promote community service, and academic achievement among students (Patton et al., 2011). It is important to include student engagement outside of the classroom when referencing protective factors that support Black male student persistence to be retained and graduate (Brooms, 2018). Out of the classroom engagement can assist with identity development which supports racial identity development of Black students (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Harper 2005). The gap reflective in the literature is understanding how leadership originates in this population. Studies have not been conducted to understand how leadership qualities form among Black males. Being involved as a student leader and involved in campus activities has been tested and proven to support Black male academic achievement and connectedness on a college campus (Hilton and Bonner, 2017; Preston-Cunningham et al., 2016). The disconnect stems from how the qualities needed for these levels of involvement originated in Black males.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks chosen to guide this study are Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) and Intersectionality Theory. Each seems useful in gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of these participants.

**Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST)**

Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) is defined as an identity focused cultural ecological systems approach (Velez & Spencer, 2018). Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) demonstrates how different contextual levels and environments can influence an individual's development. PVEST expands Bronfenbrenner’s model by adding a phenomenological
approach to address the perceptions and life circumstances (contexts) of youth of color by factoring in an adolescent’s understanding of their experiences as they unfold and how these experiences shape their identities (Knight, 2014; Spencer et al., 1997; Velez & Spencer, 2018). PVEST allows researchers the ability to understand systems such as racism, discrimination, and stereotyping which affects their identity (Spencer, Dupreee, & Hartman, 1997). PVEST focuses on the individual's perceptions and how those perceptions inform the development of identity as that individual interacts with various structural, contextual, and cultural influences (McGee & Pearman, 2015). Risk and protective factors can be mediated by one's influences and perceptions. Their identity begins to form based on the support and challenges an individual face (McGee & Pearman, 2015).

PVEST has been used to explore the conditions and process of shaping the development of Black people and to examine the phenomenological process in identity development (McGee & Pearman, 2015). The original Ecological systems theory largely influenced social sciences by examining various structural systems which may affect an adolescent but was not completely inclusive in examining the effects of race and gender and various factors that are similarly related to inequality (Knight, 2014). However, PVEST acknowledges theoretical perspectives that focus on race and gender and infuses both in some instances to support identity formation (Velez & Spencer, 2018). Identity formation is typically used in theoretical frameworks that exclude the factors and environments which shape identity (Velez & Spencer, 2018). If research solely focuses on race and racial identity it could ignore certain nuances involving environmental factors. Within the experiences PVEST explores, Spencer adds to the theory by stating it is not only the experiences which shape the identity of adolescents but the cultural context of how they
perceive the experience and how collectively it will influence the individual (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartman, 1997).

Additionally, understanding how these systems were used to combat some of the challenges Black males faced in society but more specifically their educational experiences could be illuminating. Using the PVST framework will help the researcher identify any early onsets of leadership qualities that may increase their overall identity, self-esteem, and confidence to become involved in leadership positions on their college campus.

**Intersectionality Theory**

Intersectionality Theory is used to explore how multiple identities intersect to shape the development of an individual (Crenshaw, 1989). Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality to describe how the legal system would only allow Black women to identify as either Black or women but would not consider that the experiences which created a legal matter related to the biases of their intersections of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). One of Crenshaw’s (1989) goals was to demonstrate that multiple identities create individual’s intersections and can further illustrate dominance and oppression through the understanding of these intersections as inseparable aspects of an individual’s identity. Intersectionality calls for a balance in each domain understanding the impact on each identity separately and together how they intersect (Graham-Bailey, Richardson Cheeks, Blankenship, & Chavous, 2018).

Intersectionality focuses on lived identities that form systems of oppression and these systems highlight the notion that there is not a single axis problem (May, 2015). Intersectionality shifts thought from a single axis process to a matrix process, which is referred to as the matrix of domination. This matrix highlights structures in systems, lived identities, and marginalization forms collectives of power (Gouws, 2017). Intersecting identities can be related to ‘add and stir’
references where each identity is added and mixed in collectively with other identities, which create the intersections to better understand which ways intersecting identities of particular people are oppressed (Gows, 2017). The matrix of dominance rejects this ideology because of the dominance created from these intersecting identities; because of the oppression, power and privilege benefit others. Intersectionality acts as a prism to understand problems and the identities of an individual are the connectors within that prism (Proctor, 2020). The matrix of dominance rejects this prism because of how it challenges the power and privileged.

Intersectionality theory seeks to examine how inequalities, dominance, and oppression manifest in the lives of individuals based upon an individual’s intersecting identities. The manifestation may create oppression or opportunity depending on the combination of identities (Shields, 2008). Therefore, this theoretical framework is fitting to this study. Using a lens which includes the domination matrix allows a deeper understanding of the oppressions which govern the educational and social experiences of Black males based upon their race, class, and gender. To study this framework in reference to understanding their experiences with leadership, the author explored the intersecting identities of Black male FGS and how these identities affected their development of leadership qualities as they navigated the systems of oppression.

Intersectionality Theory suggests that everyone is a collection of intersections and experiences at those intersections are shaped by systems of dominance and oppression (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989). With respect to black males, the influence of those systems of oppression begins early and continues throughout life. During high school years, development may differ among adolescents. Based on their experiences, a students’ personal identity evolves as they transition to and through higher education. Therefore, it is important to explore their pre-college experiences to fully understand the influences of their leadership qualities. Race, gender,
and social class are three identities that are linked to a college student’s inter- and intrapersonal outcomes (Graham-Bailey et al., 2018). Watkins et al., (2015) argue that the challenges Black men face which intersect their race, class, and gender can translate in this group becoming more depressed, hopeless, and lacking overall satisfaction in life. Gender is one of the earliest areas of identity socialization shaping itself in the adolescent years from the roles and traits connected with various genders (Graham-Bailey et al., 2018). Race, more specifically on a college campus because of the level of diversity in reference to race, frequently is exposed to attacks such as racism, microaggressions, and discrimination on college campuses. Black men reportedly have experienced psychological distress more frequently than other groups and many of the challenges that trigger this distress occur during the transitional period from adolescence to adulthood (Watkins et al., 2016). One common challenge is the societal discrimination towards Black males which limits their opportunities such as lack of educational support, lack of resources, and fewer employment opportunities (Watkins et al., 2016). These systems of oppression are clear indicators that their race and gender combined evokes treatment that could hinder their experience as college students. Class is not visibly noticed in higher education atmospheres (Graham-Bailey et al., 2018) but in reference to first-generation low-income students, their lack of access can have a negative effect on their personal and academic adjustment depending on social class status’ they may or may not obtain.

Though Intersectionality Theory is a valuable important theoretical perspective to identify the various intersections in one’s life which are subject to oppressive experiences of populations (Crenshaw, 1989) it was also intended as a tool for change and social justice (Proctor, 2020). A variety of studies have coupled personal agency with intersectionality since agency is essential to moving beyond identification of intersections and the oppressions that
occur at those intersections to gaining social justice for those affected (Singh, 2015; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014; Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010). Agency may be defined as the ability to conceptualize situations and perform actions that differ from the intersections and typical outcomes (Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). This allows the research to use intersectionality to explain how various systems how individuals’ intersections affect them (Graham-Bailey et al., 2018) while agency works detailing the actions these individuals use to make decisions that challenge those systems (Roy, 2006).

**Conclusion**

This literature review examined educational outcomes, support networks for black males, understanding the differences in family structures, and leadership and involvement in college for Black males. Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) argue that some protective factors that support Black male college students are leadership roles, mentors, peers, and family encouragement. Intersectionality Theory illuminates various systems which overlap and PVEST supports how individuals create clarity within the various points of the intersections that shape their identity (Velez & Spencer, 2018). Research shows that college counselors are also more likely to persuade Black males away from attending college (Palmer & Davis, 2012). However, some studies have captured how protective factors such as trust, confidence building, and resilience support academic achievement in the classroom (Rhoden, 2017; Marsh et al., 2012). Examining the literature, the next step is to see if these protective factors build on the leadership qualities Black male college student leaders illustrate. The gap in the literature lies in the relationships built in Black males’ peer networks, schools, families, and communities which does not examine any qualities these Black males gain from these positive relationships that they use to become leaders and involved in college. In order to properly apply the importance of leadership qualities,
we must examine how they begin in the lives of Black males. This brings the research question: What are the pre-college leadership qualities of Black male FGS at predominantly white institutions and how do these qualities support their aspirations to become student leaders at their institution? To reiterate, the literature on Black males in education does extensively illustrate protective factors to support Black males in education and even highlights how leadership and involvement encourage academic achievement among college students and promote a sense of belonging (Palmer & Davis, 2012). This study will examine through qualitative analysis the lives of Black male FGS who are involved on their college campus through student leadership positions and the origins where they gained these qualities.
CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

This chapter will describe the research approach and design for this proposed study. The chapter will also include participant selection which includes research site, recruitment criteria, and gaining access to participants. To continue, this chapter will explain data collection and analytic strategies which include individual interviews, recruitment strategies, specific information about the participants, interview protocol and the plan for the analysis of the data. Finally, it will address reflexivity, researcher positionality, and limitations of the study. The design for the methodology will support answering the research questions: What are the pre-college leadership qualities of Black male FGS at predominantly white institutions and how do these qualities support their aspirations to become student leaders at their institution?

The overall purpose of the study is to understand leadership quality origins; therefore, the author will investigate how family, school, social circles, close relationships, during the participants’ adolescent years were influential to the participants becoming student leaders on a college campus. This study will also explore the role gender and race play in the development of participants’ identities and how identity plays a role in their lives and may play a role in their leadership qualities. The questions that will provide a focus for the study are: 1) how do the participants define the qualities of a leader? 2) What are the origins of leadership in participants of the study? 3) How do leadership qualities influence their involvement on campus in their leadership positions? 4) Have any family involvement influenced participants’ leadership qualities?

Qualitative Methodology

To investigate this topic, the author used a qualitative research design to gather in-depth data about participants’ experiences prior to and during college. Given the use of
Intersectionality and PVVEST both as the theoretical framework, qualitative methods allow the researcher to explore the multiple realities that shape the lives of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1990) and focus on individuals’ worldview (Krefting, 1991). Qualitative methods are preferred to amplify participant voices and gain a deeper understanding about their experiences (Hochkins & Dancy, 2015). However, Creswell (2017) states that qualitative methods allow for exploration and true understanding of groups experiencing social problems. In applied science fields such as education, qualitative methods permit the researcher to rely on the participants’ and their stories in order to truly make a difference (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

After reviewing the literature related to First Generation Black males in college, specifically as well as FGS in general, there were many references to the use of qualitative studies to understand the experiences of Black males in education (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Harper, 2008; Moore et al., 2003; Monk, 2016). Harper (2006) challenged a pre-existing data set that concluded high achieving Black males were at risk of being accused of ‘acting white’ by their peers. Harper (2006) used this methodology and conducted interviews with the participants which showed peer support being an important factor in the participants' involvement on campus as well as high academic achievement. Other qualitative studies which focused on Black male identity and leadership qualities in college relied on qualitative methods in order to support their research and validate their study (Monk, 2016; Preston, 2014). For this study, Black voices may be able to speak to a phenomenon in reference to educational experiences in a more precise manner than statistical data analysis. Interviewing can identify the experiences with the intersectional lens of race, education, and overall social experiences (Lewis, 2016).

Grounded Theory Research Design
Grounded Theory is a form of qualitative research design which focuses on understanding the research topic, process, or action by allowing the data to lead to a theoretical perspective naturally (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The overall goal is to generate data grounded in participants' experiences or perspective with the goal of theory development or enhancement (Hays & Wood, 2011). Grounded Theory is widely used in practitioner fields such as social work, counseling, and education to explain, describe, or explore a phenomenon (Hays & Wood, 2011; Strass & Corbin, 1997) and has been used to study students’ educational experiences in K-12 education. Bell (2014) conducted a study to examine dropout rates and graduation rates of Black males using a Grounded Theory approach. The purpose of the study was to understand why Black males leave school and the author noted how Grounded Theory was essential because it allowed for themes and data to emerge based on the points from the interviews (Bell, 2014). A second study conducted on college students examined how leadership identity develops also used Grounded Theory because the purpose was to understand the development of leadership identity (Komives et al., 2005). In this study, the authors noted the way Grounded Theory is reflective of the leadership development the college students experienced (Komives et al., 2005). Other studies that have used Grounded Theory to examine the experiences of Black Male college students included Hamilton (2018), Mathews (2017), and Dahlving (2010).

Grounded Theory has many characteristics that would be needed for a specific research study: 1) Grounded Theory focuses on an action or phase that has occurred over time that the research is trying to explain. Furthermore, within Grounded Theory, there may be a development or a pre-established theory that occurs which explains the process. The next step within grounded theory is the researcher typically begins the process of memoing trying to create or connect a
theory; memos are small notes which are ideas during the data collection and analyzing process. The primary form of data collection for Grounded theory is typically interviewing and data analysis is completed through categorizing, axial coding or category coding, selective coding or theoretical coding, and forming propositions based on the data or a hypothesis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The characteristics of Grounded theory were seemingly good fit for this study. My focus was on the origin and development of leadership (i.e., a process that occurs over time) in the participants that lead me to theorizing based on the data gathered as they told their stories during the interview process. Their experiences collectively spoke to the action over time of becoming a leader and how the researcher explained that action through theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There are theories that address this process, but those theories may not be applicable to Black males given the unique issues associated with their intersectionality.

**Participant Recruitment**

**Research Site**

Montclair State University is a public research institution in New Jersey (Campus Facts, 2019). Montclair State University has an enrollment of over 16,000 undergraduate students, which include 89% full-time students per semester (Campus Facts, 2019). Montclair State University is the second largest university in New Jersey with approximately 70% of students receiving financial aid and over 70% receiving the Federal Pell Grant. While Montclair State University has notable racial and ethnic diversity among its student body, it is considered a Predominantly White University with a 40% white-non-Hispanic population, a 13% Black American population, and 5% Black male population (Campus Facts, 2019). Montclair has been designated as a Hispanic Serving Institute which supports initiatives and programs for
Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for the study, students had been First Generation College Students (FGS), who are students whose parents did not attend college (Gibbons et al., 2019; Palbusa & Gauvain, 2017; Bui & Rush, 2016; Próspero et al., 2012). This study extended the recruitment to alumni of the research site who fit the criteria during their undergraduate career. For purposes of the study, FGS included students whose parents did not finish college at the bachelor level. The second criterion is that participants must have held a campus leadership position. A leadership position is defined as a position that influences an organization (Nahavandi, 2006).

Participants of the Study

From the data collected, there were a total of 12 interviews conducted with 5 participants recently graduated seniors of as May 2020 and 7 participants currently college students. All participants identified as Black male FGS or recent college graduates who FGS. The average age of the participants is 21 years of age with the oldest participant being 27 and the youngest participants being 19. The participants came from varied 1 or 2 parent households with most of the participants in a 1 parent household. The average grade point average (GPA) of the participants is a 3.1 with the lowest being a 2.7 and the highest being a 3.49. All the participants were involved with different leadership roles in various organizations and positions on campus. Leadership definition in the study was identified in chapter 3. The organizations the participants were involved in on campus are: The Brotherhood, Residence Life, Black Student Union, Greek Organizations, Threads Mentorship Program, Educational Opportunity Fund, MSU Athletics, University College Fellows Program, National Panhellenic Council, Male Leadership Academy,
Political Science Club, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Student Government Association, The Corporate Edge Program, and Red Hawk Pride Society (see Appendix for description of organizations). The positions the participants held in these organizations were/are: Vice President, Resident Assistant, President, Peer Leader, Mentor, Team Captain, Ambassador, Treasurer, Public Relations, and Organization President, Orientation Leaders, Service Assistant (Desk Assistant) Coordinators, Team Leaders, Building Managers, Operations Coordinators, and any other campus position where there is influence over a group of students and/or organizations. These first-generation students also had to self-identify as male and Black/African American. The students recruited attained at least sophomore status or second year college students. This study excluded first year students because at the particular research site, first year students are not eligible to hold leadership positions because of the grade point average and credit requirement.

**Recruitment Procedures**

The researcher used convenience sampling to gather the participants because individuals meeting the criteria for the study existed in a location which was accessible to the researcher (Etikan et al., 2015). Furthermore, the specificity of the study warranted the use of convenience sampling in order to gather the necessary number of participants needed. The researcher had pre-existing access to students’ contact information at the university where the research was conducted as well as access to student organization executive board member rosters. The researcher communicated with colleagues who worked in various departments on campus, which gave the researcher access to students in leadership positions within their departments. The departments are within the division of Student Development and Campus Life which are Office of Residence Life, Student Organizations, Campus Recreation Center, Student Academic

Services, Health Promotions, The Health Center, Dean of Students Suite, Center for Leadership and Engagement, Center for Student Involvement, Red Hawk Central, Educational Opportunity Fund, and various academic departments. The researcher asked permission from these departments to have access to students who fit the study criteria to find interest. From this solicitation, a list of Black male students in leadership positions on campus were compiled. To broaden the pool of potential participants, the next step in gaining access was a referral method. This referral method is commonly referred to as snowball sampling which is where the researcher asks the participants for recommendations of people who may fit in the criteria of the research (Robinson, 2014). Using grounded theory allowed the researcher to be flexible with their sample size based on theoretical saturation or on the need to gather more information on specific topics (Robinson, 2014). For this study, the aim was 10 participants minimum and 20 participants maximum, but the researcher will increase if necessary, to reach saturation.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher conducted 12 interviews with many of them being undergraduate students and some alumni students. This is important for the research because it allows the interviewer to examine graduates and their journey in completing their degree. Exploring graduates also allowed the interviewer to explore whether the information differed from current undergraduate students to alumni students who have the same intersections identified in the study but who have completed their degree requirements. This information will be collected using a pre-screening form to assure all participants fit the criteria for the study.

Individual Interviews

Black Americans typically use stories to elaborate on topics that may not be explored within other methodologies (Lewis, 2016). Grounded theory recommends 10-20 interviews to
reach saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The use of individual interviews allowed for discussion of topics which participants feel less comfortable exploring in a group setting. To complete a study within the researcher’s workplace may raise issues within the participants in reference to power dynamics, assuring the accuracy of data being collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The interviews were recorded with permission of the participants with possibly limited notes recorded as well. Brief notetaking and memoing during the interviews allowed the interviewer to be connected to the interview and the participant and give attention to what is being said, while jotting key points and phrases to refer to after the interview. These memos were useful as part of theory development. It was important for the interview to flow as a conversation to receive authentic stories pertaining to the questions.

As part of the overall interview process, adjustments were made to the interview protocol as the researcher became familiar with the language patterns of the participants and as themes began to reveal themselves. This process is known as semi-structured interviews where there are large topics the researcher would like to cover but still allow the participant to tell their story (Rabionet, 2011). Prior to the interview, the interviewees were given the opportunity to ask any questions pertaining to the interview or information in the interview. Some of the interviewees knew the interviewer in some capacity given my professional position at the research site or not at all prior to the interview which may affect the participants' trust in the research project. Also, at the beginning of each interview, I asked the participants to discuss if there were any uncomfortable topics they would not want to discuss, and the researcher would respect their request and not ask questions pertaining to these topics.
Interviews ended once the researcher reached data saturation, where no significant new information was uncovered during the interviews. To reach saturation in data collection, the interviewer will need to ask the same questions to the interviewees until answers are repeated and similar among most interviewees (Fusch & Ness, 2012). Because of the saturation process, the participants ranged from sophomore student leaders based on the definition of the leadership criteria in the study to senior student leaders all self-identified as Black male FGS.

**Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol is reflective of the literature examining multiple themes and topics which include: 1) influence of decision making which lead to leadership roles on college campuses, 2) experiences or interactions prior to coming to college influence their decision to become a leader, 3) origin of leadership qualities, 4) individual changes or adjustments in interactions with families and communities prior to college based on the outlook of the participant in a leadership position. The protocol that was used is an existing research project with IRB approval (#001010) examining first generation students and their family influences. This study expands the previous study by examining leadership in conjunction with FGS and focuses on a specific ethnic group and gender (Black males). I will only be sampling from Montclair State University students and alumni. The initial interview protocol includes the questions that will be found in the Appendix.

**Analysis**

The Grounded theory approach was used to analyze the data, which the researcher used the constant comparative method where the researcher compares pieces of data against one another to evaluate and determine any similarities and differences in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of Grounded theory is to create or use a theory based on data which
is based on participants’ experiences and perceptions (Komives et al., 2005). As the grouping process began, themes were identified tentatively as more comparison and evaluations changed themes and placement of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The process of collecting and analyzing continuously allowed the researcher to sharpen the process and identify recurring themes more rapidly.

The data was collected through individual interviews using an online video platform (Zoom) and were simultaneously recorded and transcribed using an application called Otter. After the interviews, the researcher listened to the audio and read through the transcriptions changing/editing any mistakes to ensure a verbatim transcription. After this review by the researcher, each participant was provided with the transcript of his interview which he verified for accuracy. This process is referred to as member checking (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The transcriptions were then open coded for the first few interviews to analyze the data for specific words and text which have meaning (Schreiber & Stern, 2001) then detailed coding which closely examined and collapsed the initial codes into themes that emerged throughout the data (Schreiber & Stern, 2001) based on similar experiences, and ideas related to origins of leadership surrounding experiences prior to college. The interview audio was used for memoing and note-taking to triangulate the data. The notetaking and memoing supported the correlation of the coded transcripts to create themes and subthemes of the data. Individual interviews were used for this study to capture the voices, stories and lived experiences of the participants (Seidman, 2013).

**Researcher Positionality**

Acknowledging one’s positionality is an important part of qualitative research. It allows the researcher to identify and disclose their position and how that position relates to the
participants. It can help diffuse any bias that may occur during data collection and analysis (Relles, 2016). The researcher is a Black male with similar intersections as the participants who oversee a small population of FGS at Montclair State University through the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF). EOF is a New Jersey higher education grant funded program for low-income students who are primarily FGS (EOFNJ, 2019). The program was written into state law in 1968 to provide access to education from students who are from low economic and educational disadvantaged backgrounds. The student participants need to be New Jersey residents and fit into the income criteria below set by the state accessing household income and members of the household. The program is available at more than 90% of the state’s public, community, and private colleges (EOFNJ, 2019).

As an administrator, I do not provide service to the EOF students directly, but I implement policies that aid their experience as college students as well as interact with them regularly and serve as a mentor in various capacities to the Black students on campus and a few students in the study. Furthermore, I give advice and insight on the college process and navigation of higher education regularly when solicited by all students. I am a Black male who is a first-generation student who has similarities to the low economic background of the participants in the study. Although we have similarities, I am in a privileged position because although we have experience and I am relatable, I operate in an administrative capacity and service all students within this capacity regardless of our similarities that may intersect. To acknowledge any bias that may occur, but I also plan to use a reflexive journaling as well as consent forms informing the participants of my position on campus and influence (Relles, 2016). The transcripts are credible and truthful because of the rapport I have built with the students. These students at Montclair State utilize me from a perspective of campus resource, mentor, and
LEADERS OF THE NEW SCHOOL

student advocate. In respect to the study, I have 2 mentor mentee relationships out of all the participants. The remainder of the participants have knowledge of who I am and either my role on campus, did not interact with me prior to the study, or may have had brief conversations with me regarding various topics on random occasions throughout the years.

**Reflexivity**

Within qualitative studies, understanding positions of potential biases are important for the researcher to recognize during data collection and analysis (Creswell, & Poth, 2018). The researcher background, the connections to members in the study, and similarities in their family structure(s), economic background, race and gender are important factors to consider while considering reflexivity and how these factors may influence the data analysis process. As a Black male first generation college graduate who attended a PWI in New Jersey, the issues outlined by the participants in the study regarding school life, family life, and their communities, the interviews and observations may be impacted. Furthermore, since the researcher identifies with many leadership positions during his tenure as a student leader in college, it is important to note how these similarities may also impact how the researcher interprets the observations and information in the interviews regarding student leadership. The time between when the researcher attended college is 8 years prior, which may account for changes within time to how the researcher relates to these leadership positions. Furthermore, the researcher did not attend the research site (Montclair State University) as an undergraduate student and notes many differences within structure regarding these leadership positions. The age gap between the participants and the researcher also plays a role in the research. The researcher at times is referred to as a ‘young professional’ in professional settings with colleagues, so it is important to note this may reflect on how the participants view the researcher. This may allow the participants
to view the researcher as someone who they connect with based on age; the participants range from 5-12 years younger than the researcher. The researcher used this in order to connect with the participants in order for them to become more comfortable for the interview. This also allowed the participants to use language that made them comfortable and more expressive.

In some instances, some participants in the research identified the researcher over time as cool and understanding to them and their story. In broad forums, keynote addresses, and/or student leadership training supporting student groups, the researcher has shared portions of his story to inspire members of the organization hosting the specific events and their audience. Many of these audiences included future participants in this research project. Furthermore, some participants discussed the personality of the researcher, which assisted in trustworthiness of the participants. Lastly, the researcher will use a reflexivity journal while collecting and analyzing data in order to be able to identify any biases I may be overlooking within the design of the study (Relles, 2015). Having been a student leader, I acknowledge that I have been a leader of student groups or a body of students as a President of a student organization and a Resident Assistant for 3 years while I attended college.

Validity

Various methods of data collection were used in order to enrich the validity of this study. Lincoln & Guba (1985) states the importance of establishing a truth value which asks if the researcher displays confidence in presenting the truth in their findings. Further validity is based on the credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or testing the findings against certain groups. Furthermore, the researcher used triangulation which included multiple data collection methods and a grounded theory approach to analyze the data through triangulation to increase the internal validity of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher achieved
triangulation by having individual interviews, memoing the recordings as well as kept a journal to note-take the information, and member checking. Member checking allowed the researcher to gain feedback on findings through preliminary rounds of interviewing versus various interviews to follow; this process ensures that the researcher is interpreting their findings correctly rather than misinterpreting what is occurring and what is being said (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Study Limitations**

The definition of leadership position outlined by the author qualifies as a limitation in the study because it limits participants who may exhibit leadership qualities but do not specifically work within the confines of the leadership positions the author specified. Furthermore, limitations may occur within the region of the University and may not be reflective of universities that may not have similarities. Another limitation is the position of myself as the researcher and interviewer because of my position at the University, some participants may be apprehensive to participate in the study. A final limitation may be campus influencers who may not have an official leadership position but may exhibit the qualities discussed by the participants to qualify them as leaders in a similar lens that I am examining the participants through.
CHAPTER FOUR: Findings

Introduction

This chapter will present the findings of the data from the participants. There were 5 themes identified in the data and various subthemes. The emerging themes were: 1) Leadership qualities defined and utilized, 2) Self Awareness, 3) Family Influences 4) Mentorship, 5) The importance of exposure. The participants discussed pre-college experiences and experiences after they entered college that were related to their leadership origins. These themes contained various sub-themes which were illustrated by specific quotes from the participants. Because these participants typically learned or were exposed to the qualities that marked one as a leader prior to college but may not have enacted those qualities until after college admission, in this study, their stories were often divided into phases. These phases will be referred to as pre-college which encompassed all experiences and activities that occurred before participants were admitted to college and during college which included all experiences and activities that occurred after admission to college.

Themes

Theme 1: Leadership qualities defined and utilized

In this section, the participants articulated what they believed to be the qualities that define a leader. They discussed leadership traits and how these traits were essential to their definition of leadership. This section also discussed some of their experiences which influenced their involvement in leadership positions in college. Furthermore, the participants discussed their perception of themselves as leaders prior to coming to college and motivations they had in leadership experiences. They discussed leadership qualities they learned during their pre-college years which they used after admission to college.
Communication: Listening, Learning and Building

When describing the qualities of a leader, these participants spoke most often of things they learned or observed prior to college. In their description of their pre-college experiences, the participants highlighted the ability to communicate as an essential quality in a leader. For these participants, the ability to listen was inherent in and a critical aspect of communication. Though a significant number of the participants spoke specifically about the importance of listening, none spoke of it in isolation from other important leadership qualities.

Tom and James each spoke of effective communication being an important quality for a leader with listening as a focus. Tom said “being able to communicate. Just having the ability to guide other people but also being able to listen just being a great communicator.” Tom understood communication working being comprised of verbal communication and listening. In this case the ability to listen provided a mechanism to learn of the needs of others and so that they could be guided effectively. James also referenced listening but added following as an important quality for a leader:

I think to be a good leader first you have to learn how to follow. You have to learn how to listen. Because, as a leader you aren't working for yourself; you're working for everyone else. And that's what I learned.

James shared Tom’s sentiments regarding listening as a notable leadership quality but also each alluded to the willingness to work with and for others as important to being recognized as a leader. Both James and Tom began alluded to the service to others dynamic of leadership as they highlighted listening and following in order to effectively lead. They did not focus on others listening to them or following them as leaders but how learning to follow and listen are as important as exhibiting leadership which inspires people to follow and listen.
After admission to college, some participants moved beyond describing leadership qualities in others to speak of how they utilized those qualities. Matt highlighted communication in conjunction with his self-confidence as a mechanism for community building as qualities he used in his role as a student leader. He talked about using communication as a strength to connect with and lead others in his role as a Resident Assistant:

I was never scared of opportunity or scared to talk to people. And I think just being friendly and being nice to people goes a long way. Just building that community and engagement helped me as a Resident Assistant. That’s where the confidence comes in because it showed me, I could do multiple things at once.

Matt’s use of communication is the more common form -verbally speaking to others. However, he illustrates how communication began to help him in endeavors such as building community and his ability to multitask. Matt used communication as a gateway which ushered in qualities that build self-confidence to be successful in other areas.

Tom depicted communication as his strongest quality in his leadership role and how it aided him in connecting with people:

As a Resident Assistant my strongest qualities was being able to communicate. I think it was just my ability to communicate with people and connect with them. I just feel like I can easily talk to people so that helped me a lot. When you create a relationship with people, many of them will want to follow you or help you with whatever you want to do.

Tom’s version of communication was centralized around being able to communicate in order to build relationships and connect with others. While others spoke of traits which stem from communication, Tom’s use of communication and its importance is in its ability to foster relationships and connect with others.
For the participants in this study, communication was among the most frequently mentioned qualities of a leader. Their discussion of the topic seemed to center on using that ability to connect with others and on using that connection to build relationships that aided in the completion of tasks as well as assisting in personal growth for themselves and for others.

**Trust as a leadership quality**

For participants in this study, building and maintaining trust was recognized as important to anyone who was defined as a leader. In addition to defining trust as important, these participants spoke of factors that built trust and of situations where others trusted them to lead. Chris provided an example when spoke of the importance of integrity as a leadership quality. “I will say there are qualities like integrity, making sure you stick to your own word; you should lead in the most positive way you can.”. Chris' explanation links integrity to the reliability of your words/actions which reflects relationship building and trust. Tom gave an account of the top characteristics for leaders “I believe that having honor, integrity, and credibility are really important leadership qualities.” We noticed through Chris’ explanation of how integrity is connected to leadership, but Tom enhances that definition with honor and credibility. The similarities between what Tom and Chris describe are the characteristics connected to building trusting relationships.

Some participants spoke of situations where others trusted their ability to lead in various capacities. John, Jamal, and Matt spoke about people who trusted them to lead others and lead projects because of their leadership qualities they displayed. John’s trust came from his coach to lead his teams, Jamal and Matt’s trust came from their peer groups as they planned and led events.

**Being a team player**
Since leadership typically requires the presence of a group, participants described being a team player as another important leadership quality. They discussed the importance of working together in order to achieve a goal or to build confidence in others’ abilities. In fact, most of their references to leadership involved supporting and helping others in addition to being aimed at the accomplishment of a specific goal (winning the game, completing a task, advancing in competition). Many of the participants believe their success as a leader was connected to their team activity; below are a few examples.

Chauncy spoke of the importance of realizing being a leader is about assuming responsibility and teamwork. He emphasized his frustration concerning individuals in leadership positions who do not work as part of a team. For Chauncy that work was broadly defined and underscored his personal willingness to provide service:

I can't stand someone who's in a position of leadership but doesn't act like a leader in reference to working as a team and working for others, I don't have a problem with somebody telling me to do something or wanting something from me if I am the leader. For me, it was having an understanding of what needs to be done and trying to get in positions to do that.

Chauncy reflects on the importance of service to others and being focused on completing what tasks needs to be done in his position. He highlights as a leader the importance of understanding the position he has and how he maximizes his position through decision making, creating paths for future leaders by using awareness and working as a team.

Several participants spoke specifically about leadership in the midst of significant personal and or team stressors. Jamal spoke about being a part of a team as well as providing guidance to others as a team leader. “To me a leader I would say someone who can lead a team
of people when they're going through the worst of the worst”. Jamal’s testimony explained how leading a team is important in helping the people you lead go through difficult situations. Matt expressed sentiments like Jamal in relation to teamwork but added ideas about overcoming adversity to accomplish tasks and relatability. “I think a leader is a team player, somebody who is relatable, I think, a leader is somebody who even in times of adversity still gets the job done.” Matt highlighted the importance of a leader’s role as a team player and supporting individuals through their most difficult situations. A common idea among participants when discussing leadership in terms of team was their focus on building others to be the best versions of themselves. They emphasized helping guiding and aiding others in reference to teamwork more than teamwork connected to completing tasks or a goal.

**Participants Perception of themselves as leaders**

Though the participants were able to articulate qualities associated with leadership and exhibited qualities and behaviors that placed them in positions of leadership, they often did not recognize the leadership qualities they possess prior to coming to college. These participants were prone to deny leadership experience or leadership qualities when asked the question directly, yet they spoke of experiences where they led others and where they were trusted in making crucial decisions which had effects on large bodies of peers. The participants believed they were simply and randomly placed in the positions they held during high school.

Alex gave a direct response by stating “No, I didn't. I didn’t have any experience in leadership prior to coming to college.”. When Alex was asked why he believed he did not have leadership experience, his answer was that he felt as if he did not understand what leadership was or meant until he heard phrases like “leadership opportunities” as a college student. However, Alex described the development of his public speaking skills. He spoke of his classmates looking
up to him as the leader who would take on the challenge of speaking in class; he would oblige when asked and always be triumphant. He did not believe in his ability until he received praise and continuous opportunities:

Within that, that public speaking class I never thought I had any public speaking skills, and eventually I would win a public speaking award and in all my other classes where groups needed to present my classmates would be scared to present, I will just tell all my other classmates not to worry, I would tell them I’m leading the group and I will present for us.

Alex took on the role as a presenter countless times and even affirming to his classmates he will be the leader using the skill of verbal communication to articulate presentation. Alex does not speak about his classmates denying him this role but trusting in his ability to perform and lead them. Furthermore, Alex discussed extensively about his involvement in community projects and teaching (directly and through modeling) younger kids about keeping their community clean.

Jamal spoke of not having any leadership experiences and all he did was play sports. He stated that he was only a part of the team but was not a leader prior to college. “Jamal, I played football for a little while and ran track and field but besides that I did not have leadership experiences before I got to college”. However, Jamal spoke of being recognized as a problem solver in high school. He referenced constantly being the person people would look to help organize events, even though he was not formally on leadership cabinets and committees, his vision and opinion was more important than those of his peers who were appointed to these positions:
Back then I was definitely the problem solver; I did events where my name wasn’t attached to it, but people asked me for input and help organizing them. Like for instance I put together the prom event. I wasn't on the board but they kind of asked me, what do you think about this. I planned parties and many other events but mainly because people would want something to do and asked me to plan these things.

Jamal exhibited what the participants highlighted as an important characteristic of a leader which is trust. His peers and others trusted his abilities to lead and his vision for events, unofficially even if they had official staff or members apart of planning committees, which he was not. Even though Jamal did not connect with his involvement in these events as leadership experiences, it shows maybe a more important understanding of leadership because he was sought out and selected to lead others.

John speaks about not seeing himself as a leader prior to college. He mentioned he was selected for various roles. His coaches on teams he participated on nominated him for positions, but he never connected them with leadership roles:

No not until college. In high school, I was kind of a nominee. I was nominated. I've never really seen myself as a leader like I never was like, Yo, I'm a leader like I am the leader of this team. It was more like coaches would nominate me. I would rather go play basketball; I wanted to play in order to teach others. I felt like my coaches would say I am the guy to be captain. He didn't trust many people, so he put me in those positions.

John’s notion of leadership is examining his own thought process of himself and since he did not see himself as a leader, he does not recognize being a leader in high school. However, he held positions as captain of his athletic teams. More importantly, he was selected for these roles by his
coaches for abilities that he has shown that his coaches took interest in as well as the trust his coach has in him, which John expressed was not overly expressed to many other individuals.

When asked if he had leadership qualities before college, Matt responded “I don’t know, I would have to say I think everybody made me out to be that I thought differently.” Matt continued to explain positions he would be asked to hold or his opinion on important topics or decisions that had impact, but he views it as what everyone else thought of him and not what he thought of himself. However, Matt reflected on his voice being the voice for organized events in his school and community as the host:

I did a lot of pep rallies; I would be the emcee for the pep rallies...all the events and pep rallies at my school I would host them. All of the talent shows and fashion shows, any event I would host them as well.

Matt’s hosted talent shows, pep rallies, and many other events. He was entrusted to be the voice that represented everyone and their vision. This shows how Matt’s perception of himself as a leader is different from what others not only perceived him as but valued his leadership and trusted him during important scenarios.

James shared how others saw the qualities in him and guided him to various opportunities:

I never really saw myself as a leader, other people saw me as a leader before I did that oh you make you your person, you know, oh I see you do this, this and that's really well you should think about doing this, and I kind of just say alright, and if other people think I can do it then obviously there's something I can do for a long time it's always been other people seeing that leadership quality in myself before.
James, similarly, to other participants did not see himself as a leader even though others believed he was a leader. However, James connects with other abilities to see the leadership qualities in him prior to him having the ability to notice them himself.

While these young men may not have seen themselves as leaders prior to college they were able to articulate their pre-college experience with leadership positions and their interpretation of how their qualities originated. The participants also reflected on some college influences which aided them in using their qualities in their leadership positions on campus. Many of the participants also attributed peers and communities that supported their leadership qualities by encouraging the participants to lead others based on their abilities and insight.

**Theme 2: Self Awareness**

The responses of these participants communicated the importance of self-awareness to the development of leadership qualities. In this section, the participants discussed their journey to self-awareness and how that journey ended in the initiation of personal agency. That journey began with self-reflection, continued as that reflection interacted with multiple layers of environmental factors to shape their identities and their development as leaders. The pre-college journey culminated in gaining the ability to initiate agency as a mechanism to enter college. They discussed moments they reflected on their experiences to learn the qualities they used in their roles as leaders. Furthermore, they discussed navigating negative influences, peer pressure, and environmental factors by using agency to create outcomes they wanted to experience. The participants also discuss how these moments of self-awareness, reflection, and using agency supported their leadership development.

**Self-Awareness and Self-Reflection**
The participants discussed how reflecting on past experiences and interactions which influenced the development of leadership qualities and the ability to utilize those qualities. The participants spoke of qualities such as being honest with themselves, supporting people and of the reality that both positive and negative experiences were included in those reflections. Being open, honest and supportive are qualities they learn from interactions with others and their past experiences. Some participants expressed how once they became more self-aware of their journey and their identity; they were able to help others and support them more as leaders.

Several participants described the journey toward becoming a leader in terms of constant growth, understanding, and self-improvement. Fred emphasized how his experience of understanding himself made him a better leader. Though he, nor any of the other participants, used the term, it was clear from the context of his statement and the overall context of the interview that he was speaking of self-awareness. He said:

I think leadership qualities come from our self-knowledge. While I was in high school. I was more so just like going with the flow, learning, you know, developing, but once I realized my self-understanding and who I am as a person. It made it easier for me to be a leader.

Fred reflected on high school and spoke about the experiences he had which shaped his understanding of who he was as a person and how it aided in his leadership skills. He spoke about the change he experienced from getting into trouble and realizing that he was causing distress for his mom. This realization made him want to change and he began seeking out opportunities, which lead to positive behaviors. Through these experiences, he became more exposed to opportunities and gained more skills “I joined extra-curricular activities and challenged myself in classes. I did sports, robotics, advanced placement classes and I knew I
would gain positive experiences out of something”. Fred was eager to try countless amounts of activities and extract the skills from them that ultimately lead to positive outcomes and experiences.

Chauncy took a wider view and reflected on the history of his entire family, as well as his own actions, in becoming more self-aware. He said:

I was looking at as we have to do better. And my favorite quotes are always a smart man learns from his own mistakes. A wise man learns from the mistakes of others. There were a lot of mistakes before me, and it's my job to change and not know continues, the same trend or getting that same right.

Chauncy’s awareness of himself as part of a larger family group was echoed by a significant number of the study participants.

Alex spoke about confidence and the importance of self-knowledge/self-awareness through the pursuit of education. He emphasized the importance of contact learning and moving away from perfection and towards growth. He also added the need for support systems and constant improvement:

A major leadership quality is having confidence. Being honest with yourself seeking education, I feel like you can never be a perfect leader. I feel like you will always need some type of aid or support, and you will always learn from time to improve.

Alex’s explanation of leadership qualities was also a reflection of self, similar to Fred. They both echoed sentiments around growth, improvement, and learning about themselves.

Antwon spoke of using his past experiences to give him confidence and how mentors at Montclair aided him in understanding his gifts:
I think it went back to that empathy, and not being scared of my past and not being able
to talk about it. It gave me more of an opportunity to speak up and feel more confident in
saying so because I wasn't at first, but I think it did take some molding from I guess
people called me their mentors at Montclair for me to realize that, that gift.

Antwon reflected on how his past allowed him to empathize with others as a leader. He was able
to connect with them based on shared experience and he used his journey of going through some
challenging moments in his life and how he overcame them. One such experience which
involved betrayal by a friend provided a turning point in his journey to self-awareness:

It's like what am I doing? I'm the people I'm hanging around …. what am I doing? I kind
of just started thinking about my life in totality like what direction I'm heading in, even to
the sense of, if my best friend can do this, like, anybody can do it. So, I kind of just put
all that energy and trust into myself and kind of just moved how I needed to, to not only
protect myself but to make sure that I just started moving smarter.

Antwon is not alone in experiences such as this, but his story provides a compelling example of
the way the experiences viewed a s negative can lead to growth.

Joe expressed his acceptance of who he is and how his journey allowed him to lead others and
the importance of helping others be confident in their authentic selves:

I believe my most important quality I feel like I have is that I'm okay with being me. So, I
don't put on any facade, or any face or mask or anything, I'm okay with being myself.

When it comes to being the leader, you want others to be comfortable with themselves.

Joe’s explanation reflected on his greatest strength is connected to awareness of self and being
comfortable with himself, which allows him to encourage others to be authentic in their identity
and the importance of this quality as it relates to being a leader.
Kalil talked about his mindset and being courageous enough to let others view him holistically in order to support them as a leader:

Well, I just mean I'm very strong minded. And I like to help people. I like that the reason why I wanted to be in leadership roles on campus, because I know I would be able to, tell people things about me that they probably haven't known, give people advice that they probably haven't had before.

Kalil connects with his ability to open up to others as the reason why he wanted to become a leader on campus. He expressed not only the desire to help others but reflected on his qualities that focused on examining his journey and realized him being strong-minded was beneficial in his role as a leader.

These participants were able to have a level of self-reflection of themselves using their past experiences and their skill sets to their approach to leadership. They reflected on what qualities they embody which they can use to connect deeper with those they service as leaders through relational connections, authenticity, and empathy, to name a few. They display the importance of knowing oneself prior to leading others, primarily, typical college-age students

*Use of Agency to navigate their environment*

In order to take up positions of leadership in college these participants were first called upon to negotiate the oppressive and sometimes dangerous environments from which they came. The environments in question may have been physical or social. Their ability to be self-reflective and the development of a personal identity that allowed them to perceive and consider other opportunities served as a catalyst to utilize personal agency in order to assess their situation and chose activities that eventually led to college admission. To exercise agency, these
participants acknowledged and acted on goals and interests that did not always match community or societal expectations.

There were numerous descriptions of the neighborhoods in which they were raised that spoke to those environmental factors. Jamal discussed his motivations for choosing a different path than the norm he was exposed to in his community. He highlights the paths his friends traveled in their environment, and the thoughts of being stuck in his environment motivate him to make different decisions using agency to navigate and create a different path for himself:

For me, um, I guess early on at a young age, I knew I wanted more than what was around me. I wanted to do more; I wanted to see more. I didn't want to be stuck in my city for the rest of my life, I knew that I wanted more and going into high school with all of my friends, I noticed that I might have been going down the same path as them. It made me realize like, no, I can't be like them anymore or make the choices they are still making:

Jamal discussed how it was the social environments leading down the path of destruction and their reflection on themselves allowed them to assess their situation and chose different outlets that eventually lead to a successful future as a college student. In these instances, the participants chose to go against the norms of their communities and were persistent in making changes in their behavior and/or lives.

John added how his will and ambition kept him away from failure:

My will to go to college came from the ambition of me, I really hate failure. I would say I had people in my life like some male figures in my life like coaches and stuff like that, but I felt like without them, I think I think that like my ambition would still have gotten me to success, like I always I just hated being around the hood. Like I hate being around the streets I hate being around that stuff.
John’s overall demeanor towards entering college and his definition of success was connected to his strong dislike of his environment. He claimed to hate being around the environment so much it was the main source of motivation to go to college, which in his terms meant going against the norms in his environment. Furthermore, he was able to analyze what other members of the community had experienced connecting failure with the streets and his environment. Antwon echoed individual motivation and gaining an understanding of his choices and the effects of the choices he made:

I was bigger than my environment. Eventually I broke out of these bad habits I was involved in with the streets and peers, I just started to gain understanding. I was a bit different. And I kind of just thought of who I really was and who I wanted to be; it was an endeavor that I took on by myself. When it was time to go to college, I just had to figure it out.

Although Antwon was involved with what can be described as negative influences, he was able to identify with what his perception of his future life and make changes to his behaviors. He went against his habits, which appear to have been a part of his normal routine up to the point he made the decision to change.

The participants expressed not only the importance of becoming self-aware as a leadership quality, but how self-awareness led them to reflection. They were able to reflect on decisions they made, and decisions others have made which influenced them to apply agency towards their future goals and aspirations. The participants largely discussed overcoming environmental barriers through this self-reflective process and navigating their decisions connected to their outcomes.

**Theme 3: Family influences**
During these interviews, it became apparent that many of the qualities attributed to leaders and later utilized by these participants were first observed in the context of their families. Having strong familial connections as well as other family-based motivations was a recurring theme among participants. Some participants referred to family influences that mitigated some of the risk factors present in their low-income living environments. Others detailed how their decisions were largely influenced by the knowledge that they inspired younger siblings/extended family members. What is consistent is the development and utilization of the participants’ decision-making skills, participants ability to trust and be trusted based on interactions or relationships within the family.

**Parental influences instill strong qualities**

Leadership qualities can be gained from family environments. Each of the participants spoke of the influence of parents with respect to the development of leadership qualities. The qualities these participants gained/learned from their parents were trust, following instructions that would lead them towards college, and belief in the vision their parents had for their lives. This may also have been their earliest account where they learned to follow while others lead. Much of the training and emphasis on decision making was focused on education. Tom, James, Alex, and Matt discussed how the choice to go to college was motivated by their parent(s) with the idea that a college education would provide them with multiple opportunities and exposure. Through the values and mindset, they gained towards education, because of the parental influence, they unconsciously developed qualities which shaped their decision-making skills and ability to trust in others.

Tom reflected on his introduction to educational values as a child. He explained the importance of education from his parents and their emphasis on him succeeding in education:
I acquired my educational values through my parents. They have always been strict on me with education, ever since I was a young child. I think that was instilled in me when I was younger that education is extremely important and you should always keep learning and learning and learning, get as many certifications and degrees as possible.

Tom’s account of his parents’ view of education also highlights his willingness to adhere to their directions and follow their plan for his life. This can be interpreted as an instance of following a trusted leader.

James was open about the rationale behind his mother’s mandate regarding college. As a result of James’ older brothers being involved with gangs and incarceration, his mom pre-determined the future for James:

My mom always told me college was not a choice. I never had to choose it; it was chosen for me. I figured I want to go to college like for actual school purposes, probably my sophomore year of high school.

Although James’ mom had plans for James, she ultimately trusted him to make the decision as she came to trust his decision-making skills. She believed he had the aptitude to make the right decision for his life and his future, which led him to college by his independent decision. Trust was a huge quality on both sides as James’ mom trusted in his decision, and he made what he believed to be adequate decisions because of that trust. Alex also trusted in his mom’s vision for his future, classifying college as a ‘family thing’ even though he initially was not interested in going to college and did not have examples as the only child:

To be honest, when I went to high school, I never considered college. I mainly considered college, as a family thing. My mom wanted me to go to college and thought of it as the best way for me to earn a living and gain new opportunities.
We notice in this passage that Alex understood the overall vision of gaining opportunities his mother believed he would be able to access by going to college and trusted her vision and insight for his life. More importantly, as he referenced college as a ‘family thing’ he made the decision to lead his family by taking on this task and believed what his mother wanted him to choose was the best decision for his opportunities.

Matt added by expressing the requirement of college from his mom and going to college was not a choice but an obligation in his mom’s eyes. “College was always pushed upon me from grade school. My mom would push it on me as a requirement that I would go to college, not a choice.” While Matt acknowledged his mother’s strong desire to have him attend college, he referenced other options he contemplated besides going to college. “I did consider other options. When I first graduated high school, I wanted to either be a police officer or firefighter”. Matt’s recollection of his educational journey and the requirement of college is more his own decision to go to college while actually considering multiple career options. However, unbeknownst to him, his decision to enter college was fueled by the educational path his mother set him on. Matt being able to decide between college and other careers shows that his mother noticed the quality of critical thinking and trusted her son would make the best decision for him. In return, he trusted in the values she instilled in him.

Many participants either spoke on the values instilled in them in reference to education, the choices they made on their own or the choice made for them, and/or the trust they had in their parents’ vision for their life. Overall, throughout this process, they learned to allow themselves to be led to decisions that would be best for them. These decisions to enter college regardless how it may have been influenced, were still decisions the participants made through belief in a plan
their parents had for them. Throughout this journey with their parents, they were learning to trust others' and gain valuable critical thinking skills to aid their decision making.

**Doing it for my siblings/family**

Participants discussed their role within their families and how they took on various roles to inspire their family members, to support and help their families, and perhaps, most importantly to model positive behavior. Though they assumed roles with the intention to help and support their families, these participants developed and demonstrated qualities such as tasks completion, inspiring trust, and they served as mentors to others. Being a role model for the family during their adolescent years illustrated how some participants’ leadership qualities began to develop.

Fred emphasized the importance of family and then discussed how his extended family from Ghana, which included his younger cousins, viewed him as the role model for a successful student in America. This motivated him to continue pushing forward and doing well:

I knew how important family is, period. I just kept on pushing. The more I did, the more that my family realized I was making positive impacts academically and beyond. Then my younger cousins came to America and I was the person that their father told them to look up to and follow my footsteps.

Fred’s actions were being used as a blueprint for not only his immediate family, but he was championed as the example to follow by family in other countries prior to them coming to America. His influence extended past any influence he had in his immediate environment and spread to model success for family members still living in Ghana. In reflection, Fred understood that his motivation stemmed not only from the importance of family influence on him, but from how he influenced his family overall. This is where he began displaying role
model behavior and it stemmed from his belief of his need to influence his family in a positive way.

Many participants spoke of being called upon to take responsibility for their younger siblings and inheriting responsibilities. They described a caregiving role which required them to express the responsibilities they must babysit their siblings and enforcing rules with their parents were working. They were playing an integral role in the team dynamic of their family assuring that family objectives were being completed This displayed the participants understanding of the overall common goal of the family and their ability to play any position in order to assist in that goal. Antwon provided this example referred to his role in the family as sometimes the father figure to his younger sister and how he focused on being a positive figure to his younger siblings:

I have five siblings: 2 older and 3 younger. My role I play is the responsible older brother among all of my siblings. My parents do heavily rely on me. I do have younger brothers and a younger sister...so a lot of the weight falls upon me with my little sister as the guidance she needs also I am their father figure.

Antwon listed a variety of ways his parents relied upon him to provide support for the family and take leadership among his siblings: transportation for his younger siblings, transporting family back and forth to appointments, and grocery shopping, and being the positive example, his siblings could mirror after. He also described taking his younger brothers for haircuts, sporting events and practices, and other activities. This meant Antwon took on any role in order to assist functionality of the family. One important fact to note is Antwon is not the oldest of his siblings and his parents put their trust in his ability to support the family rather than or in the absence of his older siblings.
Kalil spoke on how his family members rely on him for his future success and for current support and advice. He described his role in his family, as the person everyone goes to for support. He attributed his position in his family to him being extremely smart. He stated since he was in elementary school he was extremely smart:

I'm definitely the one in the family that everyone is rooting for to be successful for everyone...I'm the one who my family members come to when they need advice, especially my siblings. When they need more mental type of advice because like I said they always see me as like a really smart one. So that's what I would say whenever anyone needs help like even the older people like I’m the technologists I'm just like the one who they view as the smart one of the family.

Kalil illustrated how in his family, he serves in a counselor capacity, constantly giving advice, someone who is called for help because of his abilities and aptitude, and also someone who the family as a whole heavily relies on for motivation and support.

Alex and Tom reflect on stepping up in their households as men, and the importance of being the only man and having the role to take on more responsibilities. Though their specific situations differed, they shared a common understanding- men need to step up in the household.

Alex spoke about the passing of his father and how this meant even as the youngest of his siblings, being the only male, he needed to become the man of the house and take on more responsibilities to take care of his mom and sisters:

I’m pretty much the man of house, I had to do things such as making sure the house is good, making sure my mom, my sisters are emotionally, physically, spiritually good guys one thing that my dad used to always do making sure that everybody was good and
making sure that houses paid everything every bill is being paid for me, becoming a more
of a man more of an adult.

Alex highlighted these newfound responsibilities were responsibilities his dad would perform.
His vision of who he was as a man rejected being the youngest and least qualified to take on leadership of the family. As a man, he felt taking care of his loved ones was his role, regardless of his age and experience.

Tom explains how his mother did not require him to take on more responsibilities, but as a man, he feels like it was necessary for him to step up and contribute. “My mom never asked me to take up that responsibility, but now that I have that feeling like now like yeah like I'm the only man in the house like I need to help out with bills and stuff like that”. Tom had an automatic feeling not related to anything more than being the only man in the house that he needed to help and support.

All the participants highlighted not only discuss how heavily their families rely on them, but they also highlight the responsibilities which would allow their family to rely on them. In some cases, the participants mindsets forced responsibilities on themselves based on their view of manhood. In other cases, arguably, if Antwon was not always easily relied on to complete tasks or Kalil did not offer great advice and solutions to his family's problems, their families would not be able to rely on them so heavily. But their ability to take the responsibility and accomplish tasks for their family allows their families to utilize them numerous times. Many participants expressed the responsibility they have had in their households but arguably, if they did not display abilities to lead others, they may not have been as relied on.

Leading by Example
Many of the participants discussed how they use their involvement in college inspire the younger generations in their families. The practice leading by example and focus intentionally on the impact their choice to be the first in their families to enter college can influence their younger generations to enter college.

John discussed how his decision to go to college influenced his younger sister. He continued to reflect on how it was influential to others in his family and how he started a trend:

Once I saw that, once I started that trend, my sister who's a year younger than me, she wants to go to college too. So it's just me and her right now. I think that me doing it inspired a couple of my family members to look into going to college. That was my main goal is to just, you know, show that it can be done from the area that I'm from.

John was focused on showing the goal of going to college from his neighborhood was possible through his actions. He noticed his decisions first influenced his sister, then others in his family, and soon his whole community.

Joe referenced wanting to be the first person to graduate college in his family and how his younger cousins are following behind his footsteps. He acknowledged the example he is setting:

Me wanting to be the first to graduate college, I have little cousins who talk to me and everything about school and all that. It was really like. I have people following me are coming behind me, that I have to set an example for. So even if it's not a leader by position. I just feel like I'm a leader by example.

Joe has the realization that he is a leader by the example he is setting to his younger cousins. He also highlights that there is no formal position he holds by being the example for his cousins, but he understands that he still leads them by his actions.
Chauncy shares similar sentiments as Joe in reference to his goal to be the first male to graduate from college in his family:

My goal was to be the first male in my family to graduate, not just for me, but for now surprisingly last week, my younger cousin, going to college himself let me know that is the driving force itself for me to graduate college. Chanucy realized that not only his goal to graduate college inspired his younger cousin, but it ignited his passion to graduate even greater simply by seeing his younger cousin follow his path and the example he set.

Throughout these narratives, the participants expressed how their families focus for their future was a college education. Furthermore, many of the participants’ highlighted their parents or family members raised them as the catalyst from their early educational journey. They expressed not having a choice to enter college and it was always an expectation. Many of the participants highlighted principles of being role models in their families with their pursuit to higher education and how they were seen by younger siblings and other family members as leaders in their pursuit to go to college.

**Theme 4: Mentorship**

Mentorship was found to be a critical feature of the development of leadership qualities in these participants. These mentors were to be found in both family and educational environments. The participants gravitated to these mentors and developed leadership skills such as trust and communication skills. Techniques such as modeling appropriate/desired behavior, providing constructive feedback and encouragement and helping to shape a vision or plan for success were mentioned by these participants.

*Family-based mentorship*
Participants highlighted members of their immediate and extended family whom they viewed as mentors. These members of the family may not have always made decisions which had positive outcomes, but those family members, nonetheless, seemed determined to keep the participants on the path toward college and various positive opportunities. Many participants spoke of uncles and cousins who held roles often viewed as belonging to similar to parents and older siblings. As the participants reflected on their experiences with these family members, they emphasized traits possessed or taught by these family mentors which the participants used in their roles as student leaders.

John detailed how his uncle displayed vision and leadership qualities he had never seen in another male. His uncle was heavily involved in the community and was perceived as a success in John’s eyes:

My uncle was heavy in the community - with children and stuff. He's working with the mayor and with the police department on initiatives for the community. He was doing things that I never saw from another male. So, he always, always kept me around, I was always around him. He made sure I was on the right track doing the right thing. He would gather a bunch of us from the neighborhood and take us to play basketball or something positive to keep us away from the streets. He was a big influencer to me and the community.

John's account of what his uncle modelled was a Black, male community leader who focused on influencing John positively. He described his uncle in the community working with children, police department and city officials which was instrumental in John’s approach to leadership. John took away emulating positivity as a leader and working for others from the mentorship from his uncle. Many participants highlighted important characteristics such as integrity and
credibility. John’s uncle's reputation reflected both these qualities; he built his credibility through his actions with the community and youth and integrity through his constant focus on positive exposure to John and others.

Matt described how he uses college as an influence on his cousin. He allows him to stay with him and see what life is like as a college student. “When I would stay at school for the weekend, I might bring my little cousin to my dorm for the weekend. So I would expose him to different possibilities college has to offer.” This experience Matt gives his cousin is an example of his qualities as a mentor and how he uses his accomplishments to inspire his family who may be looking up to him.

Joe explained how his cousins were instrumental in keeping him on showing him the importance of education. In some cases, they acted more as parents or close siblings than cousins. Joe’s cousin had a plan for Joe’s life that may have stemmed from his experiences with the community and his unsuccessful attempt to earn a college degree. Joe detailed how his cousin began college but did not return after his first semester:

My older cousin always told me to go to college. My cousin was just always checking in on me and coming to get me to take me on college visits. He would say ‘your mom or dad can't take you, I got you’, he was taking me on college visits at an early age. He also had friends he knew that worked at different colleges that would support me.

By supporting the vision of Joe going to college, his cousins illustrated to Joe the importance of investing in others' success.

Matt reflected on how his older cousins would ensure he stayed on track with school and how they held him accountable for his performance and behavior:
My cousins pretty much were like my big brothers. So, if I was off track or if I was slipping off, they just made sure like I got back on, whether that meant that I was coming home to a stern talk, or that they were gonna yell at me, or whatever the case was, they would say Matt you can't mess up.

Matt’s cousins held him at a high standard and more importantly, they would impart wisdom and some levels of discipline to ensure Matt would maintain a positive path towards success. Their overall messages to him were sentiments centered around Matt remaining focused on the goal of college. Matt learned accountability and how to follow instructions of others, primarily from these males who he considered role models/older brothers.

Several participants spoke of the importance of being mentors in addition to learning from mentors and role models. Jamal discusses how his cousin from afar served as a role model using his education to motivate him to do better:

I looked up to one of my older cousins. I would say, even though I kind of knew he didn't enjoy doing what he was doing but I kind of looked up to him just because of the simple fact that we grew up together; I would say I definitely looked up to him. He was playing football for Temple, going to law school. You know like just hearing that, like it kind of motivated me like if he can do it, I can do it.

Though this cousin was not actively involved with Jamal’s and in fact may not even have been aware of this impact, he encouraged Jamal to consider opportunities beyond his immediate environment. Through positive actions which Jamal perceived as pathways toward success such as college and law school, Jamal not only had someone who modelled a future he inspired to achieve, but also the importance of modeling for others.
Matt described how he moved into the mentor role by exposing one of his younger cousins to the college experience. He allowed him to stay with him on campus to see what life was like for a college student. “When I would stay at school for the weekend, I might bring my little cousin to my dorm for the weekend. So I would expose him to different possibilities college has to offer.” This experience Matt gives his cousin is an example of his qualities as a mentor and how he uses his accomplishments to inspire his family who may be looking up to him.

The participants discussed influence of mentors from their families such as building trusting networks, and communication specifically the ability to listen as a leadership quality. Most of the participants interactions with their family members was in the form of advice being passed down or positive action being displayed. The participants understood the importance of listening and applying what they were being exposed to. This was integral in developing their leadership qualities. Furthermore, some participants discussed not only being mentored to, but being mentors to others so they were practicing the mentoring qualities they were once shown.

**School based mentorship**

The participants spoke candidly about what they learn from their school-based mentors they encountered in their K-12 experiences. Interactions with those mentors instilled ideas about cultural identity, and brotherhood. These school-based mentors provided examples of leadership through their actions and instilled levels of confidence and purpose in the participants. The mentors ignited qualities in the participants which could be utilized beyond the classroom. Though Alex provided a specific example about his talent as a writer, other participants were also encouraged acknowledge and strengthen their personal abilities.
Alex discussed how his teacher empowered him in his pursuit of poetry and belief in his ability to accomplish any goal he set forth:

I met a couple of teachers and they kind of helped me to understand that I can go to college. My teacher made me recite this poem in front of the audience. And towards the end, he told me “Alex you are an amazing poet, and I can see you doing anything, whether it be writing, acting, becoming a teacher, and doing whatever profession you want, you can do it”.

By not only encouraging Alex to recite his poem but also empowering him to accomplish any goals he had for himself, his teacher instilled confidence in Alex. He spoke about Alex’s ability to become a great poet and to use his voice to inspire others. Alex’s teacher noticed his ability to communicate effectively and how this skillset would be a catalyst towards his future endeavors.

Chauncy spoke about how his teacher instilled specific values in him regarding his culture and black consciousness and provided for him a means to succeed by giving him a computer:

Miss A, a black woman who was my teacher, was one of the earliest to instill in me a black consciousness. She took the time to really nurture me and my cousin. She gave me my first computer - coming to my house to set it up.

Through the experience Chauncy had with his teacher, he was able to gain awareness of his cultural identity and the belief that he was important enough for others to nurture him and provide him with tools he needed to accomplish tasks. Those actions on the part of his teacher instilled the trust he had in her, and it provided an example of how he could build trust in others through his actions. Chauncy recognized these qualities through the encounter he had with Ms. A.
Though some participant experiences were one on relationships, others described experiences that occurred as part of a group experience. Tom reflected on the exposure his teachers gave him to college and kept him focused on college and the mentor group for Black males in middle school and high school:

I had two teachers named Mr. J and Mr. M. Yeah, Mr. J took me to college fairs when I was in middle school... he was pretty much like my school mentor helping me to stay focused on college and on the right track in school. My high school was full of mainly White students, Mr. M had a group in high school that took all black kids, basically, and will just mentor us the same. So, nice to meet once every two weeks and it was our safe zone. We talked about issues and have a place we could just be ourselves and comfortable.

Tom classified Mr. J and Mr. M as two teachers who were impactful toward him through their actions of exposure and community building among students with similar intersections. Mr. M focused on the intersection of race and an educational environment that was predominately white and realized the importance of providing them with a safe space where trust and community was built among the Black students.

Alex learned the importance of taking care of his environment through his experience. He was able to mentor other adolescents to care for their city:

I was in a cleaning community event. It's pretty much like a gardening club. I taught kids how to learn the points of a clean city. I also taught them how to plant a seed of certain flowers. Pretty much we also did tours around the city, focusing on different parts and historical parts. Most people see where I’m from as a bad city sometimes, I just see the potential and what it could be if we take care of it.
Alex had a passion for cleaning his community and was about to teach younger kids through gardening and touring around his neighborhood. Alex exemplified mentoring, role modeling, and self-pride. Mentoring and role modeling he displayed expressions of leadership qualities which focuses on teamwork and teaching others. His program taught him about caring for his community and to teach others to care for it as well. Through this experience he learned and taught community pride regardless of negative stereotypes which may have been attached to his community.

In this section, not only did the participants identify their role models and mentor relationships within their families and communities, but they also described how these individuals began to exemplify behaviors they wanted to follow as well as highlight the qualities the participants embodied. John and Jamal mentioned role modeling behavior they saw from family members and the impact it had on their development and Alex explains how his teachers’ affirmation of him becoming a great leader and poet allowed him to manifest these affirmations and make them a part of his identity. A quality these mentors instilled in the participants was accountability. From the high school teachers getting Alex out of his comfort zone or Matt’s and Joe’s cousins keeping them on the right track if they were putting their future in jeopardy, through these encounters, the participants were exposed to and began to understand the importance of accountability for their actions and responsibility for their futures.

Theme 5: The Importance of Exposure

Participants spoke of the various pre-college venues/activities in which their leadership skills developed, were nurtured and utilized. The roles held in these venues were both formal and informal and the venues included extra-curricular activities in school, involvement within their communities, and involvement in religious organizations. Being exposed to these different
roles allowed these participants to learn and grow as young leaders, gain self- confidence and develop their identities.

**Team Participation**

Virtually all the participants in the study were involved in a sport or team in high school. Many of them were the leaders of these teams based on qualities identified by others and their ability to lead successfully. Several participants spoke of their roles as team captains on their athletic teams and the reasons why they were elected to these positions. Chris highlighted his roles and different organizations. “I was in a program where we learned how to play squash and I was captain of the team and also ran track in high school. And I was like a captain for the outdoor season.”

Chris not only was a part of multiple teams, but he led both teams as captain. This was an account of how Chris learned and exercised leadership skills prior to entering college.

Joe discussed his experience demonstrating leadership skills and the roles he played as a leader prior to college. The idea of the team above self was also illustrated:

I was the captain of my basketball team during my junior year of high school. I was the captain because I was always a team player, so I believe it's not about me, it's about us. I was always thinking in a group and not just myself.

Joe noted that the importance of his role as team captain was because he was a team player. He understood the overall success of the team required each person working collectively towards their goals.

John discussed his leadership roles in high school and how they helped him overall. He spoke of how they helped him and what he learned from the roles:
In high school I was captain of the basketball team and football team. I felt like those leadership positions in high school did help me though, because you have to be able to motivate your group and find a middle ground in order to lead a group.

John’s words capture the sentiment expressed by various participants as they speak to leading a team and motivating your team to accomplish goals.

**Religious-based influence and involvement**

Given the often-stated importance of religion and faith in the lives of these participants, they detailed their development as leaders in the context of involvement in religious organizations and programs. They reflected on involvement in the church as youth leaders and how performing in church events build their confidence and public speaking skills which highlights the leadership quality of communication. These skills were previously identified as important qualities for leaders.

Chauncy’s involvement and leadership training began when he was a child in his church. Chauncy explained that he needed to always be involved with performances at the church. This gave Chauncy a chance to be in the spotlight which led to various speaking initiatives and leading programs such as singing solos in the choir and managing production for performances:

Growing up as a church kid you must always be involved in something. That became a driving factor for me to be in the spotlight and eventually love the spotlight. I love to speak, I love to hold the attention, and that is a skill I realized I could do extremely well. Chauncy continued and explained how his passion for the spotlight and speaking in church turned into a limitless opportunity to always be involved and participate.
Fred spoke on his experience in church as a youth member and how a tradition in church helped him realize he was good at speaking and preaching to others. This led to him exploring and trying to be involved in various activities in the church:

I was a part of the youth service and church and I graduated from Sunday school to youth. For some reason I was good at talking so I started preaching. I tried to do a lot of things within the church or community service. Any church events I was in I was active. With the exposure of just youth service, Fred was able to be exposed to many other opportunities and he took advantage of all the opportunities afforded to him.

Joe reflected on him being a part of his church camps to leading his church camps and how they led him into mentorship:

I was in the church camps as a kid and transitioned to a counselor when I got older. Through this, I was able to show the younger kids that were coming up after me that the stuff that I was doing as a counselor could be you; it was kind of like the start to me being like a mentor.

Joe’s experience was like Fred’s where he ascended from a member to a part of the team who lead others. He also used his position to show kids the example of possibilities for them in the camps and he mentions how this was his first start as seeing himself as a mentor.

The participants detailed various experiences involving leadership roles they were exposed to throughout their communities, school, and extracurricular activities. Important passages to highlight were the participants who discussed leading teams or organizing within their communities; the participants lead teams in the classroom, in extracurricular activities, and even using their influence or voice to accomplish a goal. Through some of their roles, they gained skills and qualities surrounding vision, teamwork, and goal setting. Many of their
experiences were being a part of community-based organizations such as churches and athletic teams where they learned working with others and leading others.
CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion

This study used qualitative methodology to explore the origins of leadership qualities in a group of Black, male, first generation college student leaders. Participants were asked to reflect on and describe their pre-college experiences and how those experiences influenced their actions as student leader. The question which guided the research was: What are the pre-college leadership qualities of Black male FGS at predominantly white institutions and how do these qualities support their aspirations to become student leaders at their institutions? This question gave rise to four specific areas of interest. These areas were: 1) How do the participants define the qualities of a leader? 2) What are the origins of leadership qualities in participants of the study? 3) How do leadership qualities influence their involvement on campus in leadership? 4) Have any family, peer, or community involvement influenced participants’ leadership qualities?

Analysis of data collected yielded 5 primary themes and several subthemes. The primary themes were: 1) Leadership qualities defined and utilized, 2) Self-awareness, 3) Family influences, 4) Mentorship, and 5) The importance of exposure. This section begins with an overview of the study’s Theoretical Perspectives and their connections to the results as this will help to frame the results for the reader. That will be followed by a consideration of the findings and their relation to leadership origins. Next, the author will discuss some findings that are not specifically addressed in the literature. Finally, this chapter will provide an overview of limitations and implications leading into the conclusion of the study.

Theoretical Connections
It is important to understand how the theoretical perspectives influenced the study overall and why they were suitable perspectives for the study. Using a cultural identity lens, PVEST explores how experiences in various environmental contexts influence an individual’s development (Velez & Spencer, 2018; Spencer et al., 1997). This theory utilizes Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems approach to evaluate influences of environmental factors and adds a phenomenological approach which allows for exploration of the support and challenges adolescents may face in the formation of their identity (Spencer et al., 1997). This was an appropriate theoretical perspective for this study, in that the participants described how exposure to certain experiences during their adolescent years shaped their development as leaders. The participants often discussed the challenges present in the physical and social environments (e.g. neighborhood, family and peer relationships) which they were trying to navigate. In addition, some discussed their personal or tangential involvement in negative activities which would have hindered their growth and future opportunities had they not taken action to extricate themselves.

Certain findings in this study may, in fact, add to PVEST in explaining the development of Leadership Qualities for Black, male FGS. The process by which these participants developed, and enacted agency resonated with a basic premise of PVEST in that the researcher was able to see how the participants’ experiences, perceptions and life circumstances shaped their identities and development as leaders (Spencer, 1997). In this process, some event, series of events or interaction(s) triggered the participants to reflect on their lives, circumstances or behaviors. Participants described importance of events that were positive such as defining moments between themselves and mentors and events that were negative such as betrayal by trusted peers. Part of this self-reflection was an awareness of the interactions between their identity as Black males, their experiences within their physical and social environments.
combined with the larger systems that controlled or influenced those environments. These systems, including the K-12 school system and law enforcement, which are typically viewed as supportive by the larger society, were experienced by these participants as oppressive. Another crucial part of the awareness of self that grew from their reflection was the acknowledgement of personal strengths (planning, problem solving, communication), values (commitment and loyalty) and goals (detailed problem solving towards an objective). The ability to establish goals and to recognize the contextual factors that influence outcomes are documented as important leadership traits (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014).

Having engaged in a process of self-reflection and established some degree of self-awareness, these participants began to utilize their newly recognized skills to support family and community as well as to fulfill personal goals that might take them outside the community. Achievement of the first two steps in the process (self-reflection and self-awareness) put them in the position to initiate agency which is defined as making decisions based on goal setting and attainment (Roy, 2006). These participants spoke of negotiating experiences, environments and relationships which had the potential for leading them down what they described “the path of destruction”. Their ability to be self-reflective and the development of a personal identity that allowed them to perceive and consider other opportunities served as a catalyst to utilize personal agency. As part of that agency, these participants assessed their environmental situations and chose activities that eventually led to college admission. To exercise agency, these participants acknowledged and acted on goals and interests that did not always match community or societal expectations. Further, after having exercised agency to achieve specific goals, these participants would begin the process again by reflecting on their
completion of the goal they set and then setting new goals. The Leadership Application Framework below displays this process and is also found in Appendix F.

Intersectionality Theory provides a mechanism for the exploration of how multiple identities intersect and how those intersecting identities can be influenced by systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). As Black male FGS, the participants' exploration of their intersections in college (race, gender, and social class) historically details oppressive experiences this population faces on college campuses (Harper, 2009; Brooms, 2018). When exploring their intersections, the participants discussed the effect of their environments on their development as leaders. They elaborated on experiences which ultimately led to their leadership development.

The participants did not utilize the term intersectionality, but as Black males from low-income backgrounds, the participants were aware of how society perceived them and how this view hindered their access to their goals. The participants recognized that as low income, black, males (their relevant intersection) used their intersections, they were influenced by oppressions which
had occurred historically and continue in the present. These oppressions were historically present in the educational system which provided few role models for them and which provided few educational resources (Brooms, 2018; Goings et al., 2015). Systems of oppression also impacted their families on an economic level in that they were typically part of low income families which, again, limited their opportunities (Anderson, 2018) and required them to live in neighborhoods that were dangerous and filled with opportunities for negative encounters with law enforcement based on their neighborhoods for example or even in literature such as the broken windows theory which means signs of disorder will lead to more disorder or crime (Gau & Pratt, 2010). With these interlocking systems of oppression the participants experienced, they reflected on their goals and future. Once they became more aware of what they wanted to accomplish and were able to identify their strengths, they were able to use agency to challenge the systems of oppression. Enforcement. Agency refers to an individual’s ability to identify and select the actions that will ultimately outline their future and outcomes (Parker & Wilkins, 2018).

The links between PVEST and Intersectionality were made evident by Spencer and Velez (2018) Intersectionality explains how intersecting identities intersect with oppressive power structures or the matrix of dominance (May, 2015). PVEST explores the experiences of a person based on these power structures created that impede their existence or cause oppressive experiences (Velez & Spencer, 2018). For the Black male FGS in the study, their experiences involved interconnected systems of oppression and using both theoretical perspectives connect with their multiple identities and the experiences through an ecological systems perspective (Velez & Spencer, 2018).
An unexpected finding in this study was the extent to which the participants acted according to an Afrocentric Worldview. Though very few actively spoke of such an intent, many demonstrated such actions in all aspects of their lives. Afrocentrism is a paradigm that focuses on the traditions of African philosophy which emphasize collectivism, and interconnectedness (Schiele, 1990). Within the tenets of Afrocentrism, the belief is that everything which works collectively is rooted in spirituality (Stewart, 2014). The principles of Afrocentrism focus on community building, belief in parents, teachers, and leaders, family unity, purpose and self-determination, and cooperative economics (Stewart, 2014; Schiele, 1990). Throughout their journey of developing leadership qualities, the participants showed traits which mirrored these principles.

**How Leadership Develops in Black Males**

**Qualities Defining Leadership:**

The first theme revealed by analysis of these data addressed the qualities these participants deemed necessary in a leader. The participants discussed communication, trust, and teamwork as important leadership qualities. The participants referenced communication and various skills related to communication as among the most important qualities that defined a leader. Those skills included listening to learning from and then guiding others. Previous research supports the importance of various styles of communication being highly regarded as a quality which an effective leader must possess (Al & Samsudin, 2020; Johnson & Hackman, 2018; Zulch, 2014; Hackman & Johnson, 2013). Such research also highlights listening as an important key to communication (Illes & Mathews, 2015). Ruben & Gigliotti (2014) refer to communication as a common linkage to achieve great leadership. Listening was often mentioned by these participants, particularly as it related to learning about the strengths and needs of those
they sought to lead. In this way, skills such as listening were used to enhance their overall communication and leadership. Closely tied to communication as a leadership necessary quality was the need to establish trust. This was also found to be documented in the literature (Day et al., 2014). The participants spoke detailing communication supporting their goals and visions for their future. Their ability to understand the role communication has in leadership exhibits an understanding of one of the most important leadership qualities the literature highlights. More importantly, using communication as a visionary tool which supports their goals and future illustrate their ability to plan and set goals for themselves, they wish to attain.

Adding to the notion communication as deemed essential qualities in leadership, the participants spoke of trust as being important leadership quality which highlighted how gaining trust is a part of the process leaders need to lead effectively (Day et al., 2013). These participants highlighted the issue of trust in both the relationships they established with mentors before college and the ways in which they used the trust placed in them the build community after they had assumed positions of formal and informal leadership both before and after they entered college Some participants spoke of how important the quality of trust was while others detailed situations where they were given trust by their peers, coaches, and mentors to carry out tasks.

Participants emphasized the ability to lead a team and to participate as a team member. In reference to an important quality in leadership, many agree with the sentiments that teamwork is important in leadership (Fair & Kondo, 2020) while others even made the connection between the importance of communication and teamwork being essential to effective leadership (Carter et al., 2016; Dillaman, 2020). Some of the skills that participants linked to communication are illustrated by the referenced literature. The participants’ version of team covers the references, but their view of team is rooted in helping others and not just leading others. In some African
family traditions with roots in West Africa and Kenya, family interdependence is essential to socialization and support (Tseng, 2004). However, many did not identify with their African origins; many of the participants’ generational lineage they could remember started in the Southern region of America. Therefore, they were adopting traditions related to family interdependence which could be traced back to African origins. Trust was essential in reference to the connection to leadership for the participants.

Among the particularly noteworthy findings in the study was the emphasis these participants placed on the belief in and active practice of servant leadership. Here, they expressed an overall vision of leadership that puts those you serve before yourself (Fair & Kondo, 2020) and guiding others through difficult situations specifically when others are faced with adversity. The literature also references supporting those you lead to reach their full potential as well as empowering your team (Elmuti et al., 2005). In their discussions of serving as a team leader the participants often alluded to helping others reach their full potential in addition to leading others to accomplish a specific task. This interpretation of leadership illustrated certain aspects of an Afrocentric worldview. One of the main focal points of an Afrocentric worldview is the principle of *Ujima*, or group identity and a collective building supporting the issues of your brothers’ and sisters’ issues creating ways to solve them together (Belgrave et al., 2011). The participants' idea of teamwork was centered around this principle, their focus was helping others and being supportive of others as part of being a great team player. The data revealed that the focus of teamwork is essentially to uplift in addition to accomplishing a task (e.g. winning). This idea of *teamwork* carried over to participants’ discussions of support in other situations of leadership and community building.

**Being Self-aware, Reflective and Applying Agency**
Self-awareness emerged as a significant aspect of these participants’ journey to college admission and to their involvement as campus leaders. It was part of their ultimate recognition of themselves as leaders and of their sense of identity. Self-awareness played a role in identification of the ways in which systems of oppression influenced the lives of low income, black males on personal, community and societal levels. Reflection on personal experiences was crucial in the gaining of self-awareness, but that personal reflection was combined with observation of their immediate physical and social environments to influence their development and their actions.

The participants spoke in detail of the realization that change needed to occur in their lives and how they began to execute it in order to go to college. Therefore, leadership formation of the participants began with awareness and reflection from the participants. They began to understand their role in their families, the importance of being the first to enter and finish college, and inspiring others to do the same. As they began adopting these mindsets, they also began their journey as leaders. The display of self-awareness is referenced in authentic leadership styles (Shamir & Eilam, 2005).

When the participants began to assess their experiences and how it shaped their development, they began to make decisions based on their aspirations and future goals. The self-awareness process allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences. The reflection was an understanding of their values, beliefs, and motivations (Showry & Manasa, 2014). This would not have been possible without understanding who they were as individuals, and in accessing these traits, they formed valuable leadership qualities. The participants began to reflect on their experience and their environmental factors which impacted their decisions. The participants discussed what qualities they used in their leadership roles currently and in the past as campus
leaders. These qualities were the qualities they used to navigate their influences and chose paths connected to their vision of their outcomes connecting their use of agency to navigate their environment to their leadership origins.

Prior to college, most of the participants were involved in activities where they exhibited what they defined in this study as leadership qualities, but very few recognized themselves as leaders prior to coming to college. The activities in which they were involved included formal roles as teammates/team captains, mentors, group and community leaders, and less formal/informal roles inspiring/influencing peer groups and family circles.

Since the participants were using their qualities (communication, trust, team building, service orientation) to create paths for their future and to combat negative experiences they faced, they perceive those actions experiences as connected to leadership. These accounts seemed farfetched; however, leaders may not be classified as leaders to act in a leadership role or capacity (Shamir & Eliam, 2005). Which means, because of their focus on supporting others and helping build teams as well as being influential in their actions, the participants justifiably did not connect their experiences with leadership roles. Furthermore, their involvement and influence supported through literature (Shamir & Eliam, 2005; Day et al., 2013; Carter et al., 2016) were exposed to leadership experiences prior to college.

The participants used self-reflective practices to understand decisions they needed to make moving forward in order to achieve their goal. Initially, all the participants focus was gaining access to different opportunities such as college enrollment, and their experience which included mentors, and their own discovery of their qualities, they were able to initiative practices that propelled them forward. Understanding yourself, being reflective, self-awareness, and identity are essential to the leadership process (Day et al., 2014). Some participants explained
how their ability to be self-reflective assisted others they lead in their current leadership roles. The level of self-reflection to inspire change in the participants expressed itself connected with principles of leadership, although the goal was to move forward and make sufficient decisions towards their future.

Many of the participants discussed the importance of these qualities in relation to their experiences, sometimes negative experiences, they encountered where they were able to uncover reflection of themselves in situations in order to grow as individuals. They discussed the importance of understanding their identity through self-reflective processes which made them more self-aware of their actions and results of their actions. Back males’ identity is a contributor to their self-esteem and their perception of themselves (Howard et al., 2012; Mahalik et al., 2006). Examining the emphasis, the participants placed on self-identity connects with the Afrocentric principle Kujichagulia, or self-determination which focuses on defining oneself (Pratt-Harris, 2013). As the participants become more self-aware and self-reflective on their experiences, they begin to define themselves and as a result, they use agency to make specific decisions and choices. The participants discussed understanding their surroundings, communities, and influences and the need to make considered and consistent changes, despite what others may think.

Some of the participants discussed their identity in terms of their gender and the effects it had on their leadership development. They expressed as men, even sometimes the youngest, they felt dutiful to take on more responsibility in their households. The participants’ understood that their gender identity in a community aspect meant they were to lead their family and support them, despite challenges. Intersectionality Theory explains how society creates matrix of dominance over their intersecting identities of race, class, and gender and their social identities.
can form forms of discrimination (Proctor, 2020; May 2015), but the participants were
displaying the importance of taking care of their community, especially as Black male figures in
their family. Through this effort, the participants were innately adopting Afrocentric principles of
Nia (purpose) and Ujima (collective work and responsibility) within their families (Belgrave et
al., 2013).

**Family Influences on Leadership Qualities**

The influence of family and other kin revealed itself as salient in the development of
leadership qualities in these participants. Many of the qualities relevant to leadership were first
observed, actively taught, or passed down as part of the family context. The participants
discussed qualities and attitudes they were taught by their parents and immediate/extended
family members. Parental involvement and influence enhance academic persistence and
achievement among students (Fan & Chen, 2001; Bui & Rush, 2016). Their decisions to enter
college, they believed, was influenced by their parents and extended family members who they
expressed gave them no option other than to attend college. However, some participants
expressed various options other than college and how ultimately, they decided to attend college.
This illustrates the participants to display trust in members of their families who had influence
over them, but also how they developed decision making skills through this process and choose a
decision for themselves. As trust becomes an outlier to leadership origin for the participants, the
specific trust they had towards others is related to one of the seven principles in
Afrocentrism, *Imani*, or having faith and believe in individuals in our communities includes
teachers, parents and others who lead us (Stewart, 2004). The participants expressed trusting in
the vision of their teachers as they are proclaiming the participants as great leaders and
supporting the participants even taking roles such as extended family members purchasing items
for their development and caring for them during and outside of school; the teachers and leaders of the commuting were caring for the participants as extended family, or kin. Kinship care is another aspect of an Afrocentric worldview as the beliefs of Afrocentrism emphasize community building (Ince, 2009; Schiele, 1990). Kinship is referred to as extended family care supporting a child or children who are sometimes extended related family or members of the community (Ince, 2009). The literature supports building trust as an important factor for leadership development (Day et al., 2013) as well as leaders possessing cognitive skills which supports their decision making (Day et al., 2013). Also, what is revealed is decision making, trust, and the leadership of the participants’ families which highlights the families’ leadership qualities that the participants gained and learned. Learning leadership qualities from family members or close trusted sources through experiences in adolescent years for Black males is a new addition into literature based on this study.

Throughout the discussion of family, the participants spoke of how they worked (and continue to work) as vital players on the family team and serve(d) as positive influences on younger members of the family. The idea of teamwork and the importance the participants placed on teamwork in reference to their family is deeply rooted in the Afrocentric model which emphasizes on collective survival (Schiele, 1990). The data revealed participants were more motivated to make positive decisions as they became aware that they were an inspiration to younger siblings and/or kin. This willingness to serve as a role model for future generations as well as extended families, primarily younger siblings. Furthermore, the research in this study highlighted the participants taking on responsibilities to at times lead their families which allowed their families to rely on them. Leaders who are effective have been noted to be committed to a purpose and effective in their actions (Elmuti et al., 2005). These participants
were committed to their positive influence over their families which, ultimately, enhance their leadership qualities.

The participants discussed the impact of negative influences in their environments, among peers, and families. However, those discussions were often focused on the insights gained from reflection on the outcomes that typically resulted adherence to the expectations set forth by those influences. Those reflections were sometimes fueled by family members who experienced negative outcomes and sought to steer participants in different directions. This behavior modeled actions participants would later take with younger family members or as mentors in the community. And how they began to possess either with the will to negate from these influences they had been involved in, and/or the understanding that they wanted different experiences related to college and escaping their environments. All the participants were from low-income to moderately low-middle income communities which are reported to have various risk factors for adolescents (Animosa et al., 2018). The participants understand the complexities of their environmental factors which historically in their experiences led to negative outcomes and were able to use agency to create different outcomes for themselves which aligned with their overall goals. They were able to visualize outcomes based on family members’ experiences and/or understand certain outcomes based on environmental historical factors and chose different outcomes. Based on the theoretical perspective of intersectionality, the participants as Black males from low-income environments had intersecting identities which create a matrix of domination that negatively impacts them based on their social identities. However, applying agency in this case to combat their negative experiences allowed them to create different paths based on their goals.
Many participants spoke of older siblings or older family members who made certain decisions and the negative results from those decisions or peers and influences in their environments and the decisions which resulted from specific actions typically. These experiences gave birth to the participants' exploration of their individuality in reference to being able to choose various decisions that were opposite of their influences. Some research has explored individuality in leadership exploring this concept as a social actor which understands external circumstances and exercises influence over the circumstance (Wood, 2005) or accessing individuality as an important skill to promote singular roles in a team that supports the overall progression of a group (Taylor et al., 2014).

**Mentorship: A Catalyst for Leadership Development**

Mentorship was often articulated through the data as an important factor which supported the participants decision making. These mentors were widely discussed as family mentors and school-based mentors. What was discovered through exploring the participants' influence of mentorship is the traits gained through perceived leaders to the participants. Some of the traits were understanding identity, role modeling behavior, and self-belief. These traits were not only identified in the leadership literature as qualities of leaders, but the participants either addressed the importance of these qualities for leaders and/or spoke of experiences where they displayed these characteristics in their adolescent years. School based mentorship is supported in literature as a protective factor which supports academic performance and identity development (Curran et al., 2017; Coller & Kuo, 2014). What is apparent is the influence these mentoring relationships had on the participants, but what is not evident in literature is characteristic traits the ‘mentees’ embody from these experiences. Literature highlights the importance of mentorship relationships for Black males (Scott et al., 2013; Brown, 2011; Whiting, 2006) and some studies indicate how
mentorship can be linked to leadership development highlighting traits such as self-awareness, goal setting, and role modeling (Crisp & Alvarado-Young, 2018) but very little research reflective of embodiment of the characteristics which is displayed through the mentors and how the mentees adopted and used these characteristics. What has been added based on this study is the traits passed down in mentor-mentee relationships for Black males and how these traits are regarded as leadership qualities.

Exposure is heavily regarded within this research as an influence of leadership qualities. Literature expresses the importance of exposure to develop leadership qualities (Sutton & Terrel, 1997). For Black males in college, exposure has positive outcomes related to self-identity and development (Preston-Cunningham, 2013). However, little to no research has connected exposure to leadership qualities during adolescent years of Black males. In this study exposure which influenced leadership skills were captured in four categories: team participation, community-based influence and involvement, church organizational involvement, and informal leadership roles. There has been extensive information linking leadership qualities to team dynamics (CITE). However, in these roles serving on teams, many of the participants were the leads of the teams (captains, co-captains, and unofficial captains) and they expressed they were given these roles because they understood the dynamics of pushing their teammates toward a common goal focusing on the efforts of the team collectively. Therefore, they were either nominated to lead the team by coaches and/or teammates who trusted in their leadership capabilities. To reiterate, they were using Afrocentric ideologies such as Umoja, unity within the community and family (Stewart, 2004) as their leadership qualities began to originate gaining teamwork and trust of others who they assisted in achieving a goal (Shamir & Eliam, 2005).
while unifying everyone. They also gained trust through their actions and leadership of their teams which is an important aspect of leadership (Day et al., 2013).

**Community Involvement Influencing Leadership**

Community-based involvement and informal leadership roles connected if any, the role the community played in the participants leadership development. The roles within the community ranged from afterschool programs, programs teaching life skills, organizations geared towards maintaining visible positive images in inner cities, to name a few. Community based organizations have historically influenced Black males giving them exposure, positive role models, and influencing positive outcomes for Black males (Animosa et al., 2018; Goings et al., 2015; Sanderson & Richards, 2010). The participants understood being involved in their community required purpose or *Nia* which is the principle highlighted in Afrocentrism which focuses on the collective development of the community for restoration and illumination (Stewart, 2004). What this research uncovered that is not highlighted in literature is, if applicable, the skills and character traits Black males learn from these experiences in these community-based involvements.

Informal leadership roles were how the participants discussed their influence over large groups of peers, and how the peer groups, networks entrusted them with making decisions that would have effects on everyone involved. These discussions led to the participants expressing making final decisions for events without being a part of official event committees, always being chosen to coordinate and host events regardless of leadership committees formed for these specific roles, and peers asking for their final input and vision of events. Leaders may not always be classified as leaders (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), but they possess effective decision-making skills, relationship building skills, and have established trust over those they lead (Day et al.,
The informal roles the participants were involved in took place in their later years as high school students. This was prior to entering college, but it can be described as the sum of their experiences and building/use of their leadership traits over the years ushered in these informal roles as their reputation as leaders were solidified among their communities and peer groups.

Community organizations including Church leaders have historically formed positive relationships which help adolescents navigate certain stressors they face in communities (Goings et al., 2015), specifically low-income communities majority of the participants come from. Black churches provide psychological support, values, knowledge, and informal/formal educational support (Hodges et al., 2016). Programs such as 100 Black Men College to Church, which was a program in Louisiana that created a bridge program with a nearby community college to support Black males entering college with collaborative programming and initiatives (Hodges et al., 2016), have been supportive to the educational advancements of Black males. The participants in the study heavily discussed the impact of their church affiliations during their adolescent years. They described leading summer camps for younger generations and Church being the first place where they were able to perform, public speak, lead sermons. The Black church largely has male leaders who serve as community engagers, activists as well as leaders in the church (Hodges et al., 2016). The participants did not discuss specific leadership inspirations in church, but arguably, they were modeling behaviors similar to their church leaders. Thus learning various leadership qualities, which they mastered prior to college. From preaching sermons to managing youth camps and running programs, the participants’ roles in their churches stemmed from the leadership of their church leaders.

**Significant Findings**
The findings aligned with a number of new concepts within this study: the center of leadership development is rooted in self-awareness and development which was influenced or enhanced by experiences with families, community, and mentors. For these participants, self-awareness was indicated as a precursor for the implementation of agency and the innate use of an Afrocentric approach to the overall origins of leadership qualities of the participants. The leadership positions the participants are involved in during their collegiate years were largely influenced by community building among other Black students and helping others through mentorship.

The overall goal was to explore the experiences of the participants to understand if there were any connection to their origin of their leadership qualities and their adolescent influences. While exploring the origins of leadership in these Black male FGS, there were interesting findings linked to the influence of Afrocentrism, the importance of self-awareness, and agency. The implementation of agency as well as the Afrocentric approach has been essential to the participants’ leadership origins. Agency refers to individuals who make decisions based on strategically achieving their goals and providing organization and vision for their lives (Roy, 2006). The Afrocentric model places a focus on conceptualizing human beings as a collective and living/surviving as a collective experience (Schiele, 1990). Afrocentric approach is rooted in various thematic origins such as: identity of human is a culmination of a collective concept, spirituality connects all people together, knowledge is centered around all aspects of a person including the mind, body, and soul (Stewart, 2004). Throughout the discussion, the participants used agency as they began to develop into leaders, and as Black males, unbeknownst to them, they were heavily using Afrocentric ideology and tenets as they developed their leadership skills and continue to use these tenets and values in their current positions. With the
interlocking nuances of self-awareness, adopting Afrocentric principles, the use of agency to combat negative experiences the participants navigated, the participants' origins of leadership began to form. These origins had strong influences such as families, peers, community members, and even the community environment. Exploring Black male leadership for FG Black male student leaders, it was essential to explore the origins of leadership qualities among this population which could inform how we approach understanding leadership characteristics of marginalized populations.

What is not explored heavily in the literature is the impact self-awareness has on the overall development of leadership qualities and the use of agency because of this impact. When the participants began to assess their experiences and how it shaped their development, they began to make decisions based on their aspirations and future goals. This would not have been possible without understanding who they were as individuals, and in accessing these traits, they formed valuable leadership qualities. The participants discussed what qualities they used in their leadership roles currently and in the past as campus leaders. These qualities were the qualities they used to navigate their influences and chose paths connected to their vision of their outcomes connecting their use of agency to navigate their environment to their leadership origins.

Another concept adding to literature is the exploration of unconventional non formal leadership roles and how these roles develop leadership qualities of individuals. The participants were involved in these roles and experiences, but ultimately could not connect these experiences with their own leadership development. On the contrary, understanding the experiences the participants discussed suggests they gained and have even perfected some leadership qualities during these unconventional roles. The author will go so far as to emphasize gain and perfected, because others sought out the participants’ leadership in these various roles which means they
were trusted or had a record of successful leadership in these specific areas. However, having their strong self-awareness which led to their and decision making was not enough evidence for the participants to apply their leadership qualities and involvement prior to college.

**Limitations**

As a qualitative study, the research cannot be used to generalize the experiences of the population (Hays & Singh, 2012). Though it fit the requirements of a Grounded Theory study, the small sample size, was also a limitation. With more participants, there may have been a wider range of experiences which could have been applicable to diverse populations. Another limitation is the region where the study took place. The participants are all from New Jersey and attend school in Northern New Jersey. It is important when analyzing this study to understand that the specific regional location may have contained certain social characteristics that influenced outcomes.

During the time the study took place, there was a global pandemic occurring which prevented many aspects of the original data collection process. All interviews were collected via zoom, which may have had effects on the participants ability to be completely open and comfortable. Many of the participants were confined to their homes during this time and the interviews were heavily based on their family life and upbringing. Furthermore, the study would have been enhanced through observations of the participants during leadership roles to examine how they apply their leadership qualities through action research. Because of COVID-19, the participants’ leadership roles became reconfigured to fit the social distance requirements of the research site, and during that process, observations were not available.
The limitations of the study did not hinder the study completely or affect the amount of research collected. The data collected still added immensely to the literature and the participant pool allows for the possibility of larger datasets and comparison analysis research for this topic.

**Implications**

There are various ways to expound on this research for future implications. This is the first study to understand leadership qualities of Black male FGS at a PWI. However, it would be advantageous to see what results this study would have in different regions and/or at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Future research could be developed if instruments from quantitative analysis would be used. Exploring if the numerical data supported the findings in this research would be an interesting comparative and could either support or add to this research perspective.

In this study, I examined the adolescent experiences of Black male FGS which could have supported their leadership development. There are commonalities between some experiences of FGS; next steps would be to apply this research to other ethnic groups and genders (Black female, Latinx, Asian, etc) who identify as FGS. Overall, this study can be used to enhance practitioners in secondary education when creating programs which support the retention and graduation of this population. The overall qualities of Black male student leaders are largely connected to qualities which supported their decision to further their education. The mere fact that they are in college may be sufficient enough to assume through this research that they may have qualities in which they could become more involved on campus and excel in leadership roles.

For research, this study adds to protective factors which combat risk factors in reference to Black males succession in education. The research enhances the need to understand and study
leadership qualities and how they can be used to support Black males in college. Furthermore, this leadership is the first of its kind to explore how FGS without cultural capital of college campuses access qualities they may have gained through their quest to become the first in their families to enter college.

For families, the research explores how Black males view their identity and role in their families as role models. They take on the role to support their family by their actions and to change their families’ trajectory by entering college. However, researchers and practitioners can examine various ways to provide opportunities to support Black males as they are taking on large roles within their families. Lastly, the leadership traits absorbed through the participants largely came from family members who displayed these qualities and passed them down to the participants. Future research could explore unexamined leadership qualities of Black families and how they have passed down to their children.

This study revealed how Black males in the study used reflection to become more self-aware on their experiences and how to navigate the stressors and challenges within their environments and overall influences based largely on their intersections; the process leads to their leadership origins. The participants used awareness to better connect to more outcomes which lead to the use of agency to create actions that would change their paths. This concept of self-awareness formation which is linked to agency is a significant finding in the study. Agency has been coupled with Intersectionality Theory focusing on using agency as a catalyst to combat oppressive experience due to someone’s intersecting identities. However, the findings of this study suggest that the participants' use of agency prior to college was a result of their intersecting identities, but they were able to understand their identity because of the self-awareness, which explained their leadership experience prior to college.
Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore origins of leadership qualities in Black male FGS at a PWI to further research related to protective factors which may retain and graduate Black males in college at high rates. The themes which emerged from the study were Understanding of leadership qualities, family influence of leadership qualities, mentorship, and community involvement. The study uncovered a few new additions to literature which included: the focus on self-awareness as a catalyst in leadership development of Black males, leadership qualities passed down from informal leaders such as parents, community members, and mentors of Black male FGS, and the use of agency to apply action to experiences related to leadership development of Black male FGS.

Although Afrocentrism was heavily connected to how the participants' leadership qualities formed, it was not discussed among the participants as a focus of their development. This allows the researcher to conclude, there is a linkage with Afrocentric values that the participants as Black males in communities and families of primarily Black members inherited which enriched the origins of their leadership qualities. Therefore, the traditions of Afrocentrism may be rooted in American communities heavily populated by Black people.

What does not exist in literature is the concept of using individuality as a protective factor against environmental influences which inspires leadership development. The participants discussed positive influences they experienced but these specific actions they discussed highlighted them as the individuals making decisions based on self-reflective practices. To reiterate, they were either inspired to choose decisions based on typical outcomes they viewed which either family, peers, or many individuals in their communities had experienced. Their views of themselves and their future exploration related to college enrollment promoted their use
of agency to develop leadership skills. In conclusion, their leadership skills were developed while they made decisions which would allow them to be the first in their families to go to college.

However, the leadership literature which is connected to understanding leadership has not yet uncovered how leadership originates other than expressing important traits and characteristics of leadership for adolescents or the impact of families, peers, and community involvement in reference leadership development.
References


Allen, Q. (2015). “I’m trying to get my A”: Black male achievers talk about race, school and achievement. The Urban Review, 47(1), 209-231. doi.org/10.1007/s11256-014-0315-4


Elmuti, D., Minnis, W., & Abebe, M. (2005). Does education have a role in developing leadership skills?. Management Decision.


DOI: 10.1080/02796015.2004.12086262


Hegji, A. (2017). Programs for minority-serving institutions under the higher education act.


Huijg, D. (2020). *Intersectional agency: A theoretical exploration of agency at the junction of social categories and power, based on conversations with racially privileged feminist activists from São Paulo, Brazil*. The University of Manchester (United Kingdom).


Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). Designing your study and selecting a sample. *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*, 73-104.


Appendix A: Interview Questions

General
1. Where did you grow up? What was it like?
2. Why did you decide to go to college? Did you consider other options?
3. When did you initially begin thinking about college? Why?
4. When was the decision to pursue college made? How old? Circumstances?
5. Were there particular people who influenced you?
6. Where did you acquire your attitudes toward education in general and higher education in particular?
7. What is/was the hardest thing about being first generation?

Family
- Tell me about your upbringing? The environment of where you grew up and your home environment?
- Tell me about your role in your family. What role did you play in your family? How many siblings do you have and what are their roles?
- What role does your family play in your life now in college?
- What does your family know about the college experience?

Community/Environment
- Describe your pre-college educational (school) environment?
- Did you have anyone you looked up to as mentors in your communities and if so who were they and how did they impact you?

Leadership
- Did you have anyone you looked up to as mentors in your communities and if so who were they and how did they impact you?
● Were you involved with any activities in school or outside of school? If so, can you describe your roles in these activities?
● What would you describe as leadership qualities? What is a leader to you?

Campus Leadership questions

● What skills did you possess that you believe made it possible to hold your leadership position(s)?
● Did you have any exposure to leadership positions prior to coming to college?
● What would you describe as leadership qualities?
● What qualities did you have that you felt qualified you to become a student leader on campus?
● Where do you believe you gained the skills to hold your leadership position?
● Does your leadership position affect your belief in your ability to graduate college or to continue going to college at this particular school?
● Has the leadership position have any effect on your confidence or self-esteem?

Current Questions:

1. What has your experience been like since Covid in relation to your education?
2. Did you have to go back home because of covid? What was it like participating in class from home?
3. How did your family respond to the time you needed to focus on college?
4. Did you have any barriers that made it difficult for you to complete your work or stay fully engaged in your classes?
## Appendix B: Participants Details List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>FT/PT</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Began</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>3.3-3.4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Comm</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1, 2, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>2.6-2.9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Anthro</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>1, 3, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>3-3.2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Poli-Sci</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>3, 6, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antwon</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>3.3-3.4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Soci</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1, 3, 7, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3.3-3.4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1, 2, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamal</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3.3-3.4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Comm</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>3.3-3.4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Edu</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalil</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>2.6-2.9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>1, 3, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>3.0-3.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Psych</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>2, 1, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3.3-3.4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Comm</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>1, 7, 11, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chauncy</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3.3-3.4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Comm</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>2.5-2.9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Psych</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Leadership Position description

1**The Brotherhood**- We are The Brotherhood La Hermandad, a Class II organization geared towards, but not limited just to, aiding Black and Hispanic males from an academic, professional, and social standpoint here at Montclair State University. The Brotherhood La Hermandad pushes for academic excellence, as a collective, by running study sessions and holding accountability for one another.

2**Resident Assistant**- The RA is responsible for the day to day interaction and development of the students who reside in the residence halls. RAs live in the halls and supervise a floor or area within the community. RAs take on many roles, such as Community Builders, Role Models, Peer Educators, Crisis Managers, Team Players, and Administrators. They are student leaders that help our residential students feel acclimated and comfortable on campus. General responsibilities include: maintaining a safe and secure environment for resident students, student community development, educational programming, and associated administrative responsibilities.

3**Male Leadership Academy**- The direct mission of MLA is to promote leadership, scholarship, and integrity in males at Montclair State University. We accomplish this goal through fellowship, leadership, training, mentorship, community service, and scholastic excellence. Our number one goal is to develop college students' leadership skills and have them be applied to leadership roles across campus.

4**National Panhellenic Council**- Montclair State University is home to eight of the “Divine Nine”, historically African-American Greek Lettered Organizations. This sub-council’s goal is to unite as a single body under the ideals of sisterhood, brotherhood, scholarship and giving back to the community by providing service and educational and social programs to the Montclair campus.

5**Red Hawk Pride Society**- The Red Hawk Pride Society recognizes exemplary student leaders (undergraduate and graduate) who have had an instrumental impact on the Montclair State University campus. These student leaders have at least 60 credits, a 3.0 GPA, and are known for hard work on and off campus. Students are nominated and inducted in the fall semester. The Division of Student Development and Campus Life initiated the Red Hawk Pride Society in 2014.

6**NAACP**- The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is an African-American civil rights organization in the United States, formed in 1909 by Moorfield Storey, by Mary White Ovington and W. E. B. Du Bois. MSU'S NAACP Chapter is here to be a voice to students of all backgrounds on this campus.

7**Threads Mentorship Program**- THREADS at Montclair State University is a mentorship program and the work it does with male youth from Newark, N.J. with undergraduate mentors. This is what THREADS stands for: Truth... Helping boys truly evaluate themselves, their world, and their place in it Honor... Understanding the value in honoring community and culture Respect... For self, women, and authority figures Education... Promoting academic identity and achievement And... Because there is always more room to grow
Development of Self… Commitment to personal improvement as an individual and a social being.

8Corporate Edge Mentor - Peer mentors are business students who have successfully completed the first year of the Corporate Edge and can be an exemplary influence on the first year students in the program. Peer mentors will have the opportunity to share with other students about their professional development and guide them through the program. Peer mentors will engage with their mentee during the semester by attending workshops and arranging one-on-one meetings. Peer mentors will also have the opportunity to lead Corporate Edge workshops, network with employers, assist with events for career services and EOF.

9Resident Hall Association - The mission of the Residence Hall Association is to provide residents with the most profound on campus living experience, advocate on behalf of the resident student body, educate the Montclair State Community on the social issues of our generation and encourage peer relationships.

10Black Student Union - Today our purpose is to promote cultural awareness and mutual respect campus wide through the Arts, Education, and Fellowship. This organization is open to anyone, from any background, who wants to learn more about the experience we live as African-American students and our rich culture that has changed the world.

11Peer Leader - Summer student position where students oversee incoming freshmen in the EOF Summer Academy. Peer Leaders support the academic goals and socialization of students while providing them with resources to enhance their knowledge of the university.

12Student Government Association - The SGA President oversees all of the daily operations of the Student Government Association. They also act as a liaison between the campus administration and the student body and is a constant voice of the students. The SGA President strives to create an atmosphere of growth, experience and productivity for the Montclair State University community.

13University Fellows Mentor - University Fellows are student leaders who provide support, guidance and mentoring to first-year students as they transition to Montclair State University. As one of the newest student leadership positions, University Fellows: Are guides, academic resources, and role models to their students and peers. Facilitate the care, support, and learning of new and continuing students. Are knowledgeable about campus resources, policies, and culture. Have a willingness to share information, experiences, and accomplishments in an encouraging way. Are open, understanding, and approachable.

14Center for Psychological Services (CAPS) Mentor - A CAPS mentor supports and assists with weekly sessions focus on: social justice advocacy, leadership skills, setting realistic goals and expectations, staying motivated, coping and stress management skills, increasing health and wellness, and building resilience.

15Political Science Club - The Political Science Club is an organization of the Student Government Association that promotes campus involvement and political awareness. Become
informed about our world’s most pressing issues and hear from guest scholars on advanced issues concerning politics and law. This organization provides a venue where students can discuss and debate topics in a friendly and constructive environment.
Appendix D: Email request for participants

Greetings

I am working with Dr. Pearl Stewart on a study of First Generation College students. I am particularly interested in First Generation, Black, male student who are (were) involved in leadership positions at Montclair State University. I am contacting you because you currently hold or have held such a position.

This study will explore the pre-college family, social and community experiences that shaped your development as a leader, as well as your campus involvement and leadership experiences.

If you take part in this study, you would complete a brief survey and an interview via Zoom (or in person) and will last approximately 30-45 minutes.

To participate in the study, you will need to complete and sign a consent form. If you are unable to fill out the consent form, prior to the interview you can verbally agree to the consent of the project and I will review the consent of the project with you.

Please respond if you are interested in participating in this project.

This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board. IRB #001010"
Appendix E: Screener Background Document

Screening Question

1. Parent(s) Information:
   a. Occupation:
   b. Educational level (last completed):

Participant Information

1. Participant
   a. Occupation:
   b. Credit hours completed:
   c. GPA Range: 4.0-3.5 3.49-3.0 2.9-2.5 2.49-2.0 1.9 and lower
   d. Are you a current student at Montclair State University or an alumni?

2. Demographics
   a. Age:
   b. Gender:
   c. Race/ethnicity:
   d. Number of brothers and sisters:
   e. Your place in birth order

2. Current major?

3. Do you attend full time or part time?

4. When did you graduate from High School?

5. When did you begin college?

6. What did you do between High School and College?
7. Are you involved with any current or have been involved with student leadership positions on campus?
Appendix F: Leadership Application Framework

**Leadership application framework**

1. **Goal Achievement**: Once they have achieved their goals, the process starts again. This process aids the formation of their leadership qualities.

2. **Self Reflection**: Self-reflection is related to personal experiences, circumstances, and behaviors.

3. **Applying Agency**: Agency is implemented based on their self-reflection, self-awareness, and future goals.

4. **Self Awareness**: Self-awareness is connected to an individual’s identity, environments, oppressive systems as well as their acknowledgement of their personal strengths values.