EXPLORING THE LEADERSHIP EDUCATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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by

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of African American women and their undergraduate preparation for future leadership roles. African American women are more adversely impacted than their African American male and White female peers by institutional inconsistency in leadership education in their post secondary studies. While women earn more than fifty percent of all college degrees, they still lag significantly behind White men who currently hold the highest percent of leadership positions across all professions. This disparity has a serious impact on African American women who are challenged to fight the double burden of sexism and racism. Therefore, it is imperative that African American women graduate from college equipped to lead. This study highlights the lack of diversity in leadership education and underscores the need to include the experiences of African American women in leadership curricula and pedagogy. Including diverse experiences broadens societal definitions of good leadership qualities and increases the pool of qualified leaders.

Keywords: African American women, leadership education, female, college students, Black feminist theory, leadership theory, workplace equity, Howard University, sexism, racism, post secondary institutions
Dedication

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my parents Mildred and Vernon Taylor who have always encouraged my academic pursuits; my grandmother Milne Grier who passed away just short of my completion; my dog Pharaoh who makes me laugh and all the little Black girls who were told not to dream.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................. 3
Dedication ................................................................................................................. 4
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................... 5
  Table of Contents .................................................................................................... 8
Chapter One: Introduction ......................................................................................... 10
  Problem of Practice ................................................................................................. 10
  Significance ............................................................................................................ 11
Definition of Terms .................................................................................................... 14
Assumptions ............................................................................................................... 16
Study Limitations ...................................................................................................... 17
Research Question and Goals ................................................................................... 17
Summary and Organization of Paper ......................................................................... 18
Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................... 19
  Black feminist theory. ............................................................................................. 19
  Leadership theory. ................................................................................................... 20
  Applications of Black feminist theory and leadership theories. ......................... 22
Leadership Education ................................................................................................. 23
Chapter Two: Literature Review ............................................................................... 27
Quality Educational Leadership ................................................................................. 28
  Institutional capacity. ............................................................................................. 28
  Leadership styles and stereotypes. ......................................................................... 29
  Accessing leadership development opportunities. .............................................. 30
Rationale for Research ............................................................................................... 31
Key Terminology and Search Approach ..................................................................... 31
Successful Leadership Education: Formal and Informal Methods ......................... 32
  Leadership development of student athletes. ....................................................... 33
  Leadership development and student organizations. ......................................... 33
  Informal skills development. .................................................................................. 34
  Classroom-based leadership development. ......................................................... 35
Feminist Perspectives ................................................................................................. 36
Informal Pathways ..................................................................................................... 39
Chapter Three: Methodology .................................................................................... 42
Research Design ........................................................................................................ 43
Methodology and Research Tradition ....................................................................... 43
Site and Participants .................................................................................................. 44
Data Collection .......................................................................................................... 45
Data Storage .............................................................................................................. 46
Data Analysis ............................................................................................................. 46
Positionality Statement ............................................................................................. 47
Validity and Credibility ............................................................................................. 48
Protection of Human Subjects ................................................................................... 49
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis ....................................................................... 49
Data Collection .......................................................................................................... 50
  Prescreening and Confidentiality ......................................................................... 51
Findings ............................................................................................................................ 51
Demographic Profiles ..................................................................................................... 52
Chimamanda ..................................................................................................................... 55
Imani ................................................................................................................................. 56
Jamilla ............................................................................................................................... 56
Laila ..................................................................................................................................... 57
Toni ..................................................................................................................................... 57
Abbreviated Textual Narratives ...................................................................................... 58
Commonalities and Differences ...................................................................................... 62
Emergent Themes ............................................................................................................ 63
  Theme 1: Future Success .............................................................................................. 64
  Theme 2: Low Identification with Black Feminism ...................................................... 66
  Theme 3: Leadership .................................................................................................... 68
  Theme 4: Personal Mantras and Legacies ................................................................... 70
Summary of Findings ...................................................................................................... 72
Chapter Five: Discussion, Implications and Recommendations ................................. 73
  Summary of Findings .................................................................................................... 74
  Discussion of Findings ................................................................................................. 75
  Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature and Theoretical Framework ........ 76
  Limitations of the Study ............................................................................................. 79
  Implications for Practice ............................................................................................. 81
  Recommendations for Further Research ..................................................................... 82
  Personal Reflections ..................................................................................................... 83
  Post Script Positionality .............................................................................................. 84
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 86
References ......................................................................................................................... 88
Appendix A: Protocol for Interview #1 .......................................................................... 97
Appendix B: Recruiting Documents .............................................................................. 99
Appendix C: Screening Survey ....................................................................................... 100
Appendix D: Informed Consent Documents .................................................................. 102

List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of Demographic Characteristics of Participants ............................... 52
Table 2: Summary of Extracurricular Activities and Student Leadership Positions ........ 53
Table 3: Cross Matrix of Participants' Level of Self Esteem ........................................... 59
Table 4: Cross Matrix of Participants' Leadership Education Courses .......................... 59
Table 5: Cross Matrix of a Significant College Experience .......................................... 61
Table 6: Cross Matrix of Participants' Definitions of Leadership .................................... 62
Chapter One: Introduction

“Women are enrolling in college at an average rate of more than 10 percent greater than men” (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014, p.1). Yet, “women occupy around 20 percent of leadership positions in business, journalism, politics and law firms” (Lennon, 2013 p.11) These alarming statistics refer to all women, yet the reality is that African American women make up only even a small fraction of the totals. African American women’s challenges straddle both gender and race issues. Examining only one aspect cannot fully capture the complexity of these women’s realities.

As the U.S. population and workforce shifts toward more even gender representation, it is increasingly apparent that although women make up half or more of the workforce, men--especially White men--still dominate leadership positions. Women are underrepresented in leadership positions. In the case of African American women, there is even less of a chance that they will be hired or promoted to lead.

Problem of Practice

This doctoral thesis examines leadership education, defined as “providing opportunities for people to learn the skills, attitudes, and concepts necessary to become effective leaders” (Huber, 2002, p. 27). Specifically, this study examines the leadership education that female African American post-secondary students received while earning their bachelor degrees at American institutions of higher education. Currently, there is a major gap in the work place in the rate of participation of African American women in leadership positions when compared to their White male counterparts, which correlates to significantly lower salary rates (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor [BLS], 2013), and lower attainment of leadership positions and prestige. Research demonstrates that individuals who possess an understanding of
leadership theories and practices are better able to access leadership development information and use it to secure and maintain leadership positions within organizations. Based on the extant literature, institutions of higher education should provide every student, but especially African American female students, with opportunities to receive leadership education and develop their leadership skills to build a strong foundation for their future success.

Dugan and Komives (2010) suggested that even within the same institution of higher education, the content and quality of leadership education varied greatly. This variance has the greatest negative impact on minority students and women. Because of the demonstrated gap in leadership attainment, women, especially African American female students, need to build leadership skills in order to excel in the workplace. Often, employers assume that all college students have had access to leadership courses or that leadership education is provided to all students, which frequently is not the case.

Significance

African American women who have earned college degrees earn less than their White male counterparts—taking home only 69.9% of what White men are paid (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Even though African American women have higher college completion rates than African American men (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, n.d.; Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014), they are still more likely to struggle financially. According to U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, as of September 2013, African Americans had an overall rate of 14% unemployment, compared to a 6.3% rate for Whites. In fact, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics African American women with bachelor degrees have even higher unemployment rates than White men and women without college degrees.

Income disparity places additional financial, emotional, and health burdens on African
American women. African American women are more likely to be single parents than White women. Only 33% of African American children are raised in two-parent households, compared to 75% of White children (National KIDS COUNT, n.d.) and almost 40% of African American children live in poverty (National KIDS COUNT, n.d.).

African American women are often hardest hit in a number of social and economic indices. During the housing boom of the early 2000s, women were more likely to have received a subprime mortgage loan and particularly targeted were African American and Hispanic women (Fishbein & Woodall, 2006). African American, often heading single parent households, then had to manage the aftermath, contending with housing foreclosures during the recent housing crisis. The U.S. Department of Labor (2011) reported disparity between Black and White female military veterans, with Black female veterans have an unemployment rate of 11% compared to White female veterans who are unemployed at a rate of 7%. According to the Sentencing Project for Research and Advocacy for Reform, 25% of the state and federal prison population was African American and Black women had a 1 in 19 chance of being incarcerated, compared to a 1 in 45 chance for Hispanic women and a 1 in 118 chance for White women (The Sentencing Project, 2012).

Lower lifetime income projections for African American women also have negative health implications. As of 2011, one in five African Americans did not have health insurance (Duckett & Artiga, 2013). African Americans are 20% more likely than Whites to report feeling serious psychological distress, but less than 10% receive counseling or prescription medication (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [AHRQ], 2013). African American women are 70% more likely to be obese than White women, almost twice as likely to be diagnosed with diabetes than White women, and two and a half times
more likely to die from it (Office of Minority Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [OMH], n.d.).

Institutional barriers are slowly eroding due to stricter labor policies and the growing diversity of the population, which may eventually lead to an equitable playing field within the workplace. Unfortunately, there are still many barriers impeding African American women in their attempt to gain job security and financial success. For those African American women professionals who have successfully found employment, their upward mobility may be impeded by perceptions of inadequate leadership preparation and skill development.

Huber (2002) and Lenon (2013) note employers often assume job candidates have subject matter knowledge in the field in which they earned a degree and that candidates have been adequately trained in theory, methods, and practices necessary for success in a professional position. Assumptions that candidates have the “soft skills” of critical thinking, communication, team building and leadership are also prevalent in the workplace (Fain (2013); Connaughton & Ruben (2003). In a study conducted by Fain (2013) it was noted that while many institutions of higher education set academic objectives for students to hone critical thinking, communication, and team building skills, leadership education has not systematically been included consistently across academic curricula. Asheville-Buchomb Technical Community College has had successs addressing this issue college-wide by issuing “workplace readiness certificates” to ensure that students mastered these soft skills (Fain, 2012). But the inclusion of leadership education is not universal. Women are hurt by this inconsistency, and African American women and Hispanic women are most negatively impacted (Jain, 2010).

Leadership curriculums often fail to include the perspectives and experiences of women and people of color. The absence of diverse worldviews can lead to demonstration of poor
leadership by decision makers, especially as diversity of the workforce continues to grow. Trigg (2006) noted, “Although there are over five hundred colleges and universities in the United States (and a growing number around the world) that offer programs on leadership and leadership development, there are far less that offer programs specifically on women’s leadership” (p. 22). In a 2003 article authored by Connaughton and Ruben it was noted that leadership education is a critical knowledge set essential to the success of women within the workplace and offers a means of remedying their limited access to prestige, power, and wealth. By understanding current leadership dynamics and designing leadership education, women can expand the definition of leadership, and make it more inclusive and representative of the real world experiences of women and people of color (Trigg, 2006).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of African American women and their undergraduate preparation for future leadership roles. The goal of this study is to add to the body of knowledge in the academy and have real world, practical applications. The findings impacts theory by adding to the Black feminist theory perspective on leadership and higher education. This study contributes to the literature, enhancing the body of knowledge about the leadership education and development opportunities provided to African American female college students. The study contributes to practice by providing insights into how leadership is currently taught and by identifying methods and theories that should be incorporated in the pedagogy to elevate African American female leaders.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this study, the use of the term ‘African American’ and ‘Black’ were used interchangeably. The 2010 U.S. Census and U.S. Office of Management and Budget used both terms to identify all people of African descent, which also includes recent immigrants from Sub-
Sahara Africa. The term ‘African American’ was first used by intellectuals beginning in the 1970’s as a term to replace the state-sanctioned label of ‘Negro’ which was derived from the Portuguese ‘niger,’ bestowed upon enslaved Africans and free men and women in the early part of the transatlantic slave trade (Collins, 2010; Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 1997). By 1988, African American leaders at the encouragement of Reverend Jesse Jackson, began using the term “African American” which was viewed as being more inclusive (Hall, Philips, Townsend). It is important to note that while researchers, authors, policy makers, and the media switch between the terms, there are real financial implications associated with the use of ‘African American’ versus ‘Black’ (Hall, Phillips and Townsend, 2015). In a study that Hall and his colleagues conducted there was found to be almost a $9,000 difference in salaries awarded based on the White participants’ perceptions of the educational attainment and status of the people of African descent depending on which term was used to identify the person of African descent. White participants perceived people identified as African American as being more educated. For many Americans the designation ‘Black’, which rose to prominence in the 1960’s from the Black power and liberation movements, was reserved for “Black brothers and sisters who [were] emancipating themselves” (Bennett, 1967 p. 48) and viewed in more radical and political terms.

Within this study, the term ‘barriers’ includes socially constructed barriers to success based on race, class, gender, soci-economic status; both perceived and imposed. Henry, Butler, and West (2014) found that “… many Black college women report feeling isolated, marginalized, and misunderstood in their academic and social experiences on campus” (p.138). Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, et al. (1999) noted that that Black students were often reluctant to seek help from professors unless the professor was perceived to be of the same race and/or gender, which is problematic for African American female students because typically there are only a
few African American women staff or faculty on campuses. Additional barriers noted by Henry, Butler, West (2014) included “that the lack of support systems and networks (Patton & Harper, 2003), and the internalization of negative societal stereotypes (Sims, 2008)” (p. 140) have negative impacts on students.

The terms ‘institutions of higher education’ and ‘post-secondary institutions’ include accredited two and four year colleges, universities, and technical schools that award associate, bachelors, graduate, and professional degrees.

Throughout the study, the setting, Howard University, is often referred to by the single name designation ‘Howard’.

‘Racism’ refers to the systematic subordination of members of targeted racial groups who have little social power in the United States (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). Racism has a particularly damaging psychosocial impact and effect on African American girls and women (Hill Collins, 2010)

Within the scope of this study, ‘resiliency’ refers to the ability to adjust or recover from a misfortune (Morales & Trotman, 2004).

‘Sexism’ refers to a cultural, institutional, and/or individual set of beliefs and/or practices than privilege men, subordinate women, and denigrate values and practices associated with women (Adams et al., 1997).

‘Woman’ or ‘women’ is the sociological gendered term to label adult human females who are post pubescent, and is at times used interchangeably with ‘female’ who is a person born with the reproductive anatomy to produce eggs and bear children.

**Assumptions**

This study was conducted to identify possible gaps in and/or exemplar leadership
education and leadership development opportunities provided to African American women in post-secondary institutions.

This study assumed the following:

1. Participants would respond with candor and honesty;
2. African American women are less likely to receive leadership education and access to leadership development opportunities in their post-secondary education;
3. African American women can excel as leaders.

**Study Limitations**

As a phenomenological study, the researcher was aware of potential limitations:

1. This study was limited to studying self-identified African American women attending one historically Black University.
2. The study included only five participants, and is only representative of those five participants’ experiences.
3. This study did not include participants from the breadth of academic fields of study.

**Research Question and Goals**

The following research questioned guided the study: *What are the formal and informal pathways in which African American women obtain their leadership education?* This qualitative, interpretative phenomenological study provided insight into the leadership education and development experiences the participants received while attending Howard University, a historically Black University (HBCU) and the researcher’s alma mater. The goal was to identify potential gaps in their leadership education while also highlighting the leadership theories they learned and could draw from as professionals. This study highlighted the unique leadership development experiences of African American women. The study also has the potential to serve
the academic community at Howard University and the academy at large by providing experiential insight about the effectiveness of current leadership education. The other practical goal of this study was to ensure that future African American women graduating from Howard University receive the theoretical foundation, preparation, and training to become leaders.

The information obtained by conducting this interpretative phenomenological qualitative methods study should be useful to the student participants, the institution of higher education that serves as the research site, the higher education community and employers. Additionally, this information could be useful to the designers of leadership education programs. The goal of this study was to identify and encourage the expansion of leadership theories, education and strategies to ensure that when African American female college students graduate, they are ready to enter the workforce in a competitive manner by equipping them with skills that can counteract disparities in pay, prestige and authority. The over-arching goal of this study was to include through the lens of Black feminist theory, the voices and perspectives of African American women for both the academic field of leadership education and employer based leadership programs across the public and private sectors.

**Summary and Organization of Paper**

The theoretical framework, review of the literature, research design and protection of human subjects, presentation of data and discussion form the chapters that follow. The theoretical framework provided the lens through which this interpretative phenomenological study was conducted. There were two theories that were employed: Black feminist theory, which is “social thought designed to oppose oppression and can take the form of poetry, music and essays” (Collins, 2009, p. 11), and leadership theory which emphasizes “the facilitating of change—in both the {organizational} mission and vision as well as the values and ethos”
Black feminist theory guided the interpretative lens used to understand the unique phenomena of African American women’s post-secondary leadership education experiences. Leadership theory provided the epistemological foundation for the phenomena of leadership education and development. Chapter three provides an analysis of the research literature, which positions the study in the bodies of work on Black feminist theory, critical race theory, leadership theory, intersectionality, and higher education practices. It is from this collective body of existing research that this study was guided. Chapter four includes the methods for the design of the research, research analysis and the research question and the steps that were taken to protect the human subjects. In addition, the chapter four addresses my credibility and positionality. Chapter five presents the findings and the recommendations for practice.

**Theoretical Framework**

A successful leadership education program for African American female college students attending any post-secondary institution should be equally grounded in leadership theory and Black feminist theory. Theoretical perspectives provide a framework and grounding for theories (Barron & Scott, 2010). Black feminist theory is guided by the nexus of critical race theory, which challenges racial inequality, and feminist theory, which addresses structural gender oppression and the implications of the societal differences between men and women.

**Black feminist theory.**

This study was grounded in Black feminist theory, which provided a rich textural understanding about study participants’ experiences. While leadership education is offered by numerous institutions of higher education, it does not always link theory to practice or real world experience (Miles, 2010-2011). Feminist perspectives, particularly Black feminist perspectives suggest that a lack of diversity in race and
gender correlates with a lack of diversity of ideas. Black feminist theory is unique as it is both a means to situate a grounded understanding of phenomena as a theoretical lens and as a practical tool that can be applied to actively dismantle oppression.

Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins (2012) stated:

Black feminist thought and practice responds to a fundamental contradiction of U.S. society. On the one hand, democratic promises of individual freedoms, equality under the law and social justice are made to all American citizens. Yet on the other hand the reality of differential group treatment based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship status persists. (p. 26).

Black feminist theory provides a means to explore the intersectionality of multiple forms of oppression in ways that can change society and benefit everyone.

**Leadership theory.**

Leadership is a field of study that is often taught through a particular epistemological orientation due to the complex nature of leadership theory (Moynihan & Van Wart, 2013) and the fact that it encompasses a number of defining factors. In the literature there are five overarching theories of leadership that are discussed which included, “classical management and role theory; transactional leadership theory; transformational leadership theory; collaborative leadership theory and ethical and critical leadership theory (Moynihan & Van Wart, 2013, p. 553).

While leadership theory is a relatively new field of study, it evolved from the 19th century study of the “good or ideal man” theory, which emerged from the premise that leadership traits were inherited (Starratt, 2004). In a (2103) article Moynihan and Van Wart discuss how the leadership behavioral theory put forth in the 1930’s, was based on the idea that there were three distinct types of decision making processes undertaken by leaders: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Leadership trait theory arose from this core set of idealized behaviors and was
formally identified by Roger Stodgill in the 1970’s. The theory focused on a list of the personality traits that successful leaders exhibited in their decision-making processes. More often than not, these traits were viewed as “male” defined traits and thus women were often thought to lack the capacity to lead or leadership has been thought to be gender neutral which ignores the multiplicity of interpretations and cultural and gender nuances that can occur (Ayman & Koribick, 2010). “Therefore it is important to examine whether existing leadership constructs have similar equivalence of meaning across gender and cultures, as well as across sources” (Ayman & Koribick, 2010, p. 158).

Great leaders were believed to have been born with specific traits. Successful leaders were thought to been able to publicly demonstrate authoritative decision-making and possess the charisma to get others to bend to their wills. Situational leadership theory came into vogue following leadership trait theory which takes context and additional factors into consideration in decision-making.

Leadership theory is a broad and inclusive theory that seeks to define the ways in which “an individual shapes the behavior and values of others” (Schein, 2010, p. 3). Current research in the field of leadership theory has shifted away from the exploration of inherent personality and character traits to emphasize the implementation of sets of learned behaviors that leaders use to maximize the use of the situation, skills, goals and relationships to their advantage.

Leadership theory includes the motivation and means for eliciting positive behavioral outcomes, key leadership traits such as “intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability” (Sudbrack & Tombley, 2007, p. 254); as well as adaptability and supportive behavior (Gosling, Martarauno, & Dennison, 2003). In the late 1970’s, James McGregor Burns extended psychologist B. F. Skinner’s leadership theory based on motivational behavior to
introduce the concept of leadership that can guide people to a significant level of change. Bernard Bass expanded Burn’s theories to develop the theory of transformational leadership which focuses on motivation levels in the relationship that exists between the leader and followers. Despite these broad and varied leadership theories within the field, the guiding form of leadership theory explored in this study was ethical leadership which is based on the combination of the theories of transformational leadership and the use of social and values driven decision-making (Starratt, 2004). Ethical leadership focuses on the individual leader’s decision making skills and the ongoing social process of exhibiting good leadership and the decisions based on principles of choice which are shaped by broader ideals of morality which are defined by society.

**Applications of Black feminist theory and leadership theories.**

This study posited that all students would benefit from the inclusion of a Black feminist theory framework within the design of leadership education curricula. By emphasizing the phenomena of African American women’s experiences, the combined issues of race, class, and gender inequality would be included and advance an ethical leadership theory perspective. Black feminist theory is grounded in the idea that African American women view their experiences through the inseparable intersection of race and gender. By including these perspectives, leadership curricula would expand to include broader definitions of leadership.

The complex intersection of race and gender explored with a Black feminist theory perspective allows the emic (or internal) view to be repositioned to the etic (or external) view of the world. This expands how theories that guide successful leaders are interpreted. Leadership education then broadens its definitions to not only include characteristics assigned to women, but to also neutralize those that are assigned primarily to White men (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2010;
Trigg, 2006). This creates a more universal and expansive definition of leadership.

Black feminist theory highlights identity, power, oppression, and change. African Americans face multiple barriers to positions of leadership. African Americans are more likely to have their credibility questioned, encounter stereotypes, lack access to informal networks, and bear the burden of race-based discrimination, which has too often been silenced as it relegated as a taboo topic (Hill Collins, 2010; Jain, 2010; Jean-Marie, Williams & Sherman 2009) Often African American women have been forced to “shatter the concrete ceiling” (Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009, p. 567) due to the double burden of race and gender. Many African American women battle constant perceptions of inferiority (Hill Collins, 2010). The rich intersection of gender and race included in Black Feminist theory would expand the epistemological foundation of leadership education.

**Leadership Education**

In general, the topic of the absence of leadership education in all but a select few disciplines has not been well studied. Recently studies investigated how leadership education and development opportunities have been provided to students in post-secondary institutions. However, there are no in-depth, targeted extant studies examining the diversity of leadership curricula. There is exists a gap in the literature regarding the relevancy of the content, pedagogy, and the theories taught to African American female students.

To date, the most comprehensive and inclusive review of the efficacy of leadership development initiatives in higher education is Leadership in the Making: A Comprehensive Examination of the Impact of Leadership Development Programs on Students (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). The study assessed 22 out of the total 31 leadership projects the W. K. Kellogg Foundation funded. Together, the projects received a total of $14.1 million between
the years 1990 and 1998. While the study did note the participants’ race and gender, only 10% of the participants were African American and 13% were women.

While some research has explored leadership education and leadership development of college students, there has been very little research that focused specifically on the opportunity that African American female college students have had to access leadership education and opportunities to develop their skills. There is sparse research in the literature on leadership education about the level and quality of leadership education that has been offered across institutions and disciplines.

Several recent studies have explored barriers female students may face when developing their leadership skills. Crolla, O’Sullivan and Bogg (2011) found that British female medical students studying to become doctors displayed lower levels of leadership confidence than their male counterparts. Renn and Ozaki (2010) studied whether students with leadership positions in campus-based ‘identity’ organizations pursued leadership roles in mainstream campus-wide organizations. They found that students who were leaders in organizations that celebrated specific cultures or sexual identities rarely took leadership positions in campus-wide organizations. While Jain’s (2010) study did not specifically focus on African American women, the work concluded that female student leaders of color at a California community college did not successfully develop or translate their leadership skills into academic success.

According to Connaughton and Ruben (2003), many schools of business within colleges and universities include undergraduate and graduate leadership classes, as do other professional schools, such as schools of education or nursing. Universal or institutional consistency is lacking. Even within the same departments, there are different perspectives on the role and value of leadership education and the need to enhance a student’s leadership development
opportunities. This research begins from the position that a universal goal of higher education should be to provide all students with a mandated opportunity to learn about leadership, regardless of the student’s academic major. Every college student should learn about ethics, transformational leaders, and the tenants of “dynamism, serving and leading, and tempering vision with pragmatism while getting everyone to work toward a common goal” (Van De Kalk & Constas, 2011, p. 74).

Leadership education is an opportunity to provide all students with an understanding of leadership theories and experiential opportunities to practice becoming effective ethical leaders. Without access to leadership education and leadership development opportunities that include multiple perspectives grounded in feminist, Black feminist, and intersectionality theories, White men will continue to frame the research and discussion around leadership while maintaining their dominant positions of power and prestige in the work place. (Alexander, 2010)

This qualitative study was framed by two theories. In addition to Leadership theory, Black feminist theory grounded the interpretation of the experiences of the participants. Black feminist theory “is a theory committed to the justice for the collective population of Black women” (Patton & Catching, 2009, p. 716). It was first explored during the rise of the late 20th century American feminist movement and has been further legitimized as a scholarly framework by Patricia Hill Collins in her 1986 seminal work Feminist Issues: The Emerging Theory and Pedagogy of Black Women’s Studies. Dr. Hill Collins used the intersectionality of feminist theory and critical race theory to provide “interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it” (Hill Collins, 2010, p. 10).

Black feminist theory provided the critical lens through which the experiences of the African American female college student participants were explored. Sexism and racism each
have their own complicated sets of impacts on individuals. By using a theoretical framework that focused on interpreting the realities of the participants, emphasizing the multiplicity of socially constructed differences that they may encounter, it became easier to determine how their leadership development experiences can complement specific experiences in their education. Commonalities were easier to identify.

The combined use of leadership theory and Black feminist theory allowed for a critical examination the leadership education and types of leadership development opportunities the study participants have engaged in. It provided a means to carefully examine their unique leadership experiences.

Ironically, while post-secondary institutions routinely encourage employees at all levels to receive leadership training, often these same institutions have not provided meaningful leadership education and development opportunities for their student population (Trigg, 2006). Institutions of higher education should actively work to reduce the leadership and wage disparity between African American women and others that is still found in the workplaces across the United States by providing leadership education to all students. African American students make up a total of 14.3% of the 20 million students enrolled in college (Alexander, 2010; Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics [IES], n.d.), which is a substantial number of potential leaders. The African American female college student population outnumbers their male counterparts at almost a three to one rate, though they still lag behind their African American male colleagues in pay in the job market (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], n.d.).

In the early 1970’s, the National Black Feminist Organization began to effectively explore the interconnectedness between racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia, coining the
term ‘Black feminism’. In Boston, the Combahee River Collective also used the term in its Collective Statement, which emphasized the need for a theory that explored the unique identity of African American women. Dr. Patricia Hill Collins was the first to pose it as a scholarly theory. Another key theorist, Dr. Gloria Ladson Billings, successfully tied Critical Race theory and Black Feminist theory to education. Historian Frances White (2001) provided a valuable critique of Black feminist theory, drawing attention to the assimilationist tones of “politics of respectability” often found in scholarly analysis. Iconic feminist bell hooks (1981) writes extensively about the dynamics of feminism and Black women within the social and cultural zeitgeist. Law professor Kimberlee Crenshaw, a Critical Race theorist, broadened the idea of oppression mapping and identity to explore the multiplicity of an individual’s intersections of race, class, and gender identities, and their impacts, putting forth the intersectionality theory. It is from these rich and dynamic traditions that this study drew from Black feminist theoretical concepts while exploring the unique experiences of the participants.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

African American female college students are more adversely impacted than their White male and female peers and African American male peers when post secondary institutions do not provide leadership education and leadership development opportunities. According to Connaughton & Ruben (2003), students develop leadership skills from exposure to leadership theory and practices. Leadership education can be found in varying ways and rates across campuses in varying degrees in different departments’ curricula, student affairs departments, service-learning curricula, student leadership academies, and student conferences (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Often one institution may have multiple leadership classes, each with different curricula offered in different departments. Other institutions may emphasize leadership
education without providing the critical practical hands-on component of leadership development, which is where a student’s actual leadership growth occurs. Leadership perspectives on race and gender are too often lacking in leadership education (Jain, 2010) and development initiatives at post-secondary institutions, which is leading to the perpetuation of the denial of leadership opportunities for African American women professionals.

The acquisition of leadership skills is critical to an individual’s success, which in the workplace is defined by pay and position. The lack of leadership skills can prove to be a “powerful yet often invisible barrier to women’s advancement” (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2010). This literature review focuses on the leadership education that has been provided to African American female college students. This literature review highlights the wide disparities and the dearth of research on the number of leadership education classes and development opportunities available for African American female college students.

**Quality Educational Leadership**

The topic of the quality of leadership education has been explored in many ways. Three main themes ran through the current leadership literature: the institutional capacity for providing leadership development opportunities, leadership styles and their stereotypes, and access to leadership development opportunities. Most institutions of higher education recognized the value of the development of leadership skills (Basham & Mathur, 2010; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Crolla, O’Sullivan & Bogg, 2011) positing that it can be critical to an individual’s professional success.

**Institutional capacity.**

Many colleges and universities have successfully developed mechanisms for ensuring staff and faculty members develop leadership skills (Basham & Mather, 2010; Ely, Ibarra, &
Kolb, 2011; Strom, Sanchez, & Downing-Schilling, 2010). However, it was noted by Jain (2010) and Trigg (2006) those same institutions often do not provide an equal level of thoughtful, practical, accessible leadership education to the very students that they serve.

“Those dedicated to this purpose in higher education and other organizational settings have come to recognize the considerable challenges in providing educational experiences that help learners effectively translate visions and concepts of leadership into practice” (Connaughton, Lawrence, & Ruben, 2003, p. 46). As institutional, political, religious, and educational leaders flounder in the public arena, it is critical for institutions of higher education to provide the next generation of leaders with the necessary leadership theories, skills and training to become ethical, effective leaders (Starratt, 2004). While institutions of higher education often include leadership education as a principle for success, too often they do not adhere to their responsibility to ensure opportunities for students to develop those skills.

**Leadership styles and stereotypes.**

Stereotypes about leadership qualities and strict gender role assignments are often a hindrance to women, preventing them from accessing opportunities to develop and utilize their leadership skills. All students, but especially female students, need to be able to access leadership education and leadership development opportunities. According to Trigg (2010), there exists a growing trend at various post-secondary institutions of expressing a commitment to ensuring that female students are provided with the opportunity to acquire leadership skills. “What works for women resides within the wholeness of the environment, originating from a mission in which women are taken seriously” (Trigg, 2006, p. 24). Women especially need these opportunities and institutions of higher education should provide opportunities catering to women’s specific learning needs.
Accessing leadership development opportunities.

Accessing leadership education opportunities an institution offers, while easy for some female students, the process can also be fraught with difficulty or specific challenges (Kouzes, 2012). Women often face institutional barriers such as “lack of role models” (Gonzalez, Barr, & Wanat, 2010, p. 574) or external forces such as family obligations (Trigg, 2006) that preclude women students specifically from pursuing leadership development opportunities inside and outside the classroom. Cultural dynamics may also impede women of color specifically. In some cultures, women are often viewed as being weaker than men and conditioned to be submissive, which is in direct conflict with the traits that are often taught about effective leaders (Hill Collins, 2010), thus creating a barrier for some women.

Connaughton and colleagues (2003) wrote, “Citizens must become better educated to fulfill leadership challenges effectively” (p. 47). As the global community becomes more complex, it is important that there is a large, diverse corps of emerging leaders. Post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to all their students to provide them with a leadership education including the theories, skills and practice that they will need to be successful in the job market. Women especially, need of leadership education in order to remedy the lower levels of pay and positions of leadership that they currently hold in comparison to their White male counterparts. While steadily growing in numbers, women still seriously lag behind men in holding leadership positions across all public and private sectors of employment. “Women occupy around 20 percent of leadership positions in business, journalism, politics and law firms” (The Whitehouse Project Report: Benchmarking Women’s Leadership, 2009, p.1). Even in higher education, where women dominate in student enrollment numbers, women hold only about a quarter of the college president positions (Cook, 2011).
Rationale for Research

Women have surpassed men in graduation rates from post-secondary institutions (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). Therefore, the assumption could be made that women place a higher value on higher education. But pay inequality persists post-graduation in the job market. On average, the pay for African American women lags even further behind their White women counterparts (Bureau of Labor Statics, 2015). Unless more African American women are able to advance into leadership positions, the earning potential of African American women will continue to lag behind both their White male and women colleagues (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

Key Terminology and Search Approach

The literature search conducted on SAGE using the search words “student leadership development” yielded 108 articles and EBSCO yielded 35; a search with the search words “leadership development women” yielded 30,521 articles on SAGE and 56 on EBSCO; a search for Black female leaders yielded 9,774 articles on SAGE and 4 on EBSCO. Finally, using the search words “Black, female, student leader” 6,192 articles was listed on SAGE and only one on EBSCO.

The theoretical framework for this literature review was grounded in leadership theory. Additionally, the theoretical framework of Black Feminist theory was used. Leadership theory is a broad and inclusive theory that seeks to define the ways in which “an individual shapes the behavior and values of others” (Schein, 2010, p. 3). This theory includes the motivation and means for eliciting positive behavioral outcomes; key leadership traits such as “intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability” (Sudbrack & Tombley, 2007, p. 254); adaptability and supportive behavior (Gosling, Martarauno, & Dennison, 2003, p.9).
Black feminist theory, which examines culture, institutions and human interactions through a lens of gender and race inequality and inequity, provided the means to analyze the institutional policies and practices of a post-secondary institution for this literature review. “The dual and systemic discriminations of racism and sexism remain pervasive” (Jean-Marie et al., 2009, p. 566). Black feminist theory arose from the intersection of feminist theory and critical race theory and provided an inclusive and broad lens through which to view and understand the world. It was a practical response to the unique cultural and social oppression of African American women and will remain “as long as Black women’s subordination within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality and nation persists” (Hill Collins, 2010, p.25).

Stemming from the intersection of critical race theory and feminist theory Black feminist theory connects the experience and consciousness of African American women, providing a rich lens for interpretation and inclusion (Collins, 2000).

**Successful Leadership Education: Formal and Informal Methods**

Darin Eich (2008) wrote that within many institutions, a growing trend has been to provide leadership education that could contribute to student learning and development. Additionally, students who participated in leadership development programs “reported a higher level of self-efficacy” (Posner, 2009 p. 522; Dugan & Komives, 2007 p. 542) and higher level of leadership behavior (Posner, 2009).

While there is an assumption is that the level and quality of leadership education varies from campus to campus, and department to department, the literature provide examples of successful programs. There are formalized methods that have been designed to provide leadership education and training through many student affairs departments, campus organizations, and athletic departments (Dugan & Komives, 2007) Additionally, informal
methods to provide students leadership development training, such as through service-learning assignments, have also been used (Hollander, 2006).

Faculty and staff also informally provide students with opportunities to develop their leadership skills when they select students to represent the academic departments or the university, act as ambassadors to guest lecturers, or when they participate in external programs or internships. Finally, the classroom provided both formal and informal opportunities for students to acquire and develop leadership skills.

**Leadership development of student athletes.**

Many institutions of higher education have invested in the leadership development of their student athletes. Karreman, Dorsch and Reimer (2009) examined how leadership skills were developed through participation in campus athletics. They employed the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS), a measurement tool that evaluates “training and instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, positive feedback, and social support” to determine if the student athletes felt they had achieved measures of success in their leadership development (Karreman, Dorsch & Reimer, 2009, p.720). The authors noted the ‘group related effect’ which is when group members respond to the peer pressure of being in a group, which played a significant role in the responses they received. The ‘group related effect’ or membership on an athletic team dictated whether the student received leadership training and also affected their perception of the quality of the leadership training. This meant that the position that the athlete had on the team had a direct impact on their views on leadership. The dynamics of team membership also create a feedback loop for growth and improvement (Beauchamp, Bray, Eys & Carron, 2004).

**Leadership development and student organizations.**

Student activities such as on campus clubs and student government provide students with
opportunities to gain leadership education and develop their skills. “Communication and trust building” are major leadership skills that student government leaders acquired (Miles, 2010-2011, p. 54), whether skills were gained in formal training or not (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Miles (2010-2011) found that of student body presidents, many stated that they attended retreats, which gave them an opportunity to begin the leadership process with their executive teams and advisors. In Miles’s work, all of the study participants worked with assigned advisors who were professional staff members of their college or university. He determined that advising took many forms, from bi-weekly meetings to infrequent conversations. Each institution assigned a minimum of one staff member as an advisor to ensure that the student-body president was provided with the resources and support that she or he needed. Additionally, some colleges and university student body presidents met with the outgoing student body president and cabinet to work as a transitional team. Regardless of the approach, an emphasis was placed on meeting the needs of student leaders.

**Informal skills development.**

One less formal opportunity available to students to acquire leadership education and development skills is through service (Hollander, 2006). Service learning includes community-based learning and formal partnerships with a non-profit or government agency where students volunteer their time in exchange for a grade (Hollander, 2006). Assessing the impact that service-learning had on the leadership development of the student participants, Hollander (2011) found that the responding higher education institutions expressed a “desire to prepare students to improve the quality of life of the society, or contribute to the common good… to make a difference” (p.166).

In 1997, the four living U.S. Presidents and one former First Lady met with General
Collin Powell to convene the first national summit to promote community service. Out of this historic meeting, communities created plans to engage community members and the education community committed to including real world, hands on problem solving volunteer opportunities at community agencies for students from kindergarten through college (Hollander, 2011). Studies published on service learning indicate that it successfully provides a platform for students to integrate what they learned in the classroom to real life community building and provided them with an opportunity and to develop their leadership skills (Hollander, 2011).

In the study Hollander (2011) conducted on service learning and the role it played in leadership development and its integration into curricula it was noted that responding institutions often did not have a clear understanding of service learning or leadership. Institutions “conflated civic education with civic engagement” and while stating civic education for all students was a goal, only a couple of the responding institutions had detailed goals (p. 169) which included leadership education. It was interesting to note that very few universities provided students with opportunities to engage in university governance, but instead actively provided community-based or government agency service learning opportunities at local, national, and international organizations instead. Broad inconsistencies existed; Tulane University in New Orleans was the only survey respondent that had a campus-wide requirement of completing service learning hours for graduation.

**Classroom-based leadership development.**

Much of both the formal and informal student leadership education occurs within the classroom. Research has shown that best way to measure the effectiveness of leadership education and leadership initiatives is by measuring the leadership behavior that is exhibited. Posner (2009) noted that students who participated in leadership education programs acquired
leadership skills, which positively influenced the students’ educational and personal development. Posner (2009) went on to state that in a follow up study conducted ten years post-graduation, the participants from leadership education programs were able to make a direct link between their professional success and the program they had participated in while attending college.

Leadership courses that exemplify best practices “combine academic rigor, experiential learning exercises, self-reflection, and opportunities for team participation” (Posner, 2009, p. 553). Leadership education should be multidisciplinary, drawing from the social and biological science, communication, and include a review of professional practices (Connaughton, Lawrence & Reuben, 2003). Connaughton and his colleagues have shown that by providing entering students with leadership education, institutions of higher education had higher rates of demonstrated leadership behavior by the students during their college careers and beyond.

**Feminist Perspectives**

Building from this, a Black feminist theory framework suggests that by teaching leadership, everyone, regardless of their race or gender, could learn how to change the condition of women in society--from one of inferiority to that of an equitable level with men through the dismantling of the racist and sexist laden frameworks that are used to select leaders. Black feminist theory could also be used as a broader tool to dismantle cultural, political, and social barriers that African American women encounter. As Black feminist theory stems from feminist theory, which is based on emphasizing experience through gender- and race-defined perspectives, leadership education should broaden its defining characteristics to not only include characteristics assigned to women, but to also neutralize those that are assigned to just men (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2010; Trigg, 2006). Too often there is a “mismatch between the qualities of
women and the qualities that are thought necessary to lead,” (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2010, p. 477). Programs that have not been tailored to the gender dynamics found within organizations may miss a critical opportunity to break the patriarchal leadership environment that too many women find themselves in at work.

According to Trigg (2010), a feminist centered leadership program should instill women with agency and the ability for each individual to discern their purpose for leading. It should also focus on how to maintain balance while keeping self-interest at a minimum. People in leadership positions that seek approval from others lose focus and become ineffective. Women leaders “are most effective when they pursue purposes that are aligned with their personal values and oriented toward advancing the collective good,” (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2010, p. 477).

Women are often held to a higher standard than men and so the ability to make mistakes is much smaller, making women more averse to risk (Trigg, 2006). A leader should be able to take risks, but within the dominant male culture, there is far less tolerance for women to do so. “Research shows that people fail to recognize women’s leadership potential even as they acknowledge women’s leadership competencies,” (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2010, p. 481). The dominant belief persists that men are better suited to lead, and unfortunately, too often women agree.

In a study conducted about self-identity and leadership, researchers determined “men more aggressively sought to signal credibility by displaying behaviors that conformed to their firm’s norms, even when these behaviors felt unnatural. In contrast, women modestly asserted more neutral, uncertain, or qualified images to avoid disapproval” (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2010, p. 478). Women are often penalized for displaying the same behavior as men if the organizational culture has gender assigned roles (Hawkesworth, 2012). Even the language of used to describe
gender behavioral differences reflects long-standing gender bias.

Self-segregation (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011) has made it difficult for women to demonstrate leadership qualities. When men actively seek only other men as partners and collaborators, then their experience with women becomes limited. In the same study by Ely et al, 2011 it was noted that women often find themselves relegated to areas with other women, so their experience may also become limited and their desire to “integrate” a male dominated department or area dwindles. Lack of support or mentoring further excludes women from leadership positions. Additionally, studies have shown that women often receive less professional feedback than men, so they have not been able to correct poor practices. Poor feedback may be based on men’s perceptions of a woman’s sensitivity. Women may be perceived to “get upset,” suggesting they are emotionally weaker than men. “In settings where men predominate in positions of power, women have had smaller pool of high-status, same-gender contacts on which to draw and fewer ties to powerful, high-status men” (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2010, p. 478). It can become a vicious cycle of stereotypes and negative perceptions of women which is rarely broken, or if a woman leader does successfully receive harsh feedback, she is often perceived as being an exception or different from the ‘average’ woman. Societally prescribed ‘nurturing role’ assigned to women may contribute to this.

African American educator Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of Bethune Cookman- College said, “faith, courage, brotherhood, dignity, ambition and responsibility” were the keys to her success as a leader (Boggs , 2011, p. 24). African American women too often must battle what authors Jean-Marie, Williams and Sherman (2009) called “gendered racism” (p. 561). African American women leaders often contend with isolation, discrimination, and hostility, and have are often more scrutinized than their White male peers. African American women can
never be certain whether it is sexism or racism that they are encountering; both often impact them simultaneously. Jean Marie and colleagues (2009) wrote about a female African American college president’s experience that she had while a graduate student with her academic advisor who that according to her was both sexist and racist. The advisor ‘suggested’ to her that she set her goal on a masters degree in biological sciences instead of the doctorate that she was pursuing. She was finally forced to ask, “Are you saying these things to me because I am a woman and Black?” (Jean-Marie et al., 2009, p. 573).

**Informal Pathways**

Without formal leadership education in place, students may seek less formal pathways to gain leadership education and leadership development opportunities during their college careers. Students may actively seek out faculty members or administrators to act as mentors. Academic mentors are people who can guide these self-selected students academically and professionally and provide feedback (Erkut & Mokros, 1984). In these relationships, students often select individuals that they wish to emulate.

In their research Eich (2008), Henry et al. (2012), and Jain, (2010) describe the impact of how only a select number of students are provided with leadership opportunities as student aides, research assistants, and or were invited to attend on campus meetings or professional conferences. Often these mentoring relationships are initiated by the student, which means only a select number of students were afforded the opportunity to enhance their leadership skills. If leadership is not included in the curriculum, many students who lack the initiative or are savvy about understanding the value of cultivating professional mentoring relationships will miss the opportunity to develop their skills. In many ways, this has perpetuated the poor opportunities that African American women have had to grow and develop their leadership skills.
Findings in the study published by Erkut and Mokros (1984) showed that students who already possess leadership skills and strong race or gender affinity are more apt to actively seek out faculty members or administrators as mentors who are most like themselves. In many institutions, White males still hold the majority of the faculty and administrative positions. This makes it difficult for African American women, as well as White women and other members of minority groups, to find mentors.

Student leadership academies are another way for institutions to ensure that students receive leadership education and opportunities to develop their skills (Miles, 2010-2011; Trigg, 2006). Student leadership academies can be found both on and off campuses, however students generally must self-select to attend them and they are often external to the academic curricula that students must complete in order to obtain their degrees. One rare example of a leadership academy that also has an academic emphasis is at Rutgers University in New Jersey, which offers the Leadership School Certificate that students may earn through the Women’s Studies Department (Rutgers, n.d.). The certificate combines feminist theory with social change theory to train and empower women to lead.

Additional post-secondary leadership initiatives include Washington and Lee University (www.wlu.edu, n.d.) in Virginia which hosts annual national summits on women student leadership. In addition, the American Association of University Women (AAUW), a national women’s advocacy organization who’s members have historically been female college graduates, hosts an annual conference for college women student leaders where they honor outstanding leaders, provide workshops to develop skills and offer networking opportunities. The conference is the National Conference for College Women Student Leaders (www.nccwsl.org, n.d.). AAUW continues to provide women college students with an
opportunity to not only celebrate women leaders but to also receive valuable leadership education and training.

In general, post-secondary institutions do not provide systematic access to leadership education to all students with the exceptions of student athletes (Karreman, Dorsch, & Reimer, 2009) and student leaders (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Based on these studies, it can be inferred that without a curricular program, those involved in extracurricular programs are more likely to receive leadership education.

This inconsistency rewards the students with the most initiative to seek leadership education and leadership development opportunities. Van de Kalk et al. (2011) posited that “the absence of formal pathways to leadership education have forced students to seek less formal pathways by volunteering as student aides, research assistants or individually seeking faculty mentors.” Therefore, when it comes to accessing leadership development opportunities in the workplace, similarly a high value is placed on an employee’s individualistic initiative which too often determines what makes a successful leader within an organization.

Based on the literature, awareness of Black feminist theory in leadership education would improve the leadership outcomes of all future leaders. While leadership education and development opportunities are present in some post-secondary institutions, it is often has not been executed in a systematic manner. Leadership education or theory sometimes can be found in the various curricula of academic departments, but the leadership development component, the hands-on, practical application is often missing.

A survey of the literature showed that business programs do include undergraduate and graduate leadership classes and other professional schools such as education or nursing often also provided instruction on leadership. However, there appears to be a lack of consistency. It
seems that even within the same department there may be differing perspectives on the role and value of leadership education. This study began with the assumption and position that an overarching goal of higher education should be to provide all undergraduate students with the opportunity to learn that leadership is dynamic, defined by serving and leading, tempers vision with pragmatism, and how to get everyone to work toward a common goal (Van De Valk & Constas, 2011).

Leadership development opportunities should be provided to all students and the leadership theory, skills and practical experience should be given to everyone to ensure that there are effective ethical leaders. However, barriers of race and gender can perpetuate the exclusion of African American women faculty and administrators, which impacts the inclusion of African American women’s perspectives. Leadership education is a core competency that all post-secondary institutions should provide to every student equally. Leadership education and skill development programs should to be expanded and to become more inclusive of diverse experiences and worldviews. Without access to leadership education, which includes a multiplicity of diverse perspectives, White men can continue to frame the research and curricula on leadership education. Leadership education will continue to be defined by a narrow definition and framed by excluding the diverse world view of African American women and others, thus allowing White men to continue their hold on power, resources and wealth.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This phenomenological study addressed one central research question and two sub-questions: What are the formal and informal pathways in which African American women obtain their leadership education? The first sub-question was: What are African American female college students learning about leadership? The second was: What are the experiences
that impact the leadership development of African American female college students? This chapter describes the methodological approach undertaken in this study.

**Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative research design. Qualitative researchers “admit the value laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value laden nature of the information gathered from the field” (Creswell, 2007, p. 18). This study utilized the constructive paradigm since the overarching goal of the study was to determine if more African American women will ascend to positions of leadership in the private and public sectors.

**Methodology and Research Tradition**

The research tradition that was best suited for this study was an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA seeks to explore the subjective experiences and “intentionality” or understanding of the phenomena or experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2007, p. 13). Using “descriptive, narrative, evaluative and prompt questions”, the researcher elicited participants’ experiences and their understanding of the experiences (Smith et al., 2007, p. 60). IPA is a form of a phenomenological study, an approach seeks to explore the “essence” of an experience (Creswell, 2007, p. 77). Through the exploration of the participants’ emotions, perceptions, and activities, coupled with an understanding of their leadership education and development opportunities, a critical analysis of the leadership education experience of Howard University African American female students was formulated.

Stemming from the field of applied psychology, the interpretative phenomenological analysis method (IPA) originally sought to explore research participants’ experiences with diseases by including interpreted accounts of their distinctive individual experience (Smith &, Flowers & Larkin, 2007). IPA explores the ways in which research participants “engage with an
‘experience’ of something major in their lives” and because “human beings are sense making creatures … accounts participants provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p.3). An IPA approach recognizes that each research participant provides the lens by which the experience was both recalled and then examined. As such, the researcher is forced to explore the multiplicity of experiences that shaped the research participants’ views. IPA provides a means to explore how each research participants’ beliefs helped to form their perception of the shared experience. It is this analysis of a shared experience that gives the researcher a deeper understanding of an idea, such as leadership education. IPA allows a researcher to use the lived experiences of the participants to create new ideas and identify strategies and ideas to enhance experiences.

**Site and Participants**

The study site was Howard University, a non-sectarian HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). The university was chartered by the United States Congress in 1867 in Washington, D.C. as a university of medicine and liberal arts for former enslaved Black citizens (www.howard.edu, n.d.). Named for the head of the Freedmen’s Bureau General Oliver Otis Howard, it has grown into one of the nation’s largest HBCU’s with 10,000 students enrolled in 14 schools and colleges (www.howard.edu, n.d.). According to the college’s website, the undergraduate student population is approximately 7,000 of which 60% are women. The study participants self-identified as African American female senior undergraduate students who had attended Howard University for at least two years.

Students were recruited from across academic disciplines. A number of women expressed interest and five volunteers agreed to participate in the study. Due to the need to conduct interviews face-to-face, study participants had to reside in Washington, D.C. or
45

commuting distance from the campus. Participants were recruited through faculty and administrator contacts, Howard alumni, postings on social media targeted at Howard alumni and current students, student organizations, and referrals from participants. Samples of recruiting materials are included as Appendix B. It is interesting to note that the greatest recruiting success came from online solicitation through LinkedIn, a professional social media site.

An online survey, included as Appendix C, was deployed in Survey Monkey, an online survey site, for pre-screening. Participants were asked questions related to inclusion criteria (race and gender), tenure and status at Howard University, major, minor, and their willingness to participate in interviews and be included in the study. Participants were also apprised of their rights and allowed to opt in or out of the study with informed consent. Copies of informed consent documents are included as Appendix D.

Data Collection

Two rounds of interviews were conducted. Interviews were audio taped. The first interview focused on the participants’ overall educational experience and their leadership education. Interviews were conducted during the week in an unused office or classroom at Howard and outside on an isolated bench when the campus was deserted on a Sunday. The first round of interviews were scheduled for 45 minutes and were conducted face-to-face. Interview lengths ranged from 60 to 90 minutes, although they were each scheduled for only 45 minutes. The second round of interviews were conducted via Skype and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The second interview focused on questions of racial and gender identity and how the study participants viewed their future leadership potential. Sample interview questions are included as Appendix A.

Confidentiality has been maintained at all times. Participants were each assigned a
number identifier in lieu of their name for the interview process, coding, analysis. For publication, pseudonyms were assigned.

**Data Storage**

All media files (audio and video) were password protected and stored on a dedicated external hard drive, which was stored in a locked drawer. All data was coded using qualitative interview coding software to “transcend the reality of data to progress to thematic, conceptual and theoretical” (Saldana, 2009, p. 11). The NVIVO qualitative research software was used to code the data. It allowed the researcher to review the participants’ responses and assign them to different categories, which were identified by the ideas that were expressed in single words or phrases in their responses to the questions. Then the words were group together to create larger categories of themes. A colleague validated the coding. Storage practices ensured that participants’ confidentiality was maintained.

**Data Analysis**

A third party transcription service, Rev.com, transcribed the interviews. They were then reviewed for accuracy. The software NVIVO was used to code the data. Data was coded by creating inductive codes to identify keywords, open and significant statements, splitter text, topics, descriptions, context, and analogies (Saldana, 2009). Axial coding techniques were applied to sort data into categories and then into the final themes.

The interpretative phenomenological research method was used to identify the essence of the participants’ experiences. To assure trustworthiness of the data interpretations that were developed the researcher periodically reflected findings back to study participants. Additionally, coding was completed during the transcription of the interviews and memos were generated to capture ideas as they occurred.
Positionality Statement

The researcher is both an African American woman and a graduate of the research site. Great effort was taken to remain aware of any biases while conducting the research. Theoretical frameworks were selected because of the researcher’s belief that the socially constructed barriers of race and gender had a major impact on the experiences that the participants shared. The researcher’s experiences as an African American female college graduate led her to conduct this research of exploring the current leadership education and development opportunities provided to the next generation of African American female college graduates. As the number of college educated African American women continues to grow, it is imperative to provide universal leadership education to all students, helping more African American women ascend to positions of leadership and power. By expanding the definitions of leadership and broadening tenets of leadership theories, the overall quality of the field of leadership could be enhanced.

As a student at Howard University, the researcher successfully nurtured her own leadership skills. Elected to a student leadership position (senior class vice-president of what was then the College of Liberal Arts now Arts and Science), the researcher was able to access the student affairs resources provided to student leaders. However, the training received was minimal and geared only towards effectively executing the duties of the position. Training focused on the processes and systems within the student affairs division and not on leadership theories that could have enhanced an overall understanding of leadership development.

Two mentors, Dr. Jane Flax, who taught feminist theory and politics, and Dr. Lorenzo Morris, a renowned Black political scientist, were also tremendous influences. Both professors provided support and encouragement in the classroom. Leadership skills were also gained through involvement in various campus organizations and while interning, including the
prestigious Congressional Black Caucus internship, which included leadership development opportunities. Immediately upon completion of her bachelor’s degree, the researcher enrolled in the graduate school at Howard University, and was selected by Dr. Morris as his graduate assistant charged with producing a national student mini-conference that was part of a national conference on race, which he was co-chaired on behalf of the university.

The researcher entered the university with student leadership experience acquired in high school through elected positions and as an editor of her high school newspaper, in addition to having had experience as a youth reporter/producer for a radio station in San Francisco. While a reporter for Youth News, a national youth media conference in Chicago also provided the researcher with leadership growth opportunities. A multi-year summer pre-engineering program at U.C. Berkeley encouraged the researcher to think about the ongoing development of her leadership skills. The researcher acknowledge how Howard provided some opportunities to build leadership skills, but she was not introduced to leadership theory until graduate school. The researcher worked to not show bias while coding or analyzing the data.

**Validity and Credibility**

To guard against researcher bias, a colleague checked the coding of the transcribed interviews. Additionally, “context-rich and meaningful” descriptions were included, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 20). Yardley’s four guiding principles were also employed: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigor; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance (Smith et al., 2012). The coding process is an iterative one, with each step providing an opportunity to sort and connect ideas. Through combining ideas into single categories and themes, the researcher maintained the individual voice of each participant by searching for patterns, not exact verbiage. The researcher was careful to note when ideas fell
into more than one category, thus maintaining the validity of the date.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

“At the core of the expectations and obligations that are part of a research relationship is assurance that the interviewees do not come to harm as a result of the research” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 85). Therefore, every precaution was taken to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Research best practices were overseen by the institutional review board of the researcher’s institution. There were no obvious risks for the participants, the researcher, faculty, Howard University, or Northeastern University. The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology allowed opportunities for the researcher to engage and record the personal and forthright experiences of individuals, which could have brought sensitive issues to surface. The researcher planned to handle such instances by offering participants respect, care, and sensitivity, and effort would have been made to find support.

The methodology outlined also was a means to empower participants. Participants were able to share their stories and claim their experiences in their own terms. As the goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of the participants in acquiring leadership education, which provided them with professional and life enhancing skills, the interviews were recorded and documented with care.

**Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis**

This phenomenological study was conducted to examine the lived experiences of African American women and their undergraduate preparation for future leadership roles. This study provided five dynamic African American women with the opportunity to discuss their leadership education in the context of their educational experiences earning bachelor degrees from Howard University, a large historically Black university. The resilience and fortitude of African
American women discussed in the Black feminist theory literature was used to shape the following discussion around their study participants’ leadership education. Leadership theory was used to provide meaning to the interpretative phenomenological leadership experiences that they shared in their interviews.

**Data Collection**

The interpretative phenomenological study design provided a fluid structure from which to develop questions and identify overlapping themes and experiences. The use of the qualitative method for this study meant that each of the participants’ captured unique stories could begin to help highlight the gaps in leadership education that has been provided to African American women. The ultimate inclusion of their often missing experiences in leadership theories, leadership development programs and practice should lead to a more inclusive leadership paradigm.

Study participants were asked the following questions in order to allow the researcher an opportunity to examine the richly textured phenomena in their lives. *What are the formal and informal pathways in which African American women obtain their leadership education?*

1. *What are African American female college students learning about leadership?*
2. *What are the experiences that impact the leadership development of African American female college students?*

The first round of interviews were conducted when the five participants had just finished their final exams the last week of April. They seemed excited about their upcoming gradation, which took place two weeks following the interviews. All the participants were traditional college age--in their early 20’s-- with the exception of one participant who was 25 years old. She was also the only participant who had transferred to Howard University from another
college. The participants were all bright, engaging, and eager to share their experiences as undergraduate students at Howard University as well as their views on their leadership education and development opportunities. The second round of interviews were conducted via Skype during the last week of June and first week of July, two months following the initial interviews. The recording application Recorder was used as well as Supernote on the researcher’s iPhone.

**Prescreening and Confidentiality**

Prescreening selection of the participants took place through an online survey on SurveyMonkey. Each potential participant answered 16 questions, the first of which were used to determine if the participants met the study participation criteria, and the last were asked to secure the name and contact information of the potential participants. A sample of this survey is included as Appendix C. Four out of the five participants completed the online survey prior to the interviews. The fifth participant was referred by a Howard alum just prior to the first round of interviews. This final participant answered the screening questions both informally in the recruitment call and formally during the interview. To maintain confidentiality, participants either chose a pseudonym or was assigned one identifying them only to the researcher. The following pseudonyms were used: Chimamanda, Imani, Jamilla, Laila, and Toni.

**Findings**

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections. Section one presents the participants’ demographic profiles, including their involvement in extracurricular activities and their student leadership positions. Section two used the phenomenological interview data in the form of textual narratives to present the participants’ levels of self-esteem and their leadership education experiences. The third section used cross-matrices to present the themes that have been identified in the textual narratives. The final section summarizes the overall findings of the
study and concludes this chapter.

**Demographic profiles.**

Table 1 lists the age and academic major of the study participants in the first two columns. The last three columns refer to whether or not the participant received any scholarships, whether or not the student could be considered a first generation college student (family’s level of college degree attainment), and whether or not they worked during the final semester of their undergraduate studies.

*Table 1*

**Summary of Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Scholarship Recipient</th>
<th>First Generation Graduate</th>
<th>Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chimamanda</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imani</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Radio/TV/Film</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamilla</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toni</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 illustrates how the participants possessed several similarities. Their majors were closely aligned and all were employed while they attended Howard. While they were split between being first generation college students and having a family history or college attendance, only one of the five did not receive any scholarships. Jamilla, Laila, and Toni each
discussed the importance of being the first person in their families to graduate from college and how they hoped to continue the legacy with family members. At the time of the first interview, Chimamanda and Jamilla were each facing the challenge of paying a large outstanding bill to Howard University. By the second interview, each had used their leadership skills to negotiate to have much of their bill reduced or forgiven by Howard.

Table 2 lists the participants’ extracurricular and athletic participation, differentiating between high school (HS) and college (HU) activities (HS Organizations and Sports, HU Organizations and HU Sports). The Volunteer column records whether or not the participants volunteered at a community-based organization or school in the greater Washington, D.C. community while they attended Howard. The HS Leadership and HU Leadership columns list whether or not the participants held student leadership positions while in high school or at Howard.

Table 2

Summary of Extracurricular Activities and Student Leadership Positions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>HS Orgs/ Sports</th>
<th>HU Orgs</th>
<th>HU Sports</th>
<th>Volunteer</th>
<th>HS Leadership</th>
<th>HU Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chimamanda</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imani</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamilla</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toni</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were all involved in extracurricular activities and or sports. Neither Imani nor Toni held leadership positions in high school or while at Howard. Both shared that they were more apt to sit back and observe rather than jump up to lead, and were both more reserved during their interviews than Chimamanda, Jamilla, or Laila. Imani was the only participant who did not actively volunteer, while the other four stressed the importance of being involved in the greater community. Chimamanda went beyond her internship assignment and mentored two high school students. Jamilla mentored members of her sorority and founded an organization for young women at her church. Toni’s experience volunteering with youth at a shelter for homeless families provided the direction for her professional pursuits in social work.

While the participants shared the common experience of attending the same undergraduate institution, each woman’s story was very different. Each participant’s academic journey had challenges and triumphs. Their distinct personalities shined through during the two rounds of interviews: they ranged from extremely outgoing and gregarious to shy and slightly insecure. All the participants were open about their lives, including their relationships with their
mothers and other family members. Each participant had a clear post-graduation plan and was excited to begin the next phase of their lives.

The experiences of the participants varied greatly, but their resilience was common ground. Each woman overcame a major life challenge before graduating from high school. These challenges included the most difficult types of life challenges that anyone can experience, including the death of a mother, supporting a parent through cancer treatments, financial insecurity, homelessness, Hurricane Katrina, sexual assault, and being bullied. In addition, they battled low self-esteem and a myriad of negative forces that can be barriers to educational success for young African American women.

The following description of each participant is being presented in the alphabetical order of her pseudonym names.

**Chimamanda.**

Chimamanda grew up in a large family in New Orleans, Louisiana. She was the youngest child, the third in her family to attend Howard University, and has college educated parents. She moved to Washington, D.C. with her family following Hurricane Katrina, but returned to New Orleans to attend high school. While in high school, she had trouble following the strictly-imposed rules of her private Catholic girls’ school, and was often in trouble. In high school, she was involved in the performing arts and other extracurricular activities. In her senior year, she worked a part time job while supporting her mother through cancer treatments.

Beginning in her freshman year, she became active with organizations on campus. She eventually was hired as a campus resident assistant in the all-girls’ freshman dormitory. Chimamanda has travelled to France, Haiti, and the French Caribbean islands. The winter semester following graduation she began a graduate program in history at a university in a
Francophone nation.

**Imani.**

Imani is a second-generation Howard University graduate. Raised with a younger sister in Maryland and Florida, she recently met several older siblings and one younger sister on her father’s side. Imani considers herself a quiet listener and a “tomboy.” She enjoys working with her hands: she took graphic design, art, and computer classes in high school. In high school, Imani planned to attend a culinary school to “take the easy way out,” instead of attending a four year-institution. It was her older half sister, a Howard graduate, who helped her to realize that she should earn a bachelor’s degree instead. While at Howard, Imani had several prestigious internships, including interning for a major music mogul and the Brooklyn Philharmonic. She plans to parlay her experiences into eventually owning her own recording studio.

**Jamilla.**

Jamilla had the least traditional academic journey. Her grandmother raised her, although her mother was involved in her life until she died when Jamilla was a teen. Growing up, she moved frequently. It was in this chaotic environment that she met the teacher who first demonstrated what she called leadership. She vividly remembered the way that the teacher pulled each student to the side to tell them individually to “be a good friend” to a student who was not well-groomed and had an odor. Jamilla has several younger siblings, but she identified her younger brother who lost his hearing as a child as an exemplary leader. She points to the tenacity he showed as an athlete and his commitment to earning a college degree. She was inspired to earn her degree from Howard after her summer visits to the campus with her cousin, then a Howard student.

Prior to enrolling at Howard, Jamilla worked several jobs while attending a community
college. After transferring to Howard, she faced many financial setbacks. While attending Howard, she also worked full time for a local school district, working for a principal who she described as having great leadership skills. She found the time to pledge a sorority and to volunteer in the community. Jamilla began pursuing her master’s degree in education at Howard University the fall following graduation.

**Laila.**

In high school, Laila participated in an Atlanta-based youth media project that provided her with opportunities to enhance her writing skills. Those experiences led to her to major in journalism and public relations. She used her talent to earn several prestigious internships during her college career. In high school, she was awarded the competitive Gates Millennium Scholarship, which covered all of her expenses at Howard and made it possible for her to study abroad for a semester. The youngest of three children, she describes her family as poor and always struggling financially. While at Howard, she often contrasted her good fortune, being able to access travel and new experiences, to her family’s reality of poverty, which caused her great emotional distress.

Laila thrived at Howard, becoming involved in campus organizations. She actively engaged in the various opportunities presented to her, including securing a place in a mentoring project targeting freshmen while she was a senior. During her time at Howard, she found several professional mentors, and upon graduation she successfully used her networking skills to land a job in public relations in her hometown of Atlanta.

**Toni.**

Toni, who grew up in southern California, was the shyest and least secure of the participants. An only child until recently, her single mother struggled financially and moved a
lot, which forced Toni to attend many different schools while growing up. Although she was an excellent student and athlete, the lack of school continuity meant that Toni was not able to access college readiness programs, participate in many extra-curricular activities, and forced to join different athletic teams. She found the lack of continuity to be challenging and a handicap when applying for college scholarships.

When Toni first arrived at Howard, she realized that she had been very sheltered by her family, and realized that most of her high school friendships had been made through her church. She said at first she felt she lacked confidence, which she eventually found. Her first semester as a freshman, she described being so intimidated by another student in a class, that she switched her major. Toni was not very active in campus organizations, but volunteered with teens at a local homeless shelter her junior and senior years. It was through that experience that she found her career path: helping children. In the fall semester following graduation, she enrolled in a master of social work program.

**Abbreviated textual narratives.**

Qualitative research, and a phenomenological approach specifically, allows the researcher to capture experiences in the voices of the study participants. The textual narratives that follow are excerpts that describe the participants’ feelings and actions associated with the phenomena being studied. It is through these verbatim excerpts from the transcribed interviews that the reader learns the participants’ stories and how their challenges, networks, triumphs impact their view of the world (Creswell, 2007). Table 3 presents an abbreviated textual narrative of the participants’ response to the question regarding the view of their ability to succeed in school.
Table 3

Cross Matrix of Participants' Level of Self Esteem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>“Do you think that you are smart or talented?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chimamanda</td>
<td>“I do. Um, I was thinking about this the other day. Because when I was growing up ... like in elementary school I was in like the gifted resources [classes]. Then in high school I was in all accelerated classes and then coming to Howard you realize, ‘Oh, you’re not the only smart person in the class anymore.’ You know?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imani</td>
<td>“Some people would say, you know, [I’m] smart and talented, but actually I am more talented. I’m the type of person that could pick up on anything as soon as I start [it].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamilla</td>
<td>“I think I’m very resilient. I’m very relentless in what I want to do, my goals. I’m very goal oriented. I do think I’m smart but I don’t think smartness or intelligence is only book knowledge. I always find a way to understand [something] via by reading, research or [doing it] actually hands on.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila</td>
<td>“Well, I’d definitely say, I think both. I think my natural talent is to write. And that is [what I’m] most comfortable with doing. [It’s] something that I always loved to do and I have always loved words. It was interesting because when I was younger, I used to do spoken word, and I used to get on stage at talent shows and stuff and I got really good feedback from people. [But now] I just prefer to actually write.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toni</td>
<td>“I got the donor scholarships in the beginning [freshman year at Howard], but I was never offered any other type of scholarship. I applied for scholarships while I was in high school, but I never received any. I don’t know why because I had a 3.8 [grade point average].”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 presents an abbreviated textual narrative of the participants’ description of the leadership education that they received in their classes at Howard. With only one exception, there was no discussion about leadership theory in any of the classes in the participants took while attending Howard.

Table 4

Cross Matrix of Participants' Leadership Education Courses
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>“Did you learn about leadership theory in the classes in your major?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chimamanda</td>
<td>“I don't think that there's anything explicitly that is in the curriculum to prepare us to be leaders. I think that especially at Howard, student leadership is important and it's a big part of the culture. I think, if anything, it's like student leadership, student activities, special student services that are really concerned with building and grooming leaders. But as far as the curriculum, I wouldn't say ... I mean sometimes you have projects where you have to present in front of the class. I was lucky enough to build a relationship with the dean of my department and then in this last semester I had a professor who I was able to build a personal relationship with and she helped me a lot with my coursework.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imani</td>
<td>“Now, that you mention it, I wish they had incorporated that [leadership] into something in the classes and now that I think about it I feel like I haven't really learned much about leadership. You know they have so many classes for so many different topics and leadership has never been one topic that has ever popped up.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamilla</td>
<td>“Um, as an English major no. I think they focus so much on the reading aspect of [the major] that they forget that at the end of the day you have to breed leaders.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila</td>
<td>“Uh, I wouldn’t say, I wouldn’t say it’s explicit, but it is, it is highlighted. I took a class called Management in Organizational Business and we talked about what makes an effective leader, what makes an effective manager, and the function and roles that a leader and a manager would have, but that’s the only class that its really been talked about. Though it was in the School of Business it’s also required for Public Relations and Advertising students, which makes sense, because as PR consultants, we’re leading an organization from the communication standpoint and giving them best practices, so I see how it applies.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toni</td>
<td>“Yeah, I didn’t have any courses specifically about leadership but I think that there should be courses on leadership. Yeah, I think that they definitely can give more instruction on what to do in your profession as far as psychology is concerned to be a leader like what things are the employers looking for, what sets you apart from different psychologists, what’s going to make you unique so that you know someone can hire you.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Cross Matrix of a Significant College Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>“A stand out experience at Howard University.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chimamanda</td>
<td>“Until I came to Howard I was the class clown. Not that it was a bad thing but I think that I just knew that’s what people were comfortable with about me. That’s still okay. At Howard I really think I came into myself a lot more.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imani</td>
<td>“I am part of an organization called EPP (Endustry Power Players) which focuses on the entertainment industry. We have different people in the industry come and talk to us. It’s pretty interesting. I have gotten a couple of internships from it too. They have really great connections.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila</td>
<td>“I am an intern at the Howard University Office of University Communications and I would say that this has been my favorite [internship] because I see Howard from a student’s perspective; I’m learning more about Howard; networking with Howard alumni because a lot of the people who work in the office graduated from Howard and improving my communication skills. I really felt like I got to do it all.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamilla</td>
<td>“Dr. Anderson gave me [excellent advice]-- I don’t think that he realizes that he told me-- to be patient and persistent with my [special needs] student. And one of the other things that he stresses is, and that’s why I love HU, because you have the African American experience, … is that African American women tend to coddle our boys and that I should stop coddling my Black male student.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toni</td>
<td>“I didn’t start becoming natural* until I got here [Howard]. When I was home I had weaves all the time. I had a perm and would never ever have gone natural or like wearing my hair in its natural state. So that’s really cool.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * African American women in great numbers are adopting hairstyles in which the “natural” kinky, curly state is maintained, emphasized and used to braid, twist and style the hair or just worn in a natural curly halo on the head. “Going or becoming natural” refers to the act of forsaking straight hair extensions and chemically or heat straightened hairstyles which mimic the straight hair of people of European decent. Wearing natural hair is often seen as a celebration of “Blackness” and often signifies a strong cultural identity (Byrd & Tharps, 2002).

Table 5 presents an abbreviated textual narrative of participants’ description of impactful experiences at Howard University. Participants discussed both the lessons they learned in the classroom and the many ways that the campus culture and Howard “family” of students, staff,
faculty and alumni helped them to grow. Table 6 presents an abbreviated textual narrative of the participants’ definitions of leadership and the qualities a great leader possesses.

*Table 6*

**Cross Matrix of Participants' Definitions of Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Definition of Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chimamanda</td>
<td>“I think patience. I think that when a leader says something or enacts something, a leader has to be comfortable with it and whatever comes next. A leader has to listen, be organized, pleasant and amiable so people will like them but a leader should not be concerned if everybody does like them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imani</td>
<td>“Leaders have to be able to get their own stuff done and push themselves to do what they have to do. [A leader] has to be able to bring people together and guide people along the path of whatever they are attempting to achieve.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamilla</td>
<td>“Leader to me is one that can not only guide their team to glory, for lack of better words, but can follow and take instruction. I feel that it is equally as important that a leader to be able to take suggestions and decipher them and approach a situation and handle it accordingly. In my mind a good leader can give you instructions as well as tell you why you were given the instructions.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila</td>
<td>“I think leadership is the ability to inspire people and encourage and motivate them by setting goals and also the organizational goals. An effective leader is able to build relationships and care about the people, which encourage them to do better work. I think it important in leadership to know it is an open dialogue and even if you are managing someone that you are not above them. The leader can give feedback and receive it as well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toni</td>
<td>“I think leadership is positively impacting the people around you that leaves a mark that will resonate with them for the rest of their lives. That is what my goal is when I work with the kids and families. You remember leaders, you don’t remember people who aren’t.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commonalities and Differences.**

While many of the participants described similar experiences, there were several areas where the participants’ views differed. Eight themes were identified in which a minimum of four out of five participants agreed. The following are the similar themes found in participants’
responses. The themes are listed in the order of what upon reflection left the strongest impression on the researcher. Participants valued:

- positive self-esteem
- relationships with mothers and or grandmothers
- resilience
- their experience at Howard
- academic success
- professors
- Howard’s resources
- professional mentors

Participants’ experiences also differed in several areas. Differences were due to the varying opportunities and requirements in the participants’ different majors and schools.

Participants had differing views on:

- access to internship opportunities
- ability to obtain institutional financial support
- number of women role models at Howard
- opportunities to conduct research with faculty
- sexism on campus

**Emergent Themes**

Four major themes emerged from the interview data: an expectation of future success; a lack of a strong identity with Black feminism; a high level of belief that women can be leaders but a low understanding of leadership theory and practice; and the value of leaving a positive legacy.
Theme 1: Future Success.

The participants were poised to receive their baccalaureate degrees at the time of the interviews, which is a major accomplishment for anyone, but especially a young African American woman as the odds are so stacked against academic success for this population. The first round of interviews coincided with their preparations for their impending graduation. They were attending graduating rehearsal, picking up their caps and gowns, clearing their library fines, and preparing to move. Everyone, including the researcher, was excited about the upcoming graduation ceremony and celebrations.

The participants all expressed high levels of optimism about their future professional and academic success. Each of the participants expressed a clear understanding of their personal strengths and the next steps that they were going to take to achieve success. All the participants displayed leadership qualities when outlining future goals.

For example, Chimamanda is a writer and aspiring filmmaker. At the time of the first interview, her goal was to move to Paris to work on her film skills. She selected Paris because she had previously visited the city, spoke the language, and felt that it was a place that she could capture a wide variety of stories and work on her film skills. To fund her trip, she planned to teach English. By the second interview, she had enrolled in a program to earn an English language teaching certificate. Ultimately, instead of moving to Paris, she chose to capitalize on contacts that her mother had in a Francophone Caribbean island and enrolled in a graduate program the winter term following graduation.

Chimamanda shared the following about her goals:

I want to have my own brand. I’ll need to develop better skills on how to create longevity in something. My interest in film is based on my interest in literature so my
brand is going to be a lifestyle brand based on literature in an online magazine. Film is a way to tell stories faster. Currently I am writing short stories.

Laila was focused and driven. She described how she enjoys writing and has parlayed her skills into blogging and securing a job in the public relations field. While in college, Laila interned at a variety of organizations and successfully found several mentors through her networking. The field of public relations is competitive and her diverse internship experiences made her to be very marketable. Laila was driven to escape her impoverished childhood and to provide her family with financial security and a stable home. She also has a great desire to give back to the community by encouraging teens to succeed.

Laila shared the following about her goals:

Ultimately I want to work in corporate responsibility but it would depend on the company. When I interned at AT&T, I learned about the [corporate responsibility] C star ratings. I want to do things for the community but I want to do it for a company that I am interested in. I want to be passionate about my job. I love writing and event planning but I want to reach out to youth to [encourage them]. I am excited about my [post graduation] summer internship in the corporate and finance practice in the New York office at one of the top global public relations firms. I interviewed with a member of their corporate responsibility team and I plan to try to learn more about her clients.

Toni used her experience to channel her passion toward supporting and caring for others. During the interview process, Toni was reserved until she began sharing about her volunteer experience at a shelter for homeless families. She became expressive and gave detailed and expansive answers; she was clearly passionate about working with youth.

Toni shared the following about her goals:
I want to do children and family therapy when I become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. I also want to have a foster group home because I had a foster sister when I was yeah, my junior year of high school and my senior year of high school. She was a girl from our church who had some stuff happen to her at home, so she ended up living with us. I saw her struggle. Then when I came to Howard, I met another young lady who had been in the foster-care system as well. I liked helping them with their transitions and finding their goals. So I want to do a group home for youth. I really love kids.

**Theme 2: Low Identification with Black Feminism.**

When the participants were asked to identify famous Black women that they admired, all but one participant paused to give thought to the question. Their responses seem to be evidence of a lack of exposure to the tenets of Black feminist theory, which includes the traditions, stories, and experiences of African American women and the intersection of experiences based on race, gender, and class, which serves as theoretical grounding for dismantling oppression (Hill Collins, 2010). Nearly all of the participants expressed a reluctance to identify Black women that they admired, expressing the concern that their response would be taken for blind adulation or that they would be propelling the woman into a larger than life saint-like status.

Toni shared that she admired her grandmother for the strength that she displayed after her divorce and “she had a lot of wisdom about life.” She went on to identify Kerry Washington as a famous Black woman that she admired. Toni said:

So a famous person that I admire, I don’t really have a valid reason, but Kerry Washington, I don’t know why. I started to look into who she was a little while ago and she is a humanitarian. I have always been interested in becoming a humanitarian so I wanted to see what they do. But mostly I just like her because “Save the Last Dance” is
my favorite video.

When Imani was asked who she admired, she replied,

I never thought about it. I guess I would go with my profession so probably Missy Elliot. She is a businessperson and talented. There hasn’t been a female producer in the game since. She is definitely a legendary person when it comes to hip-hop and producers.

She went on to discuss how she admired Missy Elliot because she was able to overcome a debilitating illness and continue to be successful.

Jamilla’s response reflected the overall reluctance that the participants had naming a Black woman they admired. Jamilla shared:

I’m not big on falling in love with celebrities and or famous people because I don’t know them personally. I think for me I only admire those who I can judge their character. Trying to really think. I really don’t have any. I know that doesn’t sound good. I do have favorite writers. I’m in love with Zora Neale Hurston. I have an array of authors that I admire because of their work but not because of whom they are.

When asked if she considered herself a feminist, Imani’s response reflects the general sentiment all participants expressed:

Yeah, [though] not a hard-core feminist but I do have feminist beliefs. People feel like females should be able to do anything that a man can do and not be looked at differently because of it. And I think women should walk around with a little more respect. This generation you have a woman half naked on Instagram. They should carry themselves a little better.

While Chimamanda expressed that she was “proud to be a Black woman,” she went on to explain that affinity, not race, should be the way in which people are identified and connect.
This view of a ‘post racial’ society is common among millennials, people born after 1980. It was noted in a 2014 survey conducted by MTV Strategic Insight just slightly more than 33% of both people of color and White respondents discussed issues of race at home and 75% said that their generation believes in equality more than older people. Chimamanda shared:

There are so many things that we can connect to people on [beside] our race. Especially going to Howard, I think that our history is important, but I think that people don’t emphasize enough that we are creating history right now. One-day people are going to look at it and ask what life was like in 2014 and it doesn’t necessarily have to be about race because it has been about race.

The participants’ responses highlighted a gap in their overall understanding of the issues of oppression and intersectionality.

**Theme 3: Leadership**

Most of the participants indicated that they not were familiar with leadership theory, did not remember leadership being discussed in their classes, nor were they required to take classes on leadership. Laila was the only exception. She was required to take “Management in Organizational Business” as a part of her communication major. Laila said that the course highlighted “what makes an effective leader, what makes an effective manager, and the function and roles that a leader and manager would have.” She went on to say that the takeaways from the class included that “you can be charismatic to just really motive and engage as a leader. [Leaders] use interpersonal skills but I don’t know the logistics of being a leader.”

While they lacked opportunities to formally learn about leadership theory, all of the participants had a range of leadership development opportunities. Jamilla, who was active in a youth media development program in which she became a peer mentor, actively sought out
opportunities to develop her leadership skills. In her senior year at Howard, she joined Brown Girls Lead, a campus-based mentoring program where she was paired with an African American female mentor who was a working professional in Washington, D.C.

Laila was the sole participant who learned about leadership in a required class on business management. She was able to develop her leadership skills and meet her goal of assisting young people with getting into and graduating from college. She said:

I became the president and helped found the Howard University Chapter Gates Millennium Scholar, which was really difficult to actually get recognized. I built relationships with the freshmen early on, like I called them all before they got here and asked them if they needed anything, if they needed any advice about college, or just, you know, they handed me questions. They are all like my mentees. I also started the organization working with [local] high school students on the eight [Gates scholarship] essays. I helped two students get scholarships.

Chimamanda was required to intern at a community-based organization, in her case a local high school, to meet requirements for her minor. As a resident dorm assistant, she was required to attend a weeklong training session that stressed the importance of mentoring and role modeling. During her senior year, she interned with the dean at a local public high school and when asked to mentor a student, she was able to draw from her own previous experiences. She shared what she had learned through her own life experiences with her mentee telling her, “Just be yourself so it doesn’t appear that your intentions or actions are not genuine. Stick to your word and be sincere.”

Imani earned increasing levels of responsibility at each of her internships. She successfully built on each experience, and by her junior year she was able to land paid positions
at radio stations. When Imani was asked about the professor or person in her life she admired for their leadership skills, she said that the music mogul she interned with during the previous summer was the person that she most admired. While she was impressed with his work style and willingness to consider her opinion, she was most impressed by his work as a vegan activist. Imani was raised by a vegan mom, she had forsaken the plant-based diet while at Howard. Her internship coincided with her re-embracing veganism. She said, “It was the way that he touches on animal activism, so I definitely think that he is a leader when it comes to that.”

**Theme 4: Personal Mantras and Positive Legacies.**

Without hesitation, the participants shared their mantras or personal affirmations when asked. This was surprising when compared to the hesitancy and struggle that many displayed when asked to name an African American woman that they admired. The use of a mantra or personal aspiration is a long-standing tool used by Black women to build resilience (Hill Collins, 2010). It is interesting to note, while the participants were unable to name Black foremothers who had displayed similar strength and courage, they were unknowingly using the very practices from which Black women have historically drawn their strength.

Howard University was created and funded by an 1867 act of Congress and charged with educating and training the recently freed enslaved Africans. The university has a long tradition of teaching raced-based social justice and instilling the idea of “giving back” to the community. All the participants had a mantra or saying that they used to stay focused and they each embraced the concept of leaving their own positive legacy. They all tapped into the Howard legacy of community building.

Laila, who hopes to create a nonprofit organization to focus on motivating youth, shared her guiding principle:
I’m really big on love attraction. In positive thinking, what you put into the universe and like is what will become. So if you think you can’t do something then you’re not going to do it. Or if you think positive you think that you will which is the law of attraction. I read the book “The Secret” and it really changed my perspective. It encouraged me to change my mind whenever I started thinking negative thoughts. I then try to channel it into something positive because I want to create the positive energy because life attracts light.

Throughout the interviews, Imani shared the least, which seemed to reflect her reserved style and introverted personality. However, when asked about her legacy she had a clear vision of what her contribution was going to be:

Honestly I [want my legacy] to be to make great music that brings people together. I feel like music is a form of therapy and can make people feel different emotions. I don’t want to be the type of producer that people shake their butts to, I want to make music with a meaning and depth.

Toni’s personal mantra is one that she inherited from her grandmother. She shared:

‘All you have to do is stay Black and die.’ That is what I say when I make my choices. I make my decisions in life and nobody is going to tell me anything other than what I’m about since I do for myself. I don’t have to do anything that anyone wants me to do unless I am inclined to. No one can make feel obligated to do anything.

Chimamanda talked of drawing from her spirituality to give her strength and guidance. While she was raised a Christian, she frequently worships at Muslim mosques. She said:

‘Just make me like a wildflower so that I can find the light and happiness in any place that I have to grow.’ I thought about this yesterday because I don’t know where I’m going
to be. I don't know what I'm going to be doing. But, for me personally, I just need prayer. That's how I get through pretty much everything. Just praise God.

About her legacy, Chimamanda went on to say, “I want to be a blessing to others. I also want to focus on being an agent of myself, so people will remember me, who I am, what I am and not cheating that existence.”

Summary of Findings

Research question one asked: *What are African American female college students learning about leadership?* Based on the responses from the participants, leadership education is markedly missing from many of the academic curricula at Howard. The participants’ exposure to leadership theory ranged from learning a nominal amount as part of a class to no exposure at all in their major or minor courses. When leadership was discussed in their classes, it was done in the context of historical leaders and what their contributions were to society.

The second research question asked: *What are the experiences that impact the leadership development of African American female college students?* The participants drew from a long tradition of African American women leaders who, while lacking formal leadership education, have made and found a way to excel. Participants identified membership in campus organizations in both college and high school, as well as athletics, as platforms where they developed leadership skills. Membership in campus organizations provided participants with opportunities to plan events, network with speakers, and be appointed to leadership positions. Study participants gained faculty mentors, volunteered to participate in faculty research projects, and sought opportunities to practice new skills to enhance their leadership skills.

All the participants had internships or worked as a staff member or long term volunteer in a community-based organization or public school. All but one of the participants discussed a
favorite professor and the impression that she or he made on her. Each participant was able to identify many of their strengths and displayed a large level of confidence. All the participants were satisfied with their major and each one had been inspired by what they learned in their classes.

This chapter presented a glimpse into the lives of the study participants. The chapter highlighted the phenomenon of the lived experiences of African American female college graduates and their leadership development. This chapter presented the participants’ demographic data, profiles, and composite textural narratives for each of the five African American women in this study. The four major themes that emerged were: (a) an expectation of future success, (b) a lack of a strong identity with Black feminism, (c) a high belief that women can be leaders but a low understanding of leadership theory and practice, and (d) the value of leaving a positive legacy. The following chapter will offer interpretations, recommendations and implications for future research.

**Chapter Five: Discussion, Implications and Recommendations**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of African American women and their undergraduate preparation for future leadership roles. The rationale for this study is that the number of African American women with baccalaureate degrees is significantly lower than their white male and female peers. Leadership positions provide people with power, wealth and prestige; without leadership education African American women will lag behind financially. The research questions that guided this interpretative phenomenological analysis study were: *What are the formal and informal pathways in which African American women obtain their leadership education?* The first sub-question was: What are African American female college students learning about leadership? The second was: What
are the experiences that impact the leadership development of African American female college students?

This study focused on the lives of the study participants that lead up to the moment of graduating from college, which included their family life, pre-college academic experiences and their experience as undergraduate students at Howard. Their unique stories provided an understanding of their experiences with the phenomenon. The qualitative design method provided a means to gain insight about the collected data and reveal how the participants made meaning in their lives on the issues identified in Black feminism and leadership. The data offers insight into the post secondary leadership education of African American women.

This chapter presents the conclusions and implications of this study on African American female college students’ leadership education. Participants shared their experiences of growing up as Black girls, academic experiences and their views of the world as Black women. Chapter 5 presents the summary of the study, interpretation of the findings, the post-script positionality statement and personal reflection. Finally limitations, recommendations for further research and the conclusion are also included in this chapter.

**Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of African American women and their undergraduate preparation for future leadership roles. The interpretative phenomenological design method provided a rich view through which to analyze the lived experiences that the study participants provided. Two major research questions guided this study. There were four major themes that emerged: (a) an expectation of future success, (b) a lack of a strong identity with Black feminism, (c) a high
belief that women can be leaders but a low understanding of leadership theory and practice, and (d) the value of leaving a positive legacy.

The findings suggest a lack of leadership education is provided to African American women in their bachelor degree programs. With one exception, leadership education was not provided to the study participants. Leadership development opportunities described ranged from formal to informal pathways. Participants described barriers that they face that had the potential to impact their academic success or acquisition of leadership skills, but each demonstrated or described which kept them on their academic paths.

Participants revealed weaknesses, strengths, and vision of success. This study validated that the absence of leadership education is invisible; participants often expressed surprise that they had not had mandated leadership education in their curricula.

**Discussion of Findings**

Two research questions guided this study. There were four major themes that emerged: (a) an expectation of future success; (b) a lack of a strong identity with Black feminism; (c) a high belief that women can be leaders but a low understanding of leadership theory and practice; and (d) the value of leaving a positive legacy.

The findings suggest that African American women are not receiving formal, systematic access to leadership education. While only two participants actively expressed a desire to lead, participants found opportunities to develop their leadership skills. The findings also highlighted the absence of leadership education and leadership development opportunities in the academic curricula at one institution of higher education. Additionally, personal and family challenges appeared to be obstacles to the participants’ academic success. Financial resources were often lacking and participants showed resilience and drive in securing financial support.
While the participants seemed to possess strong self-esteem, they had a low level of understanding of Black feminism and feminism in general. Self-esteem is the foundation for the drive and agency of an individual. Self-efficacy is directly related to the fragility or strength of a person’s self-esteem. It is the strength of the self-esteem that empowers a person to act for themselves and others. Feminism is what bell hooks (1981) calls “fighting for freedom” and the dismantling of the barriers of sexism and racism to create a fair and equitable society. The participants had yet to turn their resilience into identifying and working to dismantle the barriers of oppression.

Participants proudly embraced and displayed a high level of Black consciousness, but had a poor understanding of history and the leadership roles that Black women have played. The participants had academic success in spite of the myriad of obstacles they encountered in their academic journeys. The combined strong self esteem and resilience are key qualities of leaders. Ironically, they appear to have used the same resiliency skills used by their African American foremothers. While battling the societal barriers imposed through racism and sexism, participants also struggled with near homelessness, sexual assault, a mother’s death, and a mother’s battle with breast cancer. Additionally, most of participants were unaware of the intersections of race, class, and place in society, nor the potential impact that those barriers of oppression will have in their future success.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature and Theoretical Framework

African American women lag behind their female counterparts in pay and position. All women earn less than White men and men of their own race. These disparities have serious implications for African American women’s financial stability and overall physical and emotion wellbeing. Leadership positions in the workplace can provide employees with opportunities to
earn prestige, greater salaries and provide a measure of job security. African American women attempting to access leadership positions often face many challenges; there is often a perception that African American women are less qualified to lead.

There is a gap in the literature regarding leadership education graduation requirements, the level and quality of leadership education and leadership development opportunities, feminist leadership education programs, the inclusion of Black feminist theory in leadership theory and education, and the role that post-secondary leadership education plays in the workforce. This study highlighted the lack of leadership education at the study site, demonstrating that for a range of students in a number of programs, leadership education was not incorporated into the curriculum.

The findings from this study demonstrated that African American women posses the potential to lead. Resiliency, a critical tenet in Black feminist theory plays an important role in the lives of African American women but is lacking in the literature on leadership. Fortitude “the strength of character, firmness of spirit, resilience or bravery, which enables one to face the negative or difficult things in life,” (Osiemo, 2012, p. 108) a major tenet of Black feminist theory was embedded in the narratives that the study participants shared. Encouragingly study participants did exhibit a “maturation of consciousness that stresses that self-awareness is one of the three critical aspects of leadership development along with self-regulation (e.g. self-control, trustworthiness, adaptability), and self-motivation (e.g. commitment, initiative, optimism) (Krauss, Hamid, & Ismail, 2010, p. 8). However, in general, the overall level of literature on the role and impact of leadership education in post-secondary education is scarce; the last longitudinal study evaluating leadership was published 15 years ago.

Current research on leadership in higher education has often remained unexplored with
the exception of studies specifically conducted on student campus leaders or staff and faculty leadership. When directly asked about the leadership education that they had received study participants determined that there was a marked absence of leadership education in their major studies at Howard. Discussed in the literature was the low value that has been placed on leadership education and leadership development opportunities for students by post-secondary institutions. (Trigg, 2006; Jain, 2010) The study site was aligned with the current literature as only one of the study participants had a class in which leadership discussed.

More colleges and universities should engage in similar process to better define leadership within their own institutional context to best serve their students. Creating a campus-wide team of faculty, staff and students to define leadership on their campus and outline the practice for competent leader should engage are important first steps in forming a strong consensus around what is meant by leadership. (Rosch & Kussel, 2010)

All of the study participants expressed regret that leadership education and mandated leadership development opportunities were not included as graduation requirements in the curricula.

Contributing to the lack of inclusion of leadership education could be the lack of recognition of the value of leadership education. The research conducted by Trigg (2006); Freschette (2009); and Alexander (2010) includes discussion about how there often exists a presumption that leadership skills are innate and gendered meant that there has often been an assumption made that men made better leaders. It is crucial for students to have a clear understanding of leadership theory and the contributions that women leaders have made in their fields and to society. The hesitation that all of the study participants displayed in responding to the question about naming an exemplar African American woman leader underscored the need to include leadership education coupled with Black feminist theory in the curricula at post-
secondary institutions. While study participants did not overtly discuss race or gender barriers to accessing leadership education they would have benefited from what Trigg (2006) called a “feminist centered leadership program” that drew from the traditions of Black feminist theory.

Discussed in the literature review was the poor level of pairing of leadership development opportunities with critically needed leadership education Connaughton, Lawrence and Ruben stated;

when it comes to leadership development in higher education, ‘business as usual’ is insufficient. A smattering of classes on leadership, a commencement retreat on ethics, weekend retreat on leadership or limited involvement in community service can be important components in the leadership development equation but they are not sufficient in isolation (Connaughton, Lawrence and Ruben, 2003, p. 47).

“Leadership is about character and the content of character is virtue which is attained through repeated acts that become habits” (Osiemo, 2012). Study participants did engage in leadership development opportunities through internships and engagement in extracurricular activities at Howard, but lacked the leadership theory to maximize their experiences.

Limitations of the Study

This interpretative phenomenological study was limited to five volunteer participants. Because of the small sample size and qualitative nature of the study, the findings are not generalizable to other populations or settings. Specifically, the findings should not be generalized to all African American women earning a bachelor degree at private or public Historically Black College or University (HBCU), predominantly White institutions (PWI), Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges, community colleges, trade or technical colleges, or any post-secondary baccalaureate degree granting institution in the United States.
The timing of data collection was a limitation of the study. The intentional timing of the interviews, just weeks prior to graduation was done to ensure that the most African American graduating senior female students could participate. However, it was a very busy time for the students. Several students expressed initial interest but due to scheduling constraints could not participate. Due to the small pool of participants, it is difficult to determine the amount and quality of leadership education that Howard students are offered. It was also difficult to determine the impact of the various leadership development opportunities. There was no real assessment done such as a pre and posttest to determine if they enhanced their leadership skills.

Another limitation was the use of semi-structured interviews. They were used to collect the data in a systematic manner, however because participants were encouraged to openly share their experiences, there was a lack of consistency as to how much thought to each response participants gave. The researcher made a conscious effort to not steer responses but did seek to have the participants provide textured and descriptive responses.

This study was not designed to compare the experiences of African American women to White women or other women of color, nor was it designed to compare the experiences of African American women to White men, Black men, or other men of color. The study did not take into account nationality, although all of the participants were American. The study participants each self-identified as African American women, although no confirmation of their birth certificate or census data was collected.

All the participants were graduating senior students who attended Howard University, specifically those who graduated in May of 2014. This study did not include students from any other post-secondary institutions. The participants only represented three of the fourteen schools and colleges at Howard University. Howard University is also not necessarily representative of
other colleges or universities.

**Implications for Practice**

This study has implications for the expansion of leadership education and the inclusion of Black feminist theory in the development of leadership theory. This study provided insight into the academic pathways, challenges, and triumphs of African American female college students. Because the literature is limited, this study provided an opportunity for educators, researchers, administrators and African American women to better understand the potential impact that the lack of consistent curricula has on African American female college students. Additionally this study provides an opportunity to see how mentoring, internships and other informal leadership development opportunities have positively impacted African American women.

This study highlighted the need for the inclusion of a required leadership curricula for all post-secondary students, which has potentially significant implications for colleges and universities. Additionally this study provided an opportunity to see how mentoring, internships and other informal leadership development opportunities have positively assisted African American women in their leadership development. Finally, Black feminist theory should be included alongside Leadership theory in future leadership education to further broaden understanding of diverse experiences and worldviews.

Much needs to be done by post-secondary institutions to address the leadership education disparities. All students, but especially African American female students should be provided with an education on leadership. This study assumes that the disparity in leadership education opportunities leads to the disparity in the work force for leadership opportunities. By allowing each school and department to determine if and when students are exposed to leadership theories and practices, there will continue to exist a disparity in the workplace. Post secondary
institutions should seek ways to remedy the disparities and make leadership education a priority. Many of the very same institutions that purport to graduate leaders do not even require leadership to be required in their curricula. Women are graduating at higher rates than men, but still lag behind in management and leadership positions across all fields. A post secondary education is a pathway to positions of prestige, power and wealth. Women continue to be excluded from positions of power due to sexism and African American women must also tackle the additional challenge of racism. Determining who makes a good leader in an organization often is clouded by sexism and racism and not based on a person’s understanding of leadership. African American women who receive leadership education will be better positioned to lead in the workforce.

Recommendations for Further Research

There is a need for further research to build on the current knowledge highlighted in this study. This was a small interpretative phenomenological study, the results of which have broader implications. Additional research would provide further insight about the experiences that have shaped the leadership development of African American female college graduates. The use of Black feminist theory in the development of leadership theories could broaden the concept of leadership and provide a greater understanding for all leaders to access. Areas for future research include:

- Studying the leadership education of African American women attending other private or public Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s); predominantly White institutions (PWI); Hispanic serving institutions and or tribal colleges. (Repeating the study may produce similar results, which would strengthen and further validate the study’s transferability (Creswell, 2007).)
• Comparing the levels of leadership attainment of African American female college students who consider themselves feminists and or embrace Black feminist or intersectionality ideologies to the levels of leadership attainment of African American female students who do not consider themselves feminists and or embrace Black feminist or intersectionality ideologies.

• Examining the role that mentoring, internships and other informal leadership development opportunities have played in the leadership development of African American women.

• Conducting a longitudinal study on the career trajectories of African American female college graduates which would study their rate of ascension to leadership positions.

Other tangential research opportunities include:

• Comparing the access to leadership education and development opportunities that African American female college students have in comparison to White women, other women of color, White men, Black men and other men of color.

• Comparing the leadership education provided across academic fields.

• Exploring how African American female college students use resiliency to develop their leadership skills.

• Exploring the self-esteem of entering freshmen African American female college students to those of graduating African American female college students.

**Personal Reflections**

The opportunity to interview young, African American women on the brink of entering their professional and or graduate careers was amazing. The candor with which Chimamanda, Imani, Jamilla, Laila, and Toni shared about views of their lives, educational journeys, families,
dreams, and failures was affirming. They join a long legacy of successful Howard graduates. The future successes that each of them will have are well deserved.

I had hoped to hear more about how Black feminism playing a role in their journeys. It was not clear if the theory was new to them or that the intersectionality of race and gender oppression had been downplayed in their academic careers. I was especially intrigued about its absence in light of the tremendous role that resilience played in each of their lives. Resilience historically played a fundamental role in the lives of African American women and continues to be a central theme found in the discussions surrounding contemporary Black feminism.

In informal conversations with Howard faculty members, several expressed only a mild dismay about the absence of leadership education in the curriculum. Additional conversations about the need to expand leadership theory to include Black feminist theory elicited even less of response. It was unclear if it was due to the faculty’s lack of familiarity with leadership education, apathy, or a lack of understanding of its value which elicited the poor responses. Further study about the level of understanding about the faculty’s leadership education and the value that they place on leadership education may round out the findings of this study on the leadership education that African American women are receiving in their post-secondary education.

Post Script Positionality

The original interviews were conducted two weeks prior to Howard’s graduation ceremony, which occurred in May 2014. The second round of interviews were conducted via Skype the first week of July. Less than a month later, two police killings of unarmed African American men thrust race to the center of the national stage. For many people in the African American community the killing of Eric Garner, an unarmed African American man who was
killed by a New York City police officer using a choke hold, sparked anger and rekindled old wounds from previous excessive police force and brutality incidences against African Americans. Days later, Ferguson, Missouri became ground zero for a national protest against a racist police department when unarmed teenager Michael Brown was shot six times by a White police officer. People of different races and backgrounds descended on Ferguson and the peaceful protests erupted into riots. There were hundreds of sister protests across the nation. The public outcry was tremendous.

Due to the timing of the interviews, the study participants did not get an opportunity to weigh in on the incidences or the public response. A discussion with the participants around the public outrage to these incidences, the social-media campaign framed by the hashtag #Blacklivesmatter and the subsequent decisions by both the grand jury in New York and in Missouri to not prosecute either officer would have been interesting and insightful.

While each participant did display a moderate level of race consciousness, none of the women seemed very radicalized or engaged in anti-racism or anti-sexism activism. The Ferguson incidence especially has forced people who have been silent on the issue of racial injustice to speak out. People who have been blind to the multitude of daily micro racist aggressions that African Americans endure were drawn to act and politicians have been forced to question the unjust policies that allow local prosecutors to present the very arguments for charging their local police colleagues of wrong doing to local grand juries. If another interview had been conducted following those events, the participants’ responses to questions on racism, Black feminist theory and even perhaps what they want their legacy to be may have been radically different. Additionally, their view on elected leaders and the leadership role that community organizers played may have sparked a deeper conversation about positions of power
and leadership responsibilities.

Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of five dynamic African American women graduating from Howard University. These remarkable women possessed intelligence, passion, focus, drive and resilience. The findings from this study could make a contribution to the body of existing literature from which other African American women, White women, and other women of color can draw. The participant’s responses provided insight about the many barriers to academic success that African American women face and the inner strength and talents from which they drew their strength and the potential that they had to become leaders. The study data underscored the need for the systematic inclusion of leadership education across all academic fields.

The review of the literature highlighted the gap in research on leadership education in post secondary education and the value of including Black feminist theory to further expand the theories of leadership. The results from this research affirmed the emerging themes found in Chapter 4. The study participants graciously shared their insights and experiences in hopes of providing a better understanding about the implications of inconsistent leadership education. The goal of this study was to provide a better understanding about the knowledge on post-secondary leadership education. It was noted that leadership education has a positive impact on participants (Posner, 2009) and this study underscored the need for academic and department consistency at post secondary institutions to endure all students have equal access to knowledge.

Leadership education for African American women must include identity, power, and change, the core tenets of Black feminist theory. African Americans are more apt to have their credibility questioned, encounter stereotypes, lack access to informal networks and bear the
burden of race-based discrimination that makes race a taboo topic. Often African American women are forced to “shatter the concrete ceiling” (Jean-Marie, Williams & Sherman, 2010, p.567) due to the double burden of race and gender. Battling perceptions of inferiority can and do occur daily.

It is important for college students to understand leadership theory and to be provided with opportunities to develop their leadership skills both of which can play a critical role in an individual’s professional success. Success in the workplace is defined by pay and position so a person’s inability to access leadership positions could have a serious impact on a person’s lifetime earnings. The lack of leadership skills has been proven to be “powerful yet often invisible barriers to women’s’ advancement” (Ely & Kolb, 2011, p. 474). While there are many styles and theories including: trait leadership theory, contingency leadership theory, transactional leadership theory, transformational leadership theory and ethical leadership theory within the field of leadership, there are several key leadership theories and concepts that all undergraduate students should learn prior to receiving their baccalaureate degrees. By learning the core tenets of leadership theories, everyone, but especially African American women will have the knowledge to lead.

Leadership education helps to round out an academic experience. African American women, because of their disparity in numbers and lag in salary rates compared to their White male counterparts in the workplace, are in dire need of leadership education. Unless this disparity is addressed, the earning potential of African American women will continue to lag behind both their White male and female colleagues (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Leadership education should be provided in an equitable and comprehensive manner to all college students, regardless of their majors, participation in extracurricular activities or status as a student athlete.
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Appendix A: Protocol for Interviews

Before the first interview began I reviewed the consent form and went over the purpose of the study with each participant. Each interview participant signed and dated two copies of the form. The interview participant kept one copy and the other was filed and secured by the researcher.

Protocol Questions

Interview 1

Research question: What are the formal and informal pathways that African American women obtain their leadership education?

Research sub question 1: What are African American female college students learning about leadership?

Introduction/Warm-up Questions

1. Can you tell me about yourself, including where you grew up and some of your interests?
2. What made you choose to attend Howard University?
3. What is your major and why did you select it?
4. What is your minor and why did you select it?
5. What are your professional goals?

Questions on Leadership

1. What is your definition of leadership?
2. What are the qualities of a great leader?
3. Can you list some great leaders and discuss why you believe they are great leaders?
4. Have you studied leadership theory?
5. Where have you learned about leadership?
6. Is leadership theory an explicit part of your major curriculum?
7. How was leadership theory taught?

8. What are some guiding leadership principles that you have learned?

Protocol Questions
Interview 2

1. Who are the famous Black women or other women that you admire? Why?

2. Do you consider yourself a role model, if so to whom?

3. Are you prepared to take on a leadership role in your profession?

4. What feedback would you give to your department or professors about your preparation to become a leader?

5. Do you think of yourself as smart/talented?

6. Have you ever received negative messages about your academic or achievement ability?

7. Do you have a personal mantra or affirmation?

8. Do you think about race, class and or gender issues?

9. Can you think of any capacity that you do not think women can or should be leaders?

10. Do you consider yourself a feminist?

11. If you could have a conversation with any contemporary or historical leader who would it be? Why? What would you discuss? Where would you like it to take place?

12. What do you want your legacy to be?
Appendix B: Recruiting Documents

Social Media Posting

Research Study on Women and Leadership Seeks Volunteer Participants

- Are you currently enrolled as a student at Howard University?
- Are you a senior?
- Are you an African American woman?

You may qualify to participate in a research study on leadership being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation by a Howard University alumna.

What: Research study on African American female students and leadership
Where: Howard University, Washington D.C.
When: Spring semester 2014
Why: The study will explore the leadership education and leadership development opportunities being afforded to African American women prior to college graduation to determine their levels of preparation for attaining future leadership positions.
How: One-to-one, confidential interviews will be conducted on campus.

Interested - please contact Valerie Taylor, MA at taylor.va@husky.neu.edu. Participation is entirely voluntary and confidential, however participants will receive a $15 as a token of appreciation.
## Appendix C: Screening Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Questions</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact phone number and email.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
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<td>Black/African-American</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
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<td>Native American</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
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<td>Middle Eastern</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Standing</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
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<td>Senior</td>
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<td>Graduate Student</td>
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<td>Major</td>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
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<td>Business</td>
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<td>Law</td>
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<td>Medicine</td>
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<td>Nursing and Allied Health</td>
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<td>Pharmacy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>How many years have you been enrolled as an undergraduate student at Howard University?</td>
<td>1 or less</td>
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<td>2-3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4 or more</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you enrolled in a leadership class?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you enrolled in leadership training?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Have you held a student leadership position at Howard University?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you held a leadership position at work?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you held a leadership position at a community organization?</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you held a leadership position at a faith based institution?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Objectives</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Informed Consent Documents

Informed Consent to Participate

Northeastern University
Human Subject Research Protection
960 Renaissance Park
Boston, MA 02115

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study. You met the selection criteria and are invited to participate in a doctoral study that will be conducted by Valerie L. Taylor, a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies and School of Education. This study is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed. You are being invited to participate because are an African American woman student currently enrolled at Howard University as a senior.

The title of my study is “Exploring the Leadership Education of African American Female College Students: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study”. The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of where leadership education is presented and what leadership development opportunities are occurring for African American women prior to graduating from college. By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to share your formal and informal leadership development experiences.

As the researcher, I will answer any question you may have regarding this study and the specifics of your participation. Prior to the start of the interview, I will review an informed consent form with you and allow you to ask any questions that you may have about the study. You do not have to participate in the interview, but if you agree to do so, please sign this statement below and I, the researcher, will provide a copy for you to keep.

Each interview should last no longer than 60 minutes. I will schedule the interview at Howard University at a time convenient for you to conduct the interview face-to-face. However, if necessary, please be aware that I may need to conduct a follow-up phone call to clarify or resolve any additional questions. In the first 10 minutes of the interview we will go over the informed consent form together. Your responses will be audio taped using a digital recorder while I take notes. My preference is to conduct the interview in person; however, if your schedule does not allow for a face-to-face interview, I can arrange for an interview using videoconferencing technology such as Skype©.


**Risks**
If you agree to participate in this study, there will be no more than a minimal risk anticipated. The only foreseeable risk, discomfort, or inconvenience is associated with your disclosure of your leadership experiences. However, due to sensitive nature of this investigation some participants may feel a higher degree of discomfort if the leadership experiences were negative. The majority of information that will be shared will be self-disclosed, thus affording each participant to decide what information they will or will not share. Please be reminded that your anonymity will always be protected.

**Benefits**
There are no direct benefits to you for participating; however, your responses to the interview questions resulting in the findings of the study may help me to inform institutions of higher education including Howard University about the formal and informal leadership education and leadership development opportunities that African American women are able to access while enrolled in college.

**Confidentiality**
Your participation in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. I will be the only one that knows you have participated in this study. This means that no one will know that the answers you gave and which responses are attributed to you. Any reports of findings or publications based on this research will not identify you as being a participant in this study. I will use pseudonyms for each participant and institution where the participants engaged in leadership development activities in order to reduce the risk of your identification. Example of pseudonyms: Student #1; Institution #1, etc. If someone needs to see my research information about you, it will be only authorized individuals of the Northeastern University’s Human Subject Research Protection and it will be only to ensure that I have conducted this research study properly. If any data is stolen, you will not bear any risk because your identifiable information including the institution where you are employed will be replaced with pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. The database in which I solicit you will be unidentifiable and confidential.

**Option to Not Participate**
The decision to participate in this research study is your decision and you may withdraw your decision to participate at any time. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to respond to any question asked. Even if you agree to participate and the study begins, you may still withdraw up until the data is transcribed.

**Access to Findings**
You will receive access to my interpretation of your responses in formulating the findings. You will be provided an electronic copy of a summary from you interview in order to make corrections. Lastly, you will also receive access to the findings at the conclusion of the study.

**Destruction of Data**
All audio recordings, field notes, transcribed data with identifiable information such as your name and institution will first be de-identified with a pseudonym will be destroyed within one year after the completion of this study. I will personally destroy all audio recordings, interview transcripts with identifiable and de-identifiable data, and any other identifiable data. The hard copy of this informed consent form will be retained in a secured in a lockable file drawer for three years after the completion of this study and then destroyed. All data will be destroyed in a manner appropriate such as shredding or by any other appropriate means as directed by Northeastern University’ IRB human subject research protection policy.

Compensation
You will not incur any costs associated with your participation in this study. Upon completion of the study you will receive a small token of gratitude in the form of $15 gift card for your participation.

Contact Information
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me, Valerie L. Taylor at [redacted], cell or by email at taylor.va@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed at k.reissmedwe@neu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, please contact Nan C. Regina, Director of Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115, telephone 617.373.7570, or irb@neu.edu. You can call anonymously if you wish.

______________________________
Signature - Participant

______________________________
Print Name - Participant

______________________________
Date

______________________________
Signature - Researcher

______________________________
Print Name - Researcher

______________________________
Date