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INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION THAT SHAPES THE LEADERSHIP
IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN WOMEN

By
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A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This grounded theory study explored the role of interpersonal communication, including content and context, in the leadership identity development of Christian women in paid leadership positions in the southeastern U.S. Through individual, semi-structured interviews with 26 women leaders from a variety of employment settings, women’s views and experiences with leadership, interpersonal communication, intrapersonal communication, calling, and mentoring were documented. Supervisors/managers, husbands, spiritual mentors, leaders in a church or Christian ministry, and people the women were leading were mentioned most often as contributing to how the women saw themselves as leaders. Six primary types of content were noted: affirmation of leadership, suggestion to consider a leadership position or leadership development, processing issues/giving advice, personal affirmation or support, discouraging remarks, and skill-building conversations. Often tied to interpersonal communication was women’s intrapersonal communication or self-talk. Women also used their intrapersonal communication to question or second-guess the interpersonal communication of others, motivate self, self-reflect and process, and as spiritual talk. Theoretical models were presented about women’s intrapersonal communication responses to interpersonal communication that is affirming, as well as women’s responses to interpersonal communication that is discouraging. Additionally, a theory of women’s intrapersonal questioning about leadership identity was offered, which included questions about identity, skills, and motivation.

Key words: leadership identity, women and leadership, interpersonal communication, intrapersonal communication
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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method Overview</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations and Limitations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Identity Development</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Communication</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction ........................................................................................................................57
Review of the Methodology ...............................................................................................57
Data Demographics ............................................................................................................58
Data Analysis Procedures ...............................................................................................59
Results ................................................................................................................................60
Views about Leadership and the Self as Leader ..............................................................60
Calling ................................................................................................................................70
Interpersonal Communication ..........................................................................................73
Intrapersonal Communication .........................................................................................91
Grounded Theory of Interpersonal Communication and Intrapersonal Communication.....98
Women and Leadership .................................................................................................104
Mentoring ......................................................................................................................113
Observations about Interpersonal Communication Related to the Interviews .............117
Summary ..........................................................................................................................119
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ....................................123
Introduction ......................................................................................................................123
Summary of Findings .......................................................................................................123
Discussion ........................................................................................................................125
Implications for Action ....................................................................................................133
Recommendations for Further Research .........................................................................135
Summary ..........................................................................................................................135
References ........................................................................................................................137
Appendices.......................................................................................................................156

Appendix A. Participant Letter ............................................................................156

Appendix B. Interview Protocol ..........................................................................157

Appendix C. Informed Consent Form .................................................................159

Appendix D. Participant Data ..............................................................................161

Appendix E. Interview Summary: Interpersonal Communication ......................162

Appendix F. Overall Content and Role Data........................................................163
List of Tables

Table 1. Gender of Speaker and Type of Interpersonal Communication .........................86
List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Total reported interpersonal communication encounters by role of speaker</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Women’s intrapersonal communication responses to affirming interpersonal communication</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Women’s intrapersonal communication responses to discouraging interpersonal communication</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Women’s intrapersonal questioning about leadership identity related to identity, skills, and motivation</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

**Background of the Problem**

Women have emerged as leaders in many realms of American society. Today, more than half of the managerial workforce in the United States (U.S.) is comprised of women (Hopkins, O'Neil, Passarelli, & Bilimoria, 2008). However, women remain underrepresented in top leadership positions (Colorado Women's College, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2008; Sandberg, 2013). Less than 5% of CEOs are women; women hold board seats in fewer than 17% of organizations (Catalyst, 2014); women’s occupancy in political offices on a national level is also scarcer than men, comprising less than 20% of the members of Congress and the Senate (Pew Research Center, 2008); and women represent just one quarter of four-year college presidents and one third of two-year college presidents (Stripling, 2012). While analyzing the status of women in religious leadership can be difficult, a comprehensive study by The White House Project (2009) also estimated that only 15% of Protestant pastors, ministers, and priests are women. In Christian higher education, women hold the title of president in just 5% of institutions (Steffan, 2013). In Christian evangelical organizations, women are in just 21% of board positions and 19% of the top-compensated leadership positions (Women in Leadership National Study, 2014).

How women become leaders is the subject of a number of research studies. Women who are successful leaders learn and grow from a variety of experiences (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Hopkins et al., 2008; Lafrienerie & Longman, 2008). While many organizations provide leadership training to women, the research and theory underpinning women’s leadership training is not robust (Ely et al.,
Although it is clear that relationships are important for women to develop as leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007) and many leadership training programs involve relational components (Hopkins et al., 2008), some relevant aspects of how interpersonal relationships impact women in leadership have not been well researched. As noted by Dahlvig and Longman (2010), the leadership development of women may be influenced by interpersonal communication. Both encouragement and discouragement by others can shape a woman’s view of self as a leader (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ely et al., 2011; French & Domene, 2010). This might include how a woman views the goals, methods, and importance of leadership in general, or specific insights about one’s own identity as a leader. Such communication may cause a woman to feel empowered as a leader or to question her role and potential as a leader (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010). For Christian women, interpersonal communication has been shown to play a role in the development of a sense of “calling,” which includes both internal and external recognition of one’s purpose (Longman, Dahlvig, Wikkerink, Cunningham, & O’Connor, 2011).

**Statement of the Problem**

The role of interpersonal communication in Christian women’s leadership identity development merits further examination. Of particular interest in this study was how interpersonal communication affects the leadership identity development of Christian women who are paid leaders in organizations in the southeastern part of the U.S. While a limited number of studies have documented the importance of interpersonal communication on women’s leadership identity and development generally (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010; French & Domene, 2010), additional research about the content and
context of conversations that influence how Christian women view their own leadership identity is warranted.

**Purpose of the Study**

Using a qualitative research design, the purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop an explanation for the interpersonal communication that shapes the leadership identity development of Christian women who are paid leaders in organizations in the southeastern U.S. In this study, interpersonal communication was generally defined as a one-to-one conversation with another individual that may influence a woman leader to think differently about her leadership identity. Both content and context of interpersonal communication were relevant. Additionally, the way in which interpersonal communication about leadership identity influences Christian women’s intrapersonal communication was explored.

**Research Questions**

This grounded theory study examined the types of conversations that shape how women view themselves as leaders. The primary research question addressed was how do Christian women who are paid leaders in organizations in the southeastern U.S. describe the interpersonal communication that has shaped their leadership identity development? The study sought to discover both the context and the content of the interpersonal communication. What were the settings and who were the individuals with whom the communication took place? What was the content of the interpersonal communication? The study also inquired about the specific effects of the communication encounter in the life of the woman, particularly on the woman’s intrapersonal communication about leadership identity.
Method Overview

In this study, grounded theory methodology was utilized to develop a theory about interpersonal communication that shapes the leadership identity development of Christian women who are paid leaders in organizations in the southeastern U.S. Interviews with women who are paid leaders within organizations such as churches, non-profit agencies, and schools occurred. Women were only included in the study if they held a paid leadership position in an organization in the southeastern U.S. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded according to grounded theory methodology.

Definition of Terms

Words have different meanings for different individuals (Strom, 2009). Therefore, it is important to define the operational meanings of the terms in this study. The following terms were used throughout the paper:

Christian: A person who claims to have salvation through Jesus Christ.

Content: The substance of the communication encounter.

Context: The interrelated conditions through which the communication occurs (DeVito, 2009a). Context may include the situation, the relationship between the people, as well as the time in the woman’s life in which the communication occurred.

Interpersonal communication: Conversation between the study participant and another individual.

Intrapersonal communication: How the woman speaks to herself; self-talk.

Leader: One who influences others toward a goal or outcome.

Leadership identity development: How the individual thinks of self as leader or aspects of identity that relate to leadership (Day & Harrison, 2007).
**Paid:** Receiving a monetary sum in exchange for completion of responsibilities.

**Shape:** Has a potential influence upon the individual’s view of self as a leader.

**Southeastern U.S.:** Includes the following states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee (United States Department of Labor, n.d.).

**Women:** Individuals who are female and at least 18 years of age.

**Assumptions**

The primary assumption of this study was that a Christian woman leader has experienced at least one interpersonal communication encounter that shaped her leadership identity development. Also assumed was that the woman would be able to recall the conversation with accuracy about its effect on her leadership identity development. Finally, it was assumed that the participant would be willing to describe the experiences during the interview.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

As explained by Bryant (2004), *delimitations* are the factors that keep one’s study from being generalizable to all populations. *Limitations*, on the other hand, are based on methodology and are restrictions that the method places on research (Bryant, 2004). In this study, several delimitations and limitations were noted. Delimitations include the following: (a) this research focused only on women and may not be generalizable to the interpersonal communication of men, (b) the study included only women who live in the southeast, (c) the findings may not apply to women in different areas of the U.S., or in other countries, and (d) only women who identified themselves as Christian were interviewed. Frequent communication about life calling and purpose within Christian
communities and institutions, as well as discipleship and mentoring structures in many Christian religious institutions, may have made such communication more common or more likely to take place than with other populations. The study may also not be generalizable to women of other religious traditions or of no religious background. The perspective of women who are unpaid leaders was also not included in this study.

A number of limitations should be noted: (a) the sample size may not be inclusive of all types of Christian women leaders living in the southeastern U.S., (b) the study focused on self-reports of the participants, rather than observed conversations, (c) participants may not have remembered all of the interpersonal communication about their leadership identity that has occurred, (d) participants may have been hesitant to share their leadership identity experiences, and (e) limitations to the study may have occurred because of personal biases that influenced how participant responses were coded. Precautions taken to avoid personal bias included focusing on the meaning the participants ascribed to events (Charmaz, 2006), the use of constant comparative analysis, peer discussion about emerging themes, and researcher self-reflection.

**Significance of the Study**

This study provides a bridge between the subjects of Christian women’s leadership identity development and communication. The examination of interpersonal communication in the leadership development of Christian women has important implications for families, higher education, businesses, church ministry, and other organizations. For example, in higher education, faculty, administrators, and student services professionals may play an important role in a woman’s view of self as leader or about leadership in general. This study examined the idea that interpersonal
communication can alter the course of a person’s leadership. Understanding patterns in both the content and context of interpersonal communication that women describe as shaping leadership identity development is valuable. Additionally, theories advanced in this study about the specific ways that women respond to affirming and discouraging interpersonal communication, as well as women’s intrapersonal questioning of leadership identity, will be useful to both practitioners and researchers.

The results of the study may also provide insights into the type of leadership programming to offer to women. While many programs focus on large and small group teaching, attention to the types of interpersonal communication that shape how Christian women see themselves as leaders would be beneficial for leadership development designers. To the extent that the results can be generalized to other situations, the study will provide recommendations about the content of conversations that seasoned leaders and mentors can have with younger leaders.

**Summary**

Research and theory about how interpersonal communication shapes Christian women’s leadership identity development is not robust and merits further examination. Grounded theory was utilized to discover how Christian women who are paid leaders in organizations in the southeastern U.S. described the interpersonal communication encounters that shape their leadership identity development. Terms were explained, and assumptions, limitations and delimitations, as well as the significance of the study, were noted. In the following chapters, a literature review, methodology, results, and discussion are provided.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In this study of the interpersonal communication that shapes women’s leadership identity development, research from the disciplines of communication (Hackman & Johnson, 2009), religious studies (Chavez, 1997), women’s studies (Klenke, 2011), Christian higher education (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010), business (Higgins & Kram, 2001), psychology (Hopkins et al., 2008), sociology (McDonald & Mair, 2010), and human resources (Day & Harrison, 2007) was explored. Additionally, literature from the multi-disciplinary fields of mentoring (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008) and leadership (Ibarra, Snook, & GuillenRamo, 2010) was consulted. Studies from within particular professional fields such as church ministry (Sullins, 2000), nursing (Kopp & Hinkle, 2006), and higher education (Blood et al., 2012) were relevant. The following themes were identified as central to the development of this research project: (a) leadership identity development, (b) communication, (c) women and leadership and (d) mentoring.

Leadership Identity Development

Much has been written across disciplines about how individuals develop personal identity. Historically, identity was seen as existing within the individual, including a person’s “innermost attitudes and feelings” (Luhrmann & Eberl, 2007, p. 117). Modern viewpoints have come to suggest that identity be viewed through the lens of construction, with many factors contributing to the development of identity (p. 117). While there are multiple theories about how identity is developed, those who write from a developmental perspective note that identity is formed through the integration of experiences with the
self (Day & Harrison, 2007). Self-conceptualizations range from simple to complex, with the possibility of differentiated sub-identities such as gender identity or leader identity (Karelaia & Guillen, 2014). Values, past experiences, and a person’s self-perceptions all work together to formulate identity (Baltes & Carstensen, 1991; Day & Harrison, 2007). Luhrmann and Eberl (2007) also suggest that identity construction is a sociological phenomenon that occurs through interaction with others. Mutual interaction between individuals and society is an often-recognized component of identity development theory (Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005).

Identity research is valuable to the study of leadership. Day and Harrison (2007) note that identity theory is important for understanding leadership as it moves beyond behavioral or trait theories, which can lack depth. Luhrmann and Eberl (2007) write that at least four aspects of individual identity theory are relevant for understanding leadership: (a) motivation; (b) conformity and authenticity; (c) power, (d) relationships. Specifically, leaders are motivated to act in alignment with identity. Leaders continually balance conforming to the norms of a group, while demonstrating the authentic self. Leaders navigate issues of power that are present in a culture. Finally, as Luhrmann and Eberl (2007) note, leaders work within the context of relationships that influence identity.

One emerging area of scholarship is the study of leadership identity development, which consists of how one thinks of self as leader or aspects of identity that relate to leadership (Day & Harrison, 2007). As an individual has experiences as a leader, his or her view of self as a leader becomes an increasingly important part of identity (Lord & Hall, 2005). At the same time, the hierarchy of a person’s identities may influence how the person perceives any conflicts in their multiple identities (Karelaia & Guillen, 2014).
For example, women often must balance identity as a parent, employee, leader, or member of a faith-based organization. Related to this need, Karellaia and Guillen (2014) find that having a positive gender identity helps women to integrate the multiple identities often required of them. In short, having positive feelings about being a woman may influence how a woman evaluates her leadership identity.

According to Carroll and Levy (2010), the study of identity in the past tended to take either a functionalist or constructivist approach in the examination of leadership identity. Carroll and Levy define the functionalist approach as one focused on skills or tools. Identity is seen as a tool that could serve as an organizing structure or a motivational instrument. For example, a leader with a charismatic personality would possess tools for persuading followers to accomplish goals. The constructivist approach, on the other hand, originates from a developmental perspective that focuses on stages of development. This developmental perspective places leadership development in stages and recommends how to move to the next stage (Carroll & Levy, 2010). For example, Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, and Osteen (2006) write about leadership identity from the perspective of developmental stages. The authors utilize grounded theory to construct a six-stage model of leadership identity development (LID model) for college student leaders. Komives et al. (2006) note that although the LID model involves progressing from one stage before entering the next, the stages are not necessarily linear, but can involve moving in and out of the stage in a circular fashion (Komives et al., 2006). The authors theorize that the six stages of leadership identity development are:

1. Awareness - Becoming aware of leaders and leadership.
2. Exploration/engagement - Becoming involved with groups and taking on responsibility.

3. Leader identified - Viewing leadership as a position in which the leader accomplishes tasks. Understanding that different leadership styles exist.

4. Leadership differentiated - Recognizing that leadership is not only positional. Possessing a commitment to a group and group processes.

5. Generativity - Commitment to purposes outside of self occurs. Developing a personal leadership philosophy and interest in how to sustain their group of involvement.

6. Integration/synthesis - Viewing self as a leader who could lead in a variety of contexts (pp. 404-405).

The LID model includes key categories that appear in each stage. These include developmental influences (such as mentors, guides, coaches, older peers, and advisors), group influences, broadening views of leadership, and a developing view of self (Komives et al., 2006). The LID model’s acknowledgement of the importance of individual and group relationships is central to the study of leadership identity development. Similarly, Luhrmann and Eberl (2007) suggest that a leader identity develops both through reflective and social processes. They note that leadership identity is a “‘strategic identity’ since it serves strategic purposes in interaction” (p. 122). On the other hand, Carroll and Levy (2010) offer the perspective that a social constructionist approach is an appropriate way to view the subject of leadership identity development. Social constructionism explains identity development in terms of emancipation from the limiting assumptions of a particular society or culture. Carroll and Levy explain that
much of leadership development that occurs within organizations imposes limits on identity, known as identity regulation, rather than enlarging possibilities, known as identity construction. For example, women in some religious organizations face identity regulation as the roles available to them are limited by gender.

Other researchers have identified central aspects of leadership identity. For example, researchers have examined how identity shapes activity. Leadership identity is an essential component in leadership skill building and continuous development of abilities (Day & Harrison, 2007; Murphy & Johnson, 2011). As a person comes to think of self as a leader, self-efficacy is built and the person may seek out additional opportunities to grow as a leader (Day & Harrison, 2007). A person who does not conceptualize the self as a leader may be slow to seek out leadership development opportunities (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Conversely, when one has negative leadership experiences, leadership identity can be damaged (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). These negative experiences may influence whether one seeks out additional chances to grow in leadership. While the body of work about leadership identity development is growing, Murphy and Johnson (2011) suggest that a greater understanding of the impact of individual differences is needed about (a) how leaders develop a leadership identity, as well as (b) how people progress from one stage of identity to the next. Murphy and Johnson also recommend that leadership development be examined from a long-lens perspective in which leadership identity is influenced by early developmental factors - such as parenting styles, authority figures, or sports activities - and continues throughout adulthood. They suggest that individuals may experience prime developmental periods
during youth. This life span approach to leadership identity and leadership development can provide a beneficial framework for studying this subject (Murphy & Johnson, 2011).

The concept of leadership identity may also be found in a related term, namely, one’s calling. Elangovan, Pinder, and McLean (2010) write that calling consists of three fundamental features: (a) an orientation toward acting, not simply being, (b) clarity of purpose and personal mission, and (c) a desire to improve and serve the world (p. 429). The idea of calling is rooted in religion (Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010). Damazio (1988) cautions that a person should enter leadership only if he or she has a calling to do so. Within some organizations, perception of calling is a primary determinant of an individual’s suitability for leadership (Grey, 2012). Within Christian organizations, acknowledgment that an individual possesses a spiritual gift of leadership (Malphurs, 2003) may contribute to an individual developing a sense of leadership identity.

How individuals come to conceptualize calling is a personal and individualized activity, although some common themes have been reported. In a study of Salvation Army officers, Grey (2012) notes a “call narrative pro forma” which is:

- God speaks
- The recipient ignores, rejects, or resists the sense of a call
- The call is interpreted as verified through some circumstances
- The called person gives in and submits to the process

Others have noted that calling is formed through active participation of the individual, not simply something that happened to the person (Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010). In a study of female leaders in Christian higher education, Longman et al. (2011) write that for a woman to conceptualize her calling as a leader, internal and external messages were
important. For example, a woman might possess an inner sense that God is directing her
toward leadership, but would also desire affirmation from a supervisor that she has
leadership skills. In short, the discovery of calling is a developmental process that is
ongoing, rather than a one-time occurrence (Longman et al., 2011).

The process for identifying oneself as a leader often involves other people. Miller
(1995) writes of leadership, “The only real way to find out who we are is through
relationships” (p. 26). Dahlvig and Longman (2010) discuss what they term *defining
moments* in a woman’s leadership formation. One key finding is the importance of
someone *speaking potential* into the woman’s life (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010).

Similarly, in a study of female leaders in Christian higher education, Longman et al.
(2011) report that external confirmation from others is an important piece of the
formation of calling for women. In many cases, parents play an important role in shaping
the development and sense of calling for their daughters (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010).

French and Domene (2010) find that mothers play a particularly crucial role in the
development of calling. In other cases, the voices of impact might come from a mentor,
role model, or workplace authority (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010). In summary, women’s
leadership identity development is impacted by the words of other people.

**Communication**

The importance of communication in the study of leadership is undeniable
(Tourish & Jackson, 2008). Communication in relationships, teams, and public spheres
are all relevant to leadership (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). In this study of the
interpersonal communication that shapes the leadership identity development of Christian
women leaders, a number of sub-themes of communication are explored. Interpersonal
communication, the self in communication, and gender communication are identified as central to the topic.

**Interpersonal Communication**

Interpersonal communication occurs between two people or a small group of people and is personal, rather than impersonal (DeVito, 2009b). DeVito (2009b) writes, “Conversation is the essence of interpersonal communication. These two concepts are so closely related that some communication researchers think of the terms conversation and interpersonal communication as synonyms” (p. 151). Interpersonal communication is an inherently relational and interdependent activity (Beebe, 2011; DeVito, 2009b). Interpersonal-oriented communication is differentiated from task-oriented communication, which focuses on production and structure (Hackman & Johnson, 2009).

Interpersonal communication encounters have the potential to have effects on the individuals participating in the communication event (DeVito, 2009a; Strom, 2009). Cognition, emotions, and behavior can be influenced by interpersonal communication. (DeVito, 2009b). DeVito (2009b) suggests that there are five reasons people engage in interpersonal communication: to learn, to relate, to influence, to play, and to help. Interpersonal communication encounters that shape the leadership identity of women could potentially originate from any these points.

**Content and context.** Content and context are relevant concepts in interpersonal communication. *Content* relates to the information or ideas contained in the messages being sent (Beebe, 2011). *Context* is the interrelated conditions in which the communication takes place (DeVito, 2009a). DeVito (2009a) identifies and explains four aspects of context: physical, social-psychological, temporal, and cultural. *Physical*
context is the location or environment of the communication encounter. Social-psychological context is the relationships of the people, including hierarchy and relational tone, as well as the type of occasion in which the communication occurs. Temporal (time) context relates to time of day, year, and history. To understand cultural context, the individual and generational values, beliefs, and behavioral patterns must be considered. DeVito (2009a) explains that these four aspects of context interact with one another to shape the communication encounter. Communication that aids in shaping a person’s leadership identity is described by both the content of the conversation, as well as the context of the situation.

**Supportive communication.** Emotional support is a key aspect of interpersonal communication. Burleson (2003) writes that emotional support speaks to concerns at the heart of one’s being. Supportive communication can take a number of forms. MacGeorge (2001) indicates that in supportive interactions, three types of emotion-focused goals are common: (a) emotional support – expressing care and sympathy, (b) distraction – helping others move attention away from a distressing situation, and (c) positive perspective – providing a different way to view the situation. MacGeorge also notes three types of problem-focused goals of supportive communication: (a) understanding the situation – helping the other person have insight, (b) problem-solving – improving the situation, and (c) prevention – keeping the situation from happening in the future. For example, a woman describing a difficult leadership scenario to her spouse could receive supportive communication in the form of insights about how to navigate the situation (problem-focused) or concern about the woman’s well-being (emotion-focused). Additionally, MacGeorge writes about communication that encourages the
individual to attribute blame either to themselves or to another. For instance, a co-worker might suggest to a woman who is leading that the problem originates with her supervisor’s conflict management style. Furthermore, supportive communication is offered by both male and female communicators (MacGeorge, Feng, Butler, Dane, and Passalacqua, 2007). Problem-solving supportive communication is pursued more than any other goal (MacGeorge et al., 2007). It is important to note that spousal support is a unique form of supportive communication. In a qualitative study of spousal support received and valued by executive women, Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2008) report three categories of support involving communication: (a) emotional support – providing encouragement and understanding, (b) career assistance – offering advice, and (c) esteem support – giving a sense of support and validation. Ezzedeen and Ritchey find that executive women prefer emotionally supportive communication over communication that solves problems or gives advice. The authors note that too much spousal support, whether in the form of fighting the battle for the woman, or from unrealistically high professional expectations, can be perceived as unsupportive.

Other supportive communication researchers have examined the concept of verbal person-centered support (VPC), which is how targeted, person-centered, and contextualized the supportive message is (High & Solomon, 2014; MacGeorge et al., 2007). High and Solomon (2014) describe three levels of VPC that have been well-researched. Low person-centered messages (LPC) ignore, deny, or do not take into account other’s feelings. Moderately person-centered messages (MPC) note other’s feelings, but attempt to reframe or divert the conversation. High person-centered messages (HPC) both recognize and build upon the other person’s feelings. For example,
an LPC message might suggest to a woman facing leadership challenges that she “shake it off,” whereas HPC communication would explore and validate the woman’s feelings about the difficult situation. Studies have shown a preference for HPC communication over LPC communication (Burleson et al., 2011; High & Solomon, 2014). In summary, high verbal personal-centered support comes in the form of communication that is directed to an individual and contains a message tailored to that person and their situation.

**Listening.** Listening is a vital part of any examination of interpersonal communication (DeVito, 2009a). Strom (2009) writes that in active interpersonal listening, both head and heart are engaged in a purposeful way. Listening is a process of selecting, attending, constructing meaning, remembering, and responding (Beebe, 2011). Listening in the context of relationship necessitates paying attention to clues beyond verbal expression, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body movements (Eckstein, Byles, & Bennett, 2007). Good listening involves taking an interest in the speaker (Nichols, 1995). Cordingley (2006) writes that four skills are important for active listening: valuing silence, listening to what has been said, using affirming body language, and using similar words of the speaker to, “value, reframe, develop, analyse or check meaning” (p. 54). For example, as a mentor quietly attends to a woman leader’s communication, the mentor can respond empathetically with a smile or frown, while also speaking in terms that the leader might use herself. These actions work together to promote understanding between listener and speaker during a communication encounter. Additionally, listening is shown to be a valuable tool for those seeking to influence others because listening provides relational and informational clues about how to approach
communication encounters (Ames, Maissen, & Brockner, 2012). As suggested by Ames et al. (2012), listening is positively related to influencing others. Leaders can utilize listening in many ways to improve their leadership effectiveness.

**Interpersonal communication and leadership.** A number of aspects of the intersection between interpersonal communication and leadership have been studied. In writing about *discursive leadership*, Fairhurst (2007) notes, “All must repeatedly perform leadership in communication and through discourse” (p. 5). Riggio, Riggio, Salinas, and Cole (2003) write that both leader emergence and leader effectiveness are affected by interpersonal communication skill. In other words, whether one becomes a leader and how effective one is as a leader are impacted by interpersonal communication. Another area of considerable study is *leader-member exchange theory* (LMX), which focuses on the dyadic relationship between a leader and a follower (Gerstner & Day, 1997). In LMX, a high-quality relationship between leader and follower can positively impact work experience and performance (Gerstner & Day, 1997). For example, when managers use face-to-face communication, employees have greater satisfaction with their organization (Men, 2014).

Also related to interpersonal communication and leadership is a study by deVries, Bakker-Pieper, and Oostenveld (2010), who find that a leader’s supportiveness, assuredness, and preciseness are important when communicating with followers (deVries, Bakker-Pieper, & Oostenveld, 2010). Research by Men (2014) suggests that those with a transformational leadership style display concern for employees by listening and valuing different opinions. Alternatively, Madlock (2008) describes the construct of *communication competence* among a group of supervisors. Based on a review of
literature, Madlock suggests that communication competence encompasses numerous elements including knowledge, influence, listening, negotiation, and persuasion. The study finds that communication competence on the part of a supervisor is a predictor of follower’s job and communication satisfaction (Madlock, 2008). This suggests that a leader who demonstrates high communication competence can maximize follower satisfaction and potentially improve employee performance. For leaders who want to grow in their skills, Quick and Macik-Frey (2004) suggest that those in executive level leadership positions can benefit from a relationship with an executive coach who engages in deep interpersonal communication. Deep interpersonal communication increases self-awareness and allows the leader to rid the self of toxic emotions that can undermine leadership and communication (Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004).

The Self in Communication

In 1902, the concept of the looking-glass self was introduced by Charles Horton Cooley (as cited in Beebe, 2011). Cooley posited that self-concept is formed through seeing the self in a figurative looking glass. Similar to looking in a mirror, people learn who they are in relationship with others (Beebe, 2011). Hill, Watson, Rivers, and Joyce write (2007), “….within everyday interpersonal communication are to be found a considerable number of messages with the potential to influence the process by which we construct and negotiate a sense of self-identity (p. 55). A concept related to the looking-glass self is termed reflected appraisal, which addresses the image of oneself based on perceptions of what others think (Jaret, Reitzes, & Shapkina, 2005). Alternatively, other’s appraisals are sometimes provided through interpersonal communication in which one individual shares their views about the other person. Beebe (2011) suggests three
conditions that make it likely for individuals to integrate the interpersonal conversation of others into one’s self-concept: (a) the comment is similar to what others have said, (b) the individual views the other person as credible, and (c) the communication is in keeping with one’s own experience. In summary, both reflected appraisals and communicated appraisals have the potential to shape identity.

Communication scholars describe the development of self-identity as a communication process in the communication theory of identity (CTI) (Hecht, 1993). Hecht, Warren, Jung, and Krieger (2005) write that identity is formed, maintained, and modified in a communication process. Individual identity and social context (including group identity and social roles) are relevant in this theory (Hecht et al., 2005). Identity is both internalized and externalized through communication encounters (Hecht et al., 2005). As noted by Dahlvig and Longman (2010), the self-perceptions and life journey of women may be altered by interpersonal communication encounter; some women may be changed by a single sentence. Within CTI, four frames of identity are recognized (Jung & Hecht, 2004). First, personal identity is how the individual views the self (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Self-concept and self-image are relevant concepts in personal identity. Secondly, enacted identity is how an individual expresses identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004). One’s identity is enacted in social behavior and through communication (Hecht et al., 2005). Relational identity, in which identities emerge in relationship with others, is the third frame (Hecht et al., 2005). Finally, in CTI identity is communal (Hecht et al., 2005). The communal layer moves beyond the unit of the individual into groups and networks of people (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Jung and Hecht (2004) describe the four
frames of CTI as being interpenetrable; they co-exist and work together to create a person’s identity development.

How one speaks to the self, referred to by communication scholars as *intrapersonal communication* (DeVito, 2009a), is an important construct. Other fields of study use different terminology to describe intrapersonal communication. Some refer to this as self-talk (Hardy, 2006; Kross et al., 2014), private speech (Martínez, Calbet, & Feigenbaum, 2011), or inner speech (Perrone-Bertolini, Rapin, Lachaux, Baciu, & Loevenbruck, 2014), while also noting the multidimensional quality of “verbalizations addressed to oneself, expressed either overtly or covertly” (Oliver, Markland, & Hardy, 2010, p. 308). For the purpose of this study, the term intrapersonal communication is utilized. Intrapersonal communication may be a deliberate process (such as making a mental list), or occur in a more spontaneous or unstructured manner (such as mind wandering) (Perrone-Bertolini et al., 2014). Kross et al. (2014) demonstrate that how one engages in intrapersonal communication can influence thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in stressful situations. For example, if a woman’s intrapersonal communication is negative, her perceptions about a difficult leadership situation could be skewed. Alternatively, Oliver, Markland, and Hardy’s (2010) findings indicate that intrapersonal communication in the form of thoughts and feelings that improve personal autonomy and competence are related to greater emotional well-being. From time to time, intrapersonal communication takes the form of self-questioning in *interrogative self-talk* (Puchalaska-Wasyl, 2014). For example, a woman might question her skills as a leader in the midst of a challenging situation with those whom she is supervising. This interrogative self-talk can also influence how the woman interacts in her interpersonal communication with
those she is leading. In summary, both interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication are relevant in the study of leadership.

**Communication and Gender**

Differences in the way that men and women communicate interpersonally and intrapersonally have been noted in linguistics (Tannen, 1990), neuropsychiatristry, (Brizendine, 2006), psychology, (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982), and counseling (Wright, 2000). In a review of literature, Knight, Woods, and Jindra (2005) note, “Gender differences have been detected in areas such as language usage, interpersonal relationship development, conversational styles, and storytelling, to name a few” (p. 116). In one particular example, Klofstad, Anderson, and Peters (2012) suggest that voice pitch influences how men and women are perceived in leadership capacity, with lower voices perceived more favorably. However, others dispute the theory that men and women’s communication styles are differently focused (Burleson, 2003). For example, Burleson (2003) finds that in supportive communication, men and women’s patterns are more similar than different. Additionally, in a review and meta-analysis of studies on gender similarities and differences, Hyde (2014) explains that gender differences in such areas as tentative speech are small and are contextually dependent. MacGeorge et al. (2007) also suggest that there are greater similarities than differences in male and female communication.

For those who do adhere to theory that there are gender differences in communication styles, a number of factors have been shown to account for the variances. Differences in the brains of men and women exist (Brizendine, 2006). Women’s brains contain more nerves in the corpus colosum, which allows for connection between the
right and left hemispheres of the brain. This can result in greater perception of the outer world, to include the emotions of others (Wright, 2000). Male brains have more space allotted to sexual drive, action, and aggression (Brizendine, 2006). In short, men and women may attend to different pieces of external information which can influence the conversations in which they engage. Additionally, hormonal changes throughout a woman’s lifespan, including in utero, impact all aspects of a woman’s life, including communication (Brizendine, 2006). For example, during seasons of hormonal changes, women may engage in additional intrapersonal communication that influences interpersonal communication. In addition, how women are socialized and trained to communicate as children also plays a role in communication style (Tannen, 1990). For instance, some girls are socialized to be less assertive or have lower aspirations than boys. These patterns can be carried into adulthood.

Although not true for all men and women at all times, additional gender differences have been documented in communication. Tannen (1990) generally describes the purposes of women’s communication as rapport talk (establishing connections and negotiating relationships) and men’s communication as report talk (preserving independence and negotiating/maintaining status in a hierarchical world). For example, a female leader may use communication to show she is similar and connected to others, whereas a male may utilize speech to display dominance. Additionally, women tend to tell stories that will make them look foolish, whereas men tell stories that make them look good (Tannen, 1990). In a number of situations, men provide information and women are listeners (Belenky et al., 1986; Tannen, 1990). For example, men have been shown to participate in college classroom discussion more than women (Galvin, Dolly, & Pula,
Also, in a study of gender dyads in physician-patient communication, Sandu, Adams, Singleton, Clark-Carter, and Kidd (2009) find that in male physician/female patient dyads, the physicians made presumptions about patients and were less patient centered than were female physicians, who engaged in more friendly communication. Additionally, men are noted to be more comfortable with language in which they self-promote than are women (Reardon, 1995). In one example, a study of gender differences in the communication of Christian conversion narratives, Knight, Woods, and Jindra (2005) find that men used metaphors about forms of adventure, whereas most women used metaphors of peace and comfort. Women told their conversion story with someone other than self as the central character. Men were the central character in their conversion narratives. In these situations, women were more likely than men to describe themselves in a way that is foolish, rather than clever (Knight, Woods, & Jindra, 2005).

In short, although the differences may be smaller than first reported, men and women do exhibit different communication skills in some contexts.

How men and women communicate with others in relationships has also been documented. MacGeorge et al. (2007) find that women pursue the goal of supportive communication at slightly higher levels of interest and effort than men, which results in men’s supportive communication being of a slightly lower quality. Additionally, Burleson et al. (2011) note that women process supportive communication more deeply, as a result of both greater ability and greater motivation in processing. In High and Solomon’s (2014) study of VPC, the gender of the supportive communicator is shown to be relevant. Specifically, people who received support from men perceived the interpersonal communication to be of higher quality than those who received supportive
messages from women. High and Solomon theorize that this perception had to do with social perceptions of the importance of men’s communication.

In marriage communication, Priem, Solomon, and Steuber (2009) find that three factors influence how supportive a spouse perceives communication to be: (a) how a person acts, (b) self-perceptions by the receiver, and (c) relational satisfaction. For example, a wife who believes she is encouraging and has a positive view of the marriage may also judge her husband’s communication to be supportive. Priem et al. suggest that all three factors were important in the wife’s perception of the husband’s supportiveness. However, for men, the primary factors in perceiving supportive communication were their wife’s behavior, as well as their own supportive behavior, rather than overall marital satisfaction. Overall and Fletcher (2010) also note that in intimate communication, such as within marriage, using positive strategies to communicate desired change is more effective than coercive or blaming strategies. For example, asking one’s spouse to help with household work and thanking the spouse when action takes place is a better strategy than nagging the person to help.

Even as women and men often communicate differently, women in leadership situations may struggle to find their voice. Women who sound like men may not be well-received (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Fears of sounding too agentic (focused on task) may cause women to be silent, rather than to participate in dialogue (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Other women may hold back their communication out of concern for not calling attention to themselves (Sandberg, 2013) or self-promoting (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Additionally, Sandberg (2013) notes that women are concerned that if they speak honestly about workplace issues they will be seen as negative, not a team player, or overly critical. At
the same time, when women do speak up, at times they do not feel that others value their voice. For example, Angier and Axelrod (2014) report that in a 2013 survey of the 1,700 top leaders at eBay, women were significantly less likely than men to believe that others listened to or understood them. This finding came after a two and a half year campaign by eBay to increase the number and proportion of women in senior leadership positions. Determining what style of communication to use can be quite challenging for women in leadership positions (Beech, 2008; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sandberg, 2013).

**Women and Leadership**

Women and leadership has been the subject of much scholarship. While this literature review does not attempt to cover the plethora of related subthemes, two topics are of interest in this study: metaphors of women’s leadership and perspectives on women in leadership.

**Metaphors of Women’s Leadership**

One way to explore the changing experience of women in leadership is to understand the metaphors that have been used to describe women’s leadership journeys. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which something is identified with another thing (Quinn, 1999). Metaphors use images to replace words (Hale, 1999). For example, a person may be called an early bird, the brain termed a computer, or finishing a doctoral program similar to completing a marathon. Five such metaphors from the literature about women and leadership are documented here: (a) the concrete wall, (b) the glass ceiling, (c) the labyrinth, (d) the glass cliff, and (e) the stained glass ceiling.

**Concrete wall.** For much of history, women faced overt boundaries and laws that kept them from entering leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007). For example, until 1920,
women were not permitted the right to vote (Klenke, 2011), which effectually kept women from pursuing political leadership. Eagly and Carli (2007) describe this as a concrete wall. The wall existed based on the widely held belief that men should be in the workforce and leadership roles, and women in the home (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Leadership was conceptualized as the man on the white horse or as great men (Klenke, 1996), thus indicating women were not part of the leadership equation. While a small number of women successfully scaled the concrete wall, such as Mary Baker Eddy, who founded the Christian Science religion, or Harriet Tubman, who led the Underground Railroad (Klenke, 1997), most women prior to the modern era accepted the wall as reality (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The concrete wall was gradually deconstructed in most fields in the U.S. as women gained entrance into leadership positions in universities, businesses, and other organizations (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

**Glass ceiling.** In a now famous article in the *Wall Street Journal* Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) introduced the concept of the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling represented a metaphor for covert barriers women faced as they moved up the ranks within organizations. Although women had the qualifications to advance when they were permitted to entered leadership pipeline, they often found an impenetrable ceiling that kept them from attaining top positions (Klenke, 2011). The glass ceiling was more apparent at higher levels of authority and earnings than at lower levels (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001). Under the glass ceiling, both African American and white women faced limitations in their career earnings (Cotter et al., 2001). A number of factors contributed to the glass ceiling phenomenon including corporate tradition, prejudice, and male discomfort with working alongside women (Hymowitz &
Schellhardt, 1986). For example, *old boy networks* existed that excluded women and allowed men to socialize in activities such as golf, which led to the development of relationships tied to career promotion (Klenke, 1996). Additionally, under the glass ceiling, women felt on display in areas unrelated to work performance such as dress or political views (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). For instance, a woman’s attire might be critiqued or complimented by co-workers, while a man’s was not discussed. While the glass ceiling metaphor was prominent for many years, a number of scholars agree that the metaphor is an outdated way to depict the current state of the leadership journey of women (Dreher, 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Klenke, 2011).

**Labyrinth.** Today, the glass ceiling metaphor has largely been replaced by the metaphor of a *labyrinth* (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Klenke, 2011). Klenke (1997) suggests the use of the labyrinth metaphor from Greek mythology as a more accurate way to capture the essence of a woman’s leadership journey. Eagly and Carli (2007) also note that a labyrinth represents the twists and turns on a woman’s journey, which sometimes lead to dead ends, but can typically be navigated to achieve the desired goal. They write, “The labyrinth metaphor symbolizes the complexity of the causes of women’s current situation as leaders” (p. 8). At the same time, the wisdom a woman gains while navigating the labyrinth can benefit not only the woman, but also her organization and profession (McDonagh & Paris, 2012).

Barriers and wrong turns exist in the leadership labyrinth. Both conscious and unconscious notions about leadership, women, and men create prejudices that women must overcome (Eagly & Carli, 2007). For example, Ely, Ibarra and Kolb (2011) describe a number of second-generation forms of gender bias that include cultural beliefs,
as well as policies and structures in the workplace, and actions biased in favor of men. Ely et al. note that subtle forms of gender bias have an impact on how women view themselves, as well as how others view them. For instance, in many professions, women have few female role models to emulate due to the underrepresentation of women in top positions (Ely et al., 2011). Furthermore, male social networks remain a challenge for women to enter. Additionally, continuing stereotypes about the great man model of leadership can create obstacles in the labyrinth (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). For instance, bias exists when men are more associated with being leaders due to agentic qualities, whereas many women display communal qualities not as commonly associated with leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

According to Eagly and Carli (2007), the lifestyle choices women make on the leadership journey also contribute to navigation of the labyrinth. The decision of whether or not to have children is one that women face. Women who do have children are tasked with responsibility for childrearing and housework more often than men (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Because of family responsibilities, women face choices about the types of careers to pursue, as well as the level of stress and leadership to accept. For example, a woman in the medical field might choose not to pursue a specialty area that requires considerable on-call time. On the other hand, a woman in business might decide that a promotion involving travel is not conducive to caring for her family. Additionally, more often than men, women choose to remove themselves from the workforce or to accept lesser responsibility for a period of time to care for the ongoing needs of family members (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Upon resuming their journey through the labyrinth, women may be surprised to realize
the difficulty of the process. Reasons for this might include an inability to obtain a desired position, difficulty of adapting to changing technology, or challenges in managing the work/life balance.

Women’s ability to achieve social capital is also a factor in the labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Social capital is the personal and professional networks one establishes (Schlichtemeier-Nutzman, Moerer, Ewing, & Hill, 2011). The possession of social capital can open doors for advancement through introducing the woman to influential individuals and career contacts (McDonald & Elder, 2006). Because social capital is largely built through relational activities that can be time consuming, this can be problematic for women who face responsibility at home (Eagly & Carli, 2007). For example, a traditional social capital building activity is to play a round of golf, which necessitates several hours outside of the office or away from home. Many women may lack the flexibility to commit extra hours to events outside the office. Additionally, networks are often gender segregated and difficult for women to access (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Alternatively, McDonald and Mair (2010) find that, unlike men, as women age and move up the career ladder, they accumulate more contacts with men, thus creating additional social capital. Additionally, women have greater trust and feel closer to their contacts as they age, whereas men do not (McDonald & Mair, 2010). This seems to suggest that women who persist through the labyrinth may find social capital increasing more than men in their later years.

While some women do successfully navigate the labyrinth, reports note that women are still underrepresented in the top levels of numerous organizations and institutions (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Sandberg, 2013; The White
House Project, 2009). Contextual factors (Klenke, 2011), women’s individual choices (Eagly & Carli, 2007), and the ability to envision oneself as a leader (Killeen, Lopez-Zafra, & Eagly, 2006), impact the number of women who successfully progress through the labyrinth. In addition, Cook and Glass (2014) note that institutional elements, such as diversity among decision makers, can also impact women’s mobility and tenure in top positions. For instance, organizations with women on the boards of directors have a higher likelihood of selecting a woman as CEO (Cook & Glass, 2014). Additionally, ethnicity and race can be factors in women’s ability to move upward in leadership (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). For example, in a review of the literature, Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) find that African American women face greater levels of unfair practices in training and promotions, as well as lower levels of psychosocial or practical support. At times it may be impossible to determine if bias or discrimination are due to race or to gender, making it a challenge for women to know how to respond to situations (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Glass cliff. Ryan and Haslam (2005) argue that while opportunities for advancement and leadership are now available to women, these positions are often more risky and precarious than those offered to men. They coin the term glass cliff to describe the situation in which women are chosen to fill roles in organizations that experienced poor performance in the preceding months. Some suggest that women who accept leadership roles on the glass cliff are vulnerable to additional scrutiny and blame (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). The glass cliff is associated with stereotypes of women being better suited to lead in a time of crisis than men (Bruckmuller & Branscombe, 2010). However, in a comprehensive study of data on CEO transitions in Fortune 500 companies over a 20...
year span, Cook and Glass (2014) find little support for the glass cliff theory. Their research indicates women are not more likely to be promoted in struggling firms, nor do they have shorter tenures in their positions than men do. These contradictions with previous research indicate further study about the glass cliff phenomenon is needed.

**Stained glass ceiling.** Workplace and organizational context is important to consider when studying the leadership journey of women (Klenke, 2011). Religious institutions and denominations hold theological and philosophical positions about the role of women in leadership (Klenke, 2011). While some Christian churches and organizations agree that women are gifted by God to lead, others maintain that leadership roles are only available to men (Chavez, 1997; Ziegenhals, 2009). For women involved in these institutions, a stained glass ceiling exists (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010). The stained glass ceiling refers to ornate stained glass features of many church buildings. Similar to the glass ceiling, the stained glass ceiling keeps women from advancing to leadership positions. For example, in some religious denominations, women are not permitted to be ordained as pastors or priests (Chavez, 1997). At the same time, although women are prohibited from formal ordination in some denominations, they regularly perform many of the functional responsibilities of the men who hold official titles (Chavez, 1997; de Gasquet, 2010). In other denominations, the resistance to female clergy members resides within the cultural values of congregations, rather than in the hierarchy of the denomination (Sullins, 2000). For example, Adams (2007) discovers that some congregations strongly communicate a prohibition against women in senior leadership as a means of portraying the church as conservative. Yet, in other denominations, women are freely ordained and serve without limitations (Chavez, 1997).
Sullins (2000) also finds that in religious organizations that do allow women to lead, female clergy members often hold lower-status positions within congregations. This occurs in spite of the fact that a higher percentage of church participants are women (Adams, 2007).

Female faculty and administrators in Christian higher education may also encounter a stained glass ceiling (de Gasquet, 2010; Wood, 2009). Women enrolled in Christian higher education sometimes experience harassment based on gender (Eliason, Hall, & Anderson, 2011). Demeaning or derogatory comments, as well as expressions of stereotypes or suggestions women are unsuited for certain roles by men on campus (Eliason et al., 2011) contribute to some Christian women’s ongoing experience of the stained glass ceiling. Christerson, Lewis Hall, and Cunningham (2012) describe a benevolent sexism in existence in some evangelical universities. Glick and Fiske (1996) establish the term benevolent sexism and define it as attitudes toward women that, “are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver)…” (p. 491). For example, on Christian college campuses, although women may not experience overt hostility, the emphasis on women staying home to care for children or other traditional gender assumptions effectually reinforces the stained glass ceiling (Christerson et al., 2012). Alternatively, Lowe (2011) finds the stained glass ceiling might be showing signs of cracking in theological higher education, due in part to the strength of women’s collaborative and relational style of leadership. However, given the theological importance and history of the stance that limits the role of women in some religious
organizations, Wood (2009) suggests it is unlikely that the stained glass ceiling will be deconstructed in all institutions.

**Perspectives on Women and Leadership**

Although women have served as leaders of nations, tribes, movements, universities, armies, and other contexts throughout history (Klenke, 2011), women were not counted into leadership equations in all settings, as has been noted. In many research areas, women’s voices and perspectives were rarely documented until feminist scholars began to represent women’s views (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982). For example, Belenky et al. (1986) interviewed women about how they developed the self, mind, and voice in their ground-breaking work. The study of leadership also historically had a decidedly male perspective (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Prior to the 1980s, most leadership research was conducted by men about men (Klenke, 1996). However, many of these conditions have changed. Studies about women and leadership abound (Blood, et al., 2012; Bruckmuller & Branscombe, 2010; Christerson, Lewis Hall, & Cunningham, 2012; de Gasquet, 2010; Lowe, 2011; Schlichtemeier-Nutzman et al., 2011). Discussions of women’s more collaborative, transformational style of leadership are prominent (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007), as are opportunities for women to be promoted into leadership roles.

At the same time, some women still struggle to see themselves as worthy of being counted in the leadership equation (Sandberg, 2013). One possible explanation for this is the imposter syndrome. Leary, Patton, Orlando, and Funk (2000) describe the imposter syndrome as “…the sense of being an imposter or fraud - believing that others perceive oneself more favorably than is warranted” (p. 726). This can lead to women feeling the
need to be better prepared than men to assume a position (Newkirk & Cooper, 2013). Dahlvig (2013) notes that among Christian women, the imposter syndrome is prevalent. However, because humility is a valued characteristic among Christian leaders, some women prefer to think of others as more important, or not to promote the self at all. For these reasons, it can be difficult to tease apart the imposter syndrome and the concept of humility among Christian women leaders (Dahlvig, 2013). Women also wrestle with others’ perspectives of their leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007). For example, some women are hesitant to display an assertive leadership style for fear of being perceived as bossy (Sandberg, 2013). Expectations and stereotypes of women leaders can be paradoxical at times (Klenke, 2011). For example, this can be seen in women-only leadership development programs, which provide women with training, but isolate them from male leaders (Klenke, 2011). Additionally, while a recent study by Latu, Mast, Lammers, and Bombari (2013) indicates that when women are exposed to reminders of successful women leaders, their own behavior is empowered, previous research indicated women who were exposed to high-level women leaders felt more feelings of inferiority and lower leadership aspirations (Hoyt & Simon, 2011).

Within Christian thought, the leader as shepherd metaphor has lent itself to a male conceptualization of leadership that persists and may prevent women from seeing themselves as leaders (Scott, 2014). Specifically, the pervasive perspective has been that men lead the flock. Some Christian girls are socialized in this viewpoint early on, as they are taught that the primary role of women is to bear and raise children. As Scott notes, “Girls also seem to learn that certain intellectual and leadership gifts are not appreciated and are perhaps even negative” (p. 50). For those Christian women who feel inclined
toward leadership, both the stained glass ceiling and the perceptions of others can lead them to pursue leadership outside the bounds of Christian ministry (Scott, 2014). A study of Christian women by the Barna Group (2012) finds that while nearly three forths reported making the most of their gifts and potential, 20% of women feel underutilized at church and 16% believe their opportunities are limited due to gender. For some women, prejudicial views keep them from being able to envision self as a leader (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010). Many factors within some Christian cultures can make women hesitant - or unable - to pursue leadership opportunities.

At the same time, mechanisms for encouraging women to see themselves as leaders are evolving in many arenas. In a study of senior women leaders in government, nonprofit organizations, and business, Fine (2009) explores discursive representations of leadership as a means of providing new theoretical approaches to leadership. The study examines themes that emerged through women’s leadership narratives. For example, the need for a model of leadership ethics based on the feminist ethic of care emerged as a result of women’s descriptions. Lowe (2011) also describes the need for theological education administrators to consider the collaborative, transformational, relational style of female leaders as a model for theological education. Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011) recommend a design for women’s leadership development programs that provides a safe space to explore leadership identity. Additionally, tools such as the Career Aspiration Scale (which examines aspiration to leadership and continued education), are now available to assist women in navigating career and leadership paths (Gray & O’Brien, 2007). It is reasonable to expect additional means for empowering women as leaders to emerge in the future.
Mentoring

Mentoring is a subject of interest to both men and women. Examples of mentoring can be observed in most institutions such as schools, workplaces, religious organizations, and medical facilities (Clinton & Clinton, 1991; Kopp & Hinkle, 2006; Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz, & Wiethoff, 2010). Research has documented a number of differences between male and female mentoring such as accessibility of mentors, time available for mentoring, and the career benefits that mentoring provides (Blood et al., 2012; Klenke, 1996; McDonald & Westphal, 2013; Ramaswami et al., 2010). In this study of interpersonal communication that shapes women’s leadership identity development, mentoring was expected to be identified by participants as a primary source of interpersonal communication about leadership identity. What follows is a brief description of the topic of mentoring. The discussion begins with an overview of how mentoring has been conceptualized, then continues with a description of the benefits of mentoring. Finally, unique challenges of mentoring for women will be noted.

Conceptions of Mentoring

The origins of the term mentor are often traced to Greek mythology. In Homer’s Odyssey, Odysseus asked the Ithacan noble, Mentor, to care for, educate, and protect his son, Telemachus, while he fought in the Trojan War (Hansman, 2010; Johnson, 2002; Klenke, 1996). Mentor has come to encompass a variety of actions and expectations (Hansman, 2010). Authors note that mentors serve numerous roles: teacher, guide, sponsor (Johnson, 2002), coach, protector, counselor, friend (Kram, 1983), preceptor (Kopp & Hinkle, 2006), and feedback provider (Lester, Hannah, Harms, Vogelsgesang, & Avolio, 2011). The beneficiary of mentoring actions is often referred to as the protégé
(Kopp & Hinkle, 2006) or *mentoree* (Anderson & Reese, 1999). Kalbfleisch (2002) notes the mentor/protégé relationship is about the connection of two people who are committed to achieving success together. Kram (1983) writes that mentoring serves both career and psychosocial functions. Career mentoring focuses on career development and advancement (Johnson, 2002; Kram, 1983). Psychosocial mentoring often takes the form of support or confirmation related to identity and competence (Johnson, 2002; Kram, 1983).

Mentoring relationships may be formal or informal. Formal relationships occur in workplaces or professional organizations and may involve a systematic matching process (Hansman, 2010). In a case study of formal mentoring dyads, Muir (2014) finds that mentoring can be useful for the discovery of leadership identity. Muir’s study suggests that in the majority of participant dyads, both mentor and mentoree pinpointed the same moment in time when the mentoree began to self-identify as a leader. This was due in part to the question asking and reflective listening of mentors. The study suggests that a formal mentor can play a pivotal role in helping an individual develop leadership identity. On the other hand, informal mentoring occurs organically, without third-party intervention (Johnson, 2002). Mentorees have, in fact, reported greater satisfaction and benefit from informal mentoring (Johnson, 2002). Depending upon career stage, a mentor from outside one’s organization can be of greater benefit to a mentoree’s career success (Peluchette & Jeanquart, 2000).

Developed through a study of mentoring dyads, Kram (1983) identifies four phases of mentoring relationship progression: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. The initiation phase occurs when the two individuals begin to get to know
one another. In the cultivation phase, meaningful interactions occur related to both career and psychosocial issues. Separation takes place when the relationship changes due to factors such as the mentoree growing out of the relationship, or the mentor no longer being available. Finally, the mentoring relationship may be redefined through termination or taking on a different form. Kalbfleisch (2002) cautions against initiating mentoring too early in a relationship. Likened to the equivalent of saying “I love you” too soon was the action of asking someone to be a mentor before the person was ready (Kalbfleish, 2002). Likewise, mentors are wise to be selective in accepting only mentor relationships for which they are adequately prepared to give guidance (Johnson, 2002) and have the time in which to invest.

Context is relevant when discussing mentoring (Ramaswami et al., 2010). For example, higher education is a common context in which mentoring takes place (Parks, 2008) as is nursing (Kopp & Hinkle, 2006). Of particular interest in this study is mentoring within Christian organizations. History has documented a wealth of teaching on this subject from Augustine to Ignatius of Loyola, to modern day Christian theologians Richard Foster and Dallas Willard, who write about spiritual disciplines and the importance of relationships (Anderson & Reese, 1999). Clinton and Clinton (1991) describe nine types of mentoring for those in Christian leadership positions in churches and para-church organizations. *Active mentoring* types are those that are tightly controlled and intentional. Discipler, spiritual guide, and coach are active mentoring types. Clinton and Clinton’s second category of mentors is *occasional mentoring*, which includes counselors, teachers, and sponsors. The final group of mentors is *passive mentoring* relationships, in which there is little or no relationship required; this suggests
that mentoring can occur indirectly. Contemporary model, historical model, and one time
divine contact are passive mentoring types (Clinton & Clinton, 1991).

An individual may receive mentoring from more than one source. Higgins and
Kram (2001) recommend re-conceptualizing mentoring from a single mentor perspective
to a developmental networks viewpoint. They suggest mentoring is most accurately
viewed through social network theory in which people receive guidance for many sources
during their career. For example, a woman might receive mentoring from a college
professor, her first supervisor, a subject matter expert, and a spiritual mentor, all within a
few years. At the same time, Clinton and Clinton (1991) acknowledge a constellation
model of mentoring, with upward, lateral, and downward mentoring necessary to have
balance. That is, one should receive mentoring, have peer relationships that are
supportive, and also provide mentoring to other individuals.

Benefits of Mentoring

Being mentored can potentially benefit both career and psychosocial development
(Kram, 1983). Having an available mentor is perceived as being important for career
success (Blood, et al., 2012) and building social capital (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden,
2001). Mentoring relationships allow one to be socialized in a profession (Kopp &
Hinkle, 2006). For example, those training in the nursing profession often benefit from a
preceptor who guides them about how to work effectively in a hospital setting.
Mentoring can also have tangible benefits. In a meta-analysis of literature, Allen, Eby,
Poteet, Lentz, and Lima (2004) report that promotions and compensation are more highly
correlated with career mentoring than psychosocial mentoring. For instance, mentoring
about techniques for successful sales appointments would be more advantageous than
discussion about how one feels during the sales call. Further, those who have more than one mentor receive more career benefits than those with only one mentor (Seibert et al., 2001).

At the same time, simply having a mentor contributes to having a more positive attitude toward job and career (Allen et al., 2004; Eby et al., 2008). Mentoring builds self-efficacy in leadership development more than education or training efforts alone (Lester et al., 2011). Mentoring can also fill the need for acceptance and affiliation for the protégé (Eby et al., 2008). For example, a woman with a work mentor may feel more connected to the organization. Additionally, mentor communication provides both positive and negative feedback to the protégé. For instance, Newkirk and Cooper (2013) find that among African American women pastors in the Baptist church, mentoring gave the mentoree the opportunity to, “see things within themselves that they would not ordinarily be able to visualize” (p. 337). This includes both positive attributes and skills, as well as limitations and obstacles (Newkirk & Cooper, 2013). While sometimes difficult to receive, negative feedback is also beneficial for those who wish to learn about weaknesses from a trusted advisor (Lester et al., 2011). For example, a women in a new job might be told by her mentor that her poor listening habits are detrimental. On the other hand, mentors can serve as a facilitator and encourager of a protégé’s dreams (Johnson, 2002). This might include suggesting a person pursue an advanced degree or affirming their ability to manage a complex project. For professional females in male-gendered industries, such as engineering or science, having a male mentor may provide benefits in terms of compensation and career progress satisfaction (Ramaswami et al., 2010). This is true in part because mentoring provides sponsorship and legitimacy for
women in male-gendered environments. This is especially the case within informal mentoring relationships in which the mentor selects the protégé (Ramaswami et al., 2010). For example, if a male leader in an electrical engineering firm begins to invest in the career success of a new professional woman, this could affirm her value to others within the organization.

**Challenges of Women Related to Mentoring**

While women receive benefits from mentoring, challenges have also been documented. Women report a mentor gap between what they want in a mentor and what they receive in mentoring activities. However, having a mentor does not guarantee that the goals of mentoring will be achieved (Blood et al., 2012). For example, a woman might spend considerable time with a mentor in hopes that she will advance in her career, only to be overlooked for a promotion. Additionally, the mentors that men have are more likely than women’s mentors to assist them in obtaining promotions or serving the sponsorship function in which the mentor advocates for the protégé (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010). Ibarra, Carter, and Silva (2010) find that qualified women are promoted less when their mentor does not act as a sponsor. Additional challenges come into play because women often bear the greater burden for home and child responsibilities outside the workplace (Eagly & Carli, 2007) and time for mentoring activities can be limited. Even women who commit to pursing a mentoring relationship report that finding an available mentor is difficult (Blood et al., 2012; Kellerman & Rhoad, 2007). This is sometimes the case because fewer women hold positions high on the corporate ladder, contributing to less women available to mentor others (Cunningham, 1999; Klenke, 1996). At times women in leadership positions may be too busy navigating their own
labyrinth to invest in other women (Klenke, 1996). Because of these factors, Kalbfleisch (2002) theorizes that women make more communication efforts to keep current mentoring relationships alive because of the limited number of mentor possibilities. Additionally, when women are mentored by women in higher positions, at times the relationship is not as beneficial as what the protégé hoped it would be (Parker & Kram, 1993).

For women who desire to participate in cross-gender mentoring, challenges may occur. Women may not have access to networks or avenues with which to develop mentoring relationships with men in positions of power (Klenke, 1996). For example, in a study of women on boards of directors, McDonald and Westphal (2013) find that in-group favoritism by men toward other males who are first time board members leads to more mentoring of men. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that women receive less nominations to additional boards as a result of a lack of mentoring about norms and appropriate ways of acting on a board (McDonald & Westphal, 2013). Additionally, men may be hesitant to mentor women because of public image concerns (Klenke, 1996). This can be seen especially in the case of younger women and older male executives (Sandberg, 2013). Within some Christian organizations in particular, mentoring relationships with the opposite gender are discouraged or seen as inappropriate. Often, the assumption is made that men will mentor only men (Weber, 1997). Scott (2014) utilizes the term *bubblewrap approach* to describe the high boundaries and limited interactions among men and women in Christian organizations. For example, even in denominations with few restrictions about the employment of women in leadership roles, a female leader may receive little mentoring from a male senior pastor out of concern for
the appropriateness of the relationship. In short, cross-gender mentoring situations must be navigated carefully in terms of both internal dynamics (mentor and protégé) and external dynamics (within the organization) (Christian Reformed Church in America, n.d.; Hopkins, O'Neil, Passarelli, & Bilimoria, 2008).

Summary

A review of literature indicated four themes for this study of interpersonal communication that shapes the leadership identity development of Christian women who are paid leaders: leadership identity development, communication, women and leadership, and mentoring. Leadership identity development was examined as a facet of identity development. Identity development can be viewed as constructed through a developmental process that is relational. Additionally, the concept of calling was noted as relevant in the study. The theme of communication was also explored. Interpersonal communication, which is personal communication between two people, is at the heart of this study. Relevant communication subthemes included the content and context of interpersonal communication, supportive communication, as well as listening. The importance of studying the self and one’s intrapersonal communication was indicated. Gender differences related to communication were noted. Several aspects of the study of women and leadership were discussed in the literature review. Metaphors of women’s leadership included the concrete wall, glass ceiling, labyrinth, glass cliff, and stained glass ceiling. Finally, literature related mentoring was examined. Mentoring can take a number of forms and be beneficial in a multitude of ways, including building social capital, socialization in an profession, and building self-efficacy. However, unique mentoring challenges do exist for women.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a theory that explains interpersonal communication that shapes the leadership identity development of Christian women who are paid leaders in organizations in the southeastern U.S. In this study, interpersonal communication was defined as one-to-one conversations with another individual that cause a woman to think differently about her leadership identity. The purpose of this chapter is to provide information about the methodology of the study. What follows is an explanation of the research questions, method rationale, sample, instrumentation, researcher’s role, data collection and data analysis plans, validation strategies, and ethical considerations.

Research Questions

This qualitative study explored the types of interpersonal communication that shape how Christian women view themselves as leaders. The primary research question addressed was:

1. How do Christian women leaders in organizations within the southeastern U.S. describe the interpersonal communication that has shaped their leadership identity development?

Sub-questions included:

2. In what communication context (time, physical, social-psychological, cultural) did the interpersonal communication take place?

3. Who were the individuals with whom the interpersonal communication occurred?
4. What was the content of the interpersonal communication encounters?

5. How do women describe the impact of interpersonal communication about leadership on their intrapersonal communication?

**Method Rationale**

The most appropriate approach to this topic was grounded theory methodology (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory is a procedure used for generating theory that conceptualizes a process, action, or an interaction (Creswell, 2012). Development of leadership identity is a process that has been studied (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Day & Harrison, 2007; Komives et al., 2006). However, the specific role that interpersonal communication plays in that development has not been widely researched. Creswell (2013) noted that grounded theory is an appropriate method when theory about a topic is not abundant. Grounded theory allows the researcher to maintain an open posture in which theory creation is driven by the data (Creswell, 2012). In this study, the data collected formed the basis of the development of theory about both interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication that influence how women see themselves as leaders.

Data collection occurred through interviews with Christian women about specific interpersonal communication, including content and context that shaped their leadership identity. Creswell (2012) writes that three different types of grounded theory design exist: systematic, emerging, and constructivist. While the three designs types vary considerably, common elements exist, including studying a process, the use of theoretical sampling, constant comparative data analysis, creation of a core category, the development of a theory, and memo writing on the part of the researcher (Creswell,
2012). This study utilized the constructivist approach developed by Charmaz (2006) which includes flexible strategies, emphasis on the meaning that participants ascribe, and acknowledgement of the researcher’s role (Creswell, 2012). Successive levels of analysis led to the development of specific concepts for understanding the topic (Charmaz, 2006).

**Description of Sample**

Theoretical sampling as utilized in grounded theory involves choosing participants intentionally based on contribution to theory development (Creswell, 2012). Participants were Christian women who are paid leaders in organizations in the southeastern U.S. Participants were recruited through colleagues in a number of organizations such as businesses, churches, education, health care facilities, and non-profit agencies in the southeastern U.S. Sixteen women and four men were contacted about whether they could recommend a woman they knew for the study. A participant letter (Appendix A) was emailed to the initial contact to be given to the potential participant. It was requested that the colleague ask the potential participant if she could be contacted by email about participating in the study. When possible, women were contacted within 24 hours in a follow-up email after their name and email information were provided. Three participants made contact directly after receiving information about the study. Additionally, the snowball technique, in which participants recommended other individuals who met the criteria, was utilized for the recruiting of two participants (Creswell, 2013).

Five women expressed initial interest but did not respond to two requests for an interview. No further contact was made. In one case, an interview was scheduled, and then canceled by the participant. When asked to reschedule, the woman did not respond.
In another case, an interview was scheduled and begun. However, the participant immediately began to express that she did not see herself as a leader during the interview and was hesitant to answer questions. That interview was terminated and the data was not included. One participant was found to be retired from her position; however, the decision was made to include her data in the study. Twenty-two interviews took place in person, while two were conducted on FaceTime and two were on the phone. In total, 26 interviews were completed and included in the results. Efforts were made to assure diversity within the study in age, race, occupation, and field of practice.

**Instrumentation**

Semi-structured personal interviews with study participants were conducted (Creswell, 2013). Relevant subtopics guided the choice of questions in the interviews. Interview questions covered the following topics: (a) leadership, (b) leadership identity development, (c) interpersonal communication, (d) intrapersonal communication, (e) women in leadership, (f) mentoring, and (g) calling. An interview protocol was developed (Appendix B), but was treated flexibly, depending upon the woman’s interview responses (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). Charmaz (2006) noted that it is appropriate for a researcher to shift the conversation in an interview or to follow a hunch. At times, this occurred in the interviews.

Interviews began with the general subject of leadership to ease the participant into the interview and encourage openness (Creswell, 2013). The participant was asked about her own leadership roles, leadership identity development, and hesitancy to self-identify as a leader. This allowed the woman to share general thoughts about leadership, as well as what that process was like for her. The topic of interpersonal communication and how
it affects leadership identity development was also initiated. The participant was asked to think of specific examples of interpersonal communication that shaped how she sees herself as a leader or thoughts she has about leadership. Participants were prompted about specific categories such as parents, teachers, co-workers, pastors, friends, spouse, or authority figures. When the participant identified a specific person or category, follow-up questions about the content and context of the interpersonal conversation were asked whenever possible. Based upon the responses, the subtopic of intrapersonal communication, that is, how the interpersonal communication affected how the woman spoke to herself, was addressed. This approach required moving between the subtopics of interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication. Participants were co-creators of what occurred during the interview in that their responses shaped the follow-up questions (Manning & Kunkel, 2014).

For the subtopic of women in leadership, participants were asked to recall interpersonal communication about being a woman in leadership if that had not already been described. If the participant recalled a new occurrence, questions about interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication were asked (Creswell, 2013). Women were also asked about their general perspectives about women in leadership. Interviews generally concluded by asking the woman if she had anything else she wanted to add, or any comments about topics she thought she would be asked about during the interview but was not. Creswell (2013) urges researchers to gather enough data to saturate (fully develop) a model. While saturation was achieved after approximately 21 interviews, the additional interviews that had been previously scheduled were conducted. The researcher did find valuable insights in the final five interviews.
The Researcher’s Role

In constructivist grounded theory, the role of the researcher is acknowledged (Creswell, 2012). This topic was chosen based on personal experience as a Christian woman in leadership in the southeastern U.S., as well as a teacher and practitioner of communication studies. Throughout adolescence and adulthood, I experienced interpersonal communication that both enhanced my view of self as a leader, as well as detracted from it. As a leader of leaders in two different churches in the southeast, I developed and taught leadership training. At times, the training was for women only and on other occasions, for both men and women. On some occasions, my leadership was controversial because of my gender. At other times, people embraced my leadership because I offered a different style of leading. In yet other instances, gender seemed to play no role in the leadership situation.

As an adjunct faculty member in a Bible college, I have studied and taught leadership communication, small group communication, and oral communication courses on a regular basis with a particular interest in interpersonal communication. Throughout the years, as a matter of conversation with students, friends, and fellow church members, I have asked about individual views of leadership and shaping forces of leadership identity. When people describe what others have said to them that has influenced their view of self as a leader, my interest is always piqued. This study of the interpersonal communication encounters that shape the leadership identity of Christian women in the South is truly born out of people’s stories, including my own.

Based on my background and values, biases were present. Not all study participants shared my same views about the roles of women as leaders in Christian
settings. It was necessary to examine fairly the participant views as they were presented. Additionally, my work in pastoral counseling roles led me to become an empathetic listener with a desire to show compassion to the speaker. During the research process, I had to remember that my primary purpose was data collection, not emotional support. This was challenging as many participants displayed strong emotions. Throughout the study, I reflected on my goal of gaining insight into the intersection of interpersonal communication and leadership in terms of how leadership identity is formulated in developing theory relevant to this topic. Times of self-reflection and peer discussion were important to the process.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Data was collected through intensive interviews, which asked for the participant’s interpretation of her experiences with interpersonal communication that shaped her leadership identity development (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006) writes that one means for respecting the participants in a study is to establish rapport with them. This was the current researcher’s goal from the initial contact with participants. Interviews were scheduled at the participant’s convenience, typically in a location that was conducive to private conversation or by telephone or Skype. The study’s purpose and parameters were explained. A copy of the informed consent guidelines was provided and described to each participant (Appendix C). Guarantees of confidentiality were given through assurance that both the participant’s name, as well as names of anyone mentioned during the interview, would be changed to a pseudonym. An interview protocol was utilized, but was subject to adjustment depending on how the conversation between participant and interviewer moved (Creswell, 2013; Manning & Kunkel, 2014).
All interviews were audio recorded and an outside resource was used for transcription. The researcher took notes during each interview. Memoing about the interviews, categories, and emerging theories occurred during both data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2012). As Charmaz (2006) notes, “Memos catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue” (p. 72). Adjustments were made to interview questions as needed upon review of initial transcripts (Creswell, 2012). Data collection occurred over a seven-week period. Interviews ranged in length from 25 to 55 minutes, with the average interview taking 40-45 minutes.

**Data Analysis Plan**

According to grounded theory procedures, data is collected and analyzed immediately, rather than after all data is collected. This process is termed emerging design (Creswell, 2012). Data was placed in codes, which led to categories (Creswell, 2013). NVivo qualitative software was chosen based on recommendations by the dissertation committee and colleagues. Codes and categories were adjusted as additional data was collected and analyzed, a process that is known as constant comparative analysis (Creswell, 2012, p. 434). Although all transcripts were stored and initial coding was conducted using NVivo, ultimately, it was decided the software would not be used for analysis. Instead, hand coding was performed. The researcher created a summary sheet for each interview (Appendix E), detailing the context and content of interpersonal communication described by participants. Summary sheets were analyzed to form categories related to interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication. Data was then re-coded and analyzed in those categories.
Validation

Creswell (2013) recommends using more than one type of validation strategy when conducting a qualitative study. Once an interview was completed and transcribed, the transcript was emailed to the participant for review, as a request to respond if she wished to omit any comments or add additional thoughts. Replies from 10 individuals indicated no changes were needed. One participant inquired about changing the names of people within the transcript, but had no other changes. One participant made corrections to information that was transcribed incorrectly. The other fourteen participants did not respond to the email. Ten participants indicated that no changes were needed. One individual asked whether names would be changed. One participant noted several misspelled or incorrect words in the transcript. The other participants did not reply with any corrections. Triangulation occurred as multiple women were interviewed about the same topics. Themes included in the findings section appeared in numerous participant responses. Additionally, reflection about author assumptions and biases occurred as transcripts were analyzed, memoing conducted, and themes developed (Creswell, 2013). Peer debriefing also served as a validation tool throughout the process.

Ethical Considerations

All researchers must address ethical considerations (Roberts, 2010). In considering the research topic and preparing to propose the topic to the dissertation committee, a number of ethical issues were noted. Institutional Review Board approval from Creighton University was sought and obtained prior to contacting colleagues or potential participants. The Institutional Review Board (Roberts, 2010) granted an expedited review. The rights of informed consent were also given to all subjects.
Confidentiality of participants was a primary concern and each participant was assigned a pseudonym prior to transcription. No identifying information about any of the women was included in the dissertation. Further, because this study asked participants to recall conversations with other people at distinct locations, confidentiality of people and places cited by the participants was assured. Names of all people and places identified by participants were changed to guarantee anonymity.

Another ethical concern was the pressure a woman might feel to have something to say during the interview. This was discussed with participants prior to the interview questions, noting that their responses should reflect only their actual experiences, whatever those experiences might be. Charmaz (2006) emphasized the importance of understanding the participant’s lives from their perspective, which occurred through the process of intensive interviewing. Care was taken to understand participant views from their vantage point, rather than through the assumptions of the researcher (Charmaz, 2006). Gonzalez-Lopez (2011) suggested the need for mindful ethics noting, to be mindful means “to be alert to the urgency of being present at the moment and being cautious about what we take for granted” (p. 449). Respect for each individual participant, her situation, her views, and her emotions was shown (Charmaz, 2006).

Summary

This chapter described the methodology that was employed in the development of a theory that explains the interpersonal communication that shapes the leadership identity development of Christian women who are paid leaders in the southeastern U.S. Constructivist grounded theory was utilized to emphasize the meaning that participants ascribe (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2012). An explanation of the sampling procedures
was included. With the exception of one participant who was retired, study participants were women who are paid leaders. An interview protocol was followed, although at times adjustments were made based on the turns of conversation in the interview. The role of the researcher, relevant to constructivist grounded theory (Creswell, 2012), was explored. Data collection and data analysis plans, validation strategies, and ethical considerations were also detailed in the description of methodology.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe interpersonal communication that has shaped the leadership identity development of Christian women in paid leadership positions in the southeastern U.S. and to create a theory about the process.

The research questions were:

1. How do Christian women leaders in organizations within the southeastern U.S. describe the interpersonal communication that has shaped their leadership identity development?
2. In what communication context (time, physical, social-psychological, cultural) did the interpersonal communication take place?
3. Who were the individuals with whom the interpersonal communication occurred?
4. What was the content of the interpersonal communication encounters?
5. How do women describe the impact of interpersonal communication about leadership on their intrapersonal communication?

This chapter provides a review of the methodology, an account of data analysis procedures used by the researcher, and a detailed description of the study’s findings about interpersonal communication that has shaped women’s leadership identity development.

Review of Methodology

The most appropriate approach to this topic was grounded theory methodology, which is used for generating theory that conceptualizes a process, action, or an interaction (Creswell, 2012). Theory creation was driven by the data (Creswell, 2012) and
theoretical sampling in which participants are included based on their contribution to theory development was conducted. Professional and personal acquaintances were contacted and asked whether they could recommend potential participants from among their contacts. In most cases, names and contact information were given to the researcher and potential participants were emailed a letter introducing the study and explaining study parameters (Appendix A). Other potential participants contacted the researcher directly through email. A reply was sent to individuals that included the introductory letter. When a potential participant replied with interest, an interview time and location that was convenient for the participant was established.

Over a seven-week time span, twenty-six interviews were completed. Twenty-two interviews took place in person. Interviews with two women were completed through FaceTime and two interviews were held over the phone. All participants received an informed consent document either prior to or at the beginning of the interview, which was discussed with each individual (Appendix C). Interviews were audio recorded with permission and were later transcribed by an outside transcription service. Names of participants were changed, as were names and locations mentioned during the interviews. Triangulation of data occurred as the diverse viewpoints of many women were included, rather than relying on a few sources. Memoing was conducted throughout the process, which aided in the development of codes, themes, and theory.

**Data Demographics**

Of the twenty-six women interviewed, two were in their 20s, seven in their 30s, nine in their 40s, six in their 50s and two in their 60s. Six participants described their race as black, 19 as white, and one as Hispanic. Twenty participants were married, four
divorced, and two single. Seven participants had no children, two had one child, 10 had two children, four had three children, two had four children, and one had six children.

For the highest level of education achieved, one participant reported having a high school diploma, 11 had a BA/BS, 10 had obtained a Master’s degree, and four held a doctorate. Careers fell into one of seven categories: eight worked in education, five in non-profit work, five in business, four in religious institutions, two in health care, one in media and one was a retired government worker. Job titles were diverse and can be found in a detailed chart of participant demographics in Appendix D.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data was analyzed according to the principles of a grounded theory methodology (Creswell, 2013). Upon completion of each interview, an audio file was uploaded into NVivo software, then transcribed and returned into NVivo for future coding. Upon receipt of the first transcript, initial coding began. As each transcript was received, coding continued. Initially, coding was completed within the NVivo program. However, the researcher determined that analysis without the use of the computer program was preferred. A summary sheet was created for each transcript (Appendix E), which was utilized for coding who the communication was with, the gender of the speaker, the time frame of the conversation, the content of the communication, and anything reported about the impact of the communication. Summary sheets were reviewed and comments were coded into the categories of the role of the communicator, the content of the communication, and the impact of the communication on the woman’s intrapersonal communication. Themes began to emerge about the primary types of interpersonal communication, as well as types of intrapersonal communication related to leadership
identity development. Coding was revised and data was examined in light of new codes. Analysis of the coded data also occurred based on role and gender of the person with whom the interpersonal communication transpired. Peer debriefing of emerging themes and results took place throughout data analysis.

**Results**

Each participant was asked questions that pertained to her perspective about leadership, her view of herself as a leader, and how leadership identity had been developed. Of particular interest were interpersonal communication encounters that shaped the woman’s leadership identity development, as well as her intrapersonal communication. At times, responses appeared to relate more generally to identity than specifically to leadership. When utilizing grounded theory, it is the participant who is the authority in her own story (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, such responses are included when the participants saw the events as related to their leadership identity development. What follows is a report of the central themes that emerged during the interview process. Documented themes include (a) views about leadership and the self as leader, (b) calling, (c) interpersonal communication, (d) intrapersonal communication, (e) grounded theory about interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication (f) women and leadership, (g) mentoring, and (h) observations about interpersonal communication related to interviews.

**Views about Leadership and the Self as Leader**

Leadership definitions vary from person to person. Understanding how a person defines leadership is important to understanding how that individual describes communication that has shaped leadership identity. For this reason, once demographic
information was gathered, the interview began by asking each woman how she defined leadership. Some women had a ready response, while others paused to think about the question before replying. In the initial part of the interview women were also asked, “Are you ever hesitant to call yourself a leader?” The majority of respondents indicated a level of hesitation with self-identifying as a leader.

Definitions of leadership. Women described different conceptions of what it means to be a leader. As Teresa, a coordinator in a state educational agency, noted, “The only hesitancy I have in describing myself as a leader is in knowing that everybody’s definition of leadership is not the same as mine.” Many women admitted their views of what leadership is have changed over time. Five primary categories emerged as women defined leadership: (a) moving people toward a goal, (b) serving, (c) modeling, (d) empowering others and (e) influence. Although women’s definitions of leadership sometimes contained multiple components, most definitions had a slant toward one of the five categories.

Moving people toward a goal. More women described leadership in terms of moving others toward a goal than any other definition. Primary comments about leadership by 11 participants indicated a leader should be involved with helping individuals or a group progress toward accomplishing something. Sally, a director in a women’s hospital, stated leadership is, “…guiding others towards a common goal - either through education, or coaching, or giving information, or gaining support from others.” Similarly, Rose, a retired supervisor in a government agency explained, “You have the capability, rather, of bringing people together to do what it is that you set out for them to do.” Michelle, an assistant principal of an elementary school, suggested:
Leadership, to me, is the ability to impact others positively to get the job done.

So basically it’s just getting the team together, working through the challenges, working through issues, troubleshooting, and having a vision, and being able to execute the plan to make sure that vision comes forward.

Sarah, the director of development for a non-profit agency, indicated:

Leadership requires understanding what the goal is and then laying out the vision and the plan to achieve that goal, and really coaching and developing the people that you’re working with to achieve not only that goal, but the goal that they have personally.

Monica, a for-profit business owner, differentiated between leadership and management. She stated:

Leadership is working with others. It is setting a goal and then having someone else work out the parameters to accomplish that goal. Others have to develop it. To make it concise, leaders would define the what, managers the how – how it’s going to be accomplished. You have to have both.

Setting goals, encouraging the team to participate in attaining the goals, and working through challenges were consistent themes among those who defined leadership as moving people toward a goal.

Serving. When asked about her definition of leadership, Barbara, the director of a non-profit educational program, said simply, “Serving. That would be my word.” Teresa also stated succinctly, “Really, to me, leadership is about service.” Valerie, a lead teacher in a middle school, suggested, “Initially, I wanted to say that leadership is
someone who is very dominant or some sort of authority figure. But a lot of times, what I’ve discovered with my own self is a leader is actually the best servant.”

Several women’s description of leadership as serving was influenced by their Christian faith. Allison, a case manager in a non-profit health care facility, stated:

“Honestly, I define leadership as servanthood. I think to lead, you have to serve, and if the Lord increases the people you serve, it becomes leadership, because you’re modeling what He’s asked you to do…I look at it as I’m serving people and the Lord just keeps increasing the amount of people He allows me to serve.

Linda, a radio personality, indicated:

“Jesus provides the ultimate model. And what makes that so amazing is He was a leader that was a servant leader. It is a very complicated thing to think about leading and being meek, but meek is strength. It is a difficult thing to think about balance between what’s often thought of as a strong leader when we’re commanded by our Lord Jesus to serve others. It’s a mix and I’m still trying to figure it out.

Women who described leadership as serving desired to serve those whom they were leading.

**Modeling.** A number of women noted that as a leader, one must show others the way. For Kelly, the director of a non-profit agency, her views of leadership have been altered through the years, but she has ultimately settled on the concept of modeling:

“...
in non-profits, and as I’ve grown a little but more in the Lord, leadership has
taken on a whole new meaning as far as how that looks to me…I feel like it’s
modeling to other people just how to work effectively for the Lord and how to be
effective in what we’re doing not only in our jobs, but also as Christians, and how
we minister to others, and how we treat other people, and really just showing it.
Because you can talk a lot of things, but then if you’re not doing what you saying
that you’re doing, people don’t really trust your leadership.

Rebecca, a professor, succinctly stated, “Leadership is practically doing what you
preach.” Megan, the youngest participant in the study, a 26-year-old accountant/auditor
in a for-profit business, also echoed the idea of the leader as a model:

I define that as somebody that you look up to, you admire, you try to be like them.

Somebody who is a very good example, just like a good role model, somebody
you want to be like in the community or in your job.

Women who described leadership as modeling embraced the idea of a leader being
someone that others can emulate.

Empowering others. Several women explained leadership as empowering others
toward accomplishment. Anna, the director of development at a non-profit agency,

stated:

Leadership is something that you help people work in their giftings, and you help
them be successful in those. And that’s what you’re always trying to do, you are
trying to find out people’s giftings, their talents. Or they - you’re trying to
empower them. I think that’s leadership.
The director of a program area at a large non-profit agency, Karen, described a multifaceted definition that had empowering others at the core:

I think it’s somebody who is able to equip the people that they’re leading, empower them to make decisions, not make the decisions for them. I think there’s a difference between a manager and a leader and so I think motivating people to do their job, trying to keep them moving, and being okay with making those decisions when it does need to be the leader making the decision, but also equipping people to be able to make decisions on their own.

Lisa, who is an assistant principal at an elementary school, indicated, “I believe that leadership is doing whatever it takes to help your people succeed…” To the women who described leadership as empowering others, supporting those whom she leads is a primary responsibility of the leader.

Influence. Two participants described leadership as influence. Candace, a department supervisor in a for-profit business, stated, “I define it as an opportunity to influence others, a mentor and a guide.” Bonnie, who provides consulting for other women leaders within a large religious organization for women, indicated, “I mostly think of leadership as one person, a group of persons, influencing others to move forward. Of course, I think of it in a Christian context so I think in terms of moving forward, helping, influencing others to move forward in what God’s designed them to do.” The concept of influence appeared in many participants’ descriptions of leadership.

Hesitations about describing self as leader. Women were asked whether they were ever hesitant to self-identify as a leader. Of the participants, only four were not hesitant to label oneself a leader. Karen remarked, “At this point no. Yes, I think at one
point I was.” Faith, a benevolence pastor at a church, described her journey to greater confidence. “I would say over the last two years, I’ve started trying to embrace it. Two years ago, I did not like to do that. But it has changed over the last two years…” Rachel, a children’s minister of a church, simply stated “No” when asked if she was ever hesitant to call herself a leader at this point. Jennifer, a business owner, honestly admitted, “No, I don’t think so. I think I’m comfortable with it. If I’ve been hesitant, it’s because I don’t WANT to be in charge.”

All other participants described some degree of hesitation at saying “I am a leader.” Reasons fell into three primary categories: (a) concerns about personal or role limitations, (b) concerns about the expectations of leaders or leadership, and (c) negative associations with the words leader or leadership. Many of the participants, while expressing hesitation, were ultimately prepared to accept the idea that they are leaders.

**Concerns about limitations.** Some women described personal hesitations about calling self a leader based on their own perceived personal limitations. Monica explained, “…it’s not my nature. It’s something that I have to do, need to do, but it is not something that I am comfortable doing.” Angeline, a coordinator at a state education agency, said that she was hesitant to call herself a leader, “All the time.” She noted, “I don’t necessarily see what others see. I just do what comes naturally.” Shirley, the invoicing manager at a business, admitted that she has become more hesitant to self-identify as a leader as she has aged:

I guess sometimes you just don’t see yourself a way another person might see you. And I’ve become more hesitant lately as I get older. I don’t know why.

When I was younger, I didn’t really realize I was a leader and accepted a role,
whatever. Someone was like, “Yeah, you should be the leader!” “Oh yeah! I’m going to be the leader!” And it was fine. But now it seems – especially in the church - now that I’m asked to do more things, I’m not sure. I don’t know if I’m thinking I’m not worthy or I’m just not capable.

For a number of women, the hesitation had more to do with the appropriateness of assuming the role of leader, rather than personal weaknesses. Dawn, the chief pharmacist for a hospital system, indicated she has few hesitations about identifying herself as a leader unless she does not hold a position. She stated:

I think if it’s not clearly defined, yeah there are times when I’m hesitant. So a direct reporting line is very clear. “I am the leader in this group.” If it’s an indirect reporting line, or more of an influential type relationship, yeah, I think there is sometimes some hesitancy, like, “Am I the leadership, am I not the leader?” Because I try not to run over my scope of practice.

Kimberly, a program coordinator in a state education agency, expressed:

I feel like I can be a pretty successful leader with the definition I gave you, in the supporting role. With the people that I worked directly with, I would not say that I’m a leader in every situation. Because there’s a lot of times that I don’t feel like it would even be appropriate for me to do that.

Michelle’s perspective about her hesitation also related to the realization that she might not be the most appropriate leader in a situation. She stated:

I always want to be sure that I step in a way that will be a good example and also that I will be efficient in certain things. You can see things that need to be done,
but realize that you might not be the person to do it. And I think a good leader realizes that there are others around them that might take the helm at that time.

Expressions of hesitation about both personal limitations and role limitations were abundant in the interviews.

*Concerns about the expectations of leaders or leadership.* Some women were hesitant to identify self as leader because of the perceived expectations of what leaders are/do or what leadership is. Lisa explained:

I still when people ask me what I do, I almost always say, “I’m a teacher.”

Almost always when I meet a stranger or whatever, because there’s just something – I don’t know - that’s uncomfortable to me about the mantle of leadership, so to speak. I feel like there are expectations that come along with that when I meet people that I’m not necessarily ready to meet.

Monica, who experienced the loss of a college-aged daughter, expressed the weight of responsibility of being watched by others as a leader when she explained, “And I think now I just have to still set an example, which sometimes I don’t want to do.” Bonnie stated a similar sentiment when she said, “…that always comes with a great deal of expectation and responsibility, and often I would rather not have that…” As a result, women felt the pressure of leadership in advance and were hesitant to self-identify as leader.

*Negative associations.* A few women described hesitation about self-identifying as a leader because of perceived negative associations with the words *leader* or *leadership.* Allison indicated, “I guess maybe a little hesitation because I have seen at times the role of a leader may be abused, or misrepresented, and so maybe I’ve shied
away from that a little bit.” Valerie’s hesitations were more specific to being a woman in leadership, “…sometimes I do hesitate to even associate myself with a leader [woman]…just because this title is portrayed so negatively. These women are just cut-throat and demeaning, and just so condescending towards each other just to get one step further.” Rebecca, on the other hand, had concerns about being a leader in church because of the way the word leadership, “…it’s thrown around like there’s this - there’s a group of elite and then there’s the other.” She went on to indicate the strong sentiment that, “…there are the leaders and then there are ‘the other,’ and so that continues to make me want to vomit.”

Although many women expressed hesitation about self-identifying as a leader, many ultimately accepted the idea that they are leaders. Valerie explained, “I’m leading people. It might not be in some grand fashion that you typically think about, but I am leading and I am molding young minds, so I think I am.” Melanie expressed it this way:

I don’t know that I would’ve ever called myself like, “I am a leader” – used that terminology. I don’t know that I’m hesitant, it’s just maybe I’ve never thought about saying it like that. But that is what I am.

Faith’s perspective was that leadership was the only way to accomplish the call on her life. She proclaimed:

Becoming a leader was never my intention. I just didn’t see any other way of serving God. If you take the gospel seriously, you have to do more than just come to church on Sunday. You have to really get out there, do things, try to - you have to come at the world from every angle. It has to be constantly on your mind. How am I going to be following what God is doing? Where is He working? And
how am I going to do it? I didn’t see it as me being a leader in the church, just like, I’m taking the gospel seriously.

Hesitation about self-identifying as a leader was a predominant theme among participants in the study.

**Calling**

Women were asked the question, “How do you describe your calling?” The word *calling* was not defined for the participant, but was left to the woman to assign her own meaning. Some women had a ready answer. Others seemed to struggle with the term *calling*, or indicated *calling* was a word they did not use often. Three themes emerged related to calling: (a) multiple callings, (b) connection of faith and calling, and (c) the mediating role of calling.

**Multiple callings.** A number of women said that calling did not consist of just one thing. Multiple callings at one time were described. Teresa indicated, “I spend a lot of my time working, but I don’t think I would hold it out and say, ‘that’s my calling; that’s my thing.’ I think it’s one aspect of who I am.” “…it is a dual role that God has a calling on my life in ministry, and God has a calling on my life in the secular business world,” Dawn said. Some women felt confident with one aspect of calling, but struggled to be sure in other areas. Valerie explained, “I know that I’m called to teach as far as the school, but I’m still trying to figure out what it is in church - what is my role.” For Rebecca, “I am called to number one, be a mother and a good wife. Number two, to serve in a university as a faculty member, a mentor, a co-worker. Then my third calling is to lead people through inner healing ministry.” One woman, Megan, described how one aspect of calling allowed her to accomplish another, “So I always knew that I’d have
to help my sister. That always pushed me to want to do business even more.” Other women acknowledged that calling can be different over time. “I think that changes,” Rachel said. Melanie reported, “…right now it is to college women. It could look different one day.”

**Connection of faith and calling.** The participants in this study each self-identified as of the Christian faith. This proved to be important for some as they described calling. Teresa noted:

> But in the sense that I pray about decisions to put myself in certain positions, in that respect, I hope I’m where I’m called to be. I’ve worked very hard to try to hear that voice to know that I am.

Monica, the for-profit business owner, put it this way, “I would say that my calling’s my work. Not work to make money, a nest-egg, but my work to try to shed that Christian light to employees mainly, who don’t have that in their family.” Karen acknowledged that although she did not realize it at the time, she now sees that God was calling her earlier in her life. “I think the calling has come as I’ve grown spiritually…I do think He was the one who called me in it 12-13 years ago….” One of the ways calling is discovered, according to Bonnie, is for God to use other people to help one know their calling. “…I also believe that idea of ‘calling out the called.’ And that there were many people along the way…that gave me the opportunity and helped me learn, and are still helping me, and I don’t think I have it all figured out.”

**Mediating role of calling.** During the course of the interviews, it became apparent that having a strong sense of calling from God shaped how women responded to challenges in their leadership identity journey. For many, calling appeared to play a
mediating role in negative interpersonal communication or action by others. Lisa described the situation of being paid unequally compared to men in a similar position. “…I don’t necessarily need their approval or respect if I’m doing what I feel God has called me to do.” Bonnie also faced discouragement as a female leader. However, she has arrived at the point where she believes:

At the end of my life, I am not going to answer to these men who think I can or can’t. I’m not going to answer to other women who think I can or can’t. I’m only going to answer to the Lord, and have to be faithful to what I believe God has called me to do.

Allison confessed, “I feel like they just see me as a young girl…but I’m also an equipped professional and the Lord has placed me here for a reason.” Dawn indicated:

What makes me keep going is that my commitment is to accomplishing the call of Christ on my life. I am convinced enough and convicted enough of God’s calling and purpose, that even if I’m discouraged, I have to go back to that basis of, ‘God, is this what you want? Is this what you called and designed me to do?’

When faced with discouraging words, Rose reported that:

I don’t let that bother me because I look at the bigger picture, and the bigger picture to me is I’m not doing it for you. I’m not doing it for me. But I’m doing it for the Lord. And I’m really just concerned about how He feels about it.

Sally admitted that she still lacks confidence, but that her attitude toward God is, “…if You can equip me, and then I can do that.” She went on to say:
So every day I feel not worthy, every day I feel the challenge is too great, every day I feel there’s too many demands and there’s too much on me. That it’s not just me doing it - it is definitely not just me doing it - because I would fail.

Shirley put it simply, “But at the end of the day, I’m there to serve God. That’s my first mission. Nothing else.” Calling was a theme that resonated in many of the interviews.

**Interpersonal Communication**

The primary focus of this research was to examine interpersonal communication that has shaped the leadership identity of Christian women. Questions were asked about conversations that helped the woman see herself as a leader or to more fully understand aspects of leadership. The request to recall conversations that shaped leadership identity was repeated several times throughout the interview. As many times as was feasible, the interviewer reminded the participant that the interview related to the topic of leadership.

As the following section details, results pertained to both the context and the content of the interpersonal communication directed toward the woman. Themes began to emerge of who conversations were with and six primary types of content. Additionally, women’s interpersonal communication directed to others was noted and six categories emerged.

**Interpersonal communication that shapes leadership identity.** Whenever possible, the context and content of interpersonal communication, which included the age of the participant at the time of communication, as well as the role and gender of the person speaking, were recorded. Some women clearly recalled instances, people, time frames, and words. Some such conversations were from childhood. Rachel, who is 54
years old and one of eight children, emotionally recalled an incident when she was a young girl:

I couldn’t get my dress zipped. I tried to get my aunt to help me, and she said, “Oh no, Rachel. Out of all these kids, you can zip your dress.” And I think that was the first time somebody had said, “You can do something nobody else can. You have a way to do that”…she saw me in a way that nobody else could.

The conversation had a clear impact on the way that Rachel saw herself, which contributed to her eventually becoming a woman in leadership. Linda reported that her mother told her, “Just because other people jump off a cliff, are you going to do that?” Her mother also said, “I am raising you to make decisions that are wise. I am not raising you to be someone with an easily pliable disposition. A wishy-washy way of life. You are a brilliant girl and I expect nothing less.” Other specific recollections were more recent. Faith described a time eighteen months ago when her senior pastor said she should become a licensed minister. She replied to him, “Really? I had no idea you were thinking that…” Not all interpersonal communication that the women remembered was positive. Jennifer described an encounter with her supervisor in which she wanted to celebrate a ‘win’ in the workplace. He told her, “Don’t be so arrogant. And don’t be so braggadocios…You need to tone it down. You’re too much.”

Occasionally, the turns and pace of dialogue between participant and researcher did not permit specific data about context to be gathered. This was especially the case when women used the generic term “people” in passing comments. In some instances, participants had a general recollection of those whose communication affected their leadership identity, but had difficulty citing specific conversations. Bonnie reflected
about communicating with her mentors, “I’m trying to remember specific conversations. There were just years of mentorship.” Dawn also stated, “In that mentoring relationship and conversations back and forth, I think there was almost a bringing forward or realization of aspects that are part of me that I didn’t necessarily recognize on my own.”

A number of women admitted that some conversations were not impacting at the time, but now they see the communication as important. Rose, age 61, talked about comments that several women in leadership in her denomination made about her as a younger woman related to her potential:

I didn’t think about it. It really didn’t mean that much to me. But now, some of these same people, thankfully, are still alive to see some of these things come to fruition. That makes me feel good that at least I lived up to – at least part ways.

Angeline recalled advice that her mother gave to her, “Never always be the person with all the answers.” Angeline said that at that time:

I don’t know that I fully appreciated what she meant by that. Because I thought, “if I know all the answers, what’s wrong with me sharing that? What’s wrong with me speaking up?” But as I’ve gotten older and been in lots of different situations, I really see the need not to be so quick to speak up.

Angeline also acknowledged that some conversations did not seem to be about leadership at the time, but served to facilitate her leadership journey:

I have people who embraced me all throughout school. I don’t know that we necessarily had conversations about leadership per se. But God put people in my pathway that really believed in me, and they saw in me something that I didn’t
necessarily see in myself at the time. They opened up avenues for me that have over the years led me to where I am now.

**Context: Roles of people whose communication shaped leadership identity.** As participants described conversations, the role of the person whose communication impacted the woman’s leadership identity was noted when provided. Figure 1 displays the roles of individuals and the total number of conversations referenced during research interviews. Note that most participants described multiple interpersonal communication encounters, sometimes occurring with several people who had the same role, such as conversations with three different supervisors.

![Figure 1. Total reported interpersonal communication encounters by role of speaker.](image)

By far, the highest number of conversations took place with supervisors and managers in the workplace. Teresa explained her experience of being approached by the female assistant principal of her school this way:
I was a teacher for eight years and I was approached somewhere about my sixth or seventh year. It had never occurred to me to pursue administration, like a formal leadership position, and I was approached by an administrator about, “Hey, have you ever thought about doing it?” I had never thought about it. It was sort of not even on my radar. I remember the day that, “Somebody is looking at me and thinking I need to pursue a formal leadership.” I would say that’s when I began to consciously contemplate myself as a leader in those terms.

Shirley’s supervisor affirmed her abilities. Her director, “said that I had the ability to do my job…because I didn’t think I could do it. I didn’t know anything about it. It was a change of everything I knew how to do.” She went on to say, “And even the CFO was like, ‘I need that brain…and you can do it.’”

Communication with her husband was also mentioned as contributing significantly to the shaping of leadership identity. Michelle talked of her spouse, “He pushes me to pursue education, pursue more roles. He’s very supportive, even with ministering. He wants me to minister more. He’s always been very encouraging. He mentors me as well.” Rebecca talked about the role her husband plays in her leadership: He’s a really incredible sounding board. He’s very consistent, and I am more emotionally driven and I’m spontaneous. He just provides a consistent, solid kind of sounding board to throw things against and see how it comes back. He encourages me a lot and generally it is to do with what my heart’s desire is.

Other individuals who were often mentioned were spiritual mentors, church leaders who were not the senior pastor, people the woman is/was leading, and mothers. Melanie
described being approached by a female leader of a ministry to consider leading a small group:

And it was great. I was very excited…But it was one of the - not the first time - but I think as an adult in this context where I’ve lived - it was one of the first times that I really felt like someone saw something that really stood out and said, “I want you to consider this. I think you would be really good at this.” And coming from this particular woman who led our lectures - 250 women every week - I mean that was a big thing.

Megan’s mother taught her, “To never depend on a man.” She also told Megan that when faced with negative comments from others, “Get over it. If you want to be a leader, you have to, you know, not care what people think about you.”

Fathers were mentioned less often, as were teachers, professors, career mentors, and other workplace leaders. However, for those who mentioned these individuals, the conversations were an important part of leadership identity development. As Sally described how she moved into one leadership role, she noted:

Dr. Jones came to me and he’s like, “Sally, I really see you as a leader. I really see you as somebody who could do this job,” and he said, “I really wish that you would apply for it.” I probably wouldn’t have applied for that job had he not come to me personally.

Lisa talked about her graduate school professor’s encouragement to consider leadership, “…several of my professors, after reading some of my work, came to me and said, ‘Why aren’t you in the educational leadership track? You seem to have what it takes to be able to run a school.’”
Content of shaping communication. As the content of conversations was
examined, six primary categories emerged in the types of communication that
participants described as contributing to leadership identity development. By frequency,
these categories included (a) affirmation of leadership, (b) suggestion to consider a
leadership position or leadership development, (c) processing issues or giving advice, (d)
personal affirmation or support, (e) discouraging remarks, and (f) skill building
conversations. Appendix F details the number of conversations cited for each category
and indicated the people with whom the conversations occurred.

Affirmation of leadership. The most often mentioned type of conversations were
those in which a woman’s leadership was affirmed. Faith found the comments of a friend
who holds a high position in business confirming:

She has those kinds of skills that probably since infancy, people have been like,
“This is a leader.” And we became close friends. To hear from her that she
respected me as a leader made a big difference - that she could recognize in me,
who’s very different from her. Never going to be a VP in any kind of secular
place. So that made a big difference to hear that from her.

Husbands were described most often as making comments in which a woman’s
leadership was affirmed. Valerie said of her husband, “He is all about, ‘whatever you
feel; whatever you feel. If God is calling you do to it, do it. Just do it.’” Monica
reported that she and her husband, “… talk over a process and he’ll say, ‘You’ve got
this.’” Several women mentioned that their husband’s estimations of their capabilities
were somewhat unrealistic. Bonnie noted:
He would say, “Well, maybe you could do this.” And he would mention a job, and I would think, “Are you kidding me? I don’t have the experience or the capability for that.” And he would say, “Yeah, you do. I don’t know why you don’t think you do. You do.” So he is supportive in that he really believes that I am capable of a lot of things, but I think, “I don’t know. I don’t know if anybody would hire me to do that.”

Supervisors were also significant contributors to women feeling affirmed as leaders. Rose’s former supervisor told her that, “There’s going to be a lot of adversity, days that they’re not going to want to listen to you, but the bottom line is you hold the purse strings. You can shut the plant down if you see fit. And they can’t do a thing about it.” Jennifer’s director encouraged her leadership by telling her, “You think you’re all alone. That’s because nobody can run at your same pace. They’re going to run, and they’re going to run pretty fast, they’re just not going to run at your same pace…”

* Suggestion to consider leadership or leadership development. Women often began thinking differently about their leadership identity when approached by someone to consider moving into a leadership role or a leadership development program. This happened most often through someone in an authority position, either in the workplace or in a Christian organization of which the woman was a part. Candace described an experience at work. “They came to me and asked would I be interested in participating in their leadership development programs. They wanted me to do presentations and everything. So I led a few projects. I worked on a few committees at work.” Rachel was approached by one of the deacons in her church:
She called me on the phone and said, “Hey, would you be willing to head up congregational care?” I was like, “I’ve never done that before.” “Oh, we think you’d do a great job at that.” I’m like, “Well, I’ll certainly give it a try…”

In an earlier role as a high school science teacher, Kimberly’s principal approached her about helping other teachers:

So students were requesting to be in my class, rather than in other teachers’ classes. And so he did encourage me to be available and open to working with any teacher that might be interested in moving into more of a lab-based instruction, or hands-on type of instruction. So, yeah, he was very encouraging. He really did get me to try to go into administration…I said, “Why would I want to deal with the bad kids and the bad parents?”

Anna said of one of her mentors, “She always talked about that she felt like that God was favoring what I was doing and was blessing me, and was giving me the ability to lead and speak. The more she said that, the more I started believing it.”

*Processing issues or giving advice.* Women explained that one aspect of interpersonal communication that shaped leadership identity was people helping her process issues, or giving her advice about leadership. Many of these conversations took place with husbands. Kimberly said that when she experiences challenging times with other people:

Most of the time he’ll try to give me the perspective from the other person, possibly. So that I can look at it from a different perspective. Sometimes I don’t want to hear that…But usually after I sleep on it, it really helps.
Megan indicated, “If I’m having a problem, he tries to give me advice because he is like six years older than me…he’ll tell me a similar situation that’s going on at his job…”

Susan’s former husband also provided similar assistance, “So when I was struggling with things at work, he was that confidant where I could tell him, and he could help me see what was transpiring and how to correct things that were off-track.”

Women also reported spiritual mentors as providing advice and processing. Allison described a mentor’s role this way, “She’s able to give me wisdom, like, ‘Here’s what I didn’t do…” One of Lisa’s spiritual mentors actually discouraged her from leading, advice she considered, but did not take:

   It was not because she didn’t think I was capable. She just didn’t think women should be in leadership roles. That was her understanding of submission.

   Whereas, my understanding is that women should be submissive to their husbands. She felt that women should just be in submissive roles.

Another mentor offered Lisa a different perspective, “She taught more about the Proverbs 31 woman who was buying, selling, and providing for her family.” Dawn had a career mentor who gave her a piece of advice that she utilizes to this day:

   When I started the official professional mentor program she said, “You need a success book, and you need to write down - keep a record of - your successes.”

   But I have kept over the years, the dates and the times, and different challenges…

Dawn proceeded to take the success book off her shelf and share a number of the handwritten notes, emails, and cards during the interview.

   Personal affirmation or support. At times, women described support or affirmation that was personal in nature, rather than related to leadership. They saw a
connection of the conversations to their leadership identity. Kimberly, who leads a program about science curriculum at a state education agency, talked of a science teacher in high school:

I think he was the first teacher - I won’t say I was the teacher’s pet, but I love animals and he had a room full of animals. So I’d go in after school and help feed and do those kinds of things. And the 10th grade year was a little rocky for me anyway, being the new kid in a small town and being 15. He was just very encouraging to me in my learning of science, and then just let me know that I could be successful regardless of what I did, but he really encouraged the science too… It’s funny, because had I not had him as an instructor, I don’t know that I would have ever ended up in science, and that’s been my main big love ever since.

Barbara’s father offered words that affirmed her. “He was the one always saying, ‘You can do so much more.’ He would be that one who would continue to push us all toward excellence.” Kelly had a spiritual mentor who aided her:

Re-learning that the Lord still speaks. Before that point, I knew I was a Christian and I knew that I wanted to live my life for Him, but I did not realize that the Lord still spoke to us the way He spoke to people in what you read in the Bible.

Rachel’s high school dance teacher was influential when, “She always pushed me to excel, to do more than the status quo…very much of an encourager and a mentor.”

Discouraging remarks. At times, participants described discouraging interpersonal communication that shaped leadership identity. The majority of such communication came from people the woman was leading. Candace talked about an
incident in which, “I did have one employee that went to HR because she felt like I was trying to get her fired.” She further explained, “But I guess she was not in a good place, so whatever I said, it was something else to her. It was a big fiasco.” When asked how she felt about that, Candace indicated, “Well, of course, I was a little bit depressed to be honest. Just had to pray about that one, because I had to self-reflect...Just the realization to definitely doing a little more explanation when I’m performing, managing…”

Barbara’s mother discouraged her from some of her leadership activities. “You don’t need to lead the lady’s Bible study. You don’t need to host that dinner party of leaders. You don’t need to be doing a cooking class for the young moms at church.” Her mother would also say, “You don’t need to be doing this meeting for these home-school leaders...You’ve got too many things.” Barbara noted her mother was, “Not necessarily discouraging me from being a leader, but activities that I was doing that were leadership positions.

Other times, the discouraging communication motivated the woman to adopt different practices. Angeline explained that some individuals she works with have said: My concern is shallow or surface level. That I’m really driven by work. So that was concerning to me. It was hurtful, so I have worked very hard over this past year to try to make sure that all of my encounters are really quality, and I help people to see the other side of me. I mean, I actually don’t know if this is appropriate to say or not, but I actually incorporated that into my prayer life. That as dedicated as I am to the work, that people also see my heart for the relationship piece.
Monica described learning how to deliver constructive criticism from a professor’s hurtful communication method:

We were doing clinicals…And I got called on the carpet right in front of everyone. She just gave me up one side and down the other. I rightly deserved it. I did not deserve it in public…it also set in my mind, there’s a right way to do things and a wrong way. My husband and I have always said, “You praise in public; you coach in private.”

Others admitted that the interpersonal communication was difficult emotionally. Lisa described a conversation that occurred the same day as the interview. Although parents in her school encouraged her to apply for a position in another part of the school, her supervisor did not take her seriously. She reported, “…I said to my boss today, I said, ‘You know you might need to address just why you’re not going with me, because I would want it.’ But he said, ‘Huh. That’s funny.’ And I thought, ‘that’s insulting.’”

Occasionally, the women eventually tried to brush the comments off. Faith indicated:

So there have been people who came away unhappy with my decision and will write lengthy emails about how I’m really bad at my job. In all areas that I serve in ministry sometimes make people upset and I don’t have those traditional leadership skills of organization…That’s not the kind of leader I am.

Skill building. Mentioned least often, but serving an important function in leadership identity development, was interpersonal communication in which specific skills were built. Monica stated that her husband helps to build her skills through their interpersonal communication. “‘Joe, how would you handle this?’ I do best by recalling his words…and so then when I’m in that situation, I recall it.” Jennifer’s director told
her, “You’ve got to ask more questions because we can talk all day long. But in our communication, it’s powerless unless you start asking questions.” Jennifer noted, “And she’s helped me.” Kimberly reported that her supervisor has been helpful to her skill development. “She’s been a principal and she’s been a deputy superintendent in a central office, so she’s had experiences with people and in situations that I have not. She’s also much more politically savvy than I am, so I know that I need to go to her. But just a lot of what I’ve learned from her is observing her working with people and how she handles situations.”

**Gender and content.** Each category of interpersonal communication described above was examined for the gender of the person making the comments. Table 1 provides a breakdown by category of female speaker, male speaker, and unspecified gender of speaker.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Speaker and Type of Interpersonal Communication</th>
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<tr>
<td>Affirmed her leadership</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
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*Note.* Numbers indicate the number of times participant mentioned individuals in each category. Multiple participants described multiple communication partners.

The majority of interpersonal communication described in the interviews came from female speakers, more so than male speakers. In only two categories were male voices
more prominent: affirming her leadership and making discouraging remarks. It should be noted that in the discouraging remarks category, the communicator’s gender was frequently unspecified. This occurred most often when women described “people” who had said things about how she led or when several examples were provided at one time and the participant did not describe incidents in detail before moving to on to another example.

**Interpersonal communication to others.** As conversations that shaped women’s leadership identity development were documented, women often also described outward communication with people they were leading or their supervisors. These conversations revealed clues about how the woman viewed leadership and self as a leader. Six primary themes emerged in the interpersonal communication that Christian women in paid leadership positions in the southeastern U.S. described themselves as using: (a) views about leadership, (b) functional leadership communication, (c) asking questions, (d) leading up, (e) repeating impactful comments to others, and (f) sharing one’s story.

**Views about leadership.** Women use their interpersonal communication to share their views about leadership with the individuals they are leading. Kelli noted conversations with her staff members in which she said:

Guys, I don’t ever want you to be out in the community saying, “Well, my boss dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. Technically, I’m your boss, but technically, I’m you’re co-worker because I’m working there beside you guys, and we’re all doing the same thing. There has to be somebody in a leadership position. So, yeah, when it comes down to decisions or things that have to be done, obviously, I’m going to take the bull by the horns and do it. But I don’t want you to think that just
because I’m the leader that I’m not open to suggestions, or that I’m not open to correction, or that I’m not open to different ways of doing things or to fixing the toilet.”

Michelle voiced a sentiment that she shares with people she is leading, “I’ll remind them that I’m a coach, not a supervisor.” Angeline also reported that she finds it important to ensure that those she leads in various settings understand her leadership philosophy:

In church ministry, as well as in my workplace, one of the things that’s most important to me is that everyone – we are a team that that there’s nothing - even though I’m the so-called leader (and I hate that term), but I’m the one that’s been appointed to the chair sometimes. We are all equal and there is no job too big or too small for any of us to do. I think when you approach it from all of us being in it together, we’ll accomplish something that’s really greater than anyone one of us can do by ourselves.

Functional leadership communication. Women described the use of leadership communication to serve the function of motivating, correcting, and coaching followers. Shirley talked of telling people under her leadership, “You can do this. You’re here on time. I can depend on you. Whatever goals I set for you, you have met them.” Linda mentioned celebrating the new accomplishments of others when told others, “You stepped up, look at how God’s grown you. A year ago you couldn’t have done that. High five.” Candace described the importance of two-way communication:

Get to know your people. Make sure they can trust you with everything because you’re almost like a parent to the employees you work with. You want them to be
able to come to you so that you understand what’s going on, so you can help them.

Lisa shared how she encourages the young girls at her school, “So I’m always trying to talk to my girls especially about how blessed they are to have an education and the power that that gives them.”

Alternatively, how women used their leadership communication to correct others was also described. Monica talked of using a specific method in which:

Whenever you have that coaching to do, you’re always going to sandwich it in between two positives… that’s just something that I think works well for us because hearing that negative thing first, you’re closed off to any positive after that because your brain is already thinking, “Oh my gosh, I’ve got this negative I’ve got to turn around and make better.” So, if you soften it slightly, it makes a little sweeter to have to consume.

Women described utilizing many forms of leadership communication with their followers to encourage and motivate them.

*Asking questions.* Women indicated that they utilize question asking for a variety of functions. Candace said she asks those she leads about issues at home:

I meet with my associates every week for 15 minutes. We just have one-on-one, and our first conversation is always how are they? What’s going on in their personal lives? And we’ll talk about that and try to give advice on how to handle whatever situation they’re going. And then we may talk about the work, but we may not get to the work part. But I know at home, that can impact what happens at work, more so than anything.
Shirley reported using questions to help employees set goals. Kimberly said she regularly leads debriefing sessions with her staff to talk about what could have been done differently. Rose noted that she often asks questions during meetings, “That way I’m clear on what it is I’m trying to find out and I can take it back to the ladies that I’m leading to make sure that they’re clear.” Bonnie indicated that in dealing with extremely conservative college students who did not think she should be teaching men, she asked, “Why do you think that? What do you base it on?” She also noted of her own intrapersonal communication about the situation, “Nothing’s going to change about what I do because you don’t think I should, but I’m happy to engage in conversation with you.”

Leading up. A few women offered comments about what they said to those in leadership over them. Sally, a nurse, described educating her leader, an administrative professional without direct healthcare experience:

When my vision of the unit or the direction of the unit is different than my current leader….because she doesn’t have the understanding about how this unit needs to run….And so I have to spend a lot of time teaching her how that can or cannot work….Or how I can alter it to make it work. Because she has a vision too. And so, I have to implement that plus mine, and teach her how that may or may not work. And so, when we get in those discussions, it’s a lot of energy…and you have to gauge moods, and you have to gauge fatigue and energy levels before you can approach that kind of conversation.

Rose’s perspective was slightly different as a former civilian contracting officer who worked with military leaders, “…even though I was a civilian and the general had the
uniform on and the four stars, it was very little that he could tell me to do. But I could tell him.”

**Repeating impactful comments to others.** Several women noted that they shared comments or concepts with their followers that had been previously told to them. Kelli described being a youth pastor and telling the students the same thing an adult youth leader told her in high school about not succumbing to peer pressure. She said, “…you can be the leaders in this and you don’t have to follow suit. And I know because I’ve been here, and I’ve walked through this, and I’ve done all the same things that you guys are doing.” Barbara talked of sharing a mentor’s comments, “…her words of wisdom that I’ve shared with many home-school families is, ‘Look for fruit, not just in academics but also in character, and hang on, watch closely.’”

**Sharing one’s story.** Some women indicated they used interpersonal communication to share personal stories with those they lead. Jennifer said, “My story to them, that inspires them.” Allison noted, “…the Lord doesn’t give me anything that is not also to share in some kind of way.” Monica described what her family has experienced upon losing her daughter and noted, “So it provides an opportunity – not anything I would have ever wanted, but it’s an opportunity to be a leader to them.”

**Intrapersonal Communication**

Of interest in this study were connections between interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication. In order to examine one of the research questions, “How do women describe the impact of interpersonal communication about leadership on their intrapersonal communication?” two methods were used. At times women were asked a direct follow up question about a conversation, such as, “How did that impact
how you talked to yourself?” Other times, the women’s descriptions of her thoughts about the interaction, or the phrase, “I was like…” alerted the researcher of a reflective process within the participants. Some women also described intrapersonal communication that occurred in a seemingly spontaneous manner, rather than in response to interpersonal communication. Women’s intrapersonal communication centered around several themes, which were (a) questioning or second-guessing the interpersonal communication of others, (b) motivating self, (c) self-reflection and processing, and (d) spiritual talk.

**Questioning or second-guessing the interpersonal communication of others.**

A primary use of women’s intrapersonal communication was in questioning or second-guessing what others communicated. Women described talking to themselves about the motives of the people communicating with them about leadership identity. Rebecca described being suspicious:

> It wasn’t but a couple of months and they were coming to us saying, “Y’all really need to lead a small group.” And I’m like, “You don’t know us. What is this you’re identifying?”

Rose also identified a skepticism of motives, “…some people say something to you and you can tell they really don’t mean that. They just said it because it was the right thing to say at the time…” Later, Rose expressed skepticism about those who used their communication to discourage her, “…I tend to look at that that it’s because this is a person that apparently either has no life or the life that they have is not as rewarding, per se, as they would think mine is.” Linda shared about one incident in which she presented the sermon in a church:
I literally had been allowed, in one situation, to so-called “preach” when the male pastors didn’t show and somebody’s van broke down and they had no speaker. Then they said, “It is not a sermon. She’s female so she’s leading a small group. Therefore, we will allow it.” I think that’s a bunch of hocus pocus, phooey pooey. I think that’s ridiculous.

Linda’s comment, as well as those of others, displayed an intrapersonal process of considering the words of others, but having questions about what was being said. Other women described this differently as they shared about times when people communicated things about the woman that she simply could not see or accept. Allison talked about a couple who told her she was an amazing young woman during college, at a time that she did not feel she was. Her intrapersonal communication was, “What are they talking about?” Anna used sarcasm to explain her thoughts about the comments of one of her mentors:

He always called me coach or boss. Nobody had ever done that, and he loved spending time with me and his family did. And he always called me a world-changer. And the first time he called me that, I laughed. I said, “Yeah, that’s me alright. I’m driving a broken down car. I’m trying to raise my children. I am a world changer.”

Rachel’s husband is a regular encourager, but she doubts what he says. “He always thinks I do the best at everything, even though he’s so wrong.” For Rebecca, it was her mother’s comments she had a hard time accepting. She would think, “…you’re deluded. You just – you think more of me because you love me so much.” Bonnie made similar statements about her pastor’s communication in which he affirmed her capabilities and
qualifications. She said to herself, “I’m not as great as you think I am. You just really like me.” Many of the women interviewed expressed similar questions and self-doubts about the interpersonal communication of others.

**Motivating self.** The women interviewed often described intrapersonal communication that motivated them to fulfill their role as leader. Some of the motivating self-talk was based on the interpersonal communication of others. For example, Bonnie recalled a conversation with her former pastor. He said, “With your level of education and your level of personal skills, if you were not in ministry, you could be in the corporate world and you would make a lot of money.” She noted that while he wasn’t encouraging her to do that, it made her realize that, “…somebody sees in me some real capabilities and qualifications for doing some significant things…That encouraged me to keep going.” Rose had a skill-building conversation about decision-making with her supervisor that she reminded herself of in subsequent years, “I go back to him saying, ‘If you make it, make it and move on. But don’t second-guess. Not while you’re sitting there talking to them.’” Anna was encouraged by a mentor’s words, “People want to be in your light, Anna.” She shared, “…I think about that often.” Monica’s father said a phrase that stuck with her and motivates her still today, “In a roundabout way, whenever I find something that’s just really difficult, I can hear my father say, ‘Buck up and do it.’”

Other women’s intrapersonal communication was based on her own thought processes. Megan described talking to herself about the price she would need to pay to be a leader. “Some people are going to hate me. I don’t care. I’m trying to get to my goals. I’m just focused on myself and what I need to do.” Melanie also described how she motivated herself in a difficult work situation:
And basically I realized two to three months in that it didn’t matter how much I did and it didn’t matter how perfect I tried to make it, that it was never going to be good enough and it was never going to be - it was never going to be what she wanted. And so I just stuck with it and I worked as hard as I could.

Anna talked about finding motivation in recalling scripture passages and spiritual sayings, “I say that I’m a princess of the Most High King and that He created me the way that I am, and He formed me for a plan and a purpose and I believe that with all of my heart.” Motivational intrapersonal communication came in many forms and was a consistent theme among women interviewed.

**Self-reflection and processing.** Women often use their intrapersonal communication for self-reflection and processing issues. In this realm, women also spent time thinking about the things other people said. Lisa talked about reflecting on the words of people who encouraged her to consider leadership:

In some ways it was so great to hear people saying these really affirming things about my gifting. And at the time, I wasn’t really seriously considering it; I was just enjoying that affirmation. I was also afraid of what that might be. Leadership is a very scary thing, and I thought, if I became a leader then I’ll be exposed as not having all of those gifts, and people will think, “What were we thinking when we asked her to do that?” And I never wanted to be exposed in that way as not enough and that’s always the fear.

Melanie described a profoundly reflective time when others affirmed her leadership after a difficult season:
It was just like water. It’s just like you’re dying… “Am I worth anything? Are my skills valid anymore?” I’ve just basically been destroyed this past year in my experience working, and I just feel drained entirely. So to receive that was such a gift. It really was.

Shirley reported questioning herself for trusting people who later betrayed her, “What has happened is who I shared it with, it’s like they told it. So my trust has been shaky… That’s broken me. I was questioning what happened to my discernment of seeing things before it got to this point.” It was a lack of comments by others that piqued Rebecca’s attention:

I started noticing that I was priding myself on my leadership, and that there became this sense of performance…I started to realize that when I didn’t get the recognition, I would get really hurt…I realized that this is something that I’ve slipped into. This pattern - for years I’ve done things and people have given me the credit and I’ve boasted in the credit and loved the credit. Now I’m not getting it. Something’s wrong. I’m leading for the wrong reasons or I’m doing what I’m doing for the wrong reasons.

Karen also mentioned reflecting on her own motives and actions. She stated, “That’s just something I have to examine and say, ‘Am I upset about that because pride or is that a righteous anger?’ That’s something that is a constant challenge as a leader, but a Christian leader particularly.” Women also reported engaging in intrapersonal communication about her own role as leader. Often this took the form of self-questioning. Valerie talked about having to correct people she knew well. She indicated:
It was very uncomfortable and it was something that, had it been someone else, I wouldn’t have had a problem correcting or talking to that person about it, but because of who the person was, or the people were, it was uncomfortable and I thought, “Well, maybe I’m not…Maybe this is not the role for me.”

Dawn put her experience this way. “We’re talking about how sometimes lately with healthcare it’s not fun. That makes you question like, ‘Am I doing the right thing? Is this really what I want to do? Is this what I’m supposed to be doing…’”

Candace also questioned the tactics she had used in a challenging situation:

I think I was a bit depressed to be honest, just had to pray about that one, because I had to self-reflect. “What did I do? What did I say, or what could I have done differently to avoid this whole situation?”

**Spiritual talk.** At times, the line between intrapersonal communication and interpersonal communication with God seemed to be blurred. As Allison put it, “I think a lot of times in that period, I thought I was talking to myself; I was talking to the Lord.”

Karen described it this way:

So I’m always analyzing “How can you do that better the next time” or “How can you approach that differently?” and then just pour into the Word and going to the Lord and saying, “Please, help me, search me, and examine me.” I talked to myself just in my thoughts and just the way I’m always processing and thinking through things.

When asked how she talked to herself during challenging times, Angeline replied:

It would vary from me being frustrated to, “God, how did I end up here? What’s happening…Am I in the right place? Am I doing the right thing? Have I done
something wrong? What is the lesson that I need to learn?” I want to be sure that I get it, so that I won’t get back to this place again.

Linda identified that her communication was with God:

But in some moments, I feel like I’ve been given direct commands to follow. In other moments, I feel like, “Okay, Lord. I’m running this way. I’m listening. Stop me if I need to stop.” When I have a peace, I perceive. So I feel like He’s giving me leadership assignments.

Angeline reflected upon this idea, saying:

My self-talk has changed over the years, and now instead of questioning myself or questioning the situation per se, I rely more on the Word of God. And speaking the Word, speaking the prophecies of the Word and not doubting God’s love for me, or doubting that He has me right where He needs me at any different points.

**Summary.** Women noted that the interpersonal communication of others had an impact on their intrapersonal communication. Women also described intrapersonal communication unrelated to outside communication. Questioning or second-guessing the interpersonal communication of others, motivating the self, self-reflection and processing, and spiritual talk were documented as forms of intrapersonal communication.

**Grounded Theory of Interpersonal Communication and Intrapersonal Communication**

The examination of interpersonal communication that shapes women’s leadership identity development led to the development of theories about women’s responses to two types of interpersonal communication: affirming and discouraging (Figure 2 and Figure 3), as well as a theory of women’s intrapersonal questioning about leadership identity.
Interpersonal communication that shapes the leadership identity
development of Christian women. Women’s intrapersonal communication responses to affirming and discouraging communication can be grouped into themes. Two contextual factors are relevant in both models: the woman’s perception of calling and relational trust. Perception of calling relates to what the woman feels called to be and do as a leader. Relational trust is how the woman feels about the person who has spoken to her and whether she respects that person’s opinion. Figure 2 categorizes women’s potential intrapersonal communication responses to affirming interpersonal communication about the woman as leader.

Figure 2. Women’s intrapersonal communication responses to affirming interpersonal communication.
Intrapersonal communication responses to interpersonal communication perceived to be affirming to the woman as a leader range from questioning the speaker’s motives to allowing the comment to motivate her toward leadership action. Six response patterns can be seen.

*Why are they saying that?* Women sometimes question the motives of the speaker, wondering why the person was saying what they did.

*What are they talking about?* At times, women do not seem to grasp what the speaker is saying to them. In other instances, when encouraged about leadership, a woman might wonder whether the person was overestimating her abilities, or if their close relationship might be coloring the speaker’s judgment.

*What if they find out I’m really not that?* Women can be fearful of being discovered to be an imposter. At times, women believe it is better to not identify as a leader, rather than to be discovered as not being a good leader.

*They see something in me. Are they right?* Women’s response to affirming interpersonal communication is sometimes to ponder that communication in relationship to how she sees herself as a leader. At times, this leads to the woman assuming a new role. Other times, the viewpoints are dismissed. For example in the study, Kimberly discussed instances when others tried to persuade her to take a leadership role. “Usually, people are very compelling when they want you to do something…So usually, I respond in the affirmative. But one thing about being 60, you do learn where your limits are.”

*I remember when they told me…* Women sometimes recall phrases said to them in an effort to motivate themselves as leaders. Monica’s remembrance of her father’s exhortation to “Buck up” was an example.
*I'll give it a try.* In other instances, interpersonal communication propels the woman toward a leadership opportunity she had not previously considered.

A grounded theory of women’s intrapersonal communication responses to interpersonal communication perceived to be discouraging was also developed. Figure 3 provides a depiction of women’s potential intrapersonal communication responses to discouraging statements. Discouraging statements are those that challenge or question the woman as leader. The patterns of women’s responses typically fall into one of three categories. Contextual factors such as the woman’s perception of her calling and the relationship she had with the speaker are also relevant in this model.

![Diagram showing women's intrapersonal communication responses to discouraging interpersonal communication.](image)

*Figure 3.* Women’s intrapersonal communication responses to discouraging interpersonal communication.
Are they right? Women often filter discouraging interpersonal communication, wondering if what the person is saying is correct. If they deem the person to be right, this can become dispiriting to the woman. At other times, negative communication serves as a catalyst for change, in which she realizes what is needed to become a better leader.

That’s not the truth of who I am. Some women process discouraging communication and are able to dismiss it as inaccurate. This often happens when the woman has a mistrust of the person speaking. In these situations, the person’s comments are seen as untrue and the woman’s own leadership identity emerges as of greater importance.

I don’t care what they think. The other type of response that participants describe when faced with negative interpersonal communication is the desire not to be impacted by the opinions voiced by others. For example, for Rose, people’s opinions were part of being a leader. “…I learned early on that if people are not, as they say, talking about you or trying to hurt you, you must not be doing something right.” Lisa also talked of, “I’m learning to be okay with it regardless of the noise, whether its accolades or criticism.”

A grounded theory of women’s intrapersonal questioning about leadership identity. Women’s internal dialogue about leadership was revealed through their narratives. A theory emerged about the general types of questions women ask themselves about leadership identity. Figure 4 displays three common themes of intrapersonal questioning and representations of the types of questions women asked themselves: (a) identity, (b) skills, and (c) motivation.
Figure 4. Women’s intrapersonal questioning about leadership identity related to identity, skills, and motivation.

**Identity.** Intrapersonal questioning about identity asks about the core of who the woman is as a leader.

- Is this who I’m supposed to be?
- Should I do this?
- How did I get here?
- Am I still supposed to be doing this?
- Is this God’s plan for me?

Questions such as these demonstrate a range of concerns and demonstrate that Christian women in paid leadership often consider God’s view of them in their identity questioning.

**Skills.** Women also question themselves about skill preparation, levels, and validity. Women wonder:

- Can I do this?
- Am I doing anything wrong?
• How did I do?
• How can I do this better?
• Are my skills valid?

Questions about their own abilities and whether or how to improve their skill are evident in many women’s intrapersonal communication.

Motivation. Within many women’s intrapersonal communication is a questioning of her motivation to be a leader. Women ask themselves:

• Do I really want to do this?
• Am I going to keep doing this?

Such questions display women’s internal dialogue about their motivational levels for beginning or continuing in leadership roles.

Summary. Through grounded theory methods, the analysis of interpersonal communication that shapes women’s leadership identity development led to the development of theories about interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication. Two models described women’s intrapersonal communication responses to both affirming and discouraging communication. In addition, questions of identity, skill, and motivation were described in a model of women’s intrapersonal questioning about leadership identity.

Women and Leadership

In addition to questions about interpersonal communication encounters that shaped their leadership identity development, women were also asked to share experiences that they had as a woman in leadership or general thoughts about the topic of women in leadership. What women reported about their views, as well as their
experiences, varied widely. What follows is a description of (a) the range of personal experiences, (b) views about women in leadership, (c) thoughts and experiences about female leadership in Christian organizations, and (d) a description of the apparent contradictions and conflicts in women’s individual narratives about women in leadership.

**Range of personal experiences as a woman in leadership.** Personal experiences as a woman in leadership were varied. Susan, who was a young woman in a male-dominated business in the late 1970s, described a situation in which a male executive would not shake her hand. “And I introduced myself, and he looked at me and said, ‘I don’t shake hands with women.’ Then I went, ‘Wow! How do I handle this?’” to which Susan replied, “Oh well, I only shake hands with gentlemen.” The next thing that happened was, “he looked at me and we shook hands.” Lisa described pay inequity she faced in her position and, “I feel the old cliché has certainly been true for me that I feel like I have to work twice as hard to earn half the respect.” Teresa noted that:

> I think it’s been harder as a woman to step into formal leadership positions. I’ve always worked at the secondary level and at the district level, and yeah, there are a lot of men in leadership positions in those areas. It seems that there’s a lot more scrutiny where women are concerned to give them an opportunity and positions like that.

Allison indicated that at times, “I felt like my opinion might not have held as much weight as a man’s…I think I still see that sometimes. There’s definitely a lack sometimes in people realizing that women are such a vital resource to any organization, any ministry.” Angeline echoed a similar sentiment:
It’s not equitable…People just seem to respond better to men. Sometimes when a man - he can come behind you and say the exact same thing - but it just - it’s just a whole different response than when we do it. I really don’t know why that is. But it’s one of the reality pieces for us, I guess. So that is a little bit of a challenge at times, because I want to stand on my own feet and I don’t want someone else to come in and say the same thing I say and get a different response.

Kimberly explained the way she has handled issues related to being a female in the workplace:

Well, I have worked under some men that were not comfortable with women with strong personality. But most of the time, once you realize that, you figure out a way to work with them and approach them. And for the most part - no - I really haven’t run into a lot of problems…when I have run into somebody like that, usually just with the patience and figuring out how to best work with them, remove the barriers over time.

Other women indicated that they had not faced issues related to being a woman in leadership. “No, not yet. I can’t say that I have,” Candace indicated. A few women perceived that this was because of the field they work in. Karen said, “…I’m in social work, the majority of the people are women and so that hasn’t been as big of an issue as far as like men getting more preference or anything like that just because most people in this field are women.” Sally shared a similar perspective from the field of nursing. For Linda, women have been more supportive than men have been. “Women tend to be absolutely, completely thrilled, and so excited for me.”
Range of personal views about women in leadership. Personal views about women in leadership were as diverse as women’s experiences. Rachel, who serves as a children’s pastor in a church, noted:

Growing up, I’ve always seen men in leadership in the church and accepted that. It has just been sort of odd that God would call me, and I feel like at times, I would rather have a male leader. That’s sort of - I’m a pretty old-fashioned person - so it’s interesting to me that I am in ministry and that my daughter is in ministry too. She’s had a little easier road to tow, I think, than most women in ministry, because as years go on, that gets accepted more.

Barbara’s viewpoint was that, “A lot of times women in leadership today are leading because men aren’t doing what they’re supposed to be doing in arenas that I see…I think the man is very disrespected and the woman is elevated today in our society.” Lisa, an elementary school principal at a Christian school noted that for the girls in the school:

I still want my girls to honor and venerate motherhood and being a wife. I still think that those are the most important callings for a woman. So I’m not saying be anything you want to be and just forget all of that, but I do want to help them see that there are a lot of possibilities out there for them and that they can be great moms, great wives, and that there are other things that God is equipping them to do to build up the kingdom. And I want them to do - I want them to do whatever they want to do, have that stewardship mindset that whatever gifts and talents God has given that they should steward them well.

Dawn’s perspective was that men and women bring different things to the table:
I’ve gotten to the place where I believe that God will use anybody who is willing to be used. I don’t personally believe that men and women are exactly the same. That they’re equal in everything. I’ve seen enough that I believe that we are very different, and that God did create us differently.

Some women expressed their thoughts about how women in leadership act. Rebecca stated:

A lot of times I see women be threatened by other successful women, and it saddens me, because I feel like we are undervalued and not always understood, and that we need to be coming together to be supportive - even in our differences - and not be threatened by our differences…I can see women being real competitive and catty in terms of leadership.

Some women were strong advocates for women in leadership. Rose explained why she thought there should be more women in leadership:

Women tend to get things done. They don’t let things just hang around and keep going over the same things, same thing over and over again. They tend to just look – well, this is what we’re going to do - and if everybody is not on the same page, can we agree to disagree…Let’s go ahead and move this. Whereas men will sit, and just sit, and sit, and nothing still gets done. I think more women should step up to the plate…

Linda put it this way, “I believe my wiring is just as good.” Rachel voiced the viewpoint that, “…we don’t need penises as much as they think we do.”

**Female leaders in Christian organizations.** Although planned interview questions did not specifically address women in leadership in Christian organizations,
women did express views about this topic as they discussed the general subject of women and leadership. A few women explained that they felt supported as a woman in Christian leadership. “Everybody is kind of accepted for whatever role they operate in,” Angeline explained. Michelle stated, “I guess I’ve been blessed in that.” Other women reported experiencing being treated differently as a woman in Christian leadership. Linda stated:

I’ve run into some opposition being female in leadership within the Christian community…There has been some resistance within a deeply traditional Christian community to allow a woman to be in a leadership position where I might speak to - or what they would think - over men. That’s been shocking to me.

Rachel also noted:

I have worked with some senior pastors, who, you can tell, have issues with women in ministry. They were not in-your-face sort of things. It was just more in the way - there was just a real difference between what they would say to me and what they would say to the males on the staff. I just tried to go on about my business, really. You just kind of have to - you have to accept that and realize there is a perfectly good reason for it. I mean, men have been in leadership for so long. It just takes a while for that wheel to turn.

Other women expressed hurt, discouragement, or anger at the way they had been treated. Melanie shared:

I know what I do is good and valuable in the Kingdom of God but - and maybe this is particularly to my situation because I’m single - but there doesn’t seem to be as much - particularly in the church. My experience in the church has been there is not as much of a place for me.
Allison said:

You know when they say, “Women are equal. They can do this, but they can’t do this” because it’s all men and we want to go on - we go on these retreats and women can’t come. Or they say, “Women are equal,” but then you see that mostly men are getting those positions. So I have seen that and had to battle...sometimes discouragement from that.

Rebecca’s perspective about the denomination she is involved with was that, “…there’s a very clear line between men and women and their titles and their roles and it’s a lot of role B.S. to me.” She also stated, “…the church makes me want to vomit all the time when it comes to women…”

Some participants emphasized the importance of embracing both male and female leaders in Christian organizations. Lisa explained her view as:

I think that the church has done a pretty poor job of that in general with women’s gifts…So, let’s say I had a great talent for accounting - I don’t. But even if I did, in the church it would be more like, “Well, what can you bake?” Those would be the types of things that women are still asked to do. And I think that the church needs to do a much better job of seeing the gifting that God has given women- just as there are different gifts given to men - and to really capitalize on those…

Melanie discussed her denomination, which holds the position of not ordaining women. She said, “Well, that’s fine, but let’s talk about what we CAN do. Like what women are doing and can do within the church.” Allison’s perspective was:

There are times when I’ve come up against situations where people have said, “Well, we’re not going to let a woman do that.” But when you know the nature of
God and to know Him as Father, I just can’t ever imagine my Father say, “You can’t do that, you’re a woman.” That is not the God I know’s character.

Internal contradictions and conflicts. While at times participants voiced strong opinions about their experiences or their views on women in leadership, it was apparent that the topic is not completely clear for some. During the course of the interviews, some women’s narrative revealed uncertainty or an inner conflict about the subject. For example, Dawn described attending a professional conference in which one of the topics was how to promote more women into leadership positions. Initially she thought, “I didn’t really identify with that. I never had a problem.” However, as the conference progressed to an awards session, she realized few women received awards. She said:

Now that could be potentially the dynamics of pharmacy used to be more men, and the people that won those awards are people who have been in the career a long time. Or that could be the dynamics of maybe men are more recognized than women. I don’t know. But it did make me realize, ‘maybe women do face this.’

Faith reported an incident that occurred when she began to attend church when she talked with the pastor about women in leadership:

“Okay, let’s talk about it. 1 Timothy 2:9-15, women must be silent in church.”

And it was a deal breaker for me if women were not allowed in leadership. And he said that the denomination held that women could hold leadership positions in church except for senior pastor. And that was a deal breaker for me, but I got the message from God that this was the place, and I never thought about it again.

Kelli revealed an internal question:
But in the way of leading a man, there’s just always this thing in my mind that’s like, “Is this really my place? I don’t really feel like I have the right to be speaking into any man’s life because he’s a man.”

A few minutes later during the interview, Kelli said:

Because really, when it comes down to it, God sees us all the same, and if He didn’t, He wouldn’t have given us gifts in different areas…yes, I think men should be leaders, and I think that they should naturally be leaders. But if they’re not going to, women should not be scared to fill those roles because we have work here to do…we all need to be encouraging each other to do the work that needs to be done…

Bonnie reflected:

When you’re a woman and you spend your whole career in denominational work, most of your life has been with men. Most of my working career has been with men. I don’t think I can point to something and say, “Here’s the situation where I was treated unfairly, or poorly, or not taken seriously as a leader because I’m a woman.” And I think a big part of that is, I do not filter things through that lens. I’m often aware I’m a different perspective in this room…

Shortly after that in the interview, Bonnie described being challenged while she was a college student about whether women could hold the role of pastor. She also talked of difficulties she faced with male students who did not believe she should be leading them.

For one participant, the contrast between her experiences and her hope for women in ministry was stark. Linda talked of numerous challenging incidents as a woman in leadership. She went on to say:
I don’t want to be wildly controversial, but I believe we’re in a revolution of female leadership around the world. I believe God uniquely equips women in the indescribable ways to perpetuate His kingdom. He’s wired us differently for a reason.

It was evident that some women had competing and contradictory intrapersonal communication about the subject of women and leadership. Most women did not seem to be aware of the inconsistences in their narratives.

**Mentoring**

While describing the interpersonal communication that shaped their leadership identity development, many women talked about people who had mentored them. Additionally, participants were asked if they had ever experienced any formal mentoring during their life. The word “mentor” was not defined for the person being interviewed. The themes that emerged were, (a) multiple forms of mentoring, (b) lack of formal mentoring, (c) carefully chosen mentors, (d) spiritual mentoring, and (e) views about male/female mentoring.

**Multiple forms of mentoring.** Participants seemed to value mentoring in a variety of forms. Anna stressed, “I think everybody should have mentors in their life.” “Mentoring’s a funny thing. It’s never about one thing,” Rebecca reported. Melanie saw that she had been mentored in many ways since she was in junior high school. Linda described her feelings about mentoring this way:

I cannot say enough about it. I can’t even - there would be no - I think God would still use me as a leader because I’m built that way, but I would not be nearly as
effective without having guidance by godly women who are willing to pinpoint some areas of weakness, but do it in a loving way.

Some mentoring related to skill development. Megan stated, “She was a very good mentor because she was always teaching me things.” Dawn’s experience was with her pastor, who mentored her on speaking and teaching at church. Lisa’s first boss, a man whom she considered to be a mentor, shaped her views of leadership and how to lead. Kimberly’s mentor, her current supervisor, provided, “very good words of wisdom.”

Participants also described observing a role model as a form of mentoring. Kimberly said of her supervisor, “…a lot of what I’ve learned from her is observing her work with people and how she handles situations.” Both Rose and Michelle’s mothers served as role models and mentors. Angeline talked about a woman whose example shaped how she wants to function as a leader:

She was always willing to do whatever she could. She always took on a challenge, and even when things didn’t go right, she didn’t complain about it….She was a really grateful leader. And so, as I have gotten older – I’m not there yet - but I try to be grateful and gracious in situations.

Lack of formal mentoring. A number of women indicated they had never been involved in a formal mentoring relationship. “I’ve led, I’ve coordinated a mentor program for teachers…but I don’t think I’ve ever formally had a mentor,” Teresa stated. Valerie mentioned her desire to have a mentor, “…I would actually love that, I would love to have someone, you know, to mentor.” Bonnie described the mentoring she has experienced this way:
They have always been - I would call it informal. Like they’re not situations where I went to the person and said, “Would you mentor me?” Or they came to me and said, “I want to mentor you.” That was not it. They had been professional relationships with people who are just ahead of me in my career. They’re just more experienced…

Some even expressed regret about the lack of mentoring, “…I’ve thought how different it would be if it had been – if I had someone who was much more purposeful maybe, or like formal in a way that they mentored me,” Melanie reflected.

**Carefully chosen mentors.** Other women reported carefully selecting formal mentors. Angeline explained, “I always have somebody, at first it wasn’t conscious.”

She noted that in graduate school:

One of the things that we were encouraged to do at every level of our walk, find someone a few steps ahead of us, where we want to be and then allot ourselves to that person as a mentor because at every level within your life you need somebody ahead of you who can help pull you along. I’ve tried to make a conscious effort of doing that with every promotion…

Angeline further explained that she always tries to, “find the next person who can help me, not necessarily advance in position, but sometimes just advancing my thinking and advancing my opportunity.” Candace talked about choosing mentors for skill or point of view. Michelle noted that she had certain standards for those who mentored her:

I’ve accepted certain people as mentors…Typically I don’t choose mentors who are not open to dialogue. If there’s someone who is more authoritative, I tend to
shy away from that person as a mentor. I’m very collaborative, so I look for people who have that same type of mentoring style to mentor me.

**Spiritual mentoring.** For many of the Christian women interviewed in this study, spiritual mentoring was an important shaping factor in their lives. Linda sought spiritual mentoring out in a deliberate way. “…in a calculating way, watched very carefully women in leadership that God would place in my path” and then she would, “beg to teach me, lead me, guide me, mold me, correct me, love me…” Monica’s spiritual mentors consisted of several pastors and one pastor’s wife. For Karen, spiritual mentoring had implications for her leadership identity development, “You know I think that has really been what has shaped me as a leader, particularly over the past probably six, or seven, or eight years.” Faith’s spiritual mentor served as a role model for action:

> A couple of friends of mine recognized just how - just what an incredible person Diane was. So we - another friend of mine - we came up with a little joke, you know. “What would Diane do?” When you’re in a sticky situation, you know, you can say, “What would Jesus do?” And Jesus was never a supervisor at the department…So it’s hard sometimes to know. But it’s easier to say, “I know how Diane would respond.”

**Views about male/female mentoring.** While many women described having mentors who were male, other women expressed considerable hesitation about having a male mentor. Kelli voiced the view:

> I don’t think that’s appropriate, really…I think in ministry it’s hard because you open doors to things that are inappropriate, even if you don’t realize you are. You have to be really careful to keep things appropriate, on the up-and-up…
Anna also expressed concern:

I think if you’re going to be mentored as a single female or married female by yourself, that you need to have - then you need to be a wife and husband team, if it’s going to be that. I do think there’s good points in that. Unless you’re doing it in a church setting and it’s your pastor. But there’s - I just think you have to be careful about that. I do. I think that it’s just so easy when you get intimately emotionally with people, that even the best can go back and crossover. I think it should always be a male and female team. I think it’s just safer and better.

On the other hand, Candace stated that she anticipates having a male mentor in the future. “I probably will get one pretty soon just to diversify the perspectives that I’m receiving.” Several women indicated that their husband is a mentor. Karen described her spouse’s role this way, “I’ve come to realize that it’s making me a better leader here or in other places when I allow him to pour into me and disciple me and lead me at home.”

**Observations about Interpersonal Communication Related to the Interviews**

Every interview is an interpersonal communication encounter. The researcher and the participant engage in two-way communication, in which questions are asked and responses given. In a grounded theory study, based on the turns of conversation, additional questions are asked and other dialogue occurs. In this way, the participant and researcher are co-creators of the interview (Charmaz, 2006). During each of the interviews in this study, specific questions were asked about the woman’s experiences with interpersonal communication about leadership and leadership identity development, as well as other topics. Charmaz (2006) explained that in conducting grounded theory interviews, “Responses may range from illuminating, cathartic, revelatory,
uncomfortable, painful, or overwhelming” (p. 28). That proved to be the case in this study. Ranges of responses were observed in the interpersonal communication between the participant and the researcher.

Several participants expressed feelings about being asked to be a part of the study. Megan shared her apprehension, “When a friend recommended me to do this, I was like, ‘Really, are you sure?’ She’s like, ‘Yah, you’re perfect for it.’ I’m like, ‘I don’t know.’ She’s like, ‘Just go and you’ll see.’ I’m like, ‘Ok.’” For Faith, being asked to participate was a validating experience. “So even my friend saying I should participate in this was like, ‘Oh, somebody besides the pastor is saying, ‘I see you as a leader in the church’ was nice. It was like, ‘Okay, I am.’” Valerie described a similar experience:

When my friend told me about this whole women in leadership - well, I was like, “I’m not in leadership, what are you talking about?” And she was like, “Yes, you are,” and I was like, “Oh, okay, yeah.” But now, yeah, I do. I’m leading people. It might not be in some grand fashion that you typically think about, but I am leading and I am molding young minds, so I think I am.

Others were concerned about how they would be or were perceived during the interview. Kelly admitted that she engaged in intrapersonal communication prior to the interview. “I was in my mind thinking, ‘I wonder what she’s going to ask me. Don’t sound like an idiot.’” Bonnie stated, “I probably talk a lot.” Linda humorously proclaimed, “Cheryl is secretly thinking, my friend gave me a crazy woman to come spend an hour with, but I haven’t been bored.” One participant wanted to ensure that the interviewer was correctly using the recording device. Jennifer said, “Is that working?...make sure it works. Make sure it’s working.” A few participants got lost in
their comments. Dawn asked, “What was the question?” Sally wondered aloud, “What was my point?” and Karen stated, “I’m going all over the place. I’m not sure how I got here…” Others commented about the strong emotions they displayed during the interview. Linda said, “Didn’t plan to weep through this whole conversation.” When asked about her calling, Dawn said, “You’ll make me cry.”

The primary content of interpersonal communication about the interview was about whether the participant’s responses were what the interviewer wanted. Comments ranged from Allison’s pondering, “I’m trying to think if I even answered your question,” to Rachel’s question about her response, “I hope that makes sense…It doesn’t sound overly mean?” Other comments included Angeline saying, “…if that makes any sense? I hope it makes sense,” Lisa stating, “I hope that was helpful,” and Teresa wondering, “I don’t know if I’m helping you at all?” In summary, many of the participants utilized interpersonal communication to express concerns about performance during the interview to the researcher.

Summary

A grounded theory methodology was used to explore the interpersonal communication that Christian women in paid leadership positions in the southeastern U.S. described as shaping leadership identity development. Twenty-six women were individually interviewed in a semi-structured format that was recorded and later transcribed. Women defined leadership in one of five primary categories: moving people toward a goal, serving, modeling, empowering others, and influence. Although a few women were not, most women interviewed were hesitant to self-identify as a leader for one of three primary reasons: concerns about personal or role limitations, concerns about
the expectations of leaders or leadership, or negative associations with the words leader or leadership. Because of the connection between leadership identity and calling, each woman was asked to describe what she perceived to be her calling. Three themes emerged related to calling: the existence of multiple callings, the connection of faith and calling, and the mediating role of calling in overcoming discouraging communication.

At the heart of the study were results that pertained to both the context and the content of interpersonal communication that shaped women’s leadership identity development. As interviews were analyzed and coded, categories emerged about those who engaged in interpersonal communication with the woman. Supervisors/managers, husbands, spiritual mentors, leaders in a church or Christian ministry, and people the woman is leading were mentioned most often as contributing to how the woman saw herself as a leader. Six primary types of content were noted. By frequency, these categories were affirmation of leadership, suggestion to consider a leadership position or leadership development, processing issues or giving advice, personal affirmation or support, discouraging remarks, and skill building conversations (Figure 1). Each category was also analyzed by the gender of the person speaking (Table 1). Women were reported to have been the speaker in the interpersonal communication more frequently than men in all categories except affirmation of leadership and discouraging remarks.

Women’s interpersonal communication directed toward others was noted within six prominent categories: views about leadership, functional leadership communication, asking questions, leading up, repeating impactful comments to others, and sharing one’s story. Engagement in intrapersonal communication was also shown to be a common theme in the study. Intrapersonal communication was used to question or second-guess
the interpersonal communication of others, motivate oneself, self-reflect and process, and as spiritual talk.

The examination of interpersonal communication that shapes women’s leadership identity development led to the creation of theories about both interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication. Models were presented about women’s intrapersonal communication responses to interpersonal communication that is perceived as affirming (Figure 2), as well as women’s intrapersonal communication responses to interpersonal communication that is perceived as discouraging (Figure 3). Additionally, a theory of women’s intrapersonal questioning about leadership identity was presented, which included questions about identity, skills, and motivation (Figure 4).

The general topics of women and leadership, as well as participants’ personal experiences as women in leadership, were explored with participants. Results were presented that described the wide range of views about women in leadership, a vast array of personal experiences as women in leadership, women’s thoughts about leadership in Christian organizations, and apparent contradictions and conflicts in women’s individual narrative. The subject of mentoring was also examined, with several themes emerging. These included the existence of multiple forms of mentoring, women’s lack of formal mentoring, the importance of carefully chosen mentors, the value of spiritual mentoring, and women’s perspectives about male/female mentoring.

Finally, women’s interpersonal communication related to participation in the study was explored. Women described their conversations about being invited, as well as their concerns about how they would be perceived by the interviewer. Questions and
comments wondering how the woman was performing during the interview were abundant.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to examine the role of interpersonal communication in the leadership identity development of Christian women in paid leadership positions in the southeastern U.S. How women describe the interpersonal communication that has shaped their leadership identity development, in terms of both content and context, was explored. Additionally, women’s intrapersonal communication about leadership identity was studied. Through individual, semi-structured interviews with 26 women leaders from a variety of employment settings, women’s views and experiences with leadership, communication, calling, and mentoring were documented. Responses were coded, categorized, and re-coded, using constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2006). In addition, memoing was conducted in both the data collection and data analysis phases.

Summary of Findings

Although many women in the study indicated that they were hesitant to self-identify as a leader at times, all were able to articulate instances of interpersonal communication that shaped how they perceived themselves as leaders. Many voices contribute to Christian women’s leadership identity development. Sources included family members, career-related acquaintances and supervisors, friends, workers in schools and youth activities, and church members. Most often mentioned specifically were supervisors/managers, husbands, spiritual mentors, leaders in a church or Christian ministry, and people the woman is leading. Furthermore, interpersonal communication that contributes to leadership identity was shown to take different forms. Primary types
of content by frequency were affirmation of leadership, suggestion to consider a leadership position or leadership development, processing issues/giving advice, personal affirmation or support, discouraging remarks, and skill building conversations. Moreover, women were reported to have been the speaker in the interpersonal communication more frequently than men in all categories except affirmation of leadership and discouraging remarks. On the other hand, women who received discouraging remarks from others sometimes were able to move beyond what was said by engaging in intrapersonal communication about calling. Having a strong sense that one was called to a particular role by God seemed to mediate the effects of negative interpersonal communication for a number of women. For example, if criticized by someone she was leading, a woman might remind herself, “I know God called me to this role. I’m going to keep persevering.”

Women’s interpersonal communication directed toward others fell within six main categories: views about leadership, functional leadership communication, asking questions, leading up, repeating impactful comments to others, and sharing one’s story. In addition, often tied to interpersonal communication was women’s intrapersonal communication, or how they talked to the self. For example, women reported that they used their intrapersonal communication to question or second-guess the interpersonal communication of others, motivate self, self-reflect and process, and as spiritual talk.

The examination of interpersonal communication that shapes women’s leadership identity development led to the creation of theories about both interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication. Models were presented about women’s intrapersonal communication responses to interpersonal communication that is
perceived as affirming (Figure 2), as well as women’s intrapersonal communication responses to interpersonal communication that is perceived as discouraging (Figure 3). Additionally, a theory of women’s intrapersonal questioning about leadership identity was presented, which included questions about identity, skills, and motivation (Figure 4).

At the same time, participants described a wide range of views about the general subject of women and leadership, as well as considerable variety in their own personal experiences as women in leadership. The limits placed upon women in Christian organizations were noted by some, as were apparent conflicts in women’s internal perspectives about women and leadership. Women also discussed the subject of mentoring, with several themes emerging. Themes included the existence of multiple forms of mentoring, women’s lack of formal mentoring, the importance of carefully chosen mentors, the value of spiritual mentoring, and women’s perspectives about male/female mentoring. While some women described having beneficial interpersonal communication with male mentors, other women held strong views that women should not be mentored by a man other than her husband.

**Discussion**

It was clear that women see multiple conversations and events as contributing to leadership identity. Longman et al. (2011) note that both external and internal messages are important for a woman to conceptualize her calling as a leader. In the current study, external and internal messages were termed interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication, respectively. Both forms of communication were shown to be relevant in how women see themselves as leaders. Although Dahlvig and Longman (2010) wrote about instances in which a Christian woman leader’s self-perceptions and
life-journey were significantly impacted by just a single sentence, the women in this study often described numerous interpersonal communication encounters as shaping leadership identity. This was likely due to the researcher’s stated intention for the study, which was to gather information about multiple interpersonal communication encounters, in addition to prompts from the researcher about potential sources of the interpersonal communication such as coaches, teachers, supervisors, or mentors.

Murphy and Johnson (2011) suggest that leadership be examined from a long-lens perspective, in which a person’s early experiences are part of their leadership identity development. This study demonstrated that such a theoretical viewpoint is valuable. In other words, the conversations that shape women’s leadership identity development span from childhood through adulthood. In this study, some conversations occurred while the women were young children, while others were as recent as the day of the interview. The majority of women described at least one interpersonal communication encounter that took place in her teenage years or earlier. Of note, however, was the limited number of conversations with teachers mentioned by participants. Remembered more often from childhood and youth were conversations with adult leaders of teams, clubs, and organizations, as well as mothers and fathers. This could be a result of adult leaders and parents having more time or motivation to give attention to individuals than teachers do. This study also appears to support French and Domene’s (2010) findings that mothers play an important role in the development of a sense of calling for their daughters. Further, women described calling in many diverse ways, supporting Day and Harrison’s (2007) perspective that identity is a multi-dimensional construct, as well as the view that calling is developmental and on-going (Longman et al., 2011). In other words, calling is
cultivated through interpersonal communication processes, as well as individual experiences, throughout a woman’s life.

Women’s voices were described as being particularly important to participant’s leadership identity development. Those interviewed cited 116 separate conversations with other women, while describing 99 conversations with men. In the interpersonal communication categories of suggesting leadership positions or leadership development, processing issues/giving advice, personal affirmation, and skill building, more communication with women than with men was mentioned. Only in the categories of affirming leadership and discouraging remarks were conversations with men reported more. This seems to portray a different perspective than some previous studies that showed that men provide information and advice more than women (Belenky et al., 1986; High & Solomon, 2014; Tannen, 1990). The greater number of interpersonal communication encounters with women does seem to support MacGeorge et al.’s (2007) notion that women display a higher level of interest and effort in supportive communication. It is likely that the higher number of conversations with women was influenced by cultural norms within the Christian community about boundary keeping between males and females. For example, teenage girls often are mentored by a male youth pastor’s wife, rather than a male youth pastor, thus making female-to-female conversations more likely. Christian women are often taught and encouraged to interact with other women, which appears to carry over even into the workplace.

The importance of interpersonal communication with husbands was a somewhat unexpected finding in this study. Many women described their spouse’s communication as affirming of their leadership, as well as providing beneficial advice in challenging
situations. Women noted that these conversations shaped how they saw themselves as leaders or accomplished the work of a leader. The high number of conversations might come as a result of the Christian culture’s teaching that “wives submit to your husbands” (Ephesians 5:22). This may create a dynamic in which the husband’s views are sought or offered more often than in other sub-cultures or religious groups. For example, most Christian women would consult their husband before making a decision about pursuing a leadership position requiring more time at the office. While it is likely that women from other religious groups or sub-cultures would also consult their spouse, the weight placed on a husband’s opinion as the “spiritual leader in the home” may be greater for Christian women. Furthermore, a number of women noted that their husbands mentored them in spiritual matters, as well as in leadership. This phenomenon is one that is more likely to be associated with the participants of this study than in the general population. A topic also related to interpersonal communication with one’s husband was some women’s descriptions of their spouse’s perceived over-estimation of her capabilities. For example, some husbands thought women could obtain jobs that the woman felt were outside of her competencies or experience. While Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2008) found that a partner’s unrealistically high professional expectations were perceived as an unsupportive behavior, there were no indications that the women in this study perceived the comments as such. However, women did seem to find such comments by their husbands to be puzzling or unrealistic. Some women appeared to dismiss such comments by their husband, while at the same time being appreciative that their husbands thought highly of them. This type of response to unrealistically high expectations may be unique to the population of the study.
As expected, mentors were an important source of interpersonal communication that contributed to the shaping of leadership identity. Few women indicated that mentoring took place through formal, organized associations. Rather, informal mentoring, through biological and spiritual mothers, supervisors, and other individuals was reported. At times, women described role models as being mentors, which adheres to Clinton and Clinton’s (1991) description of passive mentoring types. For example, some women said that through observation of a supervisor, she learned how to handle challenging scenarios. A few women had career mentors, but typically reported that they chose the mentor themselves, rather than being assigned the mentor through a program (Johnson, 2002). The desire to have mentors in both spiritual and career related pursuits was evident, supporting the idea of a developmental networks perspective (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Women want to be mentored by those who can advance their personal, spiritual, professional, and leadership goals. However, varying opinions about whether the mentor could or should be male were documented. Some women hold strong views about not being in a close relationship with a man who is not her spouse. These women may have been socialized in this perspective within churches or Christian organizations (Scott, 2014). This is likely unique to this population and not generalizable to women from other backgrounds. At the same time, several women in the study did report having male mentors, or desiring to have male mentors, thus indicating a different viewpoint on the subject. These women may be from Christian churches that hold a stance that male-female mentoring is acceptable, or may not see the church’s teaching as relevant to career oriented pursuits.
Women’s description of negative interpersonal communication was noted. While Murphy and Johnson (2011) write that negative experiences can damage leadership identity, many women in this study indicated that negative interpersonal communication served to motivate them toward change, or was dismissed as not important or not true, in light of the woman’s calling. For Christian women, the idea that God has called them individually at times appears to mediate even negative communication about the appropriateness of women in leadership within an organization. How one’s sense of calling becomes strong enough to overtake negative communication from others merits further study.

That Christian women leaders engage in intrapersonal communication was evident in this study, both in response to direct questions and in comments made about their self-talk. Intrapersonal communication served many functions, but one prominent aspect was the questions that women ask themselves. Such questions appear to display fears on the part of women about whether they are doing the right thing, with the right method, at the right time. Women’s hesitations to self-identify as a leader were also striking in a population of individuals who were in paid leadership positions. All but four of the 26 participants indicated on-going hesitation about calling herself a leader. Reasons ranged from concern about personal limitations, expectations of leaders or leadership, and negative association with the word leadership. The question must be asked whether Christian men - or men from other religious traditions - would cite these same hesitations and reasons for concern. Dahlvig (2013) theorizes that for Christian women, the *imposter syndrome* – in which high achieving individuals believe they are inadequate for a task and fear being discovered - is intertwined with the virtue of
humility. It is difficult to discern whether women are experiencing the imposter syndrome or the results of socialization (Dahlvig, 2013). In reality, both factors may come into play. In this study, Christian women’s narratives did convey that many are still navigating the roles of women in leadership. Several women described experiencing discriminatory practices and attitudes. Similar to what Dahlvig and Longman (2010) note, it is possible that these prejudicial experiences contribute to women’s hesitations to self-identify as a leader. Whatever the source, women’s hesitations about identifying as a leader may be hindering their performance as leaders. Day and Harrison (2007) write that as one comes to think of the self as a leader, self-efficacy is built and the person may seek out more opportunities to lead. Likewise, one who does not conceptualize the self as leader may be hesitant to pursue opportunities to lead (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). If, as this study indicates, women are often hesitant to identify as a leader, they may be less likely to pursue leadership opportunities that could lead to greater leadership self-efficacy. In turn, if women do not have leadership experiences, the view of self as a leader will not increase (Lord & Hall, 2005).

Intrapersonal communication emerged as a common theme in this grounded theory study and led to the development of three theoretical models that could be beneficial in a variety of settings. The first model of women’s intrapersonal communication about interpersonal communication that was perceived to be affirming of the woman as leader (Figure 2), suggested that some women ask themselves questions, while others make declarative statements to themselves. A similar phenomenon was theorized in the model of intrapersonal communication about interpersonal communication that was perceived as discouraging (Figure 3), in which women’s replies
are believed to fall into one of three types of responses that question self or declare disagreement with the speaker. In both models, relational trust is an important factor, as is the woman’s perception of her calling. For example, if a woman trusts the speaker, she may be more likely to receive their comments as truthful. In addition, a woman who possesses a strong sense of calling as a leader may dismiss negative comments more quickly, even from an individual she trusts. The third theory (Figure 4) involved women’s intrapersonal questioning related to identity, skills, and motivation and could be applied to similar settings as the first two theories. Within this model, women ask themselves questions that help them make important decisions related to leadership identity development. All three models could be beneficial for those who teach and train others in leadership, leadership communication, mentoring, and identity studies by making them aware of the on-going, prolific, intrapersonal questioning in which women engage. Teachers, trainers, and mentors could help direct women’s intrapersonal communication processes, or encourage external discussion about internal dialogue. Additionally, these theories could help supervisors, managers, and leaders of organizations such as churches and community groups understand what the women they encounter are pondering related to leadership. Furthermore, the models could be discussed in leadership training courses to promote understanding and insight through reflective practices and discussion with others. The models might also help men, both in family contexts and in leadership scenarios outside the home, understand types of questions women are processing, which could lead to more informed involvement with women’s leadership identity development.
This research showed the constantly evolving nature of women’s leadership identity development. Although not previously explored in light of women’s leadership, the communication theory of identity (CTI) appears to have relevance when considering leadership identity (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2005; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Hecht et al. (2005) note that identity is both internalized and externalized through communication encounters. Women in this study both received other’s interpersonal communication (internalized) about leadership, as well as shared their own views about leadership with others (externalized). The four frames of identity outlined in CTI - personal identity, enacted identity, relational identity, and communal identity - were evident in the replies that participants gave (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Women described how they saw themselves as leaders (personal identity), what they told others about their views of leadership (enacted identity), how their leadership identity was transformed through communication with others (relational identity), and leadership interactions with groups of people (communal identity). The interpenetrable aspect of CTI that Jung and Hecht (2004) describe was evident in the study. Additionally, identity gaps could be observed in how women saw themselves as leaders and how they reported that others saw them (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

**Implications for Action**

This study underscores the important role that interpersonal communication plays in women’s leadership identity development. Leaders in all settings – home, schools, workplace, community organizations, and faith-based groups - should be aware of this message and of their potential influence in shaping leaders. Organizations would be wise to educate individuals about effective communication techniques, including supportive
and specific communication, as well as listening skills. Additionally, Christian churches, in which women sometimes do not feel empowered, should consider how to empower the women in their midst with leadership potential. Further, the significant role played by husbands in relation to women’s leadership identity development could be emphasized both in church settings, as well as in other venues where pre-marital counseling occurs. This might lead to more women feeling empowered as leaders. Furthermore, recognizing the on-going intrapersonal questioning that women engage in would be helpful for those who create leadership training and development programs. The model of intrapersonal questions developed in this study could be used to inform activities that capitalize on women’s self-reflective nature. Additionally, strategies for overcoming negative associations with the words leader and leadership should be pursued.

Finally, while the interdisciplinary nature of this research - drawing from the fields of communication, leadership, psychology, gender studies, sociology, human resources, and religious studies - made for a rich field of study, it also created challenges. At times, women’s impassioned responses about a topic, such as women in leadership, made it challenging to gather complete data about interpersonal communication. At other times, women became emotional and began to cry, which sometimes made them apologize or feel self-conscious during the interview. Another primary challenge is related to terminology. Terms in one field, such as intrapersonal communication in communication studies, are called something different in other fields, such as self-talk in the psychology literature. In business literature, the term scholars might use is mentoring, while in religious studies, a similar concept is often called discipling. Even one of the primary concepts in the study, leadership identity development, is sometimes
referred to as identity development related to leadership. Moving toward a shared language should be a goal of interdisciplinary researchers in the future.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study focused on Christian women in paid leadership positions in the southeastern U.S. As such, limitations to the generalizability to other populations must be noted. Whether men would describe similar content and context in interpersonal communication related to leadership identity merits further study. Additionally, whether women and men from other religious traditions - or no religious tradition - or from other locations in the U.S. or internationally, would report similar interpersonal and intrapersonal communication warrants exploration.

Several topics in this study display the need for additional research. Women’s hesitations to self-identify as a leader and the implications for leadership should continue to be examined. For example, whether women’s hesitations to call themselves a leader negatively affect leadership practices should be assessed. Furthermore, the role of spousal support in leadership identity development in Christian women, as well as women from other sub-cultures should be explored. Moreover, examining whether men describe spousal communication about leadership identity in a similar fashion is of interest. Additionally, quantitative studies that test the theory about women’s intrapersonal responses to affirming and discouraging interpersonal communication, as well as the theory of women’s intrapersonal questioning should be conducted.

**Summary**

The role of interpersonal communication in the leadership identity development of Christian women in paid leadership positions in the southeastern U.S. was examined in
this grounded theory study. Through individual, semi-structured interviews with 26 women leaders from a variety of employment settings, women’s views and experiences with leadership, interpersonal communication, intrapersonal communication, calling, and mentoring were documented. Coding, constant comparative analysis, and memoing were utilized in data analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Theories of women’s responses to both affirming and discouraging interpersonal communication, as well as women’s intrapersonal questioning of leadership identity were presented. Research underscored the important role that interpersonal communication plays in women’s leadership identity development.

Recommendations for training leaders in diverse settings about how to communicate through supportive and specific communication were made. Additionally, designers of leadership training, as well as mentors in other settings, would be wise to take into account women’s intrapersonal questioning. A number of areas were identified as topics for future study, including replicating the study with men or with women from other religious traditions or locations. Finally, quantitative studies that test the grounded theory about interpersonal communication and women’s intrapersonal questioning proposed in this study were recommended.
References


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doi:10.1037/a0035173


Appendix A

Participant Letter

November 2014

Dear Potential Participant,

For the past two years, I have been enrolled in an Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program in Leadership at Creighton University. I am currently working on a research project for my dissertation. The title of the study is, “Interpersonal Communication that Shapes the Leadership Identity Development of Christian Women.” I would like to invite you to be a part of this interesting research by participating in an interview.

I plan to talk with women who self-identify as a Christian (faith in Jesus Christ) and as a leader. During the interview, I will ask you questions about your thoughts on leadership and how you developed as a leader. I am particularly interested in learning about conversations you have had throughout your life with people who helped shape how you think of yourself as a leader. This might include parents, teachers, mentors, supervisors, friends, or others who spoke into your life.

I expect that the interview will take one hour (or less) to complete. The interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed by a professional service. A copy of the transcript of your interview will be made available for your review. A follow up conversation of approximately 15 minutes might occur in some instances. I will gladly arrange a time and place that is most convenient for you. Confidentiality is assured in this study.

Thank you for considering this request. If you would be willing to participate, or have questions about the study, please contact me at CherylRoss@creighton.edu.

Sincerely,

Cheryl N. Ross
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

- Gather demographic information about age, race, education, marital status, children, current position, membership in church, other leadership roles in community.
- How do you define leadership?
- How long would you say you have been a leader?
- When did you begin to see yourself as a leader?
- Are you ever hesitant to identify yourself as a leader? When/why does this occur?
- I would like to find out more about the role that interpersonal communication played in how you see yourself as a leader. Would you describe any conversations that you have had that particularly shaped how you see yourself as a leader? (I will suggest categories such as parent, co-worker, pastor, authority in order to spark her memory.)
- Who was the person? What was their role in your life? What was their gender? What age were you when the communication took place? What was the setting? What was the content of the conversation?
- Do you remember how you talked to yourself about the conversation?
- Has mentoring been a part of your leadership development? Formally or informally?
- How would you describe your calling?
- Can you share any conversations or events that pertained to you as a woman in leadership that impacted you?
• If you are married, what role does your husband play in how you see yourself as a leader?

• Is there anything else you would like for me to know? Or anything you thought I would ask you that you would like to comment on?
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form
Research Project by Cheryl N. Ross, Creighton University

Title:
Interpersonal Communication that Shapes the Leadership Identity Development of Christian Women

Purpose:
This is a study of interpersonal communication that shapes how women see themselves as leaders. Research is focused on Christian women who live in the southeastern U.S. and who self-identify as a leader.

Procedures:
This study will consist of an interview and a potential follow-up discussion. I will ask you questions about your experiences with leadership and how your view of yourself as a leader has developed. I am particularly interested in learning about conversations that have shaped how you see yourself as a leader. Interviews will take place at a quiet location convenient for you and will be audio taped. After the interview, a copy of the transcript will be sent to you for your review for accuracy.

Time:
I estimate the interview will take 1 hour to complete. Follow-up conversations may take 15 minutes.

Risks:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. Participation and responses are completely voluntary.

Benefits:
Your participation is valuable. Information gathered will allow for the development of a theory about the shaping effects of interpersonal communication in the leadership identity development of women. This study could potentially be beneficial to parents, teachers, mentors, pastors, supervisors, as well as other leaders and researchers.

Confidentiality:
Confidentiality will be observed at all times. An alternative name will be assigned to you when the interview is transcribed by a professional agency. My dissertation committee members and I will be the only ones with access to data from the project. I will be the only person with access to the actual names of participants. Results will be reported so that no specific individuals can be identified.

Compensation:
You will not receive any monetary compensation for this project.
Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask me questions about the research project prior to agreeing to participate. If you have questions about your rights as a research project participant, you may contact the Creighton University Institutional Review Board at IRB@Creighton.edu or 402-280-2126. Following the study, a copy of the dissertation will be available for your review and you may ask questions about the project.

Freedom to Withdraw:
You are free to not participate in this study or to withdraw at any point, including during the interview.

Thank you for considering participation in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Cheryl N. Ross
cherylross@creighton.edu
Appendix D

Participant Data

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*Note.* All participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms.
Appendix E

Interview Summary: Interpersonal Communication

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Appendix F

**Overall Content and Role Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role / Group</th>
<th>Affirmed her leadership</th>
<th>Suggested leadership or leadership development</th>
<th>Processed issues/gave advice</th>
<th>Provided personal affirmation or support</th>
<th>Made discouraging remarks</th>
<th>Helped with skill building</th>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
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